# Introduction: Diverse Scotlands

## By Padma Rangarajan

The 2022 MLA panel on ‘Diverse Scotlands’ was inspired by Scotland’s outsized role in the history of British imperial expansion, by its vexed status as a ‘postcolonial’ colony within the imperial fold, and by its current incarnation as an increasingly heterogenous society that nonetheless embraces a ‘Scottish’ civic identity. Added to the upcoming re-vote on Scottish independence and the marked absence of any discussion of the role that Gaelic might play in an independent Scotland, the panel’s focus on the intersection of language, history, and national identity was in keeping with the broader resonances of the convention’s focus on multilingualism.

Any discussion of Scottish diversity arguably begins with Scotland’s complex language politics, which are exemplified by the division between Lowland Scots and Highland Gaelic. The linguistic divide echoed political and economic tensions that would reverberate for centuries, and which was vividly explored in the literature of Walter Scott and James Hogg, among others. This schism can be further mapped onto Scotland’s role in the expansion of the British empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, wherein Lowland Scots had substantial investment in the global imperial economy while dispossessed and impoverished Scottish Highlands formed the core of the imperial armies in North America, South Africa, India. These tensions resulted in complex attitudes around the creation of diasporic Scottish communities. The novelist John Galt, who founded Guelph and Goderich, was keenly aware of the impact that colonization would have on indigenous Canadian communities, a situation that haunts his literary explorations of his own beleaguered Scottish Presbyterian history.

The above history of linguistic, religious, and national identity is only one piece of the various diverse Scotlands represented by the papers in this panel. The panel began with Ellen Beard’s paper on the polysemy of the tartan as expressed in Gaelic musical responses to the 1746 Disclothing Act. While the Disclothing Act was uniformly vilified by Gaelic poets of all political and religious stripes, the focus of their criticism was not identical. Beard traces how both Jacobite and Hanoverian poets resented the enforced loss of their distinct Gaelic identity,

although their verse also highlighted their differing grievances with the government.

The panel's second paper, by Phillip Zapkin, explores the contemporary resonances of Scotland's colonial history. Reading Aileen Ritchie's 1999 play *The Juju Girl*, Zapkin argues that the play interrogates stories Scots tell about Scotland's relation to colonialism, both as an internal English colony and about missionary work as a form of charity. Reading the Scottish characters' responses to the African peoples they encounter while on a backpacking trip, Zapkin demonstrates how the play raises questions about the Scottish preference for seeing themselves as victims of English colonialism rather than as perpetrators of a wider British colonialism.

Moving away from colonial history, Robert Morace's paper turns to Douglas Stuart's 2020 Booker Prize-winning novel, *Shuggie Bain*, and considers what the critical and commercial success of a gay, Bildungsroman, diaspora, family novel says about the state, or states, of the Scottish novel today. Morace argues that, in the United States, *Shuggie Bain* has been read not only apart from Scottish Independence, the controversial 'Glasgow effect', and the lads-behaving-badly *Trainspotting* school, but from within the safe confines of the up-from-poverty Horatio Alger myth of secular salvation. Reading *Shuggie Bain* (and its reception) within extant traditions of Scottish urban, autobiographical, and queer literature, as Morace does, illumines the state of Scottish literature in the literary marketplace.

The final paper in the panel recovers the forgotten history of Scottish Antarctic exploration. Ellen Frye's essay on the 1902-04 Scottish National Antarctic Exploration considers the particular significance of Scottish perspectives during the era of nationalist polar expeditions. Drawing from a variety of documents, including the photographic books, ships' logs, and sailors' diaries, this paper examines these texts for their disparate opinions and impressions of Antarctica as refracted through a particularly Scottish perspective. Frye weaves the history of Scottish polar expeditions to the importance of polar literary criticism in an age of climate crisis.

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