Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies

Issue Editors: Cairns Craig and Michael Brown

Associate Editors: Stephen Dornan, Rosalyn Trigger, Paul Shanks

Editorial Advisory Board:
Fran Brearton, Queen's University, Belfast
Eleanor Bell, University of Strathclyde
Ewen Cameron, University of Edinburgh
Sean Connolly, Queen's University, Belfast
Patrick Crotty, University of Aberdeen
David Dickson, Trinity College, Dublin
T.M. Devine, University of Edinburgh
David Dumville, University of Aberdeen
Aaron Kelly, University of Edinburgh
Edna Longley, Queen's University, Belfast
Peter Mackay, Queen's University, Belfast
Shane Alcobía-Murphy, University of Aberdeen
Ian Campbell Ross, Trinity College, Dublin
Graham Walker, Queen's University, Belfast

International Advisory Board:
Don Akenson, Queen's University, Kingston
Tom Brooking, University of Otago
Keith Dixon, Université Lumière Lyon 2
Luke Gibbons, Notre Dame
Marjorie Howes, Boston College
H. Gustav Klaus, University of Rostock
Peter Kuch, University of Otago
Graeme Morton, University of Guelph
Brad Patterson, Victoria University, Wellington
Matthew Wickman, Brigham Young
David Wilson, University of Toronto

The Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies is a peer reviewed journal, published twice yearly in September and March, by the AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen. An electronic reviews section is available on the AHRC Centre's website at: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/riiss/issjournal.shtml

Editorial correspondence, including manuscripts for submission, should be addressed to The Editors, Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies, AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies, Humanity Manse, 19 College Bounds, University of Aberdeen, AB24 3UG or emailed to ahrcciss@abdn.ac.uk Subscriptions and business correspondence should be address to The Administrator.

Subscription information can be found on www.abdn.ac.uk/riiss/publications
Contents

Editorial vii
‘Taphy-land Historians’ and the Union of England and Wales 1536–2007 1
Geraint Jenkins

War of Words: Daniel Defoe and the 1707 Union 29
Anne M. McKimm

James Arbuckle and the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707 45
Richard Holmes

Linguistic Choices: Analysing Dialect Representation in Eighteenth-Century Irish and Scottish Literature in English 59
Barbara Fennell

The Move towards Written Standard English in Eighteenth-Century North-East Scotland 71
Janet Cruickshank

Enunciating Difference: Sydney Owenson’s (extra-)National Tale 85
Aaron Clayton

The ‘ethno-symbolic reconstruction’ of Scotland: Joanna Baillie’s The Family Legend in Performance 95
Penelope Cole
‘Steadfast supporters of the British connection’? Belfast Presbyterians and the Act of Union, c. 1798–1840
Jonathan Wright

Scotland is Britain:
The Union and Unionist-Nationalism, 1807–1907
Graeme Morton

Emigrating from North Britain:
The Importance of Little Magazines in the Interwar Movement for Scottish Renewal
Margery Palmer McCulloch

‘Curable Romantics’: Alistair Reid and Derek Mahon
Fran Brearton

An Guth and the Leabhar Mór:
Dialogues between Scottish Gaelic and Irish Poetry
Peter Mackay

The New Linguistic Imperial Order:
English as a European Union \textit{lingua franca} or \textit{lingua frankensteinia}?
Robert Phillipson

Does the United Kingdom have a Language Policy?
John M. Kirk

The Effect of United Kingdom Policy on the Irish Language in the North of Ireland
Janet Muller

Unions and Language:
Irish in the European Union—A Personal Appraisal
Dónall Ó Raigíin
The Disintegration of the USSR: A Complex Protracted Process
Mary Buckley

‘An Unbreakable Union of Free Republics’
Ronald J. Hill

Regional Identity in the United States: The Southern Question
Quincy R. Lebr

‘1867 and all that’: ‘Federalism’ and the Union in Britain and Canada
James Kennedy

The Idea of British North American Union 1854–1864
Ged Martin
When European communism collapsed in the late 1980s, many nations which had seemingly been ushered into historical oblivion in the previous century re-emerged to claim their places as sovereign nation-states. The resurgence of these old nations—and of an even greater number of old nationalisms—not only defied that ‘withering away’ of the nation which had been predicted by Marxism but defied, too, the assumptions of liberal western theorists who expected that the convergence brought about by economic ‘development’ would make ‘nationalism’, if not nations, irrelevant to a modern world system. The ‘new world order’ might revolve around the fact that the United States was the world’s only superpower, but the fragmenting of old states into new claimants to the status of nationhood (as in the territory of the former Yugoslavia) was capable of producing a disorder that not even a superpower could control. As a result, the nature of the nation and of nationalism was suddenly propelled to the forefront of a wide range of academic disciplines. The unexpected survival of nations and the unanticipated revival of nationalisms demanded a better understanding of what the real nature and purpose of the nation might be in a world of ever closer economic integration and mutual interdependence.

Insofar as they appeared in these debates, Ireland and Scotland played contrasting roles: Ireland was a classic case of resistance to colonial oppression, mobilised in the name of a separate language, distinctive religious beliefs and an ancient culture; Scotland, on the hand, was what Tom Nairn dubbed a ‘neo-nationalism’, one based not on substantial cultural distinction—Scotland was almost entirely English-speaking, was traditionally protestant, and had a popular national culture which was clearly a nineteenth-century fabrication—but on the perceived economic injustice of its current role within the UK economy: ‘it’s Scotland’s oil’. Ireland was a model for the colonial resistance movements which were to bring about the end of Empire; Scotland was a partner in imperial exploitation which had lost the economic benefit that Empire had brought it. There were paradoxes to both these views. In the Irish case, not only was nationalist Ireland an uncompleted project, part of whose territory still clung
to Union with the rest of the United Kingdom, but the ancient language of the nation had never been restored as a common language of the people. Moreover, Ireland might have been an independent nation but it only reversed the haemorrhage of its population when it achieved economic prosperity through joining another Union, the European Union. This rejection and reacceptance of Union was even more striking in the case of Scottish nationalism, whose rise took place under the rubric of ‘Scotland in Europe’, of a nationalism, in other words, which did not simply want to break the Union with England to be again a sovereign nation but wanted to do so in order immediately to rejoin another Union of which it was, de facto, already a part.

In this respect both Ireland and Scotland reflected the paradoxical situation of the newly independent nations of Eastern Europe which were aspirants to membership of a European Union whose founders had designed it precisely to reduce and to constrain the power of the nation. Indeed, some in the older member states had come to fear that the EU would make the traditional nation-states of Europe redundant by taking decision-making away from national governments and moving it upwards to Brussels or downwards to ‘regions’. Given the failure of the Soviet Union, what did the history of political unions imply for the future of Europe? Was it to become a version of the American Union, a ‘United States of Europe’, or was there some other model by which its development, and its rapid enlargement, could be governed?

2007 was both the three hundredth anniversary of Scotland’s Union with England and the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome which established the European Economic Community, and thus began the process of European Union. The issue of ‘Unions’ was therefore adopted as the theme of the 2007 Irish-Scottish Academic Initiative conference, held at the University of Aberdeen in September of that year. Many of the papers in this issue of the Irish Scottish Studies Journal derive from that conference and address political and cultural issues in a wide range of historical and continuing Unions. That the month of the three hundredth anniversary of the UK Union was the very one in which an SNP government for the first time ever took charge in Scotland only added to the urgency of understanding what Union, both in Britain and Europe, had meant in the past and might mean in the future.

Cairns Craig
Aberdeen, September 2008
‘Taphy-land historians’
and the Union of England and Wales 1536–2007

Geraint H. Jenkins

The night winds shake the tall trees above the hillside graves;
Awake them not, O night winds, awake them not to-night;
Let them not know our crazier, sorrier plight;
O night winds, do not murmur to our fathers in their graves.¹

These lines figure in *Gwalia Deserta* (1938), a powerful and unsettling depiction by the poet Idris Davies of industrial south Wales during the Depression. Although his immediate concern was the plight of striking miners, the unemployed and their families, Davies’ poem also reveals a heightened sense of awareness of the psychological and cultural torments experienced by the Welsh over the centuries, notably the effects of the so-called ‘language clause’ in the Act of Union of 1536 and the subsequent consequences of what he called ‘the bloody hand of progress’.² Even though the Acts of Union (1536–43) are often referred to in standard works as a critical watershed in the history of Wales, unlike the Scottish experience in 1707 their enactment caused no controversy at the time and the processes which fashioned a multinational British state were not seriously challenged except briefly during the Romantic period and, more bitterly, during the aftermath of the quartercentenary celebrations of 1936 when the controversial ‘Fire in Llŷn’³ provoked a new crisis of identity. Yet, the manner in which writers over the period as a whole chose to interpret the Union and its consequences and ramifications is important, not least, as this paper will show, because it sheds light on the preconceptions and values of the times in which such writers lived and because it also reminds us that the writing of history ‘is rarely altogether innocent or detached’.⁴

By all accounts, the administrative and political assimilation of Wales into England, enacted piecemeal by parliament in 1536–43, was passed in stony

¹ Dafydd Johnston (ed.), *The Complete Poems of Idris Davies* (Cardiff, 1994), 19.
² Ibid.
³ Dafydd Jenkins, *A Nation on Trial* (Caernarfon, 1998).
silence. No protests were organised, no shots were fired in anger and Welsh poets, who could normally be relied upon to dramatise key events, were uncharacteristically lost for words. Even the perceptive soldier-cum-chronicler Elis Gruffydd, whose massive account of world history from the Garden of Eden to 1552, gave it no great status or significance: ‘Subsequently he [Henry VIII] passed another bill to decree and divide the whole of Wales into counties.’ The muted response to union and the prospect of full-scale political integration contrasted sharply with the sense of apocalyptic pessimism expressed by Welsh poets at the time of the Edwardian conquest in 1282–3 when the ferocity of Edward I’s shock-and-awe tactics brought the Welsh to their knees. ‘Pa beth y’n gedir i ohiriaw?’ (Why are we left to linger?) was the heart-rending cry of Gruffydd ab yr Ynad Coch in his elegy to the slain Welsh prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. This poem, and others in similar vein, reflected the feelings of a people desperate to prevail but fearing the worst as their nation was cast to the ground and its authentic rulers disempowered. Yet, even when things were at their worst, the Welsh (together with the Irish and the Scots) responded to conquest and domination by making powerful and defiant assertions of their nationhood to which, in terms of history, territory, law and language, they had a perfectly legitimate claim. In the post-Conquest era, sores festered and there was a rumbling sense of anger within the vaticinatory poetry (canu brud) which kept alive a deep loathing of the English. Whenever they set aside their delight in sycophantic waffle, black humour and general tomfoolery, poets in late medieval Wales were not found wanting during periods of rebellion, economic slump and plague. Prophetic poetry assured the beleaguered Welsh that a mab darogan (son of destiny) would, at a propitious hour, return to free them from their captivity and wreak terrible vengeance on the English. This deliverer, usually referred to as Owain, turned out to be the decidedly uncharismatic Henry Tudor—a Moses who delivered the Welsh from bondage, according to the Pembrokeshire historian George Owen—who swept to victory at Bosworth in 1485 and set in motion a protracted process in which Britain became an aggregate of nations.

6 Rhian M. Andrews et al. (eds.), Gwaith Bleddyn Fardd a Beirdd Eraill Ail Hanner y Drydedd Ganrif ar Ddeg (Caerdydd, 1996), 424.
The perspective of hindsight should not therefore lead us to exaggerate the significance of the Union legislation at the time. Unlike the case of Scotland in 1706–7 there was no genuine debate about the merits and demerits of incorporation. Neither a marriage of equals nor a negotiated settlement, union was imposed upon Wales in order to safeguard the borders and the security of the realm against internal and external threats. Although the extraordinarily fictitious claim made in the preamble of the 1536 Act that Wales had always been ‘incorporated annexed united and subject to and under the Imperial Crown of this Realm’, the deep and long-standing divisions between Principality and March meant that the overriding justification for union was the issue of political security. The Marcher lordships, a ramshackle cluster of violent and disorderly behaviour, were being wilfully manipulated by unscrupulous lords for their own private purposes. By the early 1530s, moreover, alarming international tensions were provoking fears of invasion and insurrection. The repercussions of the execution of the local favourite Rhys ap Gruffydd of Dinefwr in 1531 aggravated the sense of crisis as crippling divisions prevailed in the Marches. In exasperation a psychotic hardman, Rowland Lee, was dispatched in 1534 to serve as President of the Council in the Marches and to put a lid on this steaming cauldron of lawlessness. Lee believed that the Welsh were malcontents fit only for the gallows and although he enjoyed short-term success his intimidatory tactics made him many enemies. Unsurprisingly, his profound lack of vision and compassion was supplanted by a much more expansive blueprint promoted by the chief minister of the crown, Thomas Cromwell. By this stage calls for decisive action had become increasingly strident at a time when Cromwell was acutely aware of processes of state formation on the continent and some of the glittering possibilities which unification and empire-building held in store. In his eyes Wales was crying out for an overhaul of its territories and fresh ideas for its long-term future, and events abroad provided some kind of intellectual and practical justification for making Wales part and parcel of England.

Most of Cromwell’s reforming statutes in the 1530s were undertaken piecemeal and the Acts of Union enacted in 1536 and 1543 (the latter following Cromwell’s execution) were no exception. The inclusion of makeshift and

8 Ivor Bowen (ed.), The Statutes of Wales (London, 1908), 75.
anomalous clauses, together with a desire to keep alternative options in mind, suggest a good deal of dithering. For very good reasons the cut-and-thrust of debate which occurred in 1707 was missing in 1536–43, but it is inconceivable that champions of good order and justice would have made the case for retaining the marcher lordships. Shoals of petitions had arrived at Westminster urging the king and his chief minister to impose a more effective and stable system of law and administration. Once Cromwell had convinced himself that it would be folly to allow the morcellation of the border counties and the destabilising jurisdiction of the Marcher lords to continue, a new map of Wales was produced. The Marcher lordships were abolished and internal unification was ensured by shiring the whole of Wales. Seven new counties—Denbighshire, Montgomeryshire, Breconshire, Radnorshire, Monmouthshire, Glamorgan and Pembrokeshire—were carved out of the defunct Marcher lordships and added to the other six shires—Anglesey, Caernarfonshire, Merioneth, Flintshire, Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire—which had existed since the Statute of Wales of 1284. Each shire was entitled to elect a county and a county borough member (with the exception of Merioneth), while Monmouthshire was given two county members. When, in 1543, the borough of Haverfordwest was awarded a seat, the total complement of MPs was raised to twenty-seven. Forty-shilling freeholders were entitled to vote at county elections, while free burgesses could vote in the boroughs.

Cyfraith Hywel—the hallowed and highly distinctive Welsh laws—were displaced by English common law, while the divisive Welsh custom known as cyfran (gavelkind) was supplanted by primogeniture, the more stable English system of inheritance. The Courts of the Great Sessions, which gave the Welsh a limited measure of constitutional autonomy, were set up to hear criminal, civil and equity cases. Four circuits were to be held in each corner of Wales and courts were charged to administer English law during six-day sessions held twice a year. The Council in the Marches in Wales, first established by Edward IV, was granted statutory authority and the Courts of Quarter Sessions, placed in the hands of the local gentry, were expected to shoulder the heavy burdens of local administration and governance. English became the language of High Prestige in Wales. No Welsh speaker could hold public office unless he was able to ‘use and exercise the English Speech or Language’. To add insult to injury, parts of Welsh-speaking Wales were arbitrarily lopped off and made part of England, while the position of Monmouthshire vis à vis Wales remained

10 Bowen (ed.), The Statutes of Wales, 87.
exasperatingly anomalous. In order to bring this traditionally rebellious land into ‘amicable concord and unity’ and to teach the Welsh table manners, certain ‘sinister usages and customs’ were deemed unacceptable, including the Welsh language ‘a speech nothing like, nor consonant to the natural mother tongue used within this realm’. As England’s oldest colony, Wales was the first nation to find its future political fortunes indissolubly joined with those of England.

Although, with the wisdom of hindsight, we can see that the Acts of Union marked a significant transition in the history of Wales, there is not a sliver of evidence to suggest that it was viewed at the time as a decisive, let alone traumatic, event. There were no heated debates over the issues involved and in these early days of the printing trade (Wales did not establish a press of its own until 1718) no pamphlet war. As far as is known, the only prominent figure to voice his disapproval was Rowland Lee, who made no secret of his disapproval over plans to place local government in the hands of untrustworthy natives. In the event, his injudicious comments about setting thieves to catch thieves were ignored. If there were other dissenting voices, they were drowned out by a powerful pro-union lobby. Lewys Morgannwg, who acted as a royal bard in south Wales, described Henry VIII as a ‘powerful Hercules’. He knew full well that none of his patrons would risk infuriating such a volatile and merciless monarch or jeopardise their chances of acquiring a share of the benefits of public office, commerce and trade. Thomas Cromwell and his colleagues had no need to coerce or ride roughshod over the political élite in Wales. With so many advantages to be gained, the benefits of assimilation were too powerful to resist. The Welsh uchelwyr (gentlemen) were flattered by the prospect of becoming ‘magistrates of their own nation’ because it involved personal enrichment as well as the esteem which attended local power. In similar vein, early Welsh humanists, sensing that a new window of opportunity had opened, expressed the hope that rich cultural and spiritual benefits would ensue.

By the Elizabethan period the chorus of lament heard in 1282–3 had been transformed into an effusive hymn of praise. The flow of comment on the Union was unerringly favourable. The most rhapsodic was George Owen, an unusually observant commentator from Henllys, Pembrokeshire. He not only tellingly described Wales as a ‘cuntrey in England’ but also referred to the ‘joyefull metamorphosis’ which had occurred since the coming

---

11 Ibid., 75–6.
13 Owen, Description of Penbrokshire, III, 55.
of the Tudors.\textsuperscript{14} Rowland Lee’s warning of dire consequences had not been borne out. Several Elizabethan governors, administrators and chroniclers also lavished praise on the Union for bringing stability and civility to Wales, conveniently turning a determined blind eye to evidence of public disorder, riots and disturbances, and much else. Understandably, however, the major beneficiaries, having sampled tangible economic and political advantages, were happy to put a favourable spin on the results of incorporation. Outside gentry circles it is impossible to gauge the strength of anti-union feeling. Perhaps there was none. Vaticination had lost its edge and what fighting spirit the Welsh had possessed had been dissipated by the widely-disseminated view that the Tudor dynasty had conferred on the Welsh—their own people—a charter of liberties. More than 350 years would pass before demands for the repeal of the Union made themselves heard. As Philip Jenkins has pointed out, one of the most striking features of the early-modern period was that Wales ‘achieved political integration with astonishingly little difficulty or unrest’.\textsuperscript{15} At a time when the Irish became increasingly fractious, the Welsh prided themselves on being quiescent and benign.

