Reviews

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Daniela Rogobete. *Scotland and Scottishness: From Tradition to Modernity*. Craiova: Editura Universitaria, 2020. Pp. 192. ISBN 9786061416165 (paperback).

A review of Daniela Rogobete's book finds its well-deserved place in a volume devoted to literary representations of contemporary Scotland. *Scotland and Scottishness. From Tradition to Modernity* is at once a well-written guide to Scotland and a compendium of historical, cultural, political, philosophical and literary narratives that have forged and moulded Scottish identity from ancient times until the dawn of the twentieth century. It is the first book on Scottish culture and identity published by a Romanian press and, at the same time, a study of the intricate past of Scotland that stands on an equal footing with other international works in the field, such as Jonathan Green's *Scottish Miscellany: Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Scotland the Brave* (2014), Rab Houston's *Scotland: A Very Short Introduction* (2008) or Magnus Magnusson's *Scotland: The Story of a Nation* (2001).

Rogobete argues that Scotland is a mental construct, an imaginary space which is the product of our literary and cultural representations, on the one hand, and of media constructions, on the other. However, once this predetermined image is set against crude reality, the Scottish land stirs our fascination, which stems from our desire to juxtapose what we already know with what we really see. Read in this light, Scotland turns out to be "a particular combination of fact and fiction, legend and history" and, most significantly, "a space of intriguing and unexpected contradictions" (7). Rogobete supports her idea by quoting G. Gregory Smith, according to whom such contradictions have come to be known as "Caledonian

Antiszygy” (18), i.e. a permanent blend of extremes that define Scottishness. This is the key argument of the book, articulated by the author’s recourse to *petits récits* (Lyotard 60) meant to legitimise the national and cultural identity of a geographically peripheral people within the United Kingdom.

Part 1 is a foray into the past of Scotland, a “stateless nation” (Rogobete 13) that is hard to frame theoretically because of its ever-changing ethnic, religious and linguistic heritage. Although Scotland has always been represented as a land whose picturesque Highlands, mysterious monsters, mythology, folklore, heroes and superstitions are just a few iconic samples of national identity, there is no single myth that speaks about its formation. Rogobete points to the subaltern status of the country, given its marginal position within the UK, and is particularly interested in detailing ancient social, historical and political facts that have shaped the identity of Scotland to this day. Passed down by word of mouth, the early history of the Scots – a mixture of Picts, Celts, Gaels and other ancient peoples – is briefly considered in relation to its transmission in the form of legends, myths and songs that have become part of Scotland’s literary heritage. *Lebor Gabala* (The Book of Invasions), one of the first poems in Scottish literature, Sir Thomas Gray’s *Scalacronica* or Andrew of Wyntoun’s *The Original Chronicle of Scotland* are telling examples. Rogobete embarks on a journey through centuries and explains Scotland’s sense of national identity during the War of Independence (1286-1328), its cultural connections with Europe, the “golden age” of Scottish culture in the 16th-century, the clash between modernity and conservative thinking in the 17th century, the radical scepticism augured by David Hume during the Scottish Enlightenment period, and the rise of mercantilism and the marginalisation of Scottish literature during the Victorian Scotland.

Dedicated to literary beginnings, Part 2 brings into discussion postcolonial approaches that contest the classification of Scottish literature as English or British literature. Rogobete invokes Carla Sassi, for whom Scotland is an “internal colony”, a “marginalized region” (qtd. in Rogobete 50) endowed with creative energy, a perspective which encourages a nationalist discourse contingent upon Celticism, not

Anglocentrism. In this sense, James C. Smith and Hugh MacDiarmid underscore both the distinctiveness and the powerful literary potential of Scotland, a point counteracted by figures such as T.S. Eliot, Edwin Muir or Tom Nairn, who stress the provincialism and fragmentation of Scottish literature. Rogobete fails to become engaged in this critical dialogue and concludes that the heated debates about Scottish literature as national literature have gradually been conducive to its inclusion in university curricula and in the world literary canon. To demonstrate the national character of Scottish literature, Rogobete offers us a brief account of mediaeval works written in Scots, of the Scottish Renaissance, of works written in English during the Scottish Restoration and, ultimately, of the Golden Age of Scottish Enlightenment. The chapter ends with a minute and extremely useful analysis of Scottish multilingualism, accompanied by thorough explanations about Scots, phonetic and lexical differences between Scots and English and the revival of Scots in the works of Allan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson, Robert Burns and Walter Scott.

Part 3 abounds in historical data and literary productions about the formation of the nation. Ranging from Scottish patriotism, as reflected in John Barbour's narrative poem *The Bruce*, William Dunbar and David Lindsay known as 15th-century *makars* – the Middle Scots equivalent of “maker” – to romanticized national pride embodied by the historical novels of Walter Scott and the social and political criticism advocated by John Galt, Susan Ferrier and Margaret Oliphant, this chapter insists on the construction of national identity upheld by “a sense of belonging and continuity” (89). This urge to national specificity was strengthened, aesthetically and philosophically, by the canonical figures of the Scottish Enlightenment discussed in Part 4. Here we are introduced to the prolific intellectual milieu cultivated by Edinburgh, which was known at the time as the “Athens of the North” (115). Rogobete takes every care to provide readers with the philosophical background in order to help them understand the sense of continuity and the ferment of ideas promoted by iconic philosophers, such as David Hume, Adam Smith and Thomas Carlyle, on the one hand, and by the representatives of the Scottish School of Common Sense, Thomas Reid, Henry Home and George Campbell. In Part 4, special attention is also paid to the beginnings of Christianity in

Scotland, coupled with the figure of John Knox, the spearhead of the Scottish Reformation. The last section zooms in on religion as ridiculed in James Hogg's emblematic satirical novel, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.

Such a book could not fail to include the Scottish poetic tradition, which goes back to the Celtic and Pictish tradition. Scrutinised in Part 5, this topic is approached from a generic perspective that tells us a lot about the creative energy of Scotland. Lyrical genres such as praise poetry, *brosnachadh* poems, i.e. poetry that extols heroic deeds, battle poems and Ossianic ballads are brought to perfection by Robert Burns, the national poet of Scotland. A few of his poems are analysed in a special subchapter in which the blend of biographical data with comprehensive text analysis attests to the bard's sound knowledge of the Scottish cultural tradition. The last part of the book echoes the same tradition, this time cast in the mould of the gothic, a predilect genre deeply rooted in Celtic mythology and folklore. In dealing with "fear-inspiring and fear-inspired" Scottish gothic texts, Rogobete suggests that such an emotion is triggered either by "a mythic fear" (178) or by a religious one, which is the mark of the wrong Calvinist interpretation of God as a vengeful entity. Importantly enough, the fear induced by the gothic manifests itself psychologically as fear of the Other understood as one's divided self. The latter, which epitomizes the "Caledonian Antisyzygy" tradition, is exemplified by Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Rogobete's last analytical endeavour is devoted to Arthur Conan Doyle's detective stories, with particular focus on Sherlock Holmes's logical reasoning at work when solving crimes.

Daniela Rogobete's book is a synthesis of Scottishness that represents a valuable resource catering to undergraduates attending elective courses on Scottish literature and culture and to graduate students specialising in British Studies MA programmes that include a Scottish Studies module. Along with the Appendices therein, the sections at the end of each chapter help readers acquire additional information in order to better understand Scotland's national and cultural specificity. Extremely well documented, the book may successfully enter into a dialogue with accounts of 21st-century Scotland, as is the case of the present special

issue of *American, British and Canadian Studies*. Last but not least, it may fruitfully determine other Romanian scholars of Scottish studies to open new avenues of research able to unveil unexplored local narratives about a nation for which independence has become again a pressing issue in a post-Brexit context.

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Work Cited

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