Cairns Craig’s *Modern Scottish Novel* is the first work in over twenty years to thoroughly contextualize and theorize the twentieth-century Scottish novel. With great clarity of style, Craig provides an overview of past critical approaches to the modern Scottish novel and thoroughly discusses the relevance of theories of nationalism to Scottish culture, making his book a useful introduction to the modern and postmodern Scottish novel. At the same time, the compendium of original critical approaches that Craig explores opens up new avenues of exploration for the experienced literary specialist.

The work has two broad objectives. First, Craig identifies and analyzes traits both specific to the form and content of the Scottish novel, and to the defining elements of Scottish culture in general, and traces their transmutation throughout the century. Five key interrelated traits are identified, and Craig devotes a chapter to each, placing a range of novels within the broader context of Scottish intellectual thought. In addition to discussing the penetrating influence of Scottish Calvinism, he engages with fiction through the theories of Scottish intellectuals from various disciplines, including the anthropological research of J.G. Frazer, R.D. Laing’s model of the psyche, and John Macmurray’s philosophical concepts of identity. Second, Craig reclaims the post-Scott nation, and the novel through which it is negotiated, from the pessimism promulgated by authors and critics from Edwin Muir and Hugh MacDiarmid to Allan Massie and Christopher Harvie. The novel, Craig suggests, creates an intellectual space in which national stereotypes and simplistic binaries can be challenged and replaced by complex dialogue on ideas of community and culture.
The first of the five tendencies that Craig finds in the novel is a penchant for grappling with characters that are either fearless or fearful; a legacy he associates with Calvinism and the impulse to submit to or defy a repressive figure of authority. Novelists of the 1920s and 1930s, he argues, wrote their way out of this binary in part by displacing the omnipotent narrator or author, although the binary reappears in later works such as *Trainspotting* in which it appears in the relationship between Begbie and Renton. Second, he traces a developing resistance in Scottish writing to language hierarchies that relegate Scottish dialect to an inferior position in the text, subordinated to the cultured English language of the narrator. This resistance frequently manifests in what Craig, using the terminology of Macmurray, refers to as heterocentricity, a concept that the self only comes into being in its dynamic relation with the Other, with community. Such interrelatedness is evident in a number of novels in which English and dialect become intertwined in both the speech of characters and the narrator. Third, Craig considers the relationship between history and myth in the Scottish novel. Scotland has frequently been represented as a space outside history, a void either filled by manufactured romance or a drab, eventless world of repetitive industrialism. Craig examines the way in which the modern novel attempts to resolve this by negotiating its way between a desire to participate in history proper and a drive to explore and revise the mythic world beyond history. Fourth, he discusses the use of typographical techniques by post-modern novelists to escape cultural/textual domination. Finally, Craig reveals the tension in many Scottish works between the author’s recognition of the power of the imagination and the Calvinist suspicion of the imagination that often saturates the Scottish psyche.

The *Modern Scottish Novel* is an impressive work that substantially broadens and enriches current discussions about the nature of Scottish identity by weaving together unlikely comparisons in original and exciting ways. Who would have thought Willa Muir and Irvine Welsh would have so much in common? Despite Craig’s decision to work with a relatively small number of Scottish authors to ensure the accessibility of the works he analyzes, he places emphasis on several writers who are frequently
marginalized in studies of Scottish literature. The reintegration of such neglected authors helps to counter Edwin Muir’s contention that “the Scottish past…[is] constituted by a few isolated writers with a ‘rude buttress of ballads and folk songs to shore them up and keep them from falling’” (p.16). Nan Shepherd, for example, whose work has only been revived in the past decade, becomes a vital part of the discussions of both dialect and the imagination. Similarly, Craig demonstrates that the concerns of J.M. Barrie, often reviled for his part in the sentimental Kailyard novels, were shared and explored by the Scottish novelists that followed him. His limited selection of novels does occasionally cause the reader to regret the absence of works that would be greatly illuminated by his arguments. The unique mythic novels of Fiona Macleod (the pseudonym of William Sharp) would have been a welcome addition to his chapter on history and myth, for example.

In this rich, complex analysis of the twentieth-century Scottish novel and its context, Craig explicitly rejects a detailed comparison to the English novel or to fiction coming from the other ‘peripheral’ nations - Ireland and Wales. This seems to be a justifiable response to the way in which Scottish literature has generally been overshadowed by the English canon. At the same time, it is rather problematic to discuss tendencies in the Scottish novel without distinguishing them from the traits of novels written elsewhere in Britain. Concepts of history and myth in Julian Barnes’s England, England, for example, might have been effectively contrasted with the similar concepts in the work of Alasdair Gray or Robin Jenkins. Craig does provide brief moments of intersection with English or Irish modernist and post-modernist texts - glimpses of T.S. Eliot and James Joyce - and his discussion of the relationship between dialect and classical English also gestures towards British dialogue. On the other hand, by defining traits specific to the Scottish novel, Craig provides a solid foundation for future cross-border research, research shaped by Scottish fiction rather than defined by the English centre.

Sharon Alker, University of British Columbia

1. Francis Russell Hart’s The Scottish Novel from Smollett to Spark (Harvard University Press, 1978) was the last work to tackle the subject so extensively; Hart’s work, however, covers a broader period than Craig’s.