The passivity of the Welsh is easy to explain. Was not Welsh blood coursing through the veins of the benevolent Tudors? What gentleman in his right mind would have pined for the late medieval period when Wales was a byword for division and bloodshed? Did not the Union satisfy those who yearned for the opportunity to get on in the world on an equal footing with their nearest neighbours? Just as compelling, at least to Renaissance scholars and promoters of the Reformation, was the benevolence of the Tudors in permitting Welsh to become the language of Protestantism from 1563 onwards. The coveted prize of a Bible in what (with an eye to the past) they deliberately referred to as ‘the British tongue’ enabled a Protestant culture to take shape which was as strongly attached to the vernacular as it was hostile to Catholicism. By injecting a note of ‘nostalgic nationalism’ into their writings, leading historians claimed that the so-called ‘new’ Protestant religion was in fact an integral part of the distinctive patrimony of the Welsh and that by re-availing themselves of their inheritance they were being true to the ideals of their ancestors.\textsuperscript{16} Expressions of Welsh patriotism and pride became increasingly channelled through the

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., III, 7, 56.
Protestant establishment and helped to sustain, non-contentiously, a sense of nationhood.

In strictly political circles and most certainly in the drawing rooms of the landed elite there was a strong feeling that an old song had come to an end in 1536. The dictum ‘England and Wales’ supplanted the previous nomenclature ‘Principality and March’ and fixed itself in the public consciousness. Whilst the Welsh gentry might argue strongly that this ushered in new freedoms, the new dispensation confessed a subordinate status rather than true parity. Wales was subsumed into the dominant English narrative even as its people were politically and culturally lobotomised. In his enormously influential _Historie of Cambria_ (1584), a work which covered the years from the death of Cadwaladr in 664 to that of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the last prince of Wales, in 1282, David Powel counted his nation’s blessings: ‘Since the happy incorporation of the Welsh with the English the history of both nations as well as the people is united.’\(^{17}\) The English and the Welsh had become one. The likes of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and Owain Glyndŵr were depicted as deluded rebels who had done their people a disservice by resisting centralising and homogenising forces. Since there were no Welsh universities to train young scholars in the craft of writing history or major cultural centres where intellectual stimulation was available, the Welsh were clearly in grave danger of losing their historical identity forever.

Even though the successors of the Tudors were Scottish and, subsequently, German, the Welsh saw no reason not to glory in wedlock. James I, who was greeted by Welsh writers as ‘the high and most mighty monarch’, claimed descent from Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and Henry VII, and was not loath to refer to the legendary history of Brutus in order to enhance his image as the first British monarch and the most likely restorer of a unified kingdom of Britain.\(^{18}\) Thrilled by this notion, Sir William Maurice of Clenennau in Caernarfonshire, a maverick MP given to sudden enthusiasms, caused considerable mirth in parliament by tabling a bill in 1604–5 which would have allowed the newly-enthroned monarch to style himself ‘Emperor of Great Brittaine’.\(^{19}\) James I’s status as an Anglo-Scottish king meant that Wales was a low priority in his ambitions, a perspective which he confirmed

\(^{17}\) William Wynne, _The History of Wales_ (London, 1697), sig. A3r.


\(^{19}\) Lloyd Bowen, _The Politics of the Principality: Wales c. 1603–1642_ (Cardiff, 2007), 70–1.
in pointing to the precedent set in 1536 while addressing parliament in 1607: ‘Do you not gain by the Union of Wales? And is not Scotland greater than Wales?’ Echoing such thoughts, the historian John Doddridge, author of a well-regarded history of the principality of Wales, maintained that since the annexation of 1536 had led to such ‘great peace, tranquility, civility, and infinite good’ it could easily serve as a precedent for more ambitious plans, including union with Scotland. Even though, largely for reasons of security, a critically important reversal of government policy had allowed the Welsh to worship in the vernacular, Wales played a subordinate role within the embryonic, integrated ‘British’ state and as the years rolled by every effort was made to eliminate, smooth over or blur unwelcome signs of diversity or otherness. In the meantime, the Welsh were positively encouraged to flaunt the success of the Union at every opportunity. In 1630 Sir William Vaughan of Llangyndeyrn, Carmarthenshire, a man who ironically made his name by seeking to establish Welsh settlements abroad, called on his countrymen to bury old antagonisms: ‘Rejoice that the memorial of Offa’s Ditch has been extinguished with love and charity . . . . God gave us grace to dwell together without enmity, without detraction.’

Champions of the Union believed profoundly that its fortunes were inextricably bound up with the monarch and the Protestant faith. Although there were genuine fears that James I and especially his ill-fated successor Charles I were disposed to lighten the burdens of the penal laws on Catholics and perhaps even to convert to Rome, there was no great desire among the nobility and the gentry in Wales to abandon the Lord’s Anointed in his hour of need from 1642 onwards. The deeply rooted belief that Catholicism was a perversion of Christianity and the threat posed by Irish Papists and foreign conspirators meant that the Welsh robustly rejected bearers of the Old Faith as well as regicides and turners-of-the-world-upside-down. Since their view of the past was contaminated by a profound loathing for Catholicism, they adopted a resolutely Protestant stance. In supporting the Royalist cause on the eve of the civil wars, petitioners dwelt on the benefits of union and warned of

22 William Vaughan, The Arraignment of Slander, Perjury, Blasphemy and other Malicious Sinnes, showing Sundry Examples of God’s Judgements against the Offenders (London, 1630), 322.
the price to be paid should insurgents succeed in subverting the constitution. In the post-Restoration period, too, the anti-Popery drum was beaten with great vigour. Writers like Charles Edwards and Jeremy Owen, both dissenters, maintained that the Acts of Union had set the Welsh ‘at liberty from a very tedious and ingratitude captive’ by ushering in the divine blessing of the Protestant religion and the printing press, and by ensuring that persecutors who had once ‘driven on furiously the chariots of death and destruction’ were now plying the Welsh with saving literature and charity schools.\footnote{23} Just as the Lord had watched over Israel in the days of Ahasverus and Esther, so had he planned the marriage between England and Wales. ‘Ravaging wolves’ had become ‘caring shepherds’.\footnote{24}

By the Hanoverian age, therefore, it was part of the conventional wisdom that the Union had been a brilliant success. George Owen’s roseate view still prospered. Even those who styled themselves Cambro-Britons in order to distance themselves from the Britons, who were deemed to be the descendants of usurping Saxons, and from the equally unpalatable term ‘Welsh’ which bore all the hallmarks of linguistic imperialism, had been fully supportive of assimilative trends since 1536.\footnote{25} In the Stuart age John Owen, the famous Latin epigrammatist from Plas Du, Caernarfonshire, became the poet laureate of the imperial British identity. This ‘Cambro-Britannus’ claimed to speak for his countrymen:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Though the language of Britons is not one,} \\
\text{their heart is one,} \\
\text{now that the union of three kingdoms} \\
\text{has come about.}\footnote{26}
\end{align*}
\]

Such sentiments pre-dated the Act of Union of 1 May 1707 which brought into being the United Kingdom of Great Britain. Unlike Wales, Scotland’s shotgun wedding was characterised by public riots and trenchant anti-union literature, none of which seems to have bothered the Welsh unduly. On the occasion of the bicentenary of the Union in 1736, Lewis Morris, a remarkably versatile litterateur and patriot in Georgian Wales and a man whose correspondence is

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{23} Jeremy Owen, *The Goodness and Severity of God* (London, 1717), 16.
\item \footnote{26} Ibid., 651. See also J. Henry Jones, ‘John Owen, Cambro—Britannus’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1940–1), 130–43.
\end{itemize}
packed with character assassinations of the English, celebrated, perhaps with a touch of derision, the bringing together of two peoples in 1536: ‘What people of Britain have adhered more loyally to the crown of England than the Welsh ever since their happy union with the valorous English?’ Similarly, the diaries of the tireless Welsh evangelist Howell Harris were punctuated with a desire to express ‘great freedom to cry for Great Brittain’. Such middling sorts were keenly aware of the blessings of living in a land which set great store by loyalty, civility and tolerance.

Even so, by the eighteenth century some of the more unwholesome chickens produced by the Union were coming home to roost. In spite of the rhetoric employed in the aftermath of 1536–43, it had become increasingly clear that the English were determined not to accept the Welsh as equals. When the United Kingdom came to pass in 1707 it became even more evident that the Welsh were the poor relations. According to Daniel Defoe, who was an eye witness to the run-up to the Anglo-Scottish Union, one of the arguments deployed by anti-unionists, who believed that the treaty flew in the face of history and brought dishonour upon the Scots, was that incorporation would serve as ‘an eternal badge of their subjection’:

This was a general cry, and began to be very popular: The people cried out, they were Scotsmen, and they would be Scotsmen still; they contemned the name of Britons, fit for the Welchmen [sic.], who were made the scoff of the English, after they had reduced them.

From the Elizabethan period onwards English satirists, ballad-mongers and pamphleteers had depicted the Welsh in the most unflattering terms, making contested assumptions about their primitiveness, ignorance and fecklessness, as well as their apparent willingness to remain a conquered people. Somehow the Welsh were not believed to be fully-fledged human beings. Their vernacular was thought to be an emblem of their subjugation and its survival on the lips of up to half a million people was a problem for those who believed that order, stability and civility could only be attained if the Standard English held sway.

---

Different sections within Welsh society coped in different ways with the cultural and psychological challenges posed by these developments. In order to further their own careers and please English sensibilities the leading gentry families abandoned Welsh patronymics, took up the English mode of land tenure and supposedly superior standards of civility, stood no nonsense from the much-derided ‘mountain Welsh’, employed non-Welsh-speaking agents and stewards, and carved out a reputation, as one aggrieved tenant farmer put it, for ‘insatiable avarice’. Slowly but surely from 1660 onwards land gravitated into the hands of substantial and mostly absentee landowners, new ‘Leviathans’ who viewed the otherness of the Welsh and the cultural aspirations of patriotic middling sorts with contempt. For them, ‘civilising’ meant ‘Anglicising’, and it was inconceivable to such ‘true Englishmen’ that any inhabitant of Wales would be content to remain a monoglot Welsh-speaker. The deraciné Welshman was also joined by the pseudo-Welsh gentleman, an effete figure who deemed his native tongue (which he usually spoke more fluently than English) an embarrassing handicap and who affected English airs whenever he espied the belfries of the border counties. This tragic-comic figure, known by Welsh satirists as Dic Siôn Dafydd, became the archetypal stage Welshman who bore the brunt of ridicule for confusing the tenses of English verbs and using ‘she’ or ‘her’ as catch-all pronouns. The glorification of the English language—a Scottish enterprise, the Encyclopaedia Britannica, referred to it in 1768–71 as ‘the language of a great and powerful nation’—by swaggering Little Englanders irked patriotic Welshmen and sometimes provoked rather ugly ethnic tensions.

There were therefore widespread fears by the Hanoverian age that the measure of linguistic and historical identity which the Welsh had managed to retain from 1563 onwards was in serious jeopardy. The growth of merchant capitalism, burgeoning Atlantic trade, Protestant imperialism and


glorious victories on land and sea against the ‘Popish’ foe meant that there were powerful reasons for thinking in terms of ‘Great Britain’. After 1707 the Union Flag (on which Wales, still reckoned to be a principality, was not represented) was redesigned in order to promote a much wider identification with Great Britain. ‘Rule Britannia’, composed by the Lowland Scot James Thomson in 1740, celebrated the emerging sense of Britishness, and five years later the strongly loyalist and Protestant anthem ‘God Save the King’ (also possibly written by a Scot) offered an immediate riposte to the Jacobite rebellion. Processes of incorporation and amalgamation meant that residual legal and political emblems of Welsh distinctiveness were removed. In 1689 the Council in the Marches of Wales, which had been granted in 1536–43 a significant role as an executive arm of the privy council and which possessed wide criminal and civil jurisdictions, was abolished. In 1746 the ‘inconvenience’ of having to mention Wales in every piece of legislation was removed: according to 20 George 2, c. 42, s. 3, ‘in all cases where the kingdom of England, or that part of Great Britain called England, hath been or shall be mentioned in any Act of Parliament...shall from henceforth be deemed and taken to comprehend and include the dominion of Wales’. No objections were voiced publicly. Less easy to accept, however, was the way in which the established church, so often represented as a unifying and healing force, was Anglicising itself. As non-Welsh bishops took root in Welsh dioceses and proclaimed ‘the genius of the [English] tongue’, an advocate in the Court of Arches was emboldened to argue that since Wales was ‘a conquered country’ it was perfectly in order for representatives of the Anglican church to promote the English language. Relying, as was his wont, on the wisdom of his forefathers, Edmund Burke maintained that since the fortunes of Wales had been irrevocably joined with those of England in 1536–43 the last survivor of the Welsh judicature, the Court of the Great Sessions, should be abolished. Writing under the shadow of discourses about confederation and federation in the 1770s, Burke invoked the Welsh experience, or at least his misleading rhetorical interpretation of it, since its incorporation by Henry VIII: ‘as by a charm, the tumults subsided; obedience was restored; peace,
order, and civilisation, followed in the train of liberty—When the day-star of the English constitution had arisen in their hearts, all was harmony within and without.37 In the event, the Court of the Great Sessions was reprieved until 1830, but political and legal incorporation had already acquired such unstoppable momentum that there was a very real danger that a five-foot, non-historic nation like Wales would fall off the map. As the historian William Warrington noted with approval, the ‘wild spirit of independence’ had been tamed.38

Yet there were alternative ways of thinking about and writing of the Welsh past. Much to the disapproval of dyed-in-the-wool conservatives, the application of the scientific practice of observation and experimentation on the one hand and the spontaneous creativity associated with Romanticism on the other offered different interpretations which appealed to the literate middling sorts. With exquisite timing, the great Celtic polymath Edward Lhuyd published *Archaeologia Britannica* in 1707, a substantial work which, among other things, provided a demonstration of the common Celtic origin of Breton, Cornish and Welsh, the result of a first-hand study of the Celtic languages and an incident-packed four-year journey through the Celtic countries. Probably more by chance than design, the publication coincided with the newly enacted ‘British’ polity of 1707. Simon James believes that Lhuyd had ‘a political agenda clearly in mind’ in projecting the notion of a Celtic family.39 Although the evidence for such an assertion is circumstantial, and possibly totally erroneous, there is no doubt that by making a public, inspiring affirmation of Celticity or Celticness Lhuyd showed that multiple identities existed within the Union and that being subsumed by Anglo-centrism or Englishness was not inevitable. Lhuyd’s premature death in 1709, however, was a severe blow to ‘Celtic’ studies. His disciples at Oxford took to the bottle instead of their books and the field was left to a variety of blinkered enthusiasts, local antiquarians and all kinds of ‘Druids-as-wished for’.40 As the eighteenth century unfolded historical sensibilities became more easily excited as the zeal of remembrancers

---

37 Edmund Burke, *The Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq; on Moving his Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies, March 22, 1775* (London, 1775), 38.
40 Nancy Edwards has reminded us that the Glossography, the first and only published volume of Lhuyd’s proposed *Archaeologia Britannica*, had already been sent to the press in 1704. Nancy Edwards, ‘Edward Lhuyd and the Origins of Early Medieval Celtic Archaeology’, *The Antiquaries Journal*, 87 (2007), 167, 192.
outstripped their critical powers. Thanks to the patriotic sentiments of the likes of Paul Pezron, Theophilus Evans and Henry Rowlands, Welsh historiography continued to be bedevilled by the mythology surrounding the progeny of Noah. To linguistic patriots, nothing brought greater satisfaction than to be able to declare that the Welsh people had preserved the language of the descendants of Gomer, son of Japhet.\footnote{See Colin Kidd, \textit{British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800} (Cambridge, 1999), 54–5, 61, 66–8; Geraint H. Jenkins, ‘Historical Writing in the Eighteenth Century’ in Branwen Jarvis (ed.), \textit{A Guide to Welsh Literature c. 1700–1800} (Cardiff, 2000), 23–44.}

From the 1770s the first stirrings of Romanticism brought new perspectives as a rising generation of writers sought to discover lost worlds through the assiduous study of history, poetry and language. The Bard as a custodian of the past took pride of place, Macpherson’s \textit{Poems of Ossian} set pulses racing, and the new interest in landscape, nature and all kinds of intriguing artefacts stimulated a desire to conserve the old and to mourn irretrievable losses. Bogus history and mythmaking became a cottage industry among artisans and craftsmen who took it upon themselves to assume cultural responsibilities formerly entrusted to the gentry. Chief among them was Edward Williams alias Iolo Morganwg, a remarkably many-sided Glamorgan stonemason who may reasonably be called the first of Wales’ cultural nationalists. Styling himself a ‘Rattleskull Genius’,\footnote{Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), \textit{A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg} (Cardiff, 2005).} Iolo was scathing about the ‘Taphy-land historians’ of the past: ‘I cannot help using the language of sarcasm, when I am obliged to mention the stuff that has been written on Welsh history.’\footnote{Elijah Waring, \textit{Recollections and Anecdotes of Edward Williams, The Bard of Glamorgan} (London, 1850), 170.} Like many self-taught craftsmen, he had a low opinion of the traditional universities which, in his view, did not produce graduands of cultivated sensibility and patriotic values. Spewing out piffling pedants and drunken curates, Oxford and Cambridge bestowed on unsuspecting parishes ‘a loathsome swarm of the vilest bloodsucking insects that ever dishonoured the Creation’.\footnote{NLW, MS 13112B, f. 367.} Only a fool, he argued, would thus believe that their scribblings offered an authentic view of the past. He loathed the fact that wealth and privilege counted for more than brains and opportunity, and by soaking himself in the principles of the twin revolutions of America and France and responding creatively to the pleasures of the imagination he brought new energy into Welsh historical writing.
Those who are familiar with Iolo’s remarkable archive in the National Library of Wales will know that he unashamedly created the past in his own image. Insofar as he manufactured material and manipulated sources with impunity, he was not by any means unique within a European context. But by Welsh standards he was *sui generis*, and most of his colleagues were unaware that he was passing off bogus material as authentic chronicles, blurring the lines between the factual and the fictional, and filling in empty spaces and interstices with additional data based on an imaginative reconstruction of sources. At every turn, he defied convention. He invented the Gorsedd of the Bards of the Isle of Britain, minted new Welsh words, composed a Welsh version of the Marseillaise, revelled in his reputation as the ‘Bard of Liberty’ and became Wales’ leading campaigner against the slave trade. Around the time when the Act of Union of 1800 created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Iolo identified the Union of 1536–43 as a significant cultural watershed in the history of Wales. Determined not to allow received wisdom about the assimilation of Wales into England to pass unchallenged, he was the first historian to declare that union had precipitated a cultural malaise which had worsened with the passage of time. In the first volumes of *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* (1801–7), a three-volume juggernaut designed to ‘reanimate the genius of our country’⁴⁵ and bring into the public domain the literary and historical treasures of the past, Iolo produced ‘one of the earliest examples of modern Welsh nationalist writing’.⁴⁶ Bemoaning the decline of *amor patriae* among the natural leaders of Welsh society and the lack of institutional support for the native tongue, he seized on 1536 as a major turning point in how the Welsh language was perceived:

> About the time when Wales was incorporated with England, government seems to have entertained an idea that it was not safe or politic to suffer the Welsh language to live; the use of it was discouraged, and all that could decently, and with saving-appearances, be done, was attempted, to suppress and annihilate it.⁴⁷

For Iolo, defending the vernacular culture and promoting democratic/patriotic consciousness were interlinked, and even though fanning the nationalist

---

flame during wartime was a risky business he was not an easy man to silence. For the first time, a Welsh historian had publicly declared that 1536 had relegated the native tongue to an inferior position in its own land. Had he fulfilled his promise of publishing a ‘superb’ six-volume history of Wales it is certain that his vision of the past would have differed sharply from that purveyed by the ‘Taphy-land historians’ who preceded him and whom he despised.48

Despite Iolo’s hopes that the Welsh would think again about their cultural legacy and whether the Union had been a necessary and beneficial event, these were dashed in the post-1815 period by progressivism and evangelical Protestantism. During the course of the nineteenth century Wales experienced a major economic transformation the like of which had never been seen before. As an international producer of iron, steel, coal, copper and slate, it became one of the major workshops of the world. Its population quadrupled within little more than a century and, although the bulk of the population was working class, the cultural agenda, which itself provoked unresolved tensions, was set by pious, middle-class Nonconformists and Liberals. The desire for self-improvement encouraged these to march under the banner of ‘Progress’. This was especially the case following the publication of the notorious Blue Books of 1847—popularly known as the ‘Treachery of the Blue Books’—a government-sponsored report on education which outrageously depicted the Welsh as degraded liars and cheats with the morals of alley-cats. This public indictment created a profound sense of insecurity and self-loathing. Traduced Nonconformists feared that ‘we shall have many eyes upon us [and] that we shall be scanned narrowly’, and the anxieties engendered by this shame culture were further deepened by the notion that the febrile Celts were racially and culturally inferior to the Anglo-Saxons.49 The Welsh-speaking petite bourgeoisie were persuaded by this fiction and came to believe that their native tongue could not possibly compete successfully with ‘imperial’ languages in the Darwinian age and that the best course of action was to admit defeat.

