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**Silke Stroh, *Gaelic Scotland in the Colonial Imagination: Anglophone Writing from 1600 to 1900***

Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2017

**Cyril Besson**

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## REFERENCES

Silke Stroh, *Gaelic Scotland in the Colonial Imagination: Anglophone Writing from 1600 to 1900*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2017

- 1 As mentioned in the introduction, it is particularly felicitous that, as this issue was being put together, the journal received for reviewing the volume *Gaelic Scotland in the Colonial Imagination*, by Silkie Stroh (Northwestern University Press). To be clear, the case for the application of the tenets and concepts of Postcolonial Studies to Scottish Studies has long been a controversial one. To begin with, Scotland is not Ireland, and its relationship to English hegemony is not quite the same as that of the neighbour from across the Irish sea; as is well-known, some far-from-marginal Scottish groups within Scotland benefitted immensely from collaboration with the *sassenachs*, which certainly complicates things, not to mention the active part taken by the Scots in British colonialism. It can be noted, besides, that at the definitory level, terms like “hegemony”, “colonialism”, “expansionism” or “imperialism” should perhaps not be too easily considered substitutable and rather incautiously lumped together as functional synonyms valid in all instances and forms of “subjugation”, and therefore, one should always clarify which concept best encapsulates power relationships in a *specific* situation.
- 2 These restrictions and caveats, Silke Stroh is acutely aware of, and it is one of the great merits of this essential volume to offer, even though the author’s opinion becomes quickly apparent, a very nuanced appreciation of the relevance of construing Scotland

through the lens of Postcolonial Studies. Never rushing in but always treading thoughtfully, Stroh does not consider the reader to be a convert already, and the case is made patiently, in such a way as can win over even the most reluctant of critics.

- 3 After an introduction developing the framework and the ambivalences of Scotland as regards the colonial and post-colonial situations, the book traces the gradual marginalisation of Gaeldom from 1600 to 1800, before considering case studies to establish Scotland's place in the UK at a time when the assimilationist drive of the modern nation-state was in full swing already. Chapter 3 examines the growing importance of "noble savagery" in representation of Scotland and the Gaels in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Chapter 4 places Walter Scott's work in light of this "baggage", with a very fine analysis of Scott's "synthesis between the two main strands of colonial discourse [...] a denigration of 'ignoble savagery' in favour of progressivism and modernization on the one hand, and on the other hand a romantic idealization of 'noble savagery' which emphasizes the downsides of 'progress,' though the latter is often pronounced inevitable" (pp. 31–32). Chapters 5 and 6 mirror each other, testifying to the (literally) reactionary response to a form of integrated racialism, the swing of the pendulum moving from the modes of rejection of Gaelic racial otherness to an introjection of these categories by the very people at cross purposes with this "othering", those defending and even celebrating Gaeldom and the Celtic race.
- 4 By making her focus dynamic and always being mindful of the ambivalence of the situation, Stroh has written what can be considered a milestone in the relatively recent conjunction of Postcolonial and Scottish Studies, and a work that admirably complements *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature* (ed. by Michael Gardiner, Graeme Macdonald, and Niall O'Gallagher, Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

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