Introduction: Scottish Literature at the MLA 2015

By Susan Oliver

Following from Matthew Wickman, it was my pleasure to chair the Modern Language Association's Scottish Literature Discussion Group for 2014–2015. As Matthew mentioned in his column last year, the MLA provides one of the best international forums for Scottish literature with its world-wide community of more than 30,000 members from over 100 countries. The main event for the year is the MLA Annual Convention, which took place between 8–11 January in Vancouver. The Annual Convention venue varies each year and in 2016 will be in Austin, Texas.

Scottish Literature was strongly represented as usual in academic sessions and at the Scottish Writing Exhibition in the Exhibit Hall. The Discussion Group hosted two sessions, while related and independent sessions also presented work in Scottish studies. In addition to the formal papers, a bar event jointly run with the English Romantic and Victorian Divisions made a welcome social occasion.

The Discussion Group committee felt that some interesting possibilities for writing and criticism were arising out of the Independence Referendum and the unknown future that lay ahead of Scotland for much of 2014. We consequently invited papers about some of Scotland's lesser-known writers for a session titled 'Scottish Literature: Into the Great Unknowns'. Presenters included Corey Andrews, who is well-known for his writing about working-class Scottish writing, and Juliet Shields, who is distinguished for her work on gender, class, race and identity. Corey's book, *The Genius of Scotland: The Cultural Production of Robert Burns, 1785-1834*, was published by Brill as volume twenty-four of their SCROLL series in March this year. Juliet's *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish Identity, 1745-1820* explores the literary creation of a British national identity following the 1707 political union of England and Scotland. She has recently edited a collection of essays that challenge traditional ideas about the late eighteenth-century rise of the nation-state, titled *Representing Place in British Literature and Culture, 1660-1830: From Local to Global* (with Evan Gottlieb:

Ashgate, 2013).

I am pleased to say that a large audience contributed to the lively discussion session that followed the presentations. **Corey**'s and **Juliet**'s papers are printed in this supplement of *The Bottle Imp*. A third presenter, Alexander Kaufman, was unfortunately unable to participate at the last minute. Alexander's paper on ballads, Robin Hood and chapbooks will be shortly published as part of a book so are not included here.

The Scottish Literature Discussion Group joined with the English Romantic Division in a second session, capably organised and chaired by Evan Gottlieb and Miranda Burgess. That session addressed theoretical concerns relating to reading and scale. Titled 'Scaling Romanticism', the three world-class speakers were Miranda Burgess, Elizabeth Fay and Jon Klancher. It was particularly good to see Scottish literature represented there in comparison with English writing. Meanwhile, Caroline McCracken-Flesher organised and chaired a session that ties her own current research into concepts of homecoming with the archival theme that shaped the International Scott Conference at the University of Aberdeen in July. Paul Westover presented an original and intriguing paper, 'Locating Sir Walter Scott in American Authors' Homes', and Richard Hill spoke on 'Robert Louis Stevenson's Grass Hut in Hawai'i'. Caroline's own contribution, 'Walter Scott and the Antiromance of Romantic Life Writing', was presented at the Wordsworth-Coleridge Association's session on British Life Writing and will be published in *The Wordsworth Circle*.

Every year Gwen Enstam and Duncan Jones from the Association for Scottish Literary Studies display at the MLA's Book Exhibit an exciting selection of the year's new publications by Scottish writers and presses. Gwen and Duncan talked with visitors and, in keeping with their now regular practice, gave away press copies on a first-come-first-served basis. The stand is one of the most popular destinations for visitors to the Book Exhibit. Its value can't be overstated, for new editions of mainstream works but also for the many new writers and publishing poets that make Scottish writing such a vital, thriving and necessary part of Scottish cultural life.

I have served on the executive of the Discussion Group for four very fulfilling years. The MLA has recently revised the name of all of its to groups, so it is my pleasure to hand on the job of chair of the new Scottish Literature Forum for

2015-16 to Evan Gottlieb. We are also delighted to welcome a new executive member, Juliet Shields. Juliet's expertise will strengthen the Forum as it continues to promote and discuss all that is best about Scotland's rich literary life.Following from Matthew Wickman, it was my pleasure to chair the Modern Language Association's Scottish Literature Discussion Group for 2014–2015. As Matthew mentioned in his column last year, the MLA provides one of the best international forums for Scottish literature with its world-wide community of more than 30,000 members from over 100 countries. The main event for the year is the MLA Annual Convention, which took place between 8–11 January in Vancouver. The Annual Convention venue varies each year and in 2016 will be in Austin, Texas.

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