1847 was thus a critical psychological turning point: the Welsh lost their nerve and a proper appreciation of their past. As a ‘reduced people’, they were now expected to count their blessings, hold their tongues and, as Henry Hussey Vivian, first Baron Swansea, advised them at the National Eisteddfod of Wales at Swansea in 1863, to see themselves as a ‘whole united compact

48 Geraint H. Jenkins, Ffion Mair Jones and David Ceri Jones (eds.), The Correspondence of Iolo Morganwg (3 vols., Cardiff, 2007), II, 143–8.
people’. Such sentiments heavily coloured historical writing up to the Great War and it even provoked bouts of amnesia regarding the immediate past. When Jane Williams wrote a chapter on the Tudor dynasty and legacy in her single-volume history of Wales, she airbrushed out the reference to rebellions, riots, anti-establishment views and popular radicalism: ‘Wales has gradually become a land of peace, to which bloodshed, with heinous crime in every form, is now almost unknown.’ A more fatuous verdict on Victorian Wales could scarcely be imagined, but it helped to solidify the belief that union had brought untold blessings.

Yet it would be a mistake to believe that other strategies did not occur to the Welsh. The burgeoning numbers of Welsh speakers, the development of a thriving Welsh-language periodical and newspaper press, the eisteddfod movement, the remarkable spread of Nonconformity, and a striking renaissance in historical and literary writing all contributed to the development of a new form of cultural and political nationalism. The hunger for popular, melodramatic history, peopled by medieval heroes, was reflected in Welsh-language magazines and journals. Patriotic discourse was peppered with newly coined words like cenedlgarwch (patriotism), cenedlaetholdeb (nationalism) and ymreolaeth (self-rule), notably in the pungent radicalism purveyed by R. J. Derfel, Michael D. Jones and Evan Pan Jones. Crusaders associated with the Cymru Fydd (Young Wales) movement of 1886–96 mobilised separatist tendencies and planted the idea that Wales might not remain united and annexed to England forever. During the ferment of the home-rule movement in the late nineteenth century the federal University of Wales was constituted in 1893, soon to be followed in 1907 by the National Library of Wales and the National Museum of Wales. These institutions helped to foster a renewed sense of national identity without for a moment challenging the security of the British state. There were also fervent hopes that at long last Wales would nurture its own erudite but readable historians who would not lose sight of the social and intellectual dimensions of the past. A new era of scholarship seemed to beckon.

Yet the history of Wales did not immediately become an officially recognised subject within academe. Much to the disapproval of the gwerin who had invested time, energy and precious pennies in establishing the ‘People’s

---

51 Jane Williams, A History of Wales (London, 1869), 495.
University’, the reluctance on the part of its constituent colleges to establish chairs of Welsh history or make appointments designed to improve the quality of historical writing. It was left to O.M. Edwards, tutor in history at Oxford, to quench the thirst for history by producing an array of magazines, anthologies and, in particular, his heavily-read volume *Wales* (1901), works which warmly reflected his affection for his native land. Edwards made not even the shallowest claims to objectivity in assessing the Tudors: ‘To them the customs of Wales were sinister usages, its language a curse, and its national life a dead volcano of treason.’ Like many fin-de-siècle writers in Wales, he was a prisoner of his age insofar as he championed imperialism and also the distinctive national identity of his homeland. By waving the Union Jack and the Red Dragon, he endeared himself to Welsh Liberals in particular and also to those who believed that stimulating a sense of the past, however subjective the interpretation might be, was an integral part of nation-building.

The development and prestige of Welsh history as a subject and profession owed most to John Edward Lloyd, who became professor of history at Bangor in 1899. Lloyd is the founding father of Welsh history as a serious professional business. This immensely learned, fastidious, and rather aloof figure took on the role of guardian of academic standards in the field. By precept and example, he emphasised the need for intensive archival research, critical assessment of evidence, copious footnotes and discerning judgements. His lucid and masterly two-volume *History of Wales* (1911), which took the story of the nation up to 1282, was his most enduring achievement and placed him above all his colleagues as the ‘lantern-bearer of the lost centuries’. For the most part, Lloyd was coolness and detachment personified, and in his eyes the Acts of Union were to be viewed only from the standpoint of their creators in 1536–43. Yet, as Huw Pryce has shown, even this giant carried cultural baggage: ‘he believed that the debunking of legends and traditions and the construction of a new narrative of the Welsh past based on “the most authentic sources” would serve to strengthen a sense of nationality by placing it on firmer foundations than before’. The spirit of *Cymru Fydd*, as well as a

---

whiggish presumption, continued to permeate his work even as he preached the merits of exhaustive and exact scholarship.

In many ways R. T. Jenkins, his colleague at Bangor and professor of Welsh history from 1930, was an even more zealous advocate of using primary sources, testing them rigorously and writing up conclusions in a disciplined, objective manner. A cultivated conversationalist and a scintillating writer in Welsh, Jenkins was the best-read historian of his day and also the most popular among the general reading public. Heavily influenced by the scientific methods of research advocated by Leopold von Ranke, he cared deeply about the past and warned others of the perils of violating it. No great admirer of Liberal sentiments or the polemics of nationalists, he vigorously defended the ‘independence of the past’ and always believed that a dispassionate objectivity was the mark of a good historian. His pioneering article *Yr Apêl at Hanes* (The Appeal to History) was his definitive statement on the aims and objectives of a self-respecting Welsh historian.\(^{58}\) For him, the architects of 1536–43 were not driven by malice or evil and were, for all their faults, entitled to be judged according to the standards of their own times. In one of his sparkling (and characteristically digressive) reviews, he reiterated his commitment to objectivity:

In considering our country’s past in its entirety, whether the historian himself is an ‘ardent’ Nationalist or an ‘avowed’ Communist, a ‘faithful’ Churchman or a ‘professed’ Independent, his first duty as a historian is to treat his sources without prejudice, to seek to the best of his ability to discover the objective truth.\(^{59}\)

By repudiating teleology and celebrating objectivity, Jenkins set new standards for historical writing in Wales and since his attractive prose was so widely read he must have influenced historical perspectives. No one who admired his dispassionate stance would have guessed that he was a keen supporter of the Labour movement. As a demonstration of the historian’s craft, in terms of approach, style and content his work has hardly been bettered and his seriousness of purpose remains his legacy.

---

\(^{58}\) R. T. Jenkins, *Yr Apêl at Hanes* (Wrecsam, 1930).

\(^{59}\) R. T. Jenkins, *Cwpanaid o De a Diferion Eraill* (Dinbych, 1997), 115.
Jenkins’s preoccupation with historical truth and objectivity was put to the test in 1936, the 400th anniversary of the 1536 Act. As it happened, the circumstances of the time were unusually propitious for a reappraisal of the Union. The days of economic boom were over. Indeed, inter-war Wales was a period of unimaginable misery. Structural unemployment, depressed incomes and high levels of migration characterised the years of Depression and overwhelmed rural and industrial communities alike. With the Welsh economy on its knees, the British Empire a shadow of its former self, and the native tongue in dire straits, it was hard to reiterate the old argument that union was a guarantor of security, prosperity and stability. These economic and cultural concerns, together with the fillip provided by the emergence of nation-states in the post-1918 period, let to the emergence of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru, the first political nationalist party in Wales, in 1925. Since the Labour party, notwithstanding its many promises, was loath to promote a devolutionary programme, it was left to the far less numerous nationalists to make the running. Although Plaid purported to represent people from different shades of the political spectrum, it was largely composed of affluent, university-based home rulers. In cultural circles its president, Saunders Lewis, certainly provided stature and credibility but, with his bow tie, reedy voice and fondness for good wine, he was hardly a populist. More concerned about the fate of the Welsh language than the plight of working-class families, some of his maladroit responses to social distress and ill-timed comments about the need to de-industrialise communities and return to pre-union days were greeted with consternation and anger. By flirting with right-wing movements, notably L’Action Française, a royalist brotherhood led by Charles Maurras, a poet, scholar, anti-Semite and political theorist, the party was rendered unelectable.  

Poorly organised, it struggled at the polls against the overwhelming popularity of Labour and it was an easy target for anti-fascist caricaturists.

For all his shortcomings, Saunders Lewis had an impeccable sense of timing. In September 1936 he and two colleagues set fire to an RAF bombing school in the Llyn Peninsula. Howls of protests against the building of such a training school for bomber pilots at Abbotsbury in Dorset, Holy Island in Northumbria and Friskney in East Anglia had been heeded (for conservation and environmental reasons) by the government, but the objections voiced by champions of Welsh culture were dismissed out of hand. In his address to the

---

jury, Saunders Lewis invoked what he rather nebulously referred to as ‘the universal moral law’ as a justification for the arson and referred movingly to ‘the irreparable loss of a language, of purity of idiom, of a home of literature, of a tradition of rural Welsh civilisation stretching back fourteen hundred years’. The blaze of publicity which accompanied these startling events encompassed the Acts of Union. At a time when Oxford and Cambridge were producing young historians and rebels who were converts to Marxism—among them Christopher Hill and E.P. Thompson—the Welsh-speaking intelligentsia veered towards nationalism and reconsidered ways of writing the history of the nation. Present-centred history was never more in evidence. Nationalist writers like Ambrose Bebb, a professional historian at Bangor, regarded the Union with undisguised hostility and scorn. In a preface to five addresses delivered at the Summer School of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru in August 1936, Bebb referred to the 1536 Act as a statute which inflicted ‘the most fatal blow ever to the entire Welsh culture’. No stranger to rhetorical boloney, Saunders Lewis was even more explicit: when the first Act of Union was enacted, he spluttered, Wales was ‘taken out at dawn and shot’. He urged the Welsh people to affirm their nationality by denying the validity of a union which had been ‘the primary cause of the misery of Wales and of the servitude of the Welsh people ever since’. A flurry of books, articles and papers reflected feelings of loss and exclusion, victimhood and oppression. Union was an imposition, a shackle and emblem of inferior status. Harsh words were spoken and written, usually at the expense of historical awareness and understanding, and the most that can be said is that such sentiments added emotional intensity to the historical narrative.

Historians of a more traditional bent approached the issue with greater circumspection (some might say timidity). In their eyes, unity and harmony had been, and still were, desirable. Centralism, tried and tested over the centuries, worked. Dissociating themselves from the nationalists and privately deploiring
their efforts to subvert received wisdom, they were more interested in the way in which union had brought about administrative efficiency and national unity than in its cultural consequences. In a short pamphlet written for the Historical Association, J. Frederick Rees, a historian and principal of the University College of South Wales and Cardiff from 1929 to 1949, derided the ‘small groups of enthusiasts’ who had questioned the benefits of union and waspishly invited them to consider the available options at the time: “To attempt to state in terms of sixteenth-century conditions what was the alternative which was rejected would certainly test the ingenuity of the modern nationalist.”

William Rees, the first holder of a Chair in Welsh history in the University of Wales, was less dogmatic and opinionated in his address to the Cymmrodorion Society in 1936. Focusing on what he rather clumsily termed ‘the conditions precedent to the measure’, Rees conceded that the Union had been an annexation rather than a bipartisan treaty agreed upon by negotiating parties. In a private letter to J. E. Lloyd, written at a time when the shadow of Fascism weighed heavily upon him, he maintained that the Union settlement stemmed from colonial-style attitudes: ‘I can well believe that a session of parliament at the time was something akin to a Fascist Grand Council and that there was little scope for discussion of the draft submitted.’ By contrast, in a lecture delivered to members of the Middle Temple, Sir Thomas Artemus Jones, judge, historian and journalist, claimed that the Union had been decisively shaped by the notion of ‘responsible self-government’, a principle widely recognised as ‘one of the foundations of British rule throughout the world’. Others threw in their tuppence’s worth as the Acts of Union divided opinion as never before.

It is important to bear in mind that the academic study of Welsh history was still in its infancy at this stage and the great upsurge of interest in the

---

66 J. F. Rees, *Tudor Policy in Wales* (Cardiff, 1935), 17. This essay was reprinted in idem, *Studies in Welsh History* (Cardiff, [1947]), 26–47.
68 William Rees to J. E. Lloyd, 23 August 1938, Bangor University Archives, The Papers of Sir John Edward Lloyd 248. I am grateful to Professor Ralph A. Griffiths for drawing my attention to this letter.
subject, both scholarly and lay, was delayed until the second half of the twentieth century. The revival of a sense of Welshness, triggered in part by Saunders Lewis’ portentous lecture ‘Tynged yr Iaith’ (‘The Fate of the Language’) in 1962, coincided with a striking renaissance in Welsh historical writing. Heavily influenced by the approach of ‘the Annales school’, it concentrated on social history, more especially on history ‘from below’ in the modern period. But since one of the principal instigators of this revival of interest was Glanmor Williams, professor of history at Swansea from 1957 to 1982, the Tudor period, which he taught successfully as a special subject, was not neglected. In a wider sense, by this time the 1530s had become ‘classic Elton territory’ and the part played by Thomas Cromwell in the Henrician Revolution in government was deeply entrenched in textbooks. Many historians, young and old, were in awe of Elton, none more so than W. Ogwen Williams who, in Tudor Gwynedd (1958), made no secret of his admiration for the ‘political genius of the great Tudor sovereigns and ministers’. In 1966 Peter R. Roberts, one of Elton’s pupils at Cambridge, completed a highly regarded doctoral thesis on ‘The “Acts of Union” and the Tudor Settlement of Wales’, a study which led to several illuminating chapters and articles on the issues raised by Thomas Cromwell’s strategy and also enriched what became known as the ‘new British history’. Thanks to Elton’s three major books on Cromwell and these Welsh studies, the enforcement of the Union was now unquestionably viewed as part of the Cromwellian Revolution.


Geoffrey R. Elton, The Tudor Revolution in Government (Cambridge, 1953); idem, Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Cromwell (Cambridge, 1972);
In 1975 John Pocock published his famous ‘plea for a new subject’ in which he invited historians to broaden their perspectives by adopting an archipelagic approach to the study of British history. The immediate response was muted and several years passed before Welsh historians took up the gauntlet. When it came it was as much a response to the unlovely effects of Thatcherist neoliberalism as it was to the upsurge of nationalist movements in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, not to mention the issues raised by multiracialism and multiculturalism and the place of the United Kingdom within the European Union. While purporting to recognise the ‘otherness’ of Wales and the validity of its history, however, ‘British history’ tended to emphasise convergence rather than divergence and often displayed a strong Anglocentric bias. Its proponents were notoriously deaf to the voices of the ‘Other’ who spoke and wrote in languages other than English, and references to Wales as ‘a Principality’ or to ‘British nationhood’ deservedly invited derision. Not all historians were guilty on these counts—the works of Rees Davies, Peter R. Roberts and Keith Robbins warrant serious attention because they recognised the importance of multiple cultural perspectives—but the suspicion remained that ‘British history’ was simply a synonym for a greater England. Issues regarding Welsh identity assumed greater prominence during the Thatcher era and the titles of some of the most influential historical works—When was Wales?, Wales! Wales? and The National Question Again—reflected the vulnerable mood of the times in the aftermath of the referendum on devolution in 1979.

How Welsh historians reacted to these shattering experiences may be illustrated by the responses of two Dowlais-born historians, both of whom were called Williams and both of whom had grown in stature over the years if not in physical size. No Welsh historian, not even J. E. Lloyd, exercised greater influence on Welsh historical studies than Glanmor Williams. Apart from his own seminal volumes on the sixteenth century, he served his subject

77 For a valuable introduction, see the essays in Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (eds.), Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History (London, 1995) and in Glen Burgess (ed.), The New British History: Founding a Modern State 1603–1715 (London, 1999).
by being the founding editor of the *Welsh History Review*, the general editor of the *Oxford History of Wales*, one of the general editors of the monograph series *Studies in Welsh History* and general editor of the *Glamorgan County History*, an enormous portfolio which no other historian could match. For the most part Williams embraced the social democracy of the working-class man and the sense of Britishness which the Labour movement, with its focus on centralisation and integration, fostered. But he also believed that a Welsh identity, based on language and history, could be accommodated within the Union and that assimilation was preferable to fragmentation. This often meant that, in his writings and public stance, he often found himself caught betwixt and between conflicting loyalties. He never managed to resolve the tensions implicit in being, as he put it, a ‘two-sided Welshman’.80 Although he feared that nationalist historians like Gwynfor Evans deliberately allowed politics rather than the past to kindle the fires of their emotions,81 he steered clear of disagreement and controversy, and by the end of his career he had come to the conclusion that too much had been attributed to the Union legislation and that it needed to be viewed ‘as only one strand in a broader and more complex historical tapestry’.82

The second Williams—Gwyn Alfred Williams—was just as diminutive but decidedly more combustible. As professor of history at Cardiff from 1974 and, more significantly, as a beguiling television personality, this irreverent, mischievous and hugely gifted admirer of Gramsci became the most vocal representative of the left in Wales. The old guard of unionists reeled as he flaunted his partisanship in the most vigorous way in works such as *When was Wales? A History of the Welsh* (1985). In his hands, history became a powerful usable tool, a politically-charged instrument markedly different from the complacent ‘Lib-Labism’ or ‘whiggishness’ of many of his predecessors.83 Williams believed that if Welsh history was to live, it needed to be communicated to a much broader audience, a task which someone of his riveting intelligence was uniquely equipped to undertake. By depicting the history of the Welsh as

82 Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the Act of Union* (Bangor, 1992), 47. For his interpretation of Union historiography see ‘Haneswyr a’r Deddfau Uno’ in idem (ed.), *Cymru a’r Gorffenedu Cór o Leisian* (Llandysul, 2000), 55–71.
story of successive, often cataclysmic, crises, splits and ruptures, he challenged received wisdom. For him, union was just one of many such crises which the Welsh had survived, but to champions of the post-Tudor polity and the new ‘British history’, as well as to anti-devolutionists, his words came as a shock. In retrospect, his vision of the past appears misguided and even absurd, but in the context of the times it resonated loudly.

In the mid-1980s Gwyn A. Williams concluded apocalyptically that the Welsh were ‘now nothing but a naked people under an acid rain’. But within a decade the rigours of Conservative rule had produced an ironic and unexpected legacy. The ways in which large numbers of Welsh people viewed the Union changed. In September 1997 the Welsh, riding on the coat-tails of the Scots, voted by a tiny majority in favour of a devolved Assembly Government for Wales. Even more significant for the historian’s standpoint was the growing readiness of professional remembrancers to express their nationalist leaning in their writings. Previously it had always been presumed that historians with nationalist sympathies were bound to exaggerate, distort or impoverish understanding of the past. But by the 1990s, to a greater or lesser degree, historians like Rees Davies, J. Beverley Smith, John Davies and the present writer were perfectly prepared to express nationalist sentiments in their interpretations without compromising the rules of the game. Fears of failing to pass muster in the eyes of others disappeared and some uncomfortable truths were expressed as writers addressed both the intended and unintended consequences of union. For instance, in a major multi-volume social history of the Welsh language it was emphatically declared that the ‘language clause’ of 1536 had denied equality to the Welsh language, a statement conspicuous by its absence in previous accounts. In the first edition of his magisterial history of Wales, John Davies declared that it had been written ‘in the faith and confidence that the nation in its fullness is yet to be’, an accurate prediction which he felt entitled to crow about when a revised edition emerged in 2007.

What does the future hold? The setting up of a National Assembly for Wales in May 1999 unquestionably marked a new departure. Current trends strongly

84 Williams, When was Wales?, 305.
85 Robin Okey, ‘Plausible Perspectives: The New Welsh Historiography’, Planet, 73 (1989), 31–8. Okey rightly wondered why nationalist interpretations were reckoned to be ‘uniquely subject to anachronism and propagandist present-mindedness’.
86 See the volumes published under the series title ‘A Social History of the Welsh Language’ by the University of Wales Press between 1997 and 2000, especially Jenkins (ed.), The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution, chapter 2.
suggest that the Welsh possess a growing desire to take further responsibility for their own destiny. According to the ‘One Wales’ coalition agreement made in 2007 between the Wales Labour Party and Plaid Cymru a referendum will be held by 2011, subject to the recommendations of an all-Wales Convention designed to assess the extent of support for primary legislative powers on the Scottish model. Wales has become a more lively political entity, more plural, more multifaceted and, as a result, more likely to adopt imaginative approaches to its past. Since we no longer, for instance, trust in age-old markers of identity based on blood, ancestry and heritage, other forms of historical enquiry and lines of argument are bound to emerge. Of one thing we can be certain: as they engage in a dialogue between the past and the present, historians will continue to reshape and revise their interpretations of the Acts of Union and their consequences and will do so in the light of the tastes, interests and aspirations of the society in which they live. As J. Frederick Rees laconically observed: ‘Events press forward . . . to what end we cannot tell.’

Thus, on both sides, the case stood between the nations, a pen and ink war made a daily noise in either kingdom, and this served to exasperate the people in such a manner, one against another, that never have two nations run upon one another in such a manner, and come off without blows.¹

The union of Scotland and England on 1 May 1707 was—and for some still is—undoubtedly contentious. Polemic and political pamphleteering flourished at the time, reflecting and fanning the debate, while the newsheets and journals of the day provided lively opinion pieces and a good deal of propaganda. Recent commentators have recognised the importance of public discourse and public opinion regarding the union on the way to the treaty. Leith Davis goes as far as to say that the ‘new British nation was constructed from the dialogue that took place regarding its potential existence’.²

While the treaty articles were still being debated by the last Scottish parliament, Daniel Defoe, who had gone to Scotland specifically to promote the union, began compiling his monumental History of the Union of Great Britain in Edinburgh.³ He expected to see it published before the end of 1707 although, for reasons that are still not entirely clear, it was not published until late 1709 or early 1710.⁴ As David Hayton notes, ‘a great deal of it must already have

³ He had already promoted the union in his journal, the Review, and also published several pro-union tracts in London, including two Essays at Removing National Prejudices against a Union with Scotland, in April and October 1706.
⁴ In the Review published on 24 December 1706 Defoe claimed he was working on the History. By the end of January 1707 he had begun a subscription for it and before the end of March he announced that he had a ‘great part of it finished’. Review, 29 March 1707 in Daniel Defoe, Defoe’s Review, A Facsimile Edition, Arthur Wellesley Secord (ed.) (9 vols., Columbia, 1938), III, 611; Hayton, ‘Introduction’ in Defoe, History of the
been printed by January 1708’ when the Reverend James Clark of Glasgow, who had evidently read the account given there of anti-union riots in Glasgow in late 1706, accused Defoe of misrepresenting and maligning him, prompting a heated pamphlet exchange that continued into 1710.\(^5\) Even before it was published, Defoe’s *History of the Union* was therefore controversial which, as I propose to demonstrate, was about the last thing he would have wanted.

This essay takes a close look at the language Defoe employed in his *History of the Union*, the language of persuasion, and perhaps also of propaganda, and in particular at some of the rhetorical figures and strategies he had refined as a journalist and pamphleteer. Some of the language he used provoked a small pamphlet war, in which his very words were flung back at him. In the second part of this essay I consider how Defoe handled outstanding Scottish historical grievances at the time of the Union, by examining his account of one of the most contentious political issues of the day, the Darien disaster, before offering some conclusions about the insights afforded by such a historical-linguistic analysis.

Defoe’s reputation as a polemicist is well known and, while he attracted more censure than praise in his own day—and for some time afterwards—more recently he has been acknowledged as ‘England’s chief pamphleteer of the Union of 1707’, a ‘highly professional writer and skilled propagandist’ who ‘made the biggest contribution to unionist propaganda on either side of the border’.\(^6\) Through his pro-union pamphlets and journalism he ‘became directly involved in answering Scottish pamphleteers. . . [thus] further developing his rhetoric regarding the nation’.\(^7\) An enthusiastic, versatile and prolific controversialist, nevertheless in the *History of the Union* Defoe criticised ‘the writers of the age’ for dividing the nation, and went on to identify some of

---


the main perpetrators of the ‘pen and ink war’. This ‘war’ often involved disparagement of the opposition writers, who were commonly dubbed ‘scribblers’. Defoe himself was accused of being a hired pen, a government hack, and an ‘impudent scribler’ because of his pro-union pamphlets and journalism and, in accordance with the rules of engagement, he in turn accused opponents of being ‘insolent Scribblers’. Indeed, much of the published writing produced by the Union debate can certainly be described as ‘the literature of contention’.

Defoe’s pro-union propaganda in his pamphlets and the Review, and his History of the Union, express the same desire to move beyond the ancient feuds and animosities, the national aversions and breaches that kept the kingdoms divided, and which were so often invoked by anti-union propagandists. While Defoe’s History of the Union may well be considered part of the pro-union propaganda campaign since, even after the passage of the Act of Union in 1707, debate was ongoing, and while Defoe continued to advocate for it in his other writings, it is notable that in this work he attempted to close down the debate. ‘[I]t is not my design’, he wrote, ‘to make this History a Dispute’. In the Preface to the History he explicitly undertook ‘to speak Truth, and relate Fact Impartially in all that is Matter of History’. He reiterated this claim throughout the work as well as affirming that his purpose was elucidation not contention, usually in phrases such as ‘setting the matter in a clear light’ because he wanted ‘to convey the right understanding of these matters to posterity’. His emphasis on factuality, impartiality and elucidation was conventional. As Backscheider notes, many early eighteenth-century historians ‘emphasised the objective presentation of evidence’. Davis suggests that Defoe also wanted to associate the success of the Union with the success of a new style of narrative, one written as from the eye of an impartial observer, hence his reminder to his readers: ‘I was an eye-witness to it all’. But, as one recent historian has

---

11 Defoe, History of the Union, 80.
12 Ibid., 112.
14 Defoe, History of the Union, 45. Davis, Acts of Union, 43. The title page of the 1712 London edition of Defoe’s History of the Union advertised the work as being ‘by a
observed, despite ‘Defoe’s efforts to produce a balanced analysis, his History struck his critics then as now as unmistakably, and unforgivably, the work of an English propagandist’. To his chagrin, Defoe found his claims to impartiality, clear understanding and ‘matter of fact’ history challenged even before the History of the Union was published.

Hayton describes the History of the Union as ‘first and foremost a pièce d’occasion, whose purpose was to persuade’. In it Defoe also celebrated the culmination of the Union project, most evidently in his dedications to Queen Anne and the duke of Queensberry, but also throughout the work in the many references to the Union as this ‘happy transaction’ and ‘glorious conjunction’. His account of the debate that accompanied the passage of the treaty articles forms the central sections of the History. Nevertheless, the substantial preliminary sections (that is, the Preface, ‘A General History of Unions’ and ‘Of Affairs in Both Kingdoms”) provide the historical background and contexts he believed were necessary for a clear understanding of what he presented as the inevitable and providential conjunction of the two kingdoms:

In order to come to a clear Understanding in the whole Frame of this wonderful Transaction, THE UNION, ’tis necessary to let the reader into the very Original of it, and Enquire where the first Springs are to be found, from whence this mighty Transaction has been Form’d.

And tho’ this will of course lead us back a great way in History, yet it will carry this Advantage along with it, that we shall see all the several Steps which have been taken, how Providence has led the Nation, as it were, by the Hand.

And at the beginning of the next section, ‘Of Affairs in Both Kingdoms’:

Before I enter upon the Proceedings in the Reign of Queen ANNE, towards a General Union of these Kingdoms, it is absolutely necessary to the right Understanding of Things, to take a short View of the Posture of Publick Affairs in the respective Kingdoms, and what it was that rendered the Union so absolutely Necessary at this Time, that to

person concern’d in the said treaty, and present in both kingdoms at the time of its transacting’.

15 Whatley, Scots and the Union, 23.
17 Ibid., 13; Backscheider, ‘Cross-Purposes’, 169.
18 Defoe, History of the Union, I, 1.
all Considering People, who made any tolerable Judgment of Things, it was plain, there was no other way left, to prevent the most Bloody War that ever had been between the two Nations.\textsuperscript{19}

Defoe presented the Union as the only solution to age-old warring, and the only way to prevent internecine conflict breaking out once again. The \textit{History of the Union} was a way of ‘writing the nation into union’.\textsuperscript{20} Whereas ‘Writers of the Age’ had exacerbated old wounds and contributed to deteriorating relations between the two countries, Defoe believed his pen would serve to heal the breach: ‘My Desire being to heal, not exasperate’ as he wrote in the Preface to the fifth collected volume of his \textit{Review}.\textsuperscript{21}

Military images abound in union literature. George Lockhart’s assertion that ‘all true Scotsmen looked upon it [the Union] as a gross Invasion on their Liberties and Sovereignty’ is fairly representative, especially of the anti-unionists.\textsuperscript{22} The Scottish pamphleteer and London-based journalist, George Ridpath, who later became a leading propagandist for the opposition or Country party, expressed the view that Scots should ‘defend with their pens what their ancestors maintained so gallantly with their swords’.\textsuperscript{23} As we have seen in the quotation at the beginning of this article, Defoe deplored the ‘pen and ink war’, yet his own fondness for such figures finds its way into his \textit{History}. He wrote, for example, of the ‘jealousies on both sides about church affairs, in respect to the Union’ which ‘lay like a secret mine, with which that party who designed to keep the nation divided, were sure to blow it up at last’.\textsuperscript{24} His appreciation of the paradox is evident in the 29 March 1707 \textit{Review} issue where he rejoiced in the sound of ‘the guns proclaiming the happy conjunction from Edinburgh Castle’ as he wrote, going on to exclaim that ‘the thunder of warlike engines cry peace; and what is made to divide and destroy, speaks out the language of this glorious conjunction!’\textsuperscript{25}

One of the most contentious issues in the Union debate was whether, if there were to be a union of Scotland and England, an incorporating or

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., I, 112.
\textsuperscript{20} Davis, \textit{Acts of Union}, 40.
\textsuperscript{21} Defoe’s \textit{Review}, V, unpaginated.
\textsuperscript{22} George Lockhart, \textit{Memoirs concerning the Affairs of Scotland} (London, 1714), 135.
\textsuperscript{24} Defoe, \textit{History of the Union}, 125.
\textsuperscript{25} Defoe’s \textit{Review}, IV, 81.
federal union offered the most benefits. Defoe consistently advocated an incorporating union:

If our Union be partial, federal, periodical or indeed notional, as most of those schemes have been, then the defects may be so also: one part may thrive, and another decay; and Scotland would be but too sensible of that, in those sorts of union.

But if the Union be an incorporation, a union according to the extent of the letter, it must then be a union of the very soul of the nation, all its constitution, customs, trade and manners, must be blended together, digested and concocted, for the mutual united, undistinguish’t, good, growth and health of the one, whole, united body; and this I understand by Union.26

Defoe had used the ‘united body’ metaphor in earlier tracts, and continued to do so for some years after the Treaty of Union had been ratified and legislated.27 Here, in the third part of his Essay at Removing National Prejudices Against a Union, published very soon after he arrived in Scotland, he made a case for incorporation designed to appeal to wavering or unconvinced Scots. Not only is the Union as a healthy body a favourite reiterated figure in his political writings, but he also adopted incorporating practices when he promoted this concept of union in his writing.

His critics soon recognised Defoe’s tendency not only to repeat himself, but to quote his own words. One wit called him ‘the greatest Tautologist in the World’, for ‘you, having writ more books than you have read, must quote your own dear impudent self, or nothing at all’. 28 Davis has drawn attention to the way that ‘Defoe incorporates and changes the arguments

27 See, for example, Part II of his Essay at Removing National Prejudices (London, 1706) and Daniel Defoe, Union and no Union (London, 1713). Pamphlets by Scottish incorp­orators often referred to the desirability of the nations becoming one body, as for example, George Mackenzie of Cromarty, Two Letters concerning the Present Union, from a Peer in Scotland to a Peer in England (Edinburgh, 1706), 15; 28 David Symson, Sir George M’Kenzie’s Arguments against an Incorporating Union, particularly Considered (Edinburgh, 1706), 15; William Seton of Pitmedden, Scotland’s Great Advantages by a Union with England (Edinburgh?, 1706).
of his opponents into his own perspective’ in the various parts of his Essay at Removing National Prejudices. The same, I think, can be said of his History, for there he incorporated the Union debate itself, the arguments pro and con, as part of his ‘balanced analysis’. He even incorporated into his own text the whole of Lord Belhaven’s famous anti-union speech of 2 November 1706, a speech he had earlier satirised, instigating a whole debate in verse, a ‘flyting’. He also inserted material from his own earlier pamphlets, including the various essays aimed at dispelling national prejudices, as well as from his Review articles; and he included revised accounts of Scottish resistance to union he observed at first hand, and that he originally penned as secret reports to his employer, Robert Harley, the English Secretary of State for Scotland.

I Victory in the ‘Lists of Concertation’?

It seems, however, that Defoe’s repeated efforts to persuade readers of the benefits of uniting the kingdoms, and to counter opponents’ arguments by containing them through his careful, and deliberately exemplary, incorporation of these in his History, only drew further charges from his critics, one of whom could not resist turning Defoe’s favourite metaphor against him when

---

29 Davis, Acts of Union, 25. He also followed this practice in his Review, where he sometimes cited specific caustic comments, or published hostile letters. In his obituary for his former opponent, Lord Belhaven, he quoted the late baron in a way that not only demonstrated Belhaven’s magnanimity but also illustrated how old antagonists could be reconciled despite a history of differences, as was the case with Defoe and Belhaven: ‘I confess, I thought you gave yourself too much liberty in bantering me and my speech in your writings, especially in your Introduction to that of my Lord H[aversha]ms; yet by what I have seen of your other writings, you are of the same sentiments with me as to government, &c, and, except in the matter of Union, you are a man after my own heart.’ Defoes Review, V, 182.

30 Whatley, Scots and the Union, 23.


he attacked him for producing an ‘indigested corpulent History’.33 Adopting a chivalric figure of speech as his opening parry, Defoe’s anonymous accuser cloaked recrimination with rectitude:

I never expected to have had the occasion of entring the lists of concertation with Mr De Foe, but having in his printed History of the Union of England and Scotland, abused my good friend Mr Clark, I cannot contain my self from attacking him.34

Whether the author was the Reverend James Clark, Minister of the Tron Church in Glasgow, or a ‘good Friend’ of his, ‘concertation’ or contention followed in a series of pamphlets published in Edinburgh between 1708 and 1710, in which accusations and counter-accusations were exchanged in what is usually called the Defoe-Clark controversy or quarrel.35 Importantly, what were primarily contested in this dispute were the actual spoken and printed words used. In the History Defoe had virtually accused Clark of uttering some inflammatory words in a sermon, which provoked a riot. A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe attacked Defoe for deliberately misrepresenting ‘the rise and occasion of the rabbles at Glasgow’, and accused him of ‘bombastick slanting rodomontades’ and ‘calumnious misreports’ injurious to Mr Clark’s reputation.36 The author also resorted to personal slurs: ‘methinks Mr Hosier, should keep himself about peoples legs. . .but should not meddle with mens heads’, a social snub no doubt influenced by the Review Review’d, published the previous year, which discredited Defoe as a ‘broken hosier’, and from which he quoted further in a postscript.37 He disdained Defoe’s ‘virulent, but pithless pen-guns’ and then proceeded to quote another author’s personal attacks on Defoe as ‘an hackney tool, a scandalous pen, a foul mouthed mongrel, an author who writes for bread and lives by defamation’.38

33 Anonymous, A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe (Edinburgh, 1708), 2.
34 Ibid, 1.
36 Anonymous, A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe, 1, 3, 6.
38 A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe, 6, 7. Going on the offensive with counter accusations was a quite typical response to perceived slander. M. Lindsay Kaplan, The Culture of Slander in Early Modern England (Cambridge, 1997), 9.
From 1706 Defoe suffered many such slurs, largely on account of his pro-union stance, for, as he expressed it in his Review: ‘arguing and persuading all Men to Peace’ frequently incurred the ‘malice and raillery. . . and vile reproach’ of his opponents. In An Answer to a Paper concerning Mr De Foe, against his History of the Union (1708), he dismissed Clark’s ‘scurrilous reflections’ on his character and challenged the minister to lay slander charges, for Defoe could bring forward witnesses who had been present at the Glasgow sermon and had transcribed Clark’s words. What he mainly addressed in this Answer were Clark’s accusations that ‘Mr De Foe errs egregiously in his narration of matters of fact, than which there cannot be a greater imputation on an historian’, especially given his arrogant claim of ‘being one that will relate things, with all the impartiality possible, and that for the sake of history, he will transmit things faithfully to posterity’. Illicit access to several pages from the unpublished History had enabled Clark to quote some of Defoe’s own words and thus mock his claims to be a reliable and objective historian. These are charges Defoe refuted by reasserting his credentials as a historian and insisting that he had quoted Clark’s sermon ‘verbatim’ thus fulfilling ‘the obligation of a historian to truth of fact’. Indeed Defoe went on to quote at length his own words from the History about the sermon inciting the riot, so that readers might judge the case for themselves, and also to illustrate his claims to have written ‘an impartial history of fact’. He also upbraided the ‘author’ of A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe with writing a ‘scurrilous pamphlet. . . against a book that is not yet published’.

The Clark-Defoe ‘paper war’ continued for nearly two years as accusations and counter accusations of slander flew back and forth. Renewed attempts by Clark to undermine Defoe’s credibility as a historian were rebutted again and again by Defoe who, even when he finally agreed to alter the offending sheet and apologised for the ‘mistake’ by his printer that led to the continued circulation of some unaltered sheets, reiterated his conviction of ‘the Truth and Impartiality of my History’. His final, and apparently triumphant, attempt at maintaining the high moral ground took the form of reminding the Reverend Clark that:

---

40 Daniel Defoe, An Answer to a Paper concerning Mr De Foe, against his History of the Union (Edinburgh, 1708), 1.
41 Clark, A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe, 1, 3.
42 Defoe, An Answer to a Paper concerning Mr De Foe, 5, 2.
43 Ibid., 4.
45 Daniel Defoe, Advertisement from Daniel De Foe, to Mr Clark (Edinburgh, 1710), 3.
Railing never mended an argument, many a good one has it marr’d, many a bad one made worse; I thank God, I have not been used to it, ’tis neither the sin of my education, or inclination; less still is it my talent, and least of all do I value it, when it flys at me from another; If it moves any thing in me ’tis my pity, for I take a man when he is come to railing to be but a few steps off, of distraction—And all men commiserate a lunatick, in short passion and ill language is below a gentleman, inconsistent with a wise man, remote from a good man, the disease of a learned man, and above all indecent and unbecoming a minister.46

No known riposte from Clark survives, so it may be that he finally considered silence the more dignified response. Perhaps he recognised that Defoe was not the man to back down in a war of words, in spite of his artful admission that: ‘I am very well content, to let him have the last word of flying, as he had the first’.47 Defoe, who had already proved his skill in his flying with Belhaven only a few years earlier, had the last word here too.

II Defoe and the Darien Debate

In the wake of the Darien disaster, Scotland’s ill-fated attempts to found a colony at Darien, on the isthmus of Panama between 1698–1700, there was a fierce pamphlet debate, which featured a high level of verbal aggression.48 The perceived threat to Scotland’s sovereignty was highlighted and became a major argument in anti-union pamphlets and newspapers.49 Much of this oppositional literature expressed anger, grievance and a heightened sense of nationalism.50 George Ridpath’s tract, Scotland’s Grievances relating to Darien

46 Ibid., 3–4.
48 The term ‘disaster’ was applied at the time by, for example, George Ridpath, Scotland’s Grievances relating to Darien (Edinburgh?, 1700), 7, 10 and Defoe, History of the Union, 116. The widespread use of direct verbal aggression in these texts is discussed by Marina Dossena, ‘Modality and Argumentative Discourse in the Darien Pamphlets’ in Marina Dossena and Charles Jones (eds.), Insights into Late Modern English (Bern, 2003), 288–90 and more extensively in idem., ‘Forms of Argumentation and Verbal Aggression in the Darien Pamphlets’ in Brownlees (ed.), News Discourse, 235–54.
(1700), is a prime example. In impassioned terms, he described the interference of the English parliament as a provocative ‘act of hostility’ and an ‘outrage’ that demonstrated ‘contempt of our nation’. Royal proclamations, issued against the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa, the Indies and the Darien colony, were repeatedly condemned as an ‘invasion upon our sovereignty and freedom’. Polarisation is evident in Ridpath’s choice and juxtaposition of negative (‘them’/‘they’) and positive (‘us’/‘we’/‘our’) lexes. For instance, all who opposed the establishment of the colony were ‘our Enemies’ and ‘the enemies of our nation’, whereas the colony projectors were ‘true Scotsmen’ and ‘true patriots’. Emotive language is a marked feature of Ridpath’s rhetoric of patriotism. He denounced ‘such a black piece of treachery . . . such rancour and malice’ and the part played by ‘pernicious counsellors’, the last phrase repeated five times, while the accusations of treachery, malice and rancour resound throughout the tract.

For all the emotionally-loaded vocabulary, *Scotland’s Grievances relating to Darien* demonstrates the argumentative skills of a seasoned polemicist who anticipates, and answers, possible objections:

> If it be objected that His Majesty was obliged to publish those proclamations out of regard to the English nation and his foreign allies. *We answer* that His Majesty by his coronation oath as king of Scotland, is oblig’d to govern us by our own laws, and not by any consideration of foreign interests.

> Some we know will object that His Majesty did not refuse to receive the petition, though he would not allow my Lord Basil to present it. *To which we can readily answer*, that this is the direct path to the tyranny of the late reigns, which ordered that no petition should be presented to the king but by his council.

Ridpath dismissed such objections as partisan—‘Whatever arguments the courtiers may pretend’—and he exposed the real motives behind their specious

---

52 Ibid., 1, 5, 25, 52.
55 The phrase is employed by Bowie, ‘Public Opinion’, 241.
57 Ibid., 5, 9. Emphasis mine.
reasoning as a desire for ‘tyranny’ and ‘oppression’.\textsuperscript{58} Throughout the tract he highlighted the threats offered to Scottish liberty, and then linked these to concerns about the projected union of the two nations, by pointing to the dangers if Scotland ignored the experience of history: for, he argued, Darien provided yet one more instance in a long line of English treacheries, going back as far as Edward I’s treatment of John Baliol. The emotional words of William Wallace, as rendered by George Buchanan and ‘English’d’ by Ridpath, provide the epigraph and subsequently inform the pervasive patriotic appeal of his tract:

\begin{quote}
You who had rather like cowards submit your necks to a yoke of ignominious slavery, than expose yourselves to any danger in asserting the public liberty; hugg that fortune which you value so highly: For my part, I shall cheerfully sacrifice my life to die a free-man in my native country.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

As late as 1706 Ridpath and others invoked Scotland’s grievance relating to Darien in anti-union propaganda, which frequently features emotional appeals to nationalism.\textsuperscript{60}

In addressing this grievance in his \textit{History}, and in order to counteract lingering anti-union sentiment, Defoe adopted the stance of a rational and impartial commentator. His upbringing as an English dissenter may well have influenced his declared commitment to, and frequent assertions of, the need to exercise reason, but his appeals to his readers’ powers of rationality were no doubt honed in his own pamphleteering and journalism.\textsuperscript{61} He discussed the contentious Darien issue as part of his ‘Summary Recapitulation’ of recent events that ‘tended to estrange the nations, and as it were prepare them for a breach, rather than a union’.\textsuperscript{62} His deliberately objective and rational analysis

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., unpaginated.
\textsuperscript{60} Ridpath, \textit{Considerations upon the Union} (Edinburgh?, 1706); James Hodges, \textit{Essay upon the Union} (London, 1706). In her analysis of pamphlets produced during the Anglo-Irish Union debate, Alessandra Levoratio notes that the use of reason is a feature of pro-union pamphlets while anti-union writers tend to employ more ‘emotionally-laden’ language. Alessandra Levoratio, ‘Wisdom, Moderation and Propaganda’ in Brownlees (ed.), \textit{News Discourse}, 272, 275.
\textsuperscript{61} According to Penovich, the dissenting ideology to which Defoe subscribed ‘stressed that a man should exercise his reason to understand both divine will and the world around him’. Penovich, ‘From “Revolution Principles” to Union’, 242.
\textsuperscript{62} Defoe, \textit{History of the Union}, I, 113.
of the failure of the Darien enterprise largely comprised explanation, evaluation and elucidation.

Defoe began his account by recalling that the formation of the Scots Trading Company, or as he called it, the African Company, was ‘ill-relish’d’ by the English East India Company who had enjoyed exclusive rights to trade and, because certain matters were ‘not rightly understood’, Defoe undertook to ‘set it [the whole matter] in a clearer Light’. He then described the steps taken by the English Company, with the support of the English parliament and people, to oppose the Scots Company in their schemes to trade in the East Indies and set up a colony in Darien, carefully outlining why the whole enterprise lacked ‘any rational probability of success’. He cited lack of stock to trade, lack of foresight about the predictable reaction of the English Company, the settlers’ insufficient capital and credit and, above all, organisational shortcomings, before concluding: ‘This I think clears up the Case sufficiently... be the fault where it will’.

Although he thus apparently side-stepped the issue of blame to avoid stirring up old grievances, he found fault with the projectors of the Scots Company whom he accused of being ‘exceeding short-sighted’ and irresponsible when they ‘played their other game of Darien’. In these comments he used the device of a statement that begins with a concession to the projectors, followed by a criticism that is made all the more effective through his use of parallel structure and verbal repetition or near repetition:

*If they imagined* to obtain help from abroad, they indeed were in the right, for they could not but know, that the merchants in England would leap at a proposal to get into the East-India trade, free from the bondage of the Company mentioned before; *but if they imagin’d also*, that this could do less than embark the English government against them, and bring the publick to concern themselves about it, they were exceeding short-sighted, or must at the same time believe, the other very ignorant in the affairs before them. . .

*I do readily allow*, the first scheme of a trade to the East-Indies had a probability of success in it, a thing I *can not grant* to the affair of Darren

---

63 Ibid., I, 113. In 1695 the Scottish parliament established the trading company known as the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies. Initially this had King William’s approval, but the English parliament, pressed by the East India Company, opposed all attempts at English and foreign investment in the new company.

64 Ibid., I, 114.

65 Ibid., I, 116.

66 Ibid., I, 115.
[sic.]; which, I think had not one branch belonging to its contrivance, but what was big with necessary abortions.67

This is the voice of reason pointing out foolish and irrational conduct: the Darien scheme, he said, was a ‘contrivance’, a ‘game’ and as ill-considered as other projects dreamed up through the ‘impracticable whimsy’ of the same projectors.68 His lexical choices here certainly express negative evaluation, but he was also careful to elicit agreement by appealing to the common sense of his readers, particularly to those of more foresight, knowledge and sounder judgement than the projectors:

I cannot help saying had the managers of the Companies affairs had the least forecast of things, they could not but have expected all that happened here; and also might have known that, had they acted right, those proclamations could have done them no manner of damage.

Whoever has the least knowledge of the affairs of that country, and of the trade of the English colonies, must needs know that had the Scots Company who had plac’d themselves at Darien been furnish’d either with money or letters of credit, they had never wanted provisions, or come to any other disaster, notwithstanding the proclamations of the English against correspondence.

Nor will any man be so vain to say that they ought to have ventured on such a settlement, depending on supplies from the English.69

The excerpt may begin within an apparent statement of his personal opinion, but as it proceeds it assumes a consensus of view before arriving at a univocal standpoint.70

Like Ridpath, Defoe sought to shape contemporary public opinion, to influence attitudes and beliefs and, above all, to persuade readers to his point of view. The rational approach and language he employed, however, are all

67 Ibid., I, 114, 115. My emphasis.
68 Ibid., I, 115.
69 Ibid., I, 115–16. My emphasis. Several years later Defoe admitted that the Darien venture could have been a success: ‘our brethren of Scotland fix’d a Colony, which if we had encourag’d, might by this time have been an excellent gootting for the South-Sea Trade’. Defoe’s Review, 3 July 1711, VIII, 174.
70 Defoe uses this rhetorical strategy in other work, including his fiction. See Valerie Wainwright, ‘Lending to the Lord: Defoe’s Rhetorical Design in A Journal of the Plague Year’, British Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies, 13 (1990), 59–72.
the more striking when compared to Ridpath’s highly emotive and emotional rhetoric. Both were skilled and experienced polemicists, but where Ridpath’s tract clearly appeals largely to its immediate audience, Defoe’s History is aimed at another readership too, for he also had an eye to posterity. As he had said himself, “tis necessary . . . to convey the right understanding of these matters to posterity”.71

III Conclusions

Defoe might have called for an end to the ‘pen and ink war’, but he remained an active combatant in the Union struggle for almost a decade. According to the OED, the expression ‘war of words’ is journalese for ‘a sustained conflict conducted by means of the spoken or printed word; a propaganda war’. It therefore seems an appropriate term to use in relation to Defoe and the polemic associated with the 1707 Anglo-Scottish Union debate, much of which was published in the pamphlets and newspapers of the day as part of a propaganda campaign. The dictionary attributes the earliest known usage to Alexander Pope in 1725, and one imagines that the concept of a ‘war of words’ was already familiar to, and must have resonated with, his readers. For his part, Defoe never underestimated the power of words, for good or ill and, as his published dispute with the Reverend Clark illustrates, he was not inclined to retreat from the field of battle when verbal dominion—and all that it might represent—was at stake. He was nevertheless careful to indicate that the ‘war’ was not of his making, and that reconciliation rather than retaliation was always his aim. As we have seen, he condemned ‘passion and ill language’, whether in a gospel minister or any other writer. ‘Railing never mended an argument’ he wrote, but reason might.72 He was good at coining expressions.

Defoe was a master of rhetoric before he became a master of fictions.73 Linguistics scholars might say he was particularly adept in the deployment of communicative strategies. A closer look at only two samples of his writing in response to controversy relating to, and arguably contained by, his History of the Union reveals something of his command of language, particularly the language of persuasion, including reiteration, incorporation, balanced argu-

---

71 Defoe, History of the Union, I, 113.
72 Defoe, Advertisement from Daniel Defoe, to Mr Clark, 35.
mentation, appeals to reason and consensus-seeking. He might have had an eye on posterity, but he also had an ear for Scots, the language of his immediate audience, as the Scotticisms in his other publications demonstrate. How else did he learn about the art of flying/flighting, and when, or when not, to display it?

University of Waikato
Irish historians have explored in depth the ways in which the sense of national identity of the Anglican Irish changed in the early eighteenth century ‘towards an affirmation of Irishness’. But the position of their Presbyterian fellow countrymen, ‘The People with No Name’, remains obscure. The case of James Arbuckle may shed some light on it.

Arbuckle is known, to the extent that he is known at all, as one of a group of Glasgow-educated Presbyterian Irishmen associated in 1720s Dublin with the Real Whig Lord Molesworth and loosely referred to as ‘the Molesworth circle’. The distinguished Swift critic Carol Fabricant says of them: ‘During the 1720s Molesworth’s estate served as the centre for a circle of liberal enlightened thinkers, committed to the cause of Ireland’s independence.’ This is, I suggest, a misreading of more cautious historians who have indeed found in ‘the Molesworth circle’ the ‘hidden origins’ of the United Irishmen, on the basis of their ‘Commonwealthman’ form of radical liberalism. But even they, while not suggesting that these men showed any interest in Irish

4 Carole Fabricant, ‘Swift’s Political Legacy: Re-membering the Past in Order to Imagine the Future’ in Aileen Douglas, Patrick Kelly and Ian Campbell Ross (eds.) Locating Swift (Dublin, 1998), 196.
independence, have largely ignored their positively ‘British’ patriotism. It was not however ignored by William Drennan, whose father was Arbuckle’s lifelong friend. He described his father’s generation as having been ‘led astray by false associations . . . with the Saxon Alfred’. This was a reference to the masque *Alfred*, by the Scot James Thomson, the work in which his song ‘Rule Britannia’ first appears. He is known as the poet of the British patriotism which developed in Scotland in the decades after the 1707 Union. His biographer writes of him: “Thomson offers an unreflective and optimistic vision of social and economic progress. . . . He is a child of the Union and perhaps the first important poet to write with a British as distinct from a Scottish or English outlook.” Arbuckle was educated in the culture that produced Thomson: he was Thomson’s student contemporary and his first poems were published with Thomson’s in Allan Ramsay’s *Edinburgh Miscellany.*

Arbuckle was indeed the more successful student poet, his ‘British’ poems preceding Thomson’s by some six years, but his poetry has not been much regarded since. This article will look at the expression of that ‘Britishness’ in Arbuckle’s work, focusing especially on his poem *Glotta* which celebrates the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707, and then briefly considering how these views are reflected in his later Irish writing.

Arbuckle was born in Belfast to a Scots Presbyterian merchant family. He was educated at the University of Glasgow (Trinity College, Dublin, only admitted Anglicans), perhaps intended, like many of his contemporaries, for the Presbyterian ministry, but finding instead an artistic vocation. In his student poem, *Snuff*, he described meeting his Muse by the banks of the River Lagan in terms that seem designed to outrage Calvinist orthodoxy: ‘Youth, she spake, I have adopted thee/Renounce thou therefore all the world for me’. He was a student progressive, clashing with university authorities on New Light theology, student politics and drama, and only narrowly avoided the expulsion suffered by his friend John Smith.

*Glotta* was published in 1721, towards the end of Arbuckle’s student career. He had already identified himself with Whig politics in *An Epistle to the Right Honourable Thomas*
Earl of Haddington (1719)—a eulogy for Joseph Addison, himself also seen as a poet with a post-union British identity—a poem which spoke in whiggish terms of ‘Britannia’s Goddess, Freedom’ and ‘the common rights of Human-Kind’.

The Union of 1707 was plainly not popular with all Scots. Arbuckle acknowledged this in his poem when (fourteen years after the event) he referred to ‘Disgusts, and secret Murmurs.’ One leading unionist, Sir John Clerk, wrote in 1706 that ‘In a corner of the street one may see a Presbyterian minister, a popish priest and an Episcopal prelate all agreeing together in their discourse against the Union but upon quite different views and contradictory reasons. . . .’ But it is relevant to Arbuckle’s position that among the unionists were the ‘Moderate’ Presbyterians, those who were willing to move beyond the Covenanting demand for a Calvinist state and accept a mixed ecclesiastical establishment. They were broadly Whigs in politics, seeing the Williamite Revolution and then the Union as securing liberty, in particular the liberty of their established kirk. This approach, through men like William Carstares, John Simson and Gerschom Carmichael, exerted a strong influence on the Glasgow University of Arbuckle’s time.

Perhaps it is of equal relevance that the clearest literary expression of unionist sentiment came from outside Scotland, in the work of another modernising Presbyterian Whig, Daniel Defoe, whose propaganda for the Union finds echoes in Glotta. Many English Presbyterians shared Defoe’s

---


13 James Arbuckle, *Glotta* (Glasgow, 1721), l.325.

14 [John Clerk of Penicuik], *A Letter to a Friend giving an Account how the Treaty of Union has been received here* (Edinburgh, 1706), 7.


16 Carstares is discussed in Kidd’s article above, and throughout Robertson (ed.), *A Union for Empire*. Carmichael is discussed in James Moore and Michael Silverthorne, ‘Protestant Theologies, Limited Sovereignties: Natural Law and Conditions of Union in the German Empire, the Netherlands and Great Britain’ in ibid., 189–97; on Simson, see Anne Skoczylas, ‘The Regulation of Academic Society in Early Eighteenth-Century Scotland: The Tribulations of Two Divinity Professors’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 83 (2004), 171–96.

