

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Uncovering Caledonia: An Introduction to Scottish Studies**

Milena Kaličanin, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, pp. 223<sup>1</sup>

Anglophone studies in Slovakia and other post-communist countries have come a long way since the time when they were limited to linguistics, the canonical works of Anglophone (typically exclusively English and American) literatures and overviews of British and American social and cultural institutions. Postmillennial globalising processes have brought about a radical transformation of these traditional approaches, and the need to “consider the relationship of the literatures and culture of the United Kingdom and the United States to globalization” (O’Brien and Szeman 2001: 610) has become widely accepted. As Stefano Tartaglia and Monica Rossi (2015: 106) note, global culture modifies local cultures, thereby producing a destabilizing effect that “is often counteracted by the reaffirmation of a strong group identity defined, for example, by nationalism or religion.” This reaffirmation of a strong group identity is clearly visible in the case of subjugated nations that are currently facing more intensive forms of cultural modification as the older, centuries-long pressure of a hegemonic national culture is exacerbated by the more recent impact of global culture. An illustration of this situation can certainly be found in the case of the Scottish nation, whose struggle for the revival and preservation of their cultural identity has not gone unnoticed by scholars in Central and Eastern European academic departments specialising in Anglophone studies.

Although the times in which English language students in the former Czechoslovakia had only a restricted access to foreign literature (Janigová 2015: 124) are almost forgotten, there is still a need for Scottish studies textbooks and study resources that can introduce Scottish issues to Slovak students in an accessible way. From this perspective Milena Kaličanin’s book *Uncovering Caledonia: An Introduction to Scottish Studies* is a welcome help for teachers who would like to offer their students something that goes beyond the more typical textbook format filled with facts about Scottish literature and culture. Kaličanin has many years of experience in teaching Scottish studies to Serbian students and she conceived her book as a “cultural journey—an attempt on the part of a non-Scot to portray and illustrate the burning cultural issues of modern Scotland” (1) and offer “an insight into these issues through the interpretation, analysis and comprehension of Scottish folk tales, legends, literature and film” (2).

The book focuses on these burning issues of Scotland’s past and present through Kaličanin’s examinations of selected works that illustrate some of the major trends in the poetry, drama, novels and short stories of Scottish literature. The book consists of five extensive chapters, each divided into several segments, in which the author offers discussions of topics that cast light on the overarching issue of Scottish cultural identity. Each discussion is presented in a carefully chosen and well-constructed theoretical framework that provides a sound basis for Kaličanin’s analyses and interpretations. The author’s discussions range from famous Scottish legends and myths to poetry, short stories, novels and finally to an example from Scottish film, but the real advantage of the book’s arrangement is that each chapter, even each individual segment, can be read and studied separately, allowing teachers to find useful examples of Scottish cultural issues and major literary works, regardless of whether or not their specific courses focus on Scottish poetry, short stories, novels or Scottish cinema. At

the same time, Kaličanin's work can also be used as a primary study resource for an introductory Scottish studies course. Among its other uses, the book offers readers the possibility to gain insights into the relevance of legends of monsters in the Scottish national mythos and the importance of the poetry of the Scots Makars in the construction of Scottish national and cultural identity, but the book also enables students to learn about numerous cultural trends that challenge both the outsider's stereotypical images of Scotland and Scottish attempts to construct a fixed and unique Scottish identity.

Chapters two, three and four form the strongest parts of the book, offering the reader an opportunity to become acquainted with a number of interesting and topical issues that include, among others, Scottish urban myths in short stories by A. L. Kennedy and Laura Hird, the quest for Scottish independence as seen by James Robertson, the dystopic vision of future Scotland found in Andrew Crumey's work, and the exploration of famous "Caledonian Antisyzygy" in Margaret Laurence's expatriate short fiction. The chapter on drama offers insights into key issues of Scottish history ranging from the English (and later also American) exploitations of the Scottish Highlands (John McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*) through the famous conflict between Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots (Liz Lochhead's *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*) to the exploration of much more recent history – the Scottish Black Watch regiment's engagement in the Iraq war (Gregory Burke's *Black Watch*). At the same time the chapter helps readers and students to understand the approaches and dramatic techniques of in-yer-face theatre, verbatim theatre and post-verbatim theatre.

The last chapter also offers an unusual but refreshingly new approach, essentially contrasting the poisonous pedagogy of Muriel Spark's well-known character of Miss Jean Brodie, as discussed in the first segment, with the author's own pedagogical practices. The second segment of the chapter illustrates the usefulness of the famous *Trainspotting* films (1996 and 2017) in the class aimed at introducing innovative and thought-provoking ways of teaching Scottish culture to Serbian students. On the whole Milena Kaličanin's book *Uncovering Caledonia: An Introduction to Scottish Studies* not only offers useful tips for teachers and a solid study resource for students of Scottish studies courses but also an interesting and inspiring read for anyone who wishes to learn more about the rich and often unjustly overlooked culture of the Scottish nation.

Soňa Šnircová

<sup>1</sup>This review paper has been supported by VEGA Project 1/0447/20 The Global and the Local in Postmillennial Anglophone Literatures, Cultures and Media, granted by the Ministry of Education, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

#### References:

- Janigová, Slávka. 2015. Interview with Libuše Dušková. *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics*, vol. 12, no. 2. 124-130.
- O'Brien, Susie and Imre Szeman. 2001. Introduction: The Globalization of Fiction/the Fiction of Globalization. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 100, no 3. 603-626.
- Tartaglia, Stefano and Monica Rossi. 2015. The Local Identity Functions in the Age of Globalization: A Study on a Local Culture. *Community Psychology in Global Perspective*, vol. 1, no. 1. 105-121.

*doc. Mgr. Soňa Šnircová, PhD*  
*Department of British and American Studies*  
*Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice*  
*Moyzesova 9,*  
*04001 Košice*  
*e-mail: sona.snircova@upjs.sk*

*In SKASE Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies [online]. 2021, vol. 3, no. 1 [cit. 2021-06-30]. Available on webpage [http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/SJLCS05/pdf\\_doc/04.pdf](http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/SJLCS05/pdf_doc/04.pdf). ISSN 2644-5506.*