REVIEW

Scott Hames. *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution: Voice, Class, Nation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019. Pp. 352. ISBN: 9781474418140 (Paperback); ISBN: 9781474418133 (Hardback). £24.99/£80.00.

Scott Hames' *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution: Voice, Class, Nation* undertakes the ambitious project of providing a meticulously researched and contextualised, yet theoretically complex and sophisticated, critical exploration of cultural devolution as historical account of Scotland's constitutional development and as a phenomenon that connects Scottish politics, culture, and literature. Hames invites us to read the interaction between the cultural and political through the tension between "the Dream," namely "a story of cultural vanguardism in which writers and artists play the starring role in the recuperation of national identity, cultural confidence and democratic agency," and "the Grind," or the "history of devolution as a shrewd and sometimes grubby saga of electoral expediency" (p. xii). Hames' concern is not to assess the truth-value of the assumptions built into the paradigm of cultural devolution but to delineate a critical history of its emergence and "reality-shaping" powers (p. 4).

In the Introduction, Hames frames the cross-fertilization between Scottish culture and politics that developed between the 1970s and 1999 in relation to the tensions and alignments that crystallized out of the encounter between cultural and party politics. On the one hand, "the Dream" was legible in the political sphere only inasmuch as it played out within the frame constituted by machine politics of "the Grind." On the other hand, the radical force of "the Dream" was limited by the pursuit of identitarian empowerment that was central to the rhetoric of cultural and political devolution in Scottish literature and politics alike. Hames draws on nationalism studies and the work of political theorists Wendy Brown and Nancy Fraser to explore this relationship.

The seven main chapters of *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution* trace these dynamics as they play out in the decades preceding devolution. Chapters 1 and 2 respectively explore the literary nationalism of small magazines published between 1967 and 1979 and the governmental processes, Bills, and Papers, through which self-government was discussed in the same years. Chapter 3 addresses the emergence of the assertion of a Scottish dimension out of party politics and the work of cultural and political magazines between 1979 and 1987. Chapter 4 traces the ideas of self-determination expressed in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review* and the “Self-Determination and Power” conference (1990) on the one hand, and animating the initiatives of the organized movement for self-government on the other, most notably the publication of *A Claim of Right for Scotland* and the organization of the “A Day for Scotland” event (1990). Chapter 5 is devoted to James Robertson’s *And the Land Lay Still* (2010) as the most important conscious literary representation of the journey to devolution. Chapter 6 connects the development of a vernacular literary space, and the associated centrality of working-class speech, to the search for pre-political bases in which to root the assertion of national distinctiveness besides and beneath the civic institutionalism enshrined in the *Claim of Right*. Chapter 7 engages with the vernacular literary politics that underpin the spectacle, and limits, of representation in parliamentary discourse and in the writing of Irvine Welsh, A. L. Kennedy, and James Kelman. The Conclusion reflects on the legacies of the rhetorical strategies through which devolution was achieved and the possibilities for critique that these open up.

The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution offers a series of challenges for practitioners of Scottish Literature to grapple with. First of all, Hames encourages us to look beyond any “illusory divide between culture and politics, and towards their reintegration” (p. 39). Connected to this is Hames’ persistent concern with the need for Scot Lit to self-reflectively address the constraints generated by its fetishization of identitarian empowerment and “familiar display-identities” (p. 306). It is imperative that we exit the cul-de-sac represented by the positioning of nationhood and identity as the “meta-tropes of all Scottish writing” (p. 305) if we want to be able

to attend to “other forms and stakes of ‘the political’ in literature and culture” (p. 306), which for Hames constitutes the direction the field should be moving in. *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution* crucially develops a methodology through which this can be achieved by drawing on nationalism studies and critical and political theory to frame and theorise in-depth historical and archival research into Scottish cultural, literary, and political contexts.

Ultimately, by owning up to the political constitution of Scottish literature and exploiting the heuristic potential this move affords, Hames’ study embodies a form of literary criticism that points the way forward for what might be termed “post-Indyref Scot Lit criticism.” *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution* evinces the maturity of the field, in which old binaries between theoretical and contextualist or recuperative approaches, nationalist and non-nationalist perspectives may well be overcome—once their encounter is craftily staged in the way Hames does.

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