17 Defoe’s writing on the Union was extensive, but one example is the poem *Caledonia* (London, 1707).
enthusiasm, seeing the religious heterogeneity of the new ‘Britain’ as offering support for their own dissent in the Anglican part of the new nation: a similar consideration is likely to have influenced Glasgow’s Ulster Presbyterian students.

Arbuckle’s poem celebrates the Union as ‘The joyful reign of glorious liberty/ When generous views thy sons shall reconcile. . .’ and as ‘proud thistle mingled with the rose’ (a happier metaphor perhaps than Defoe’s in Caledonia: ‘Nothing remains to make her Wealth compleat/But that her right hand and her left may meet’). Scotland’s past, Arbuckle said, was blighted by strife ‘when factious thanes the publick peace withstood/And Scottish fields profaned with Scottish blood.’ Union, in his poem, as in Defoe’s, brings harmony, prosperity and modernity.

Yet Arbuckle’s poem is more than a simple statement of Whiggish optimism. It derives its depth from the way in which it refers to Alexander Pope’s Windsor Forest. The reference is clear from the second page, where he speaks of ‘Windsor’s fair forest’ which ‘comes to life in the poet’s lays’, and throughout there are similar echoes of Pope. For example, Pope opened with affected modesty (‘were my breast inspired with equal flame’) and later praised the Thames as an English national symbol, reciting its tributaries such as the Loddon, and referring to his own model, Sir John Denham’s Cooper’s Hill; all of which Arbuckle alluded to in the following:

Oh did my breast with equal ardour glow  
So Glotta’s flood should in my numbers flow  
Not Cooper’s Hill more graceful shall appear  
Nor lovely Loddon’s Christal waves more clear

---

18 The well-known Joshua Oldfield, for example, celebrated the Union in a sermon entitled Israel and Judah made One Kingdom (London, 1707).
19 Note for example that James Kirkpatrick argued that Presbyterianism was ‘a fundamental of the Union’. James Kirkpatrick, An Historical Essay upon the Loyalty of the Presbyterians (Belfast, 1713), 68. It is also relevant that Defoe had supported the Irish Presbyterians against the Test Act in a pamphlet of 1704. The Parallel, or, Persecution of Protestants the shortest way to prevent the growth of Popery in Ireland (London, 1704).
20 Arbuckle, Glotta, I.290–1.
21 Ibid., I.271.
22 Defoe, Caledonia, 55.
23 Arbuckle, Glotta, I.267–8.
25 Ibid., I.9 et seq.
Tho’ Thames in five degrees of better skies
Nearer the sun, and Royal Brunswick, lies . . .
Our Glotta yet with justice lays her claim
To share his beauty, tho’ not wealth and fame.26

Arbuckle’s poetry can be dismissed as a pale imitation of Pope, but he was writing in an age when imitation and allusion were central to the poet’s art; what he does is to take Pope as a framework, paying tribute to him as the metropolitan master, but also articulating his own views.27 Arbuckle affected humility as a beginner and as one writing from the national margin: nevertheless he also asserted that Scotland (and perhaps by extension he the poet) had a claim to equal consideration. Modern historians have tended to suggest that ‘British’ culture, for the Scots, meant English culture.28 Arbuckle was trying to argue that Scotland could benefit from union but retain its identity, being an equal partner in union.

To this end, just as Pope in his poem praised the English landscape and English cultural traditions, so Arbuckle did the Scottish: finding beauty and harmony in the duke of Hamilton’s seat on the Clyde, or in the majesty of the Presbyterian St Mungo’s Cathedral. He even put in a word for the beauty of Scottish girls, saying that it is only marred by the antiquated fashion of wearing the unshapely plaid: ‘destruction seize the guilty garb, that holds/Concealed such charms in its malicious folds’.29 He praised Scottish poets: ‘Albion may boast, nor boasts indeed in vain/Of learning’s sons a long illustrious train . . .Not envy Scotia thou a sister’s worth/While Phoebus plants his laurels in the north’.30 He took particular care to praise George Buchanan, the great poet of the Scoto-Latinist tradition, but also ‘a Calvinist revolutionary’, an advocate of constitutional monarchy and a hero of the ‘Commonwealthman’ tradition of Whig thought.31 Glotta’s epigraph is taken

26 Arbuckle, Glotta, l.13–18, 21–2.
27 For example: ‘Augustan poetry is remarkable for its literary allusion’. Christopher Ricks, Allusion to the Poets (Oxford, 2002), 9.
29 Arbuckle, Glotta, l.123–4. This may in part be a humorous dig at his friend Allan Ramsay who defended the plaid in his poem ‘Tartana, or the Plaid’ which appeared in Allan Ramsay, Poems by Allan Ramsay (Edinburgh, 1721), 40–59.
30 Arbuckle, Glotta, l.121–5.
from him; he is saluted as ‘A British bard confess’d in Roman lines’; the poem’s conclusion imagines him as a ‘second-sight’d sage’ who has foreseen the Union, and it is Buchanan who speaks of ‘the joyful Reign of Glorious Liberty’. Finally, Arbuckle praised Glasgow University in terms that might be taken as prefiguring the scientific methods of the Scottish Enlightenment: the students are ‘Not idly resting in the show of things/But tracing nature to her hidden springs’.32

Arbuckle’s tone, as befits an Augustan, was polite, acknowledging England’s virtues, and not on the surface arguing with Pope, but simply suggesting that Scotland deserves consideration: ‘The realm in interest as in name be one/Impartial riches flow in every stream/And Thames and Glotta mutual friendship claim’.33 Pope also praised harmony: peace after discord, the balance of opposites, ‘Concors discordia’, union itself, are Augustan ideals.34 His harmony however is very English, with no reference to Scotland in his Britain.

Yet Arbuckle did more to differentiate himself from his model than assert the claims of North Britain, for there is also between them a marked party difference. Pope’s harmony is distinctly Tory; his patriotism is nostalgic for an imaginary rural England before ‘foreigners’ arrived. The precise type of foreigner he disapproved is clear from his representation of William the Conqueror as a brutal hunter, a portrayal which has been taken as applying also to William III.35 His greatest praise was for the Stuarts. He repeated the Tory mantra of deploring the execution of Charles I and—for at that time Anne was still on the throne—saw the House of Stuart as the source of national stability. He dedicated his poem to the Tory Jacobite Lord Lansdowne.36 Arbuckle, by contrast, was clearly a Whig: ‘where little tyrants rul’d a ravag’d land/There lawful kings shall stretch their just command’.37 This is the language of the ‘Glorious Revolution’, the clear preference for a chosen and limited monarchy. It is at one with his references to the Jacobite rebellion of 1715, regretting the earl of Forfar ‘by rebels slain’ while fighting in the Hanoverian cause: ‘Who fight to save, and conquer to set free’.38

32 Arbuckle, Glotta, l.174.
33 Ibid., l.327–8.
34 See for example the chapter on ‘Concors discordia’ in the work of Denham and Pope in Brendan O Hehir, Expans’d Hieroglyphics, A Critical Edition of Sir John Denham’s ‘Cooper’s Hill’ (Berkeley, 1969), 165–76.
36 Ibid., 110.
37 Arbuckle, Glotta, l.295–6.
38 Ibid., l.96.
So, Arbuckle’s poem praises the 1707 Act of Union, but it goes beyond a bland whiggish eulogy in its attempt to marry Buchanan and Pope, and by its argument that Scotland need not lose its identity in union. There is certainly a paradox in the way that he said it. Although he was insisting on the viability of an existing Scottish culture, he was using an entirely English poetic form and the language is entirely English. Unionists, Susan Manning has recently noted, tend to prefer assimilative forms. Arbuckle’s friend Allan Ramsay was at this time determinedly producing verse in the Scots language. Ramsay’s own ‘An Epistle to Mr James Arbuckle of Belfast, A.M.’ was in Scots, and there is a joke between them on this question of nation and language (which also hints at Arbuckle’s claim to share in the Latinist tradition) when Arbuckle wrote in return ‘To Mr Allan Ramsay on the Publication of his Poems’ in determinedly English and classical style, but allowing a bathetic lapse into Scots to describe Virgil as an unco’ Chield’. Ramsay wanted to protect Scottish identity by bolstering the use of a local language; Arbuckle’s poem asserts the right to participate as an equal in the new British state by showing that he can master classical and English forms.

A part of the explanation for this difference lies in Arbuckle’s own more confused sense of identity. Was he Scottish or Irish? There is a very revealing insight into this confusion in the pamphlet produced the year after Glotta by his friend John Smith (with Arbuckle’s help). It discusses their conflicts with the university authorities, which led to Smith’s expulsion and disciplinary action against Arbuckle. Clearly the university to some degree blamed their unruliness on the fact that they were ‘Irish’ which led Smith and Arbuckle to observe:

As to the reflection on Irishmen, however unmannerly it may be in itself, it is much more so when we consider against whom it is levelled; viz a numerous body of Britons transplanted who have done and suffered more for the British and Protestant interest than any twenty ministers of state...  

‘British’ was a new, compound identity that had an obvious appeal to a displaced group, who might have doubts about whether they were either Scottish

---

41 [Smith], A Short Account, 35.
or Irish; a ‘British’ language could be a *lingua franca* to evade or overcome such doubts. Arbuckle’s concern about this national ambivalence is especially obvious when examined in the context of debate about patriotism and identity in 1720s Ireland.

In 1723, Arbuckle moved to Dublin and came under the patronage of the leading Irish ‘Commonwealthman’ Robert Viscount Molesworth. Here he wrote on politics in a more extended way, first in *Hibernicus’ Letters* and then in *The Tribune* (this work gives the clearest expression of his political views but has been overlooked by most scholars of the period because of a mistaken attribution to Swift’s friend Patrick Delany).

The expression of Arbuckle’s views in Ireland was affected by two important differences between his native country and Scotland. First, Scotland had lost her parliament in an incorporating union, whereas the Irish parliament remained, however limited its powers, a focus for national sentiment. Arbuckle’s arrival in Dublin coincided with the patriotic campaign against Wood’s Halfpence and Swift’s assertion of the independence of the Irish parliament; an episode often understood, then and later, as having ‘created the political nationality of Ireland’. The Drapier’s campaign may have meant little in terms of real legislative authority, and the modern view is that Irish patriots for the most part concentrated thereafter on economic ‘improvement’, but it at least helped to encourage the use of an ‘Irish’ patriotic language.

Secondly, Arbuckle in Ireland was on the wrong side of the church establishment. In Scotland, although a powerful minority of Jacobite Episcopalians railed against it, the establishment was Presbyterian. In Ireland the minority Anglican church was established and the parliament, although it retained some Presbyterian members, was overwhelmingly Anglican and determined

---

42 The dedication of the collected edition of *Hibernicus’ Letters* (London, 1729) to Molesworth’s son says that ‘many’ of the essays were ‘composed under your own Roof, and first published under the protection, and by the command of your noble father’. James Arbuckle, *A Collection of Letters and Essays on Several Subjects, lately Publish’d in the Dublin Journal* (2 vols., Dublin, 1729), I, v.

43 *The Tribune* was also collected and published in Dublin and London in 1729. On the mistaken attribution see James Woolley, ‘Arbuckle’s “Panegyric” and Swift’s Scrub Libel’ in J. I. Fischer et al. (eds), *Contemporary Studies of Swift’s Poetry* (Newark, 1981), 193.


to protect confessional privilege. Swift was himself a High Churchman, who detested Presbyterians, blaming them for the execution of Charles I and the upheavals of the previous century.\footnote{Swift’s hostility to Presbyterians is well-known and is expressed most clearly in: ‘A Letter from a Member of the House of Commons in Ireland to a Member of the House of Commons of England relating to the Sacramental Test’, H. Davis (ed.), The Prose Writings of Jonathan Swift, II, 109–27; ‘The Presbyterians’ Plea of Merit’ in ibid., XII, 261–81; and ‘On the Words Brother Protestants and Fellow Christians’ in H. Davies (ed.), Swift’s Poetical Works (Oxford, 1967), 587–9} He disliked the British Union too, saying of its mixed ecclesiastical establishment that ‘tossing faction will o’erwhelm/Our crazy double-bottomed Realm’.\footnote{Jonathan Swift, ‘Verses said to be Written on the Union’ in Jeffries (ed.), Swift’s Poetical Works, 66.} His ‘Story of an Injured Lady’ is vicious in its hostility to the Scots; Ireland’s rival for England’s affection is portrayed as a harridan: ‘she hath a stinking breath, and twenty ill smells about her besides, which are yet more insufferable by her natural sluttishness’.\footnote{Swift, The Prose Writings, IX, 3.} In his poem ‘On the Words Brother Protestants’ he compared Presbyterians to ‘A Ball of new-dropt Horse’s Dung’, ‘a Rat’ and ‘a Swarm of Lice’. ‘Britain’, with the Anglican Church established in England and the Presbyterian in Scotland, embodied that loathed notion of a union of ‘brother Protestants’.

Swift saw a straightforward conflict between competing interests for control: he wrote of ‘the Scots in our Northern parts’ who from ‘extream parsimony, wonderful dexterity in dealing and firm adherence to one another, soon grow into wealth from the smallest beginnings’, moving to a paranoid vision of what toleration will effect: ‘I do not see how it can be otherwise, considering their industry and our supineness, but that they may in a very few years grow to a majority in the House of Commons and consequently make themselves the national religion’.\footnote{Swift, A Letter from a Member of the House of Commons, 116.} A defence of his church was inextricably bound up with his patriotism as Christopher Fauske’s recent study concludes: ‘Swift became an Irish patriot not by design but because his own determined loyalty to his church found an opportunity for expression in his country’s plight’.\footnote{Christopher J. Fauske, Jonathan Swift and the Church of Ireland, 1710–24 (Dublin, 2002), 145–7.} Clearly, not every Irish MP or every patriot agreed with Swift, but even many who were ‘state Whigs’ were ‘Church Tories’: the Irish parliament had shown its independence notably in its repeated resistance to schemes by the Whig British government to introduce legislation favouring Irish dissenters.\footnote{The history set out in J. C. Beckett, Protestant Dissent in Ireland 1687–1780 (London,
How did these circumstances affect Arbuckle’s writing on patriotism? First, he did clearly identify himself with the patriot cause. He called himself ‘Hibernicus’, he complained about English prejudices against his country-men, about Irishisms and blunders, and jokes about ‘Teagues’. He supported the patriot campaign for the use of Irish manufacture, railed against absentee landlords, as well as issuing general calls for economic and educational improvement. He even published a poem in praise of the ‘improvement’ programme identified with the Dublin Society.\footnote{James Arbuckle, A Poem Inscribed to the Dublin Society (Dublin, 1737).}

Yet Arbuckle parted company with the patriots on the topic of ‘Britain’. Very specifically he distinguished himself from Swift, as he had earlier done in relation to Swift’s ally Pope. Indeed much of the value of \textit{The Tribune} is in its careful unpicking of Swift’s Irish politics. In its place Arbuckle offered a classic Whig justification for the British connection:

\begin{quote}
Liberty and Trade, being the grand Instruments of national Happiness must be considered by the People of both Great Britain and Ireland as their first and highest Interests. So that if the Trade and Liberties of each Nation receive mutual Strength and Assistance from those of the other, it must follow, that the interest of both is one and the same.\footnote{[James Arbuckle], The Tribune (London, 1729), 44.}
\end{quote}

He insisted that an Irish patriot could be a British patriot, because they were ‘one nation’:

\begin{quote}
I have a just Right on all these Accounts to forbid anyone for the future to affix any Ideas to the Letters or Syllables which compose the Word Irishman, in Contradistinction to the Sense and Meaning of the Word Englishman; or to use the said Word in any other manner, than as the Words Yorkshireman, Wiltshireman or Fifeshireman are respectively made use of by the Inhabitants of Great-Britain, one amongst another.\footnote{Ibid., 43.}
\end{quote}

And, in direct contradiction to Swift’s insistence on the independence of the

\footnote{1946} has been re-examined by Patrick McNally, \textit{Parliamentary Politics in Early Hanoverian Ireland} (Dublin, 1997). McNally notes Archbishop Hugh Boulter’s comment on plans to repeal the Test Acts that ‘most that set up for patriots’ oppose toleration. Ibid., 185.

\footnote{James Arbuckle, A Poem Inscribed to the Dublin Society (Dublin, 1737).}

\footnote{[James Arbuckle], The Tribune (London, 1729), 44.}

\footnote{Ibid., 43.}
Irish parliament, he said that it was clearly dependent on the British: ‘a jealousy hath been entertained, as if the British inhabitants of Ireland . . . were ready to shake off their dependence upon England, and set themselves up for Rivals to a Nation’.

Later, he spoke of ‘our common mother the British nation’. Here, therefore, as in Scotland, he was arguing for a limited, local patriotism subordinate to an embracing ‘Britishness’.

Along with these views on the national question, Arbuckle supported a more general Whig ideology which was equally identified with ‘Britain’. He praised the Williamite revolution, the Hanoverian succession, and whiggish writers such as Bishop Gilbert Burnet. He deplored heroes of the High Church party such as Thomas Wentworth, earl of Strafford, and Lord Chancellor Constantine Phipps. Instead he allied himself with the latitudinarian Whigs who represented to Swift the ‘English interest’ such as Archbishop Hugh Boulter and Speaker William Conolly.

The whiggish views Arbuckle expressed in Scotland were therefore reinforced in Ireland by the divisions of the confessional state. Allegiance to an ideal ‘Britain’ which represented harmony based on ‘the glorious reign of liberty’ (albeit a liberty limited within a wholly Protestant polity) was confirmed by practical politics: the British Whig government was seen to take the side of the Irish dissenters, whereas the Irish parliament and particularly Swiftian patriots defended Anglican confessional privilege. It would be a mistake, however, to see his ‘British’ patriotism as therefore having a purely sectarian basis. Like the campaigners for Test Act repeal (many of whom shared his Glasgow education) he adopted a rhetoric of British rights. Yet he did not write expressly on the Test Act, or from a religious or Presbyterian point of view. Rather, his experience of High Church influence in Irish politics confirmed his ‘Commonwealth’ politics, the inheritance of Buchanan and Molesworth, which he expressed with an emphasis on toleration and anticlericalism. This is seen most clearly in *The Tribune*. There, he assembled a club along the lines of Addison’s Spectator club, in which he sketched the political nation of Ireland.

