

Scottish Studies Profile: Associate Professor Carla Sassi

By Carla Sassi

I am Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of Verona. My interest in Scottish Literature has followed me since my student years at the University of Udine, across academic institutions and disciplinary fields. My first academic work — a study on Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (and I am proud to say that today I am Honorary Patron of the [International Anthony Burgess Foundation](#)) — had, in fact, no connection whatsoever with Scottish literature, except for a central concern and also a delight with spoken/written varieties of English and with artificial languages. It was no doubt this fascination with language which initially triggered an interest in Lewis Grassie Gibbon's Scottish classic — *A Scots Quair* — the *coup de foudre* that, in the late 1980s, drew me to the study of Scottish literature. You may think that the step from Burgess's kaleidoscopic slang to Gibbon's beautifully euphonic Scots-English prose is a hazardous one ... and yet, one day, I might persuade you that it is not so...



My interest in non-standard varieties of English, and in Scots, as well as a growing involvement in postcolonial theories prompted the production of a volume on the history of the English language, *L'inglese* (1995), the first textbook in Italy to contain an individual chapter devoted to Scottish English and Scots (by Clausdirk Pollner), alongside with a survey of British, Irish and world varieties of English. Another pioneering work, of which I am very proud, in collaboration with Marco Fazzini, was the bilingual anthology *I Poeti della Scozia Contemporanea* (1992), again the first of its kind in Italy, which presented the work of ten established poets: Norman Maccaig, Sorley Maclean, Tom Scott, Hamish Henderson, Edwin Morgan, Kenneth White, Aonghas Macneacail, Douglas Dunn, Liz Lochhead, Valerie Gillies.

Notwithstanding my long-standing interest in linguistics, I have always been, first and foremost, a literary scholar. My militant commitment to postcolonial theories, and a concern with inequitably hegemonic relations between nations, cultures

and languages have informed all my work, both as a researcher and as a teacher. In this context, I have gradually developed the conviction that post-Union Scotland provides a fascinatingly complex paradigmatic case of contested national identity, which might prove extremely valuable beyond the disciplinary borders of Scottish Studies. In *Imagined Scotlands* (2002), a collection of essays in Italian, I attempted, among other things, to demonstrate how postcolonialism may provide the instruments for a fruitful investigation of the Scottish predicament and, at the same time, how these instruments have to be used with some limitations in a Scottish context.

In *Why Scottish Literature Matters* (2005), published by the Saltire Society, I further developed my theoretical investigation, exploring different and new Scottish texts and contexts. More recently, I have collaborated with three specialists in Caribbean Studies (Joan Anim-Addo, Giovanna Covi and Velma Pollard) in the production of a volume on Caribbean-Scottish Relations (2007), *Caribbean-Scottish Relations: Colonial and Contemporary Inscriptions in History, Language and Literature*. This project, which originated at the University of Trento, where I taught as an Assistant Professor for twelve years, has indeed been a fascinating and enriching journey, as all cross-cultural encounters always are. And a very rewarding one too, as it was welcome with great appreciation at three international conferences in the past two years: in Trinidad, Miami, Barcelona.

As a follow-up, I have been awarded a Visiting Research Fellowship by the [Royal Society of Edinburgh](#) to carry on my research in this field: from February to July 2008 I will be happily based at the University of Stirling, where I will also be engaged, with Gemma Robinson, in the editing of the special issue of the *International Journal of Scottish Literature* devoted to "[Caribbean-Scottish Passages](#)", to be published later in the same year. Another volume — a collection of essays on Re-Visioning Scotland, which I co-edited with Lyndsay Lunan and Kirsty Macdonald, will soon be published by Peter Lang in the Anglo-American studies series. Finally, I would like to add that I contribute regularly with reviews of Scottish books to the Scottish section of *Il Tolomeo*, an academic journal specialised in the new literatures in English and published by the University of Venice.

Since 1989, when I started my academic career at the University of Trento, I have always included Scottish authors in my courses - canonical ones as Ossian or

Scott, or contemporary ones, as Jackie Kay or Suhayl Saadi – thus encouraging my students to adopt a comparative and articulate approach to ‘English’ literature. Many of them have chosen to write their final dissertation on the topics I have taught or on other writers/aspects of Scottish literature, and there is no doubt that the vast majority of them have been enticed by this subject. It was with great pleasure, for example, that I discovered that one of my former Verona students has recently drawn inspiration from one of my lectures on Hugh MacDiarmid for the title of her first photographic exhibition at the Italian Institute of Culture in Edinburgh.

Finally, as the International Relations Coordinator for the Facoltà di Lingue of the University of Verona, I have been more than happy to encourage, among others, exchanges with Scottish universities. My Faculty has now ERASMUS agreements with the Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Glasgow Strathclyde, St. Andrews and Stirling. Verona is a very popular destination with international students, and I am confident that these (along with other) exchanges will foster even more enriching encounters among students and teachers in the future.

My involvement in Scottish Studies has greatly intensified in the past seven years or so: I am now a member of the ASLS International Committee, of the editorial board of the [International Journal of Scottish Literature](#) and of the of the international network ‘Global Friends of Scotland’. And because first loves never, ever die, I am also a Friend of the [Lewis Grassie Gibbon Centre](#) .

This is indeed, as John Corbett has stated, a good time to be part of the growing community of researchers into Scottish language and literature ...

(c) The Bottle Imp