

from a British perspective. For a full-scale diplomatic history of Anglo-Russian relations in this period the use of Russian sources would have been essential—MacDougall does not employ any—but that is not what this book is trying to achieve.

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PAUL MALGRATI. *Robert Burns and Scottish Cultural Politics: The Bard of Contention (1914–2014)*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023. Pp. 280. \$110.00 (cloth).
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In *Robert Burns and Scottish Cultural Politics: The Bard of Contention (1914–2014)*, Paul Malgrati examines the numerous controversies that have surrounded the figure of Robert Burns in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Malgrati primarily focuses on the political appropriation of Burns’s legacy by differing Scottish groups, each with the express purpose of enlisting Burns in such causes as Unionism, Scottish nationalism, and communism, among others. Malgrati succeeds in demonstrating just how significant Burns has been (and continues to be) in Scottish politics and culture.

Malgrati begins with an event held on 22 January 2018, at 10 Downing Street; giving readers a seat at the table, Malgrati recounts the first ever Burns Night celebrated at the office of the British prime minister. Led by Theresa May, the ceremony appears to have been an awkward affair intended to promote British unity in the wake of Brexit, which over sixty per cent of Scots had opposed. Malgrati then pivots back to the first celebrations of Burns’s birthday begun in 1801 by the Scottish Reverend Hamilton Paul, which set the template for a yearly ritual still performed in Scotland and abroad. Malgrati argues that “Burns Night is not a festival of Scottish unity” but rather an instance of “Bardocracy,” in which “a stateless nation . . . has found both a representative and an ambassador in the shade of its national bard” (6). Malgrati nods to the inauguration of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 as an instance of such “bardocracy.” During this epochal moment, singer Sheena Wellington performed a rendition of Burns’s “A Man’s a Man,” a song that insists that “Man to Man the world o’er / Shall brothers be for a’ that.” Bookending May’s Burns Night celebration with the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, Malgrati claims that “the conflation of Burns’s legacy with social-democratic devolution reveals a profound shift in Scottish cultural politics” (22).

In subsequent chapters, Malgrati recounts a variety of extreme political shifts as groups maneuvered to appropriate Burns’s legacy and turn it into political capital. In chapter 1, Malgrati examines British governmental appropriation of Burns during the First World War; for instance, his poem “I’ll Go and Be a Sodger” was used as wartime propaganda to promote enlistment. This ideological usage is opposed to the efforts of left-wing activists like Frances Parker and Ethel Moorhead, who had tried to destroy Burns’s birthplace cottage in July 1914 with a bomb. This literal battle over the poet’s legacy is also investigated in chapters 2 and 3, which focus on the decade of 1920 to 1930. The poet Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid) emerges as a figure with outsize influence in the cultural politics surrounding Burns; his wavering appreciation for his predecessor is said to have been “inspired by the broader ideological debate about the poet” following the First World War (53). Other key figures from these chapters include Burns’s biographer Catherine Carswell, poet and translator Edwin Muir, and novelist Leslie Mitchell (Lewis Grassie Gibbon). Malgrati also provides valuable commentary on lesser-known characters like Duncan McNaught, a leader of the Burns

Federation (founded in 1885 and still in existence), and John S. Clarke, a Scottish Labour official who presided at many Burns ceremonies during the period.

In chapter 4, Malgrati assesses the perception of Burns as the “Bard of Welfare” from 1941 to 1948, claiming that organizations such as the Burns Federation “turned from liberal-conservatism to social-democracy” (107) in their usage of the poet. The role of the Scottish Socialist Party in this process shifts in chapter 5 to the communist appropriation of Burns, with fine analysis of the “ideological translation” of Burns’s works into Russian by Samuil Marshak (131). Malgrati argues that the poet’s popularity in the Soviet Union represented a universalism in his message that had rarely (if ever) been witnessed beyond Anglophone countries. He also examines the contribution of Scottish communist writers like MacDiarmid and novelist James Barke to this globalizing representation of Burns’s life and works. Chapter 6 offers intriguing discussion of late twentieth-century Scottish politics, including philatelic debates about a Burns stamp, the Labour Party’s desire to claim Burns as “part of our socialist inheritance” (158), and the appearance of Burns programming on Scottish television in the late 1970s.

In chapter 7, Burns’s meanings for Scottish political devolution are traced in the works of such contemporary writers as Alasdair Gray, Douglas Dunn, Liz Lochhead, and Robert Crawford. Malgrati also attends to political disputes that plagued the two-hundredth anniversary of Burns’s death in 1996. Chapter 8 examines the political speculation surrounding Burns during 2000–2014, as various groups argued whether the poet would have voted “yes” or “no” in the drive for Scottish independence in 2014. Despite the failure of this vote, Malgrati finds that “the politicization of Burns across Scottish public opinion had reached a new and perhaps unprecedented height” (231). Malgrati concludes by claiming that “a pliable material, Burns’s work can be constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed endlessly to fit the political requirements of the present” (252). This statement is thoroughly proven throughout *Robert Burns and Scottish Cultural Politics*, where countless distortions of Burns’s life and works are shown to be the results of avid politicking from interested parties.

The strengths of this book can be found in Malgrati’s ample narrative gifts, particularly his accounts of twentieth-century Scottish politics. He provides a vivid reconstruction of hard-fought battles between Unionists, Scottish nationalists, and communists to lay claim to Burns’s legacy and promote their causes. However, the treatment of twenty-first century events is less successful, and Malgrati’s analyses of contemporary literary figures are perhaps too speculative in nature to convince. There is also an evident bias toward a more “radical” version of Burns’s legacy from the author. That said, *Robert Burns and Scottish Cultural Politics* is a thoughtful and compelling exploration of the poet’s continuing relevance for Scottish politics and culture.

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COLM MURPHY. *Futures of Socialism: ‘Modernisation’, the Labour Party, and the British Left, 1973–1997*. Modern British Histories. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

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The central conceit of Colm Murphy’s book is that the myth of a single, teleological process of Labour’s “modernization” needs debunking. This myth presents “modernization” as “a broadly coherent, singular process of party change, driven by a small group of political actors across the 1980s and 1990s, leading inexorably towards the ‘rise of New