

Project Overview

'If Scotland voted for *political* devolution in 1997', argues Cairns Craig, 'it had much earlier declared *cultural* devolution'.¹ This narrative of antecedence is a commonplace in Scottish literary studies, though it is often unclear whether the primacy of culture is a matter of causation, displacement or surrogacy – culture driving politics, culture instead of politics, or culture as politics.

This research project investigates the emergence and legacy of the 'culturalist' paradigm which accounts for political and constitutional change with reference to Scottish cultural production, expression and renewal. Drawing on workshop events, archival research and interviews, 'Narrating Scottish Devolution' will examine the interplay between literary and constitutional debates (concerning representation, legitimacy, 'identity') after 1967, and specify how political devolution came to be valorised, and managed, as a cultural project.

Competing Narratives?

There are, broadly, two distinct scholarly accounts of Scottish devolution. For literary critics, cultural devolution in the 1980s was the forerunner of democratic renewal. In the words of Robert Crawford, 'devolution and a reassertion of Scottish nationhood were imagined by poets and writers long before being enacted by politicians'.² Political historians and social scientists have a different set of explanations, centred on electoral politics, economic factors and largely 'invisible' processes of UK institutional reform.³ With few exceptions, the first school pays as little attention to the Kilbrandon Report as the latter does to Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*.

What seems difficult to reconcile in these accounts has its own cultural-historical interest, suggesting the complex status of devolution as a process largely devised and effected within the horizon of 'administration' – as something done to and by civic institutions – but whose political warrant and meaning are seen to reside at the level of national affect, territory, 'identity'.

'Narrating Scottish Devolution' centres on the gap between these narratives, and on 'cultural devolution' as a trope eliding demands for literary and political representation. Two interdisciplinary workshops will probe its function and appeal in political debates leading up to devolution, and its legacy in post-1999 governance and literary culture.

Examining this topic before and after the referendum on Scottish independence is key; the narrative shape and significance of Scottish devolution may look very different in August 2015 than in August 2014. This is the moment fully to explore the formation, ideology and influence of devolution as a cultural trope framing developments in Scottish literary production and political change.

¹ Cairns Craig, 'Scotland: Culture After Devolution' in *Ireland (Ulster) Scotland: Concepts, Contexts, Comparisons*, ed. by Edna Longley, Eamonn Hughes and Des O'Riordan (Belfast: Cló Ollscoil na Banríona, 2003), pp. 39-49 (p. 39).

² Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 2nd edn. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 307.

³ See James Mitchell, *Devolution in the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), Vernon Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom*, Rev edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Invited Participants

All participants are invited to attend both workshops, but are scheduled to speak at one or the other, as indicated below.

	<u>Speaking at:</u>	
	<i>Workshop 1</i> 22 Aug 2014	<i>Workshop2</i> 31 Aug 2015
Dr Eleanor Bell, University of Strathclyde	✓	
Professor Paul Cairney, University of Stirling		✓
Professor Cairns Craig, University of Aberdeen	✓	
Dr Linda Gunn, Edinburgh Napier University [w Sarah Bromage]	✓	
Dr Gerry Hassan, University of the West of Scotland		✓
Dr Aaron Kelly, University of Edinburgh		✓
Professor Alex Law, University of Abertay	✓	
Dr Stefanie Lehner, Queen's University Belfast		
Dr Peter Lynch, University of Stirling	✓	
Dr Catriona Macdonald, University of Glasgow	✓	
Dr Craig McAngus, University of Stirling		✓
Professor David McCrone, University of Edinburgh		
Professor James Mitchell, University of Edinburgh		
Dr Gerry Mooney, Open University		
Professor Neil Mulholland, University of Edinburgh		✓
Professor Alan Riach, University of Glasgow	✓	
Professor Carla Sassi, University of Verona		✓
Dr Alex Thomson, University of Edinburgh	✓	
Professor Adam Tomkins, University of Glasgow		✓
Kathleen Jamie		✓
James Robertson	✓	
Jean Urquhart MSP		✓

Plans for Publication/Dissemination

- excerpts from contributions to both research workshops will be published in a special issue of a scholarly journal in the relevant fields
- two chapters of a forthcoming monograph by the principal investigator will draw on this archival/workshop material.
- contributions to both workshops may be recorded for use in a future radio documentary.

Workshop 2 – Cultural Devolution as Paradigm & Practice (1999- present)

Date: 31 August 2015 (Macrobert Arts Centre, University of Stirling)

[Directions](#)

Format: Roundtable discussions, concluding with a session on future research directions

David McCrone notes ‘an influential strain of writing about the relationship between culture and politics’ in modern Scotland.

Such culturalist accounts ... have powerful appeal despite (or perhaps because of) their lack of systematic and rigorous evidence to back them. They are predispositions of considerable cultural power which set the frame for economic and political agendas. They may be wrong, in sociological terms, but they are powerfully wrong in setting the frame for debate.⁴

Workshop 2 comprises a series of roundtable discussions examining the impact and significance of ‘cultural devolution’, both as a trope charting (and at times eliding) artistic and governmental developments, and as an agenda-setting framework of lasting influence.

