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L'Écosse vue d'ailleurs

Tri Tran (ed.), *L'eau en Écosse / Water in Scotland*

Besançon, Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2022

Cyril Besson



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- 1 It is a common trope of nationalistic writing that water and the nation have affinities of the structural or essential sort. Like water, the nation can be perceived as a continuous flow, in the sense of a dynamic current, but one that occupies a given “bed”, and therefore reconciles stasis and motion, across time if not space. Some see water and nation as partaking (across time and space this time) of what *linguistique énonciative* calls *le continu*, this category of uncountable nouns pertaining to a homogeneous substance presenting no discontinuity, which can sometimes be distributed in smaller quantities (*continu dense*) but can also remain unquantifiable (*continu compact*—like “freedom”, for example).
- 2 The Tri Tran-edited collection *L'eau en Écosse / Water in Scotland* wisely steers away from these wide-ranging and absolute generalisations to more humbly focus on specific topics that eventually convey a better sense of what Scotland has been and is, also pointing, perhaps, at directions that could be taken.
- 3 The book is divided in three chapters. The first, “Les formes de l'eau”, almost inadvertently traces an enlightening if minimal history of sorts of the cultural uses water was put to, with, particularly, Marion Amblard's “L'évolution de la représentation et de la symbolique du thème de l'eau dans l'art pictural écossais dans la première moitié du XIX^e siècle” encapsulating all the ideas, notions and facts one would need to get a good introduction to the issue; the one frustration is that reproductions of the paintings so thoroughly analysed are not included with her paper,

despite the fact that some reproductions are included in Pierre Martin's (equally essential) paper on salmon from an economic and sociological perspective later in the volume. The book's second part deals with "the creative effects of water". The densest part of the book, it contains stimulating contributions across the board, especially (but far from solely) Caroline Crépin's thought-provoking paper on Stevenson, and Moira Hansen and Natalie Finlayson's corpus-based breakdown of "Robert Burns's Use of Water-Related Language in Relation to Mood Disorder", a very useful (and again, methodologically sound) approach for the de-subjectivisation of literary analysis. The third section deals with "the uses of water" and takes at times a more socio-economic stance on things, but never dryly or from a modern perspective solely, as it is mindful of the course of history, between Sabrina Juillet's very informative paper on Edinburgh and water management in the seventeenth century (a surprisingly topical issue), and Camille Manfredi's very perceptive chapter on the poetics of tides in the twenty-first century.

- 4 This book is another very fine addition to the Philippe-Laplace-edited series, "Caledonia. Regards sur l'Écosse", now an essential voice for Scottish Studies in France and abroad.

AUTHORS

CYRIL BESSON

 <https://idref.fr/158599357>

Univ. Grenoble Alpes, ILCEA4, 38000 Grenoble, France
cyril.besson@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr