

ISS9SC- Scotland the What? Contemporary Scottish Literature & Identity

Overview

For the past decade, Scotland's national status has been 'both dangled before us and tantalizingly withheld' (poet Don Paterson). With attention focused on the question of independence, recent debates concerning Scottish culture and identity gain a heightened political charge. Literature has not only reflected but actively shaped such debate. In the year the new Scottish Parliament was established (1998), Christopher Whyte argued that 'in the absence of elected political authority, the task of representing the nation has been repeatedly devolved to its writers'. But what influence have writers played in recent political change, and to what extent has Scottish culture escaped its own stereotypes?

This course examines the literary and political currents shaping contemporary Scottish identity, introducing students to key twentieth- and twenty-first century texts. We encounter and explain a range of cultural debates concerning language, class, democracy and nationhood, attending to the urgency as well as the complexity of recent Scottish writing.

Course Outline

Week 1. Robert Burns and the Tartan Monster [screening: *Brigadoon*]

Week 2. John McGrath, *The Cheviot, The Stag, and the Black Black Oil*

Week 3. A.L. Kennedy, *Looking for the Possible Dance*

Week 4. James Kelman, *If it is your life*

Instruction plan

The course will consist of a 1-hour weekly lecture followed by a 2 hour tutorial, supplemented with film screenings of *Brigadoon* and *The Cheviot*. Students will be expected to attend all classes with a grade penalty applied for poor attendance. The class excursion to Edinburgh will include visits to the Scottish Writers' Museum and the Scottish Parliament, whose Canongate Wall mark the contribution of writers to

Assessment

Assessment will be in the form of a presentation (35%), essay (50%), report based on trip (10%) and tutorial participation (5%).

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students will have a solid grounding in twentieth-century and contemporary debates concerning Scottish cultural identity, democracy and national literature. Some of the core transferrable skills developed throughout this course include the ability to i) analyse and critically reflect upon various media, ii) apply the skills of sustained oral and written argumentation in a coherent and persuasive fashion, and iii) work with others in the presentation of ideas and the process of collective problem-solving.

Set Texts and Suggested Further Reading

Set Texts (Required purchases)

Robert Burns, *Poems* [selected by Don Paterson] (London: Faber, 2001)

Michael Gardiner, *Modern Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005)

James Kelman, *If it is your life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2010)

A.L. Kennedy, *Looking for the Possible Dance* (London: Vintage, 1993)

John McGrath, *The Cheviot, The Stag, and the Black Black Oil* (London: Methuen, 1981)

Required reading (TalisList)

Richard Zumkhawala-Cook, 'The Mark of Global Scottishness' in *Scotland As We Know It: Representations of National Identity in Literature, Film and Popular Culture* (London: McFarland, 2008), pp. 108-44

Suggested Further Reading:

Ian Brown and Alan Riach (eds), *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009)

Gerard Carruthers, *Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009)

Gerard Carruthers and Liam McIlvanney (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999)

Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (London: Penguin, 2007)

T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (London: Allan Lane, 1999)

Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (eds), *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997)

Scott Hames (ed.), *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence* (Edinburgh: Word Power Books, 2012)

Fancis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: From Smollett to Spark* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978)

Christopher Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics 1707-Present*, 4th Edn (London: Routledge, 2004)

Carl MacDougall, *Writing Scotland: How Scotland's Writers Shaped the Nation* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2004)

Iain Macwhirter, *Road to Referendum* (Glasgow: Cargo, 2013)

David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London: Routledge, 1992)

Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, Rev Edn (London: Verso, 1981)

Carla Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 2005)

Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (eds), *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993)

Marshall Walker, *Scottish Literature Since 1707* (London: Longman, 1996)

Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland* (London: Macmillan, 1984 / second edition in two volumes 2007)