- How far do ‘cultural’ readings of devolution colour perceptions of associated processes of democratic and institutional change?
- To what extent has ‘cultural devolution’ served as a policy script?
- How does the culturalist paradigm shape what is perceived, studied and constituted as Scottish literature?
- What influence has this trope played in post-1999 Scottish literary production?

The event will conclude with a roundtable on future research directions and questions.

As with Workshop1, the discussion will be audio-recorded and short interviews will be conducted with participants.

A limited number of postgraduates, invited observers and interested members of the public are invited to join the workshop (subject to available space). Unfortunately there is no project funding to support the travel and attendance of postgraduate researchers, though students are particularly welcome to attend.

⁴ David McCrone, ‘National Identity and Culture in a Cold Climate: The Case of Scotland’ in *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies* 2(2) (2009), 53-65 (pp. 54, pp. 56).

Workshop 2 – Cultural Devolution as Paradigm & Practice (1999- present)

31 August 2015 - PROGRAMME

*The workshop format is intended to maximize the time available for discussion and debate, and speakers are asked not for formal papers/lectures **but relatively short prepared remarks** (lasting a maximum of 15 minutes). Ideally these remarks will open the topic in ways that stimulate discussion across the panel of named speakers, and in the workshop generally.*

- 9.30 Tea/Coffee
- 10.00 Introductory: Recalling Workshop 1 and interim developments – Scott Hames
- 10.30 SESSION 1
Before and After 1999: Devolution, Change and Continuity
- Kathleen Jamie
 Craig McAngus
 Gerry Hassan
- 12.00 Lunch
- 1.00 SESSION 2
Devolved Cultural Politics and Artistic Production
- Neil Mulholland
 Carla Sassi
 Aaron Kelly
- 2.30 Tea/Coffee
- 3.00 SESSION 3
Cultural Devolution as Policy Frame
- Paul Cairney
 Jean Urquhart MSP
 Adam Tomkins
- 4.30 - 5.00 CONCLUDING ROUNDTABLE
- Future research directions and questions

Workshop 1 – The Culturalist Narrative of Scottish Devolution (1967-1999)

Date: 22 August 2014 (Macrobert Arts Centre, University of Stirling)

[Directions](#)

Format: Short talks and roundtable discussion - *see below for outline programme*

In 1998 Christopher Whyte argued that 'in the absence of elected political authority, the task of representing the nation has been repeatedly devolved to its writers'.⁵

What role should be assigned to writers, and other cultural actors, in accounting for political and constitutional change in Scotland during this period?

Workshop 1 revisits the culturalist narrative of devolution, the political context of its emergence (a democratic 'crisis of representation'), and the relationship between literary and political developments in the period between the resurgence of political nationalism and the opening of the Scottish Parliament.

Short talks and roundtable discussion will explore questions including:

- What is (or was) the ideological character of UK devolution?
- How did devolution come to be characterised as a cultural project?
- To what extent did 'culture' and the politics of identity inform electoral strategy and constitutional debate in the 1970s, 80s and 90s?
- What are the strengths and tradeoffs of viewing devolution in cultural terms, e.g. as the recovery of national 'voice', agency, identity?
- Viewed from 'cultural' perspectives, is Scottish devolution a radical reform or 'a policy of a strikingly conservative character' (Vernon Bogdanor), devised to re-legitimise rather than transform structures of power?

The discussion will be audio-recorded and short interviews will be conducted with participants.

A limited number of postgraduates, invited observers and interested members of the public are invited to join the workshop (subject to available space). Unfortunately there is no project funding to support the travel and attendance of postgraduate researchers, though students are particularly welcome to attend.

⁵ Christopher Whyte, 'Masculinities in Contemporary Scottish Fiction', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 34(2) (1998), 274-85 (p. 284).

Workshop 1 – The Culturalist Narrative of Scottish Devolution (1967-1999)

22 August 2014 - PROGRAMME

*The workshop format is intended to maximize the time available for discussion and debate, and speakers are asked not for formal papers/lectures **but relatively short prepared remarks** (lasting a maximum of 15 minutes). Ideally these remarks will open the topic in ways that stimulate discussion across the panel of named speakers, and in the workshop generally.*

9.30 Tea/Coffee

10.00 Project Introduction – Scott Hames

10.20 SESSION 1
Devolution as Story: Power and Identity since 1967

James Robertson
Catriona Macdonald
Eleanor Bell

12.30 Lunch

1.30 SESSION 2
Writing, Politics and Representation after 1979

Alan Riach
Linda Gunn and Sarah Bromage
Peter Lynch

3.30 Tea/Coffee

3.45 SESSION 3
Devolution and Literary History, Devolution as Political Frame

Cairns Craig
Alex Thomson
Alex Law