---

55 Ibid., 38.
56 Ibid., 42.
57 Ibid., 77.
58 Ibid., 46.
59 Ibid., 20 and 51–7.
He paid particular attention to two figures. First, the High Churchman Thomas Verger: ‘a Man of a most admirable Temper, unless when he is warmed with anything that seems derogatory to the Power and Authority of the Church’.\(^{61}\) Verger was used as a vehicle to satirize Swift’s ecclesiology, particularly in two parodies of Swift which developed an image of an Irish Anglican Church driven by self-interest, its clergy obsessed with property and drink, indifferent to their lack of connection to the people.\(^{62}\)

Secondly, Will Trueman, a ‘commonwealth man’ was used as a mouthpiece for Arbuckle’s ideals. In his discussion of ‘the character of an honest man’ Will contrasted ‘real honesty and inward worth’ with ‘a mere legal man’.\(^{63}\) A society that valued form (the law) over substance (inner worth) was one that encouraged a man to ‘prefer the possession of [an estate, an employment or a title] to the public welfare’.\(^{64}\) Will insisted that ‘a real honest man is such in all times, in all places, and to all persons’ and condemned it as ‘a most dishonest and unworthy practice, to hate any man for the colour of his beard, or the cut of his cloaths, for his not being a member of any particular club’.\(^{65}\) Arbuckle focused this critique on writers who supported such a divisive system, a criticism which might be taken as intended for Swift and his determined advocacy of confessional privilege:

> those gentlemen, who can employ all their faculties, and display their utmost eloquence, in making men odious one to another. . . By their means rage and wrath and persecution are sanctified . . . The real merit of a man is of no account to them, if he happens in the least to differ from them in matters that have no relation to inward worth or goodness.\(^{66}\)

As ‘Hibernicus’ Arbuckle had similarly called on his readers to

> enlarge our thoughts with sentiments of humanity and generosity for those who differ from us; since by doing otherwise, besides the injury done to innocent persons at present, we shall lay a foundation for so

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 133–42, 146–8.  
\(^{63}\) Ibid., 102, 105 107.  
\(^{64}\) Ibid., 105.  
\(^{65}\) Ibid., 108.  
\(^{66}\) Ibid., 106.
Arbuckle carried to Ireland the ideas he expressed in his Scottish work but they were sharpened by the different circumstances he found there. In Scotland, he celebrated a ‘British’ idiom which had in a sense won its victory, which sided with political power and was to become the dominant idiom. In Ireland, a more radically divided society caused Arbuckle to focus his writing more on toleration and a resistance to church influence in the state, values which he identified with the ‘Britain’ born from the Anglo-Scottish Union. In Ireland, although many patriots were readier than Swift to accept a *de facto* dependence on Britain, their cultural idiom tended to emphasise an ‘Irish’ rather than a ‘British’ patriotism. The fact that such ‘Protestant patriots’ were also, for the most part, defenders of Anglican privilege helps to explain why James Arbuckle (and perhaps other Irish Presbyterians) did not embrace it wholeheartedly, and instead held to the patriotism of their coreligionists in ‘North Britain’.

*University of Bristol*

---

Any defensible cross-disciplinary study needs to be securely anchored in the individual disciplines involved, in the hope that researchers will inform and enhance each other’s understanding of the individual disciplines and lead to new insights into the subject matter under investigation. Such reciprocity is also intended to provide the representatives of each discipline with a deeper and broader understanding of their own discipline and how it fits into wider scholarship. Our project on the politics of the representation of Irish and Scottish dialects of English in eighteenth-century literature was intended from the outset to be a multidisciplinary venture. Its aim is to combine three primary approaches, sociolinguistic, literary historical and critical editing, to provide a comprehensive examination and interpretation of the choices made by writers, editors and publishers in the portrayal of Irish and Scottish English speakers in this period. Its further objective is to provide a comparison between the treatment of Scottish English and Irish English and between the socio-political and publishing contexts in England, Ireland and Scotland. The work of certain eighteenth-century writers provides an immediate locus for such investigation, including, in Ireland, Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849) and William Carleton (1794–1869) and, in Scotland, Robert Burns (1759–96), James Hogg (1770–1835) and Walter Scott (1771–1832). As far as we are aware, there is no study which looks at the implications of the linguistic choices of all of these authors and their editors comparatively.

In this paper, I wish to set the sociolinguistic framework of the project, examining linguistic notions of literary dialect and dialect literature, the received theory of literary dialect in the sociolinguistic literature, as well as the major potential contributions and limitations of a linguistic approach. As a partial road map for the larger study, this paper therefore necessarily focuses on description and exemplification, rather than on the interpretation of findings in the wider context of the project, which will emerge more gradually, as manuscripts and editions are analysed and synergies develop through the combined approach to Irish and Scottish literature in English. It will thus
intentionally raise more questions than it answers, with the ambition to stimulate further inquiry.

To serve the expository purposes of this paper, and because a re-examination of her work is the starting point for the project as a whole, I will for the most part provide examples of the concepts and linguistic features highlighted in this paper from recent editions of the works of Maria Edgeworth, particularly *Castle Rackrent*. These must be taken at face value, however, as they represent only examples and not interpretations or reinterpretations of her oeuvre: these will ultimately emerge from a comparison of editorial practice with manuscript sources, which will be the focus of a later paper.

It is necessary to begin with a few basic definitions. The term *literary dialect* generally refers to ‘the representation of nonstandard speech in literature that is otherwise written in standard English and aimed at a general readership’.

This is the major focus of our project. *Dialect literature*, on the other hand, refers to ‘works composed in dialect and aimed at a readership speaking the vernacular’, often with the more overtly social or socio-political function of promoting a dialect and, with it, a social group, or as Taavitsainen and Melchers more colourfully assert, with the aim ‘to strengthen patriotism and solidarity’. There is clearly some overlap in the intentions of the authors included in our study (Burns being an obvious example) and this will need to be examined more closely as the work progresses. We include both dialect and non-standard language (slang, jargon—see below) within the term literary dialect, and as a sociolinguist, I would argue that such analyses of literary dialect can be included in the broadest conception of variation studies. I agree with Roger Fowler that ‘variation in language correlates regularly and intricately with factors in the social circumstances within which the discourse occurs,’ and, with him, I take as a basic premise that:

There is a dialectical relationship between language and social structure: the varieties of linguistic usage are both PRODUCTS of such factors as power relations, occupational roles, social stratification, etc. and PRACTICES which are instrumental in forming and legitimating these same social forces and institutions.\(^3\)

---


2 Ibid.

We already run into intractable problems when we attempt to define standard and non-standard English, and we need to bear in mind that many of the preconceptions and agreed conventions which modern linguists and literary scholars take for granted were only just being formed—often controversially—in the eighteenth century. Taavitsainen and Melchers point out that the standard is for some ‘a monolith, with more or less strict rules and conventions’; for others it is a range of overlapping varieties. And, echoing Leith, they argue that the growth of the standard involves an element of engineering, i.e. ‘a conscious, deliberate attempt to cultivate a variety, as well as a desire to have it recorded and regularised, to eliminate variation, and, if possible, change’. Such attitudes and desires were the object of often heated debate in the Enlightenment period, and we must therefore take this into account in our interpretation of the choice of both standard and non-standard forms. Furthermore, we must also be careful to weigh national political considerations regarding authority in language in the period, questioning, for example, which standard is being portrayed or promoted, that of London, Dublin or Edinburgh, and which norms of speech are influencing authors and the presses, Irish, Scottish or English?

It is axiomatic when talking about the written representation of dialect to point out that the orthography of English is the orthography of standard English (and is etymological, rather than truly phonemic in character), making it more difficult to render non-standard pronunciation into written form. The notion of standard spelling must also be treated with caution in the eighteenth century, however, as norms of spelling were also still unstable and subject to considerable socio-political manoeuvring and debate. Indeed, such debates will be among the most interesting issues to revisit when considering developments from authorial manuscript to editorial practice and printing house conventions, as can be seen in the successive novels of the Edinburgh edition of Scott’s Waverley novels.

A basic—though perhaps somewhat obvious—difference between the

---

7 For discussion of the standardisation of Scots and issues of Scots spelling see, inter alia, Charles Jones, ‘Scottish Standard English in the late Eighteenth Century’, *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 91 (1993), 95–131.
study of literary dialect and the study of naturally occurring dialect must also be acknowledged here. Authors are not field workers and fiction is not fact: in other words, literary dialect is not a direct reflection of speech, but is the author's interpretation of it. The function of literary dialect is both mimetic and symbolic, but it is essentially fiction, which 'need not reflect real life as such, but may, e.g. typicalise and condense speech acts'. This is the case for a variety of reasons, many of which were enumerated in Sumner Ives's classic essay 'The Theory of Literary Dialect', first published as long ago as the 1950s. They bear brief rehearsal here in the form of part of a summary paragraph from the revised, 1971, article:

The literary artist must make up his own selection of [dialect] features which will serve his purpose of presenting a character who is real but who is likewise a recognizable social type. In this process, he is likely to regularize the speech of his character. Thus, the frequency of occurrence of particular ‘dialectal’ forms may be somewhat different in the literary dialect from the frequency of their occurrence in the speech which is being represented. Moreover, some exaggeration of the more striking peculiarities may result from their very noticeableness, and further exaggeration may result from the fact that authors may employ ‘eye’ or visual dialect. On the one hand, some of the genuinely distinctive characteristics of the represented speech will not be given. Both the author’s desire to keep his representation within readable limits and his difficulties in finding suitable spelling devices will inhibit his portrayal of a speech type. Any literary dialect, therefore, will necessarily be a partial and somewhat artificial picture of the actual speech. It is the analyst’s task to eliminate the spurious and interpret the genuine.

Furthermore, Ives also points out that in interpreting the function of literary dialect we need to consider the author’s own speech and what s/he regards as standard and dialectal (or substandard), as it may not accord with others’ views. In contemporary terms we would say that a good analysis of literary dialect needs to take into account, where possible, the linguistic attitudes of

---

9 Melchers and Taavitsainen, 'Introduction', 13
the author. With Maria Edgeworth, this has been possible, as in her notes she has provided rather frequent and fulsome (if often perplexingly contradictory) direct and indirect indication of her attitude to Irish English dialect (and the use of dialect in general).\textsuperscript{11} It also means that commentators on a writer’s depiction of dialect need to consider carefully whether variation in a character’s dialogue can be attributed to the author’s lack of consistency, or whether it is in fact an indicator of more discerning metalinguistic awareness.\textsuperscript{12}

Ives’ ‘theory’ provided a valuable approach to literary dialect, which was much used in America from the 1950s to the 1970s and even into the eighties. However, it is influenced overwhelmingly by dialect geography, which involved, inter alia, the plotting of isoglosses and dialect boundaries and the drawing up of dialect atlases. This approach concentrated on regional dialect variation and on recording direct formal variants (lexical, morphological and phonological), largely ignoring elements at or above the sentence level, and providing relatively scant information on social stratification or interpretation of the variation encountered. Since the 1970s a much broader conception of sociolinguistics has developed which encourages ethnographic study and the correlation of variants with social demographic characteristics and with socio-psychological aspects of behaviour (such as in identity negotiation and language attitude studies).\textsuperscript{13} Given that this paper is an attempt to provide a linguistic framework for our study, I attempt here to update Ives’ summary by devising a brief outline of the wider range of formal and sociolinguistic aspects of linguistic behaviour which will drive an analysis of literary text.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} See \textit{An Essay on Irish Bulls} for an indication of her attitude towards what sociolinguists might nowadays call ‘linguicism’. Maria Edgeworth, ‘Little Dominick’ in \textit{Tales and Novels}, IV (Charlestown, South Carolina, 2006). For a very fine overview of her use of and attitudes toward language see Brian Hollingworth, \textit{Maria Edgeworth’s Irish Writing: Language, History, Politics} (New York, 1997).

\textsuperscript{12} In a highly insightful discussion of \textit{Castle Rackrent}, for example, Brian Hollingworth argues that Edgeworth uses dialect features ‘very sparingly indeed’ and that this indicates that, despite her claims about the ‘accidental nature’ of the dialect writing, she is anything other than ‘artless’ in her approach. He goes on to point out that she is careful not to alienate her reader by overdoing the dialect features. Thus, Hollingworth does not dismiss Edgeworth’s dialogue as inconsistent, but recognises it as what I would term justifiable artistic impressionism. Hollingworth, \textit{Maria Edgeworth’s Irish Writing}, 87–9.

\textsuperscript{13} For a readable overview of the development of the larger field of sociolinguistics, see, for example, Peter Trudgill, \textit{Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society}, 4th edition (Harmondsworth, 2000); Ronald Wardhaugh, \textit{An Introduction to Sociolinguistics} (Oxford, 2005).

\textsuperscript{14} As the confines of the present paper render it impossible to provide detail for each
1 Regional variation
   a Phonology / orthography
   b Morphology
   c Syntax
   d Lexicon
   e Semantics
   f ‘Discourse accent’

2 Social variation
   a Class / social status
   b Age
   c Gender
   d Occupation
   e Power relations
   f Language attitudes

3 Historical information
   a Historical influences
   b Language contact
   c Socio-political constraints

4 Situational variation
   a Plot
   b Character
   c Theme—affecting tone, register
   d Setting

5 Character development: language develops along life / plot trajectories
   a Stages from childhood to maturity to senility
   b Reflecting education / life experience
   c Influence of interaction with other characters (e.g. Rackrent régimes)

6 Interplay between voice of narrator and protagonists

---

item on the list, we must content ourselves here with commentary on those perhaps less obvious or less frequently encountered in the analysis of literary text.
7. Dialogue / conversational style
   a. Power / solidarity dyads
   b. Interruptions / overlaps
   c. Cooperative principles

8. Attitudes of characters towards other characters’ language

9. Indications of author’s linguistic attitudes and sensibilities

The first two headings are fairly predictable, as they include consideration of regional and social variation, but as well as the normal surface features in (1) (a–c), we need to consider less obvious features, such as what I refer to as ‘discourse accent’ (adopting the use of a term broadly used in research in intercultural communication—this will be illustrated below). The third heading, historical information, proposes as expected a consideration of the recoverable historical influences and socio-political constraints on the language in the work in question. It provides the macro-context which influences the micro-context of the novel and ultimately the realisation of the linguistic features chosen by the author. Note that it includes consideration of contact situations—either language or dialect contact (something that is particularly important in the Scottish and Irish context). Headings (4)–(9) are an attempt to marry linguistic considerations with authorial intention and practice, plot structure and the general constraints and opportunities presented by the act of fiction writing, which are not always manifested overtly in linguistic features, but are clearly essential considerations in an analysis of literary dialect. It is in these moments, I would argue, that linguistic, literary historical and textual editing coalesce and promise mutual enrichment. Within the confines of fiction, headings (5)–(7) allow us to look at broader discourse phenomena, that is, features at or above the level of the sentence, bringing insights into the interactional aspects of character dialogue and development.

As we mentioned at the beginning of this essay, Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* provides an obvious (if not necessarily easy) starting point for the analysis of literary dialect. Written sometime in the mid to late 1790s and published in January 1800, it is generally regarded as the first novel narrated in the vernacular voice. There is much debate about the function of dialect in *Castle Rackrent* and about Edgeworth’s ambivalence towards Irish English dialect at a time when the Union with Britain was the overwhelming preoccupation of Irish and British alike. We do know that her writing had a profound effect on
Walter Scott, by his own admission, and directly influenced the Waverley novels (though it is also clear that there are both considerable similarities and considerable differences in the ways in which each author employed literary dialect). Edgeworth’s linguistic choices in Castle Rackrent are intended here to illustrate some of the narrower features that form the core linguistic framework for our larger study.

10.a Regional spelling / pronunciation
pin (for pen, 45)
Jasus (73)
sacret (75)
plase (93)
prefared (93)
shister (for sister) 82, 83, 84, etc.)

10.b Regional lexicon
Banshee (17)
gossoon (53, 90)
sarrah (75)
shebean house (83)
. . . a fine whillaluh (11, 78)
cratur (49)
kilt (84)

10.b Dialect morphology
. . . he sung it that night as hard and as hearty as ever (11)
childer (18, 39, 78, 79, etc.)

16 For a discussion of Edgeworth’s influence on Scott, see, for example, Kit Kincade, ‘A Whillaluh for Ireland: Castle Rackrent and Edgeworth’s Influence on Sir Walter Scott’ in Heidi Kaufman and Christopher J. Fauske (eds.) An Uncomfortable Authority: Maria Edgeworth and her Contexts (Newark, 2004), 250–69.
17 For initial critical accounts of the work the reader is directed to Hollingworth, Maria Edgeworth’s Irish Writing, Marilyn Butler, Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography (Oxford, 1972); idem (ed.), Castle Rackrent and Ennui (Oxford, 1995); Kaufman and Fauske, (eds.), An Uncomfortable Authority; and Susan Manly, Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s: Locke, Tooke, Wordsworth, Edgeworth (Aldershot, 2007).
19 See Edgeworth’s own note on this ‘pronunciation’.
them things, those things (19)

10.c Dialect (morpho) syntax
I remember to hear them calling me ‘old Thady’, and now I’m come to poor Thady (7)
Now that the master was sailed for England (20)

11. Historical lexicon / specialist / occupational terminology
duty yarn (13)
duty fowls and duty turkies and duty geese (14)
herriots (14)
cousin german (9)
weed ashes (17)
cart(r)ons (59)

Edgeworth was remarkably sparing in her use of dialect spelling as in the examples in (10) (a), though there is evidence to suggest she held back more in the first part of Castle Rackrent than in the later parts of the text, which reflects her growing self-consciousness about the use of dialect in the work, and for some, is an indication of the considerable speed with which she finished the novel.20 The examples in (10) (b) illustrate regional dialect lexicon. It is worth comparing these few general dialect words with the greater array of specialised occupational vocabulary displayed throughout the novel (some of those dealing with estate management are reproduced in (11), though there are others, for example, reflecting legal and financial discourse). Hollingworth suggests that the fact that Edgeworth used only about half a dozen general dialectal terms, and significantly more vocabulary dealing with estate management, was intended to ensure that English readers were not distracted from her economic and political message.21 One might also venture to suggest that she might have been more confident with occupationally-based terms than with more socially-based Irish English dialect, given her own status and likely patterns of social interaction with Irish speakers. On the whole, then, the major contrast in vocabulary in the work seems to be between a specialist and general lexicon, rather than between regional and standard terms.

The first example under (12) (a) below I have chosen to classify as discourse accent, since it does not reflect any difference in syntax from the standard, but

20 Hollingworth, Maria Edgeworth’s Irish Writing, 88.
21 Ibid., 88–9.
Barbara Fennell

12.a Discourse accent

Out of forty-nine suits which he had, he never lost one but seventeen (15)

...made it their choice, often and often, ... to sleep in the chicken house (9)

He was always driving and driving, and pounding and pounding, and canting and canting, and replevying and replevying (14)

12.b Contact effects

...to see all the women even in their red cloaks (11)

...he could not see that to be sure when he married her (12)

While the examples above have largely illustrated individual features at the sentence level, those that follow are representative of the ‘bigger picture’ of literary dialect, and can be seen in the light of considerations (4) – (9) above. The constant ejaculations as in (13) reveal important characteristics of the narrator. They are remarkable not in their quality, which is not nonstandard in any way, but in their quantity, marking Thady as a man of simple beliefs and total abject loyalty to his Rackrent masters.

