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CHAPTER ONE 13

Nation and Nationalism

This Chapter examines claims by Douglas Gifford that recent Scottish literature constitutes a 'real' Literary Renaissance. It asks whether cultural vitality in Scotland emerged as a reaction and response to certain disappointments in the political arena, particularly the failed devolution referendum of 1979?. Peter Kravitz contests such notions, foregrounding the lengthy gestation of seminal texts such as Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*, published in 1981 but three decades in the making. Besides the issue of renaissance, several critics assert that Scottish literature provides a unique artistic space in which the politics of national identity are keenly played out. They include Cairns Craig, Alan Riach and Carla Sassi. In contrast Christopher Whyte insists that nationalist criticism serves to distort, delimit and detract from the signifying possibilities of Scottish literature. In this Chapter the national question forms a conduit to examining criticism of Alasdair Gray and his groundbreaking novel *Lanark*.

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Language

This Chapter focuses on the politics of language and its particular relevance within Scottish literature. It includes discussion of writing in Scots, Gaelic and in vernacular forms of English. We begin by revisiting Edwin Muir's famous claim of the 1930s that the Scottish writer is somehow maimed or disabled by the country's fractured linguistic inheritance. In contrast, critics like Rory Watson argue that this is in fact one of Scottish literature's most enabling characteristics. Contemporary Scottish writing is seen to be enlivened by an acute awareness of the linguistic terrain upon which it travels. J. Derrick McClure's book *Language, Poetry and Nationhood* (2000) is used to explain the historical

evolution of Scotland's various languages. In discussing the role of urban vernacular we consider critical reactions to the poetry of Tom Leonard. The continuing crisis confronting literature in Gaelic is also examined in detail.

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### Gender

One of the most important transformations within contemporary Scottish literature has concerned the influence and visibility of women's writing. Marilyn Reizbaum and Joy Hendry argue that Scottish women's writing has traditionally suffered from a form of double marginalization; this on account of questions of gender and its locus within a minor literary culture. For Aileen Christianson the enduring problem is nationalism, a patriarchal ideology that has historically sidelined and subordinated women's experience. The 1990s saw the publication of several weighty anthologies of Scottish women's writing which sought to redress this historical imbalance. This chapter examines reactions to the work of two important female writers of the period, the poet Liz Lochhead and the novelist Janice Galloway.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### Class

For Christopher Whyte the flourishing of literary talent during the 1980s, described by some as a national renaissance, was, in fact, the overdue arrival of working-class voices within the literary domain. Douglas Gifford reads these contemporary innovations in the context of the Glasgow history novel. For Cairns Craig there has always been a particularly proletarian bias at the heart of literary endeavor in Scotland. In contrast for poet and critic Douglas Dunn, the preponderate influence of working-class/Glasgow fiction represents a distorted and narrow view of late twentieth-century Scottish culture. The second half of this Chapter features a discussion of critical responses to the work of James Kelman.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### Postcolonialism

This Chapter begins with the outright exclusion of Scotland from what has been proposed as a canon of postcolonial cultures, a point argued in the seminal study *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). Scotland occupies an unusual position as a country that has both suffered and benefited

from the British imperial adventure. Critics like Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull employ an explicitly postcolonial framework and read Scottish culture through Frantz Fanon's concept of 'inferiorisation'. Berthold Schoene on the other hand is hesitant regarding any outright assertion of Scottish postcoloniality. For Schoene, such narratives reveal an internal friction and the country's problematic history of exploiting its own marginal groups like the rural peasantry and the urban working-class. This Chapter examines critical responses to the work of Irvine Welsh. It also features discussion of the film version of Welsh's groundbreaking novel *Trainspotting* (1993).

## CHAPTER SIX

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### Postmodernism

This chapter features arguments by three critics on the relevance of postmodern theory to Scottish literature. For the critic Eleanor Bell postmodernism provides a welcome antidote to the immuring effects of cultural nationalism on our understanding of Scottish writing. Randall Stevenson concurs, arguing that postmodern thinking averts a worrying tendency toward parochialism within Scottish criticism. He claims that Scotland's ideological heritage – Calvinism, the Enlightenment, and the industrial revolution – make it particularly conducive to the challenges posed by postmodern theory. For Cairns Craig, Scottish literature can actually lay claim to be the inventor of postmodernism. He argues that the roots of many postmodern concepts can be found in Scottish Romantic writing, particularly the work of Sir Walter Scott and James Hogg. This Chapter also considers critical responses to the work of two influential contemporary writers: Muriel Spark and A. L. Kennedy.

### Conclusion

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