



Maley, Willy and Alison O'Malley-Younger (eds.). *Celtic Connections: Irish-Scottish Relations and the Politics of Culture*. Series: Reimagining Ireland, Vol. 38. 237 pp. Bern: Peter Lang, 2013. Pb £ 40.00.

This is a volume that promises much, not least in the back cover blurb, which “offers insights into debates about identity and politics in [...] two neighbour nations, too often overwhelmed by connections with their larger neighbour, England.” Ireland and Scotland share a Celtic history – Scotland is, after all, named after an Irish tribe, the Scoti, that, most scholars agree, settled in the western kingdom of Dalriada, bringing the ancestor of today’s Gaelic across the few miles of sea that separated the territories. But they share, in the north of Ireland at least, a Saxon history too, most obviously from 1609 century when the Scottish King, James VI and I, encouraged the plantation of English and Scottish Protestants in Ulster. And so the book could easily have been retitled *Sassenach Connections*, and several of the contributing authors focus on the long-standing sectarian conflict that lingers in Northern Ireland and which finds its slightly fainter echo in lowland Scotland, particularly in urban areas that have a history of Irish immigration.

There is, then, on the face of it, much to be gained from a perspective that frees Irish and Scottish Studies from the hegemonic preconceptions of Anglocentric “Eng Lit” and considers literary, cultural and political relations between the two nations on their own terms. The shape of the landscape is bound to change when we resituate the point from which we view it. And, reading the essays that make up the volume, change it does – though the implications of that change in perspective are not fully or comprehensively addressed. Instead we get – as is normal in such loosely-themed conference proceedings – a fairly disparate collection of reflections that provoke and stimulate without delivering a coherent programme for reconfiguring Irish and Scottish Studies. There is evidence in the volume, patchy though it may be, that devising such a programme would be a worthwhile endeavour.

The editors provide an energetic introduction, using the catalyst of an Irish-Scottish connection to reanimate the tired critical trope of duality that has understandably permeated much post-Enlightenment Scottish discourse. If Englishness is not to be the “Other” to the Scots, then Irishness might well play that role – and the same goes for the Irish with respect to the Scots. Reconstituting the sense of Self and Other makes the discussion of identity both strange and familiar, and it is worth revisiting James Joyce in the distorting mirror of possible Scottish counterparts, like Hugh MacDiarmid, whose linguistic experimentations and totalising poetic ambitions were influenced by the Irish novelist, and Alasdair Gray, whose monumental novel, *Lanark*, “does for Glasgow what Joyce did for Dublin”.

Several essays in the volume also probe Scottish-Irish dualities and mutual reflections, and their potential for refreshing our perspective on neglected or familiar writers. John Strachan considers the mixed reception in the influential nineteenth-century Edinburgh journals of Charles Robert Maturin's Gothic novels, which pushed the genre's stock suspicion of Catholicism to lurid extremes. How contemporary Tory and Whig opinion-makers in the major cities debated and negotiated the evolving cultural perceptions of Scottish and Irish literature on both sides of the North Channel is an intriguing topic for research; Strachan's paper points in potentially fruitful directions but remains content to focus largely on a positive reappraisal of Maturin's status as a novelist. In comparison, Alison O'Malley Younger chooses to reappraise a much more canonical Gothic text, re-reading *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as a parable of racial degeneration, enacted as "civilised" Dr Jekyll succumbs to his primitive, Celtic "Hyde". Like her co-editor, O'Malley-Younger finds it hard to resist a wince-inducing pun; her likening of Stevenson's descriptions of Jekyll's alter ego to newspaper stereotypes of Neanderthal Irishmen is enjoyably suggestive without being conclusive. But then, *Strange Case* is so stubbornly and artfully open to diverse readings that dualisms like "Saxon-Celt" or "Englishman-Scotsman" can easily be imposed on the evocative hints given in the text.

Other essays in the collection are more concerned with blurring the lines of Scottishness and Irishness in a pan-Celtic melting pot. Willy Maley and Niall Gallacher explore the active interest of three Scottish literary and political figures, John Maclean, Sorley Maclean and Hugh MacDiarmid, in Irish politics in the early twentieth century, and in particular their collective admiration for James Connolly, the Edinburgh-born, Irish republican leader. Connolly is presented as the neglected inspiration for a "Gaelic Socialism" or "Celtic Communism" that draws both upon Lenin's denunciation of colonialism and an idealised vision of the communal society of early Irish and Scottish clans. In a case study of "cultural flows", Masaya Shimokusu explains the attraction felt by Japanese literary translators of the 1920s to the novelists and dramatists of the Irish Literary Revival, among whom a prominent place was given to the Scot, "Fiona Macleod" (William Sharp). An equally pseudonymous Japanese translator, "Mineko Matsemuro" (Hiroko Katayama) translated "Macleod" in the 1920s, and reprinted editions of her work found a new audience in Japan in the 1980s, a readership influenced, Shomokusu argues, by the popular success of the "new age" music of Irish singer Enya, whose work was showcased in the BBC series *The Celts* (1986). On the Sassenach side of the divide, Martyn Colebrook's discussion of the Scottish academic and novelist, Liam McIlvanney's *All the Colours of the Town* explores the mirrored experiences, allegiances and links between Northern Ireland and lowland Scotland, as seen in the genre of political thriller, which is perhaps today's popular counterpart to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic shocker.

Several essays focus less obviously on interconnections between Scotland and Ireland. Deirdre O'Byrne offers a close reading of Hanna Bell's novel, *December Bride*, which is set in a Scots-Irish farming community. A male novelist's exploration of the

relationship of a determined young woman with her traditional, patriarchal community, *December Bride* on the face of it invites comparison with the earlier Scots fiction of Lewis Grassie Gibbon – but connection is not made. And another essay, *Mickey B* by Emily A. Ravenscroft and James Mollison, while dealing with the adaptation and performance of “The Scottish Play” inside a Northern Irish prison, raises general questions about the ways in which performance constructs and constrains gender, class, and religious and political identities – without directly invoking Scotland except as a potentially manageable “Other” to the unruly culture represented by the Irish inmates.

Finally, a brace of essays deals less with literature and more broadly with Irish and Scottish cultural studies. Lauren Clark offers an examination of International Exhibitions in the “Second Cities” of Empire, Glasgow and Dublin, as a means of arguing for the rise of what she calls “Celtic Consumerism.” As with many of the essays in the volume, this raises intriguing questions without wholly nailing the answers. Clark argues that by increasingly offering commodified representations of aspects of the local culture in order to promote local products, International Exhibitions began to offer a form of resistance to the imperial hegemony that at first sight provides a rationale for these kinds of display. The topic is a fascinating one, but the space of a brief essay can hardly allow a nuanced development of the ways in which global and local interactions were enacted by promoters and processed by exhibition visitors. A possible way of understanding these spectacular events was that they offered a narrative whereby visitors could place themselves, not just as “Celtic consumers” but as participants in the immediate and wider imagined imperial community. The concluding essay of the volume, by Stefanie Lehner and Cillian McGrattan, considers the “rebranding” of Irish and Scottish cultures by politicians and political commentators. Lehner and McGrattan cast a sceptical eye on notions of confident modern, liberal, inclusive civic nationalism, as touted variously by Scottish Nationalist politicians, and “post-nationalist” Irish literary critics. In questioning whether nationalism is really a productive lens with which to view the broader issues of class, race and gender, Lehner and McGrattan join sceptical critics like Alex Thomson (2007), and Scott Hames, whose recent anthology, *Unstated* (2012) is an essential litterateur’s sampler of a range of Scottish writers’ views on the upcoming referendum on Scottish independence.

Celtic Connections shares its name with a festival of vaguely “Celtic” music, which was established in Glasgow in the depths of January, in part to grasp the marketing opportunity, granted by the convenient date of Burns’ birth, to develop a specialised tourist season in the darkest, wettest and coldest time of the year. The volume is too spiky and awkward to function as a cultural tourist’s confident gloss on Irish-Scottish relations. It is too diverse in theoretical approach, too wayward in content and too partial in the treatment of its subject to function as a proper manifesto for the systematic development of autonomous Irish-Scottish cultural studies. But the contributions are provocative enough to indicate that developing the curricular space to allow such a venture would be well worthwhile.

Works Cited

- Hames, Scott (ed.) *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence*. Edinburgh: WordPower Books, 2012.
- Thomson, Alex. 'You can't get there from here': Devolution and Scottish literary history. *International Journal of Scottish Literature* Vol. 3, 2007. Available online at <http://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue3/thomson.htm>