THE LITERARY POLITICS OF SCOTTISH DEVOLUTION: VOICE, CLASS, NATION

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Within Scottish Literary and Cultural Studies, the field to which this book belongs, parliamentary devolution has been defined by prominent scholars such as Cairns Craig (1996), Douglas Gifford (2007) or Robert Crawford (2000) as a political process detonated by the 1980s cultural revival in which artists figure as the instigators of the Scottish parliament established in 1999, regarding cultural expressions of Scottishness as signs of support for self-government. *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution: Voice, Class, Nation* stands out as the first complete study which traces the shift of Scottish devolutionary politics and Scottish culture from their state as separate domains to their discursive conflation from 1967 to 1999, considering the joint responsibility of Scottish intellectuals, critics and politicians in stimulating this synthesis. This wide approach locates Scott Hames in the middle ground between culturalist and socio-political scholars as he addresses the full picture, examining the limitations of the cultural understanding of devolution as well as providing an account of the interactions between political and cultural agents. Hames's study spans over seven chapters preceded by an introduction.

In the introduction, by far the longest chapter of the book, Hames thoroughly explores the main arguments and theoretical concepts he will be working with throughout the book, from the most general to the most specific. In the first section, Hames addresses the limitations of collective identity politics by explaining

the theories of American political scientists Wendy Brown and Nancy Fraser, as well as those of Pierre Bordieu. These academics posit that, when managed through institutions, the emancipatory movements of collective identity politics often fall into essentialist tendencies which further subordinate them to the centralised status quo they were seeking liberation from. In the second section, Hames brings these ideas to the arena of Scottish literary nationalism. In particular, the author assesses the reductive constructions which —under the labels of Scottish cultural difference and identity— were strategically employed by pro-devolutionary politicians to adjust the parliamentary model, therefore excluding other expressions of identity from the critical discussions on national culture. Finally, in the third section, Hames revises the two competing narratives of devolution which constitute the main focus of the study. A first understanding of devolution, what Hames calls "The Grind" (xii), is the story of devolution as a strategic and conservative political process grounded in the need to provide the Scottish people with a Westminster-bound parliament which ensured both the continuity and renewal of the United Kingdom's parliamentary democracy. A second understanding of devolution, what Hames calls "The Dream" (xii), is the idea of political devolution as a radical process of liberation from the Union initiated by Scottish artists in the 1980s.

The first chapter examines the various reactions within the Scottish literary community to the growth of Scottish nationalism since the first victory of the SNP in the 1967 Hamilton by-election until the failed devolution referendum in 1979. What is interesting about this chapter is how Hames describes the diverse conceptualisations of Scotland and Scottishness which existed in this period. Hames sheds new light on the differences between political nationalism, spearheaded by the SNP and economically-driven, and the endeavours of cultural and literary nationalists, who embarked on a romanticised theoretical discussion of what Scottishness ought to be. Within the cultural and literary nationalist arena, Hames distinguishes two main tendencies: an internationalist and outward-looking understanding of Scottish cultural values, whose beliefs were exemplified in the magazines *Scottish International* and *Lines Review,* and a parochial and romanticised conception of Scotland, derived from Hugh MacDiarmid's ideas and led by the magazines *Scotia Review* and *Akros*. Finally, the importance of *Scottish International* as a pioneer in the merging of Scottish culture and nationalist politics in the cause for self-government is highlighted. Due to the assumption that there was no native cultural consumption in Scotland, *Scottish International* acted as a cultural spokesperson for the Scottish public, anticipating the idea that culture could function as a political layer of national representation.

The post-Hamilton period is reviewed again in the second chapter from a purely electoral and political perspective. The aim of this chapter is to cover the omissions

of the cultural narrative which, as Hames illustrates, overtly disregards the essential role played by party politics. In order to do so, Hames gathers the investigations of political historians such as James Kellas, Tom Devine and James Mitchell and the declarations of politicians to reconstruct the political path towards the first devolution referendum in 1979. According to Hames's research, the origins of devolution as a political strategy can be found in the creation by Labour, under Harold Wilson's leadership, of a Royal Commission on the Constitution, which first determined devolution as a solution to appease Scottish national feeling and recognise it while ensuring the stability of the Union. Most importantly, Hames establishes a chronology in which the political strategy of devolution precedes the cultural debate on Scottishness, dispelling the cultural devolution myth that it was in the cultural field where a Scottish parliament was first imagined.

The devolutionary interplay of politics and culture is closely examined in Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapter 3, Hames identifies which aspects of the cultural conceptualisation of Scottishness were underlined in the cultural and political magazines *Radical Scotland* and *Chapman* and instrumentalised by the pro-devolution political movement between 1979 and 1987. After the failed devolution referendum of 1979, members of the Labour party and a left-wing section of the SNP joined to find common ground. By conflating nationalism and socialism in a new construct of Scottish identity —left-nationalist, anti-Tory and working-class— which exploited Scottish difference within the Union as a political justification of the need for self-government, devolution was able to become a powerful alternative to Thatcher's mandate in Britain. Hames devotes the last part of the chapter to explaining how, although the enablers of devolution were the politicians, cultural magazines, among which *Radical Scotland* stands out, were involved in the left-nationalist political strategy, contributing to a rhetorical refinement of a devolutionary Scottish cultural identity which actively omitted ideologically diverse discussions on Scottish literature.

In Chapter 4, Hames stresses certain specific concepts which, although used in the cultural and political arena with different meanings, were conflated in the discursive framework of devolution from 1987 to 1992. The first of these concepts is "Scottish voice" (161), employed as an element of national cohesion and of polarisation against the English. The second concept Hames identifies, "self-determination" (171), is defined as an action of personal emancipation as well as as a process of national autonomy. Self-determination as an anti-institutional act of liberation featured in *Edinburgh Review*, an anarchist cultural magazine highly influenced by James Kelman's grassroots agenda. The third concept is "Scottish cultural difference" (178). The difference of Scotland within the Union and the idea that there had been a disregard for Scottish institutions were used as

arguments for self-government by political bodies like the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly and the Scottish Constitutional Convention. Moreover, in the cultural 'Festival of Democracy', held in 1987, and the festival 'A Day for Scotland', celebrated in 1990, Scottishness was marketed as a left-wing, proletarian, internationalist identity, contrary to neoliberal and Toryist England. In this vein, Hames shows how Scottishness and the claim of cultural difference were fashioned in a radical anti-Union discourse which rendered devolution electorally appealing and masked its conservative roots.

Inaugurating the more literary section of the book, Chapter 5 examines the dilemmas of narrating and accurately representing history, specifically focusing on an analysis of James Roberston's story of devolution in his novel *And the Land Lay Still* (2010). At the beginning of this chapter, Hames acknowledges the difficulty of reconstructing something as intangible and ephemeral as history. The slippery and subjective quality of history has been magnificently addressed in Scottish literature by Alasdair Gray, whose novels *Lanark* (1981), *Poor Things* (1992) or *A History Maker* (1994) attempt to examine how history is produced, questioning its epistemological foundations and exploring the interconnections between personal and national histories. Concerning Robertson's work, the idea that our experience of history is biased and incomplete is explored in the short story "Republic of the Mind" as well as in his first novel *The Fanatic* (2000). Yet, *And the Land Lay Still* attempts to narrate the totality of the cultural and political processes of devolution. For Hames, the struggle of Robertson to write a full-scale history of devolution is palpable throughout the novel. By citing scholars such as Georg Lukács or Fredric Jameson, who have aimed to explain how history can be narrated and measured, Hames assesses which literary tools allowed Robertson to effectively write a convincing history of devolution —selection of specific events, journalistic style— and which did not.

The sixth chapter expands on the concept of 'Scottish voice' by examining the particular role of vernacular Scottish languages as national identity markers during the devolutionary period. Hames describes German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder's theory, which defines language as a pivotal element in the creation of an autonomous national literary space, to explain to what extent the Scottish case differs from this model. None of the vernacular languages of Scotland, neither the Celtic-rooted Scottish Gaelic nor the group of Scottish dialects and subdialects collectively known as Scots, have official national status. Moreover, the linguistic proximity between Scots and English hinders the establishment of a clear division between the two. However, Hames argues that, in the process of creating a national space during the 1970s, the West and Central Scotland varieties of Scots were chosen, due to their working-class affiliation, as the linguistic

markers of left-nationalism. Rather than viewing it as a drawback, Hames considers that the linguistic uncertainty of Scots in relation to English and its flexibility increased the appeal of the devolutionary movement. In the conclusion, Hames claims that while the ambiguous position of vernacular Scots hampers its consideration as an official language, thus departing from the German model of romantic-nationalism as well as from MacDiarmid's modernist-primitivism, there is a different type of romanticisation underway. Indeed, the peripheral status of Scots is crucial for fuelling the victimhood discourse of contemporary Scottish nationalism which asserts Scottishness on the grounds of its dependence and marginality within the Union.

Finally, Hames devotes the last chapter to analysing how voice is integrated in Scottish Literature. The first author Hames examines is Irvine Welsh. According to Hames, in Welsh's magnum opus *Trainspotting* (1993), voice is presented as one of the elements of commodification and self-fashioning in which the novel's characters constantly participate. In A.L. Kennedy's novels, the second author Hames examines, the sense of community and belonging is so fragmented that identity and voice are configured as performative disguises. While gender is not among the identity variables Hames pays attention to in this book, it is worth noting that Kennedy's experimentation with voice is characterised by a nebulous representation of gender constructions which further problematises the fixity of identity, alienating characters and readers alike. Lastly, Hames highlights how James Kelman, in the expression of his anarchist libertarian political agenda, employs the vernacular to liberate voice from the machineries of the establishment. Despite the clear differences between these authors' use of voice and the politics of representative parliamentary democracy, the influence of the left-nationalist devolutionary framework is so widespread in Scottish literary and cultural studies to date that Welsh's, Kennedy's and Kelman's proposals are often misinterpreted as pro-devolutionary revindications of cultural representation rather than as artistic and subversive uses of language detached from the self-government agenda. By revealing how limiting the over-nationalisation of Scottish art is for the study of its literature, this book argues for an open and unprejudiced reading of Scottish authors.

The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution is an innovative, groundbreaking and complex book. It skilfully brings major contributions to the study of voice and class as crucial elements in the contemporary cultural conceptualisation of Scottishness, paying special attention to the pervasive influence of their political instrumentalisation. Despite its historical focus not being contemporary —the book only covers the constitutional politics of devolution until 1999— its findings are extremely relevant for understanding the antecedents of the current Scottish

pro-independence movement. Moreover, it presents new research on the part played by the 1980s cultural journals *Radical Scotland*, *Cencrastus* and *Edinburgh Review*, crucial sources for understanding the crystallisation of Scottish national identity as it stands today. With this publication, Scott Hames establishes himself as one of the leaders, together with scholars like Alex Thomson (2007), of a bold academic expedition which seeks to shake the foundations of the linkage between Scottish culture and political nationalism and thus diversify and enrich Scottish Literary and Cultural Studies.

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