13 Character development / idiolect

Long life to him! (10)

long may he live to reign over us! (21)

God bless him! (20, 25, 75)

And when we look at the conversational interaction in (14), we receive strong signals of the power-solidarity relations between master and servant, which

---

22 See a number of the works of Karen Corrigan for a discussion of the residual effects of contact with Irish on contemporary Irish English dialect.
are particularly marked by the forms of address ‘Old Thady’ and the hyperbolic ‘your honour’s honour’:

14. Dialogue / Conversational style
   ‘Old Thady’, said my master, just as he used to do, ‘how do you do?’ ‘Very well, I thank your honour’s honour’, said I. . . (25)

Example (14) demonstrates that if we restrict our discussion of linguistic dialect to the regional features that were the primary focus of Ives’ attention, we will miss some of the sociolinguistic devices that provide information about the interaction of characters. On an even broader level, Castle Rackrent is eminently useful as a text to illustrate authorial sensitivities, whether they be social, political, historical or aesthetic, as Edgeworth has provided us with both a glossary and commentary on the work. It is well documented that she wished to educate the English about the Irish and modify their, in her opinion, antiquated view of the country, in the hope of developing mutual understanding and respect, and that she had the potential consequences of the Union with Great Britain firmly in mind when publishing this novel. The example in (15) could not be clearer in its political intent, while those in (16) provide us with an account of the linguistic approach of the author.

15. Socio-political considerations
   When Ireland loses her identity by an union with Great Britain, she will look back with a good humoured complacency at the Sir Kits and Sir Condys of her former existence. (5)

16. Authorial sensitivity
   We cannot judge either of the feelings or of the characters of men with perfect accuracy from their actions or their appearance in public; it is from their careless conversations, their half-finished sentences, that we may hope with the greatest probability of success to discover their real character (1)

The editor. . . had it once in contemplation to translate the language of Thady into plain English, but Thady’s idiom is incapable of translation, and, besides, the authenticity of his story would have been more exposed to doubt if it were not told in his own characteristic manner (4)
Thus we have unique and direct insights into Edgeworth’s objectives, her literary method and her linguistic attitudes, which, though occasionally contradictory, nevertheless provide us with a context for the interpretation of literary dialect in the period. It will be interesting to consider her surviving literary manuscripts and interrogate them for further indications of editorial and authorial conventions and attitudes, and then compare practice between authors and between Ireland and Scotland, and we will no doubt develop other significant literary and linguistic questions along the way.

*University of Aberdeen*
The Move towards Written Standard English in Eighteenth-Century North-East Scotland

Janet Cruickshank

A. J. Aitken states that by the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Scottish gentry no longer spoke ‘vulgar Broad Scots’, but had moved to what they viewed as the ‘polite speech’ of Standard English, albeit with Scottish pronunciation.努力 was made to eliminate Scotticisms from the language from the seventeenth century, but Marina Dossena refers to the eighteenth century as ‘the heydey of prescriptivism’ and lists fourteen books published in Scotland to assist with the spelling and pronunciation of English. However, the loss of features of Scots cannot be equated with an acquisition of contemporary Standard English. James Beattie understood this and was quoted as saying: ‘We who live in Scotland are obliged to study English from books like a dead language’. The implication from this quotation is that the standard language was acquired as a ‘fixed’ entity, rather than as a developing, changeable form.

Anneli Meurman-Solin suggested that in the period immediately preceding that under discussion here, writers in the north east of Scotland appear to have maintained the use of Scots in writing in a ‘denser’ way than elsewhere in the country. However, in the eighteenth century there was a change underway in the north east. In The Statistical Account for Scotland, published at the end of the eighteenth century, the language of the city of Aberdeen was deemed to be ‘improving’, i.e. becoming Anglicised compared to previous generations and even English street names were replacing those in Scots. Furthermore, there had been English schools in Aberdeen since the beginning of the seventeenth

2 Marina Dossena, Scotticisms in Grammar and Vocabulary: ‘like runes upon a standin’ stane’? (Edinburgh, 2005), 56–82, especially 59–60.
3 Quoted by J.H. Millar, Scottish Prose of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Glasgow, 1912), 180 and cited by Dossena, Scotticisms in Grammar, 61.
4 Anneli Meurman-Solin, Variation and Change in Early Scottish Prose: Studies Based on the Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots (Helsinki, 1993).
century which provided education for children under the age of ten and taught reading, writing and arithmetic. So it would appear that there was little resistance to the acceptance of English as a means of communication, although this need not be equated with a rush to embrace Standard English.

So how competent in the use of written contemporary Standard English were the educated classes in eighteenth-century Aberdeen? This study focuses on the personal correspondence of Aberdonians in the mid 1700s to provide a sample of the written language used and so give an insight into contemporary competence in Standard English. Private correspondence was selected for this study as the text type most likely to reveal ‘normal’ competence in the use of written Standard English, i.e. the general level of capability that would be displayed when the writer was free from a critical audience, but also wanted to create a favourable impression of his or her ability. The correspondence of four writers was analysed; the writers were men in their early twenties from Aberdeen, from the same socio-economic class, either studying medical sciences or about to embark on an occupation in medical science. Their correspondence covers the period from 1751 to 1770. The letters were extracted from the David Skene Papers in the University of Aberdeen Special Collections.

The resulting corpus was interrogated for uses of language, or indicators, to give a measure of capability in Standard English. The use of Scots features and spellings identified by Amy J. Devitt and Anneli Meurman-Solin were searched for, to represent the divestment of Scottishness in the written form.

Features identified by Devitt:
1. The relative clause marker and interrogative spelling *quh-
2. The preterite inflection spelling—*it
3. The indefinite article *ane
4. The negative particles *na and *nocht
5. The present participle—*and(e)

Features identified by Meurman-Solin:
1. The past tense and participle inflection spelling -*ed* which replaced the Scots -*it*

---


2. The relative and interrogative pronouns *which* which replaced the Scots *quh-

3. The ten various pairs of English and Scottish spelling variants in the categories Scots *aw* versus English *ow*; /a:/ versus /ɔː/; Scottish *l* and *n* mouillés; *ch* versus *gh*; *sch*—versus *sc*; *o-e* versus *oi*; and the *i*-digraphs *ei* versus *e-e*, later *ea*; *ui* versus *o-e, u-e*, later *oo, ai* versus *a-e, ni* versus *u-e.*

The Scotticisms proscribed by David Hume in 1753 were also searched for and these are shown in Appendix 1. The use of a Scotticism or its English equivalence was a measure of the move towards the use of Standard English; the higher the percentage use of the English equivalent, the more anglicised the text.

The loss of these features of Scots can be viewed as one route in the move towards standardisation. The conscious acquisition of a standard feature by adherence to a prescribed rule is a second route, and the choice of use of several variants for the morphological verb ending—*ed* was analysed to investigate the effectiveness of this route. The representation of *ed* suffix of the past tense and past participle of regular verbs by the non-contracted form—*ed* (e.g. I walked) or the elided forms—‘*d*’, (e.g. I walk’d)—*d*, ‘*t*’, or ‘*t*’ were enumerated and comparison of the results made with a study by Oldireva Gustafsson.8

A third route is the sub-conscious adoption of a feature that was itself developing within the standard. The feature chosen to determine the effectiveness of this route was the use of the expanded form to denote the progressive, or durative, aspect. A count of occurrences of the progressive *be +–ing* form (e.g. I am walking, I was walking, I had been walking) per 10,000 words was made and compared with the findings by Leah Dennis.9

Table 1 shows the results of the investigation; the figures for Standard English have been extracted from the above benchmark studies. The overall movement in the corpus towards contemporary written Standard English is shown to be 78%. Despite this rather precise figure the only assertion that can be made about the corpus with any confidence is that this demographic category was not normally totally competent in written Standard English. The corpus might be described as being generally ‘Scottish Standard English’, i.e. towards the end of the continuum which has ‘Broad Scots’ at the other

---

pole. This continuum was explored by John Corbett, Derek McClure and Jane Stuart-Smith, and they consider that, in its written form, Scottish Standard English is only distinguished from Standard English in certain idioms, lexical items and perhaps some linguistic features.\(^{10}\) Certainly the results show that there were few ‘true’ Scotticisms in use, and these are shown in Table 2; the left hand column is the list of Hume’s Scotticisms found in the corpus, and where possible, their etymologies have been researched to determine the ‘true’ Scotticisms. A ‘true’ Scotticism is defined here as language that is only found in Scotland, or used by a Scot. This excludes usages that were deemed ‘impolite’ because they had fallen into disuse in south-east England. The online versions of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) and the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (DSL) are the sources of the etymologies. The eight true Scotticisms were outnumbered by the thirteen different forms deemed to be ‘impolite’ use of English, showing that the lack of competence in Standard English was due more to inaccurate use of English forms than use of Scotticisms. The writers seemed to have an awareness of Scots that made its use easy to avoid but this awareness did not help in the correct use of Standard English.

As for the use of the—ed variant, it would seem that the combination of lack of exposure to the other variants, based on Gustafsson’s data for public writing, the prescriptivism of the grammarians and the ongoing standardisation of spelling in English all had their effect on the younger writers in the corpus. The exception to the general trend was David Skene, whose use largely accounts for the appearance of the -ld variant in the corpus and is discussed in more detail below.

\(^{10}\) John Corbett, Derek McClure and Jane Stuart-Smith (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scots* (Edinburgh, 2003), 1–2.

### Table 1 – Degree of movement towards written Standard English for each feature and averaged for the corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Standard English</th>
<th>Aberdeen Corpus</th>
<th>Move to Standard English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of selected Scots</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Hume’s Scotticisms</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of levelled—ed</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of progressive per 10,000 words</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average of all features for the corpus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The use of the progressive is a more complicated issue, but essentially, from the general literature, a higher use is expected in Scots and Irish texts,

Table 2 Analysis of use of Scots language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scotticism</th>
<th>Etymology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verbs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adduce</td>
<td>Early Modern English (DSL) from Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*cause him do it</td>
<td>‘with inf. simply, as to cause make Obs. exc. Sc’ (OED)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drunk, run</td>
<td>preterite/past participle confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectuate</td>
<td>Early Modern English (DSL) from Latin/French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>send</td>
<td>no direct reference to send as opposed to send off in OED or DSL; must be polite usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*to take off a new coat</td>
<td>Five citations in DSL; general Scots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to want</td>
<td>Middle English and Early Modern English (DSL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nouns and noun entries</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>common soldiers</td>
<td>polite usage (OED)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friends and acquaintances</td>
<td>acquaintances ‘originally a collective noun, with both sing. and pl. sense, but now usually singular, with pl. acquaintances’ (OED)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prepositions and prepositional phrases</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*in favours of</td>
<td>all citations in OED are singular; several in DSL are plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*notwithstanding of that</td>
<td>‘Sc. With of, forming a compound preposition’ (OED)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tear to pieces</td>
<td>OED allows both ‘to pieces’ and ‘in pieces’; polite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*to inquire at a man</td>
<td>‘Sc. usages: with at (= Eng. of)’ (DSL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjectives and adjectival phrases</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*big coat</td>
<td>‘big coat (Sc), an over-coat’ (OED)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*ordinary</td>
<td>no use in exact sense used by David Skene cited in either OED or DSL, but closest to DSL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*readily</td>
<td>‘Sc. As may easily happen; probably’ (OED)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word order</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a pretty enough girl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as ever I saw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paper, pen, and ink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pronouns</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘tis a week since he left this</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nothing else</td>
<td>no mention of Scots in OED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Scotticisms as opposed to ‘impolite’ English
and/or narrative texts. As the correspondence falls into these two categories, a higher usage in the corpus was expected, but the low degree of movement towards written Standard English in this indicator contrasts with the high rate of compliance in the overtly prescribed forms described above. The lack of use of the progressive may owe something to the writers’ desire to display ‘correctness’ and the form may have been too new in Standard English to give any authority for its use. This idea is in tune with Beattie’s observation that English was acquired as a dead language. Although the writers were generally not immune to change from below the level of consciousness, they were far more receptive to change from above, and would also appear to have been compliant with the rules laid down by the grammarians.

Returning now to David Skene’s use of the –′d variant; the use of the apostrophe was essentially a point of fashion. Having been generally encouraged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its popularity was on the wane at the beginning of the eighteenth century and more or less eliminated in printed material by mid-century. However, the data for David Skene show a trend in the adoption of the –′d variant which is shown graphically in Figure 1.
Judging from this figure, the letters in the corpus from David Skene (DS) have captured a stylistic language change in progress. Although there is guesswork involved in the start date of the change, there is evidence to support the switching from the – *ed* variant to the – *‘d* variant, with completion in the third quarter of 1753. This certainly opens up the possibility that, in the eighteenth century, an individual’s written style might not be fixed by the time young adulthood was reached and that parallels can be drawn with J.K. Chambers’ proposal for present-day idiolect formative stages, which has the point at which a young adult enters the job market as being the last period when an idiolect develops.\(^{11}\)

This change in Skene’s language raises the question of why someone would adopt a variant that is falling out of favour in an environment (and an individual) that values adherence to a standard. Part of the answer may lie in the content of the letters themselves. Skene was very aware of the social conventions of letter writing, but he still managed to make mistakes according to polite usage. He was also very aware of his position within society as demonstrated by this quotation from a letter written to his father in response to a charge of excessive expenditure as a student: ‘I believed your intention was, That I should live as other Gentlemen’s Sons of a very moderate Fortune did . . . ’\(^{12}\) A further quotation may give some insight to his feelings about his native land on his return after travelling through England: ‘. . . my travels thro’ ye finest Country I have ever seen—Scotland was a truely mortifying Sight after it . . . ’\(^{13}\) He certainly seemed to have no allegiance to Scotland and held England in much higher esteem. His letter of 17 June 1753 describes the events he witnessed in Cambridge:

\[\ldots\] at Cambridge, where M’ Blackwells Character & Recommendations procur’d us great Civilities from the Professors—at the Same time we were entertain’d with the finest Show ever seen there—The Lord High Chancellor was created Doctor of Laws by the Duke of Newcastle, Chancellor of yᵉ University with great form & solemnity; And 5 Young Noblemen were made Master of Arts.\(^{14}\)

---


\(^{12}\) David Skene to his father, circa November 1751, Aberdeen University Library (AUL), MS38/20.

\(^{13}\) David Skene to his father, 30 June 1753, AUL, MS38/32.

\(^{14}\) David Skene to his father, 17 June 1753, AUL, MS38/31.
Skene seemed so overcome by the grandeur of the occasion, his handwriting was also affected. His signature is a mass of loops and swirls instead of the usual sober ‘D.S.’ or ‘D. Skene’. There is a suggestion that Skene was deeply impressed by the very society that, in 1712, Jonathan Swift had denigrated for, among other things, their use of abbreviations and who had referred to that society as ‘illiterate Court-Fops, half-witted-Poets and University-Boys’.

In Skene’s eagerness to emulate the objects of his admiration, he adopted a stylistic hypercorrection. It is debateable as to whether this qualifies as a delay in standardisation as described by Meurman-Solin and it probably owes more to social than geographical isolation, in view of the fact that the change was taking place during his time outside of the north-east of Scotland.

This brings us to two rather simplistic questions; is written language use modified by change of surroundings, and who or what is the source of influence on written language change? Obviously the answers are very complex and depend on many variables, but the next part of my research is going to attempt to reduce the complexity of the answers by addressing individual factors that may have a bearing on the questions.

The question of the influence of location is perhaps the easiest to analyse. An ideal writer to investigate would be one who moved between locations for significant periods of time and continued to correspond with a single individual on a consistent set of topics throughout the changes in location. In this case, assuming all other external factors remained constant (for example, social networks, correspondence, reading material), any written language change may be attributable to the change in surroundings. However, control of the external influences is beyond any researchers’ grasp, so we must settle for knowledge of these variables to be able to ‘factor in’ these data. This may in turn lead to an answer to the question of who or what is the source of influence on written language change in this environment.

Remarkably, it would seem that such a writer with well documented circumstances did exist. The Second Lord Fife (an Irish peer) was M.P. for north-east Scottish constituencies for the greater part of the second half of the 1700s and, as such, spent six months a year at his residence in London and six months in one of his three residences in the north east. Throughout twenty-five years of this time, he wrote around 800 letters to his factor in Banff, all

16 Meurman-Solin, *Variation and Change in Early Scottish Prose*. 
of which are held with the Duff House Papers in the University of Aberdeen Special Collections. These letters can provide a ‘controlled’ diachronic record of Lord Fife’s written language as the material for investigation of language change. Also to be found in the Duff House Papers are over 1,800 letters written to Lord Fife by approximately 600 correspondents during the time period in question.

The major task is to transcribe the letters to the factor, William Rose, and this is well underway. Concurrently, a relational database of the correspondents, which also holds sociolinguistic background information, and their letters to Lord Fife, has been constructed. Additionally, there is information available regarding the printed matter collected by Lord Fife, and this may also be of consequence in the analysis.

As a final point of interest, a preliminary analysis has been done of one of the first years to be transcribed (1765) to provide a comparison with the written language of the young men from Aberdeen. Lord Fife, born two years before David Skene, received the same level of education as the young doctors, having attended the University of St Andrews, but had a very rural upbringing, albeit in grand circumstances, in comparison to the Aberdonians.

Table 3 shows the comparison of results with the Aberdonians. For the use of Scotticisms and the progressive, Lord Fife had more in common with the Aberdonians than with Standard English, and he was in tune with his contemporary David Skene in the use of the – ‘d variant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aberdonians</th>
<th>Lord Fife</th>
<th>Standard English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of selected Scots</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Hume’s Scotticisms (number of occurrences per 10,000 words)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of levelled – ed</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>0 (100% – ‘d)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of progressive per 10,000 words</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No attempt has been made yet to analyse the use of the Scotticisms in Lord Fife’s writing, but samples are shown in the following quotations. As with the Aberdonians, Scotticisms in prepositional phrases were noticeable.
The results for the well-travelled and well-connected Lord Fife were unexpected; perhaps the addressee is the reason for the use of Scotticisms. Although William Rose was a very capable man, he was very much a man of the north east and this quality was highly valued by Lord Fife as it eased his dealings with tenants on his estates, his main and considerable source of income. A totally unsubstantiated feeling is that the Scotticisms were used when Lord Fife was writing on a topic close to his heart and this is shown especially in Quotations C, D, E and F. Whether or not he felt he could express himself more freely in his native language, or that its use would have a stronger impression on his factor is difficult to tell.

Quotation A
‘. . . I shall leave this to morrow & be at Spa the 22d . . . ’17

Quotation B
‘. . . tell him I have Receiv’d his letter anent the Patronages . . . ’18

Quotation C
‘. . . I hope he’ll mind the Planting & that in particular things may be minded that grow near the House . . . ’19

Quotation D
‘. . . I am very angry at them . . . ’20

Quotation E
‘Inquire at Mellis what will be the most proper way . . . ’21

Quotation F
‘I hope you will be at great pains with the young man and don’t learn him to lay a-bed in the morning?’22

Quotation G
‘. . . made him a good deal better this two or three weeks past . . . ’23

Finally, it should be noted that there was a small number of other instances of non-Standard English throughout both the corpus and Lord

17 2nd Lord Fife to William Rose, 20 September 1765, AUL, MS2226/131/41.
18 2nd Lord Fife to William Rose, 30 September 1765, AUL, MS2226/131/42.
19 2nd Lord Fife to William Rose, 14 September 1765, AUL, MS2226/131/40.
20 2nd Lord Fife to William Rose, 20 September 1765, AUL, MS2226/131/41.
21 2nd Lord Fife to William Rose when discussing smuggling wine from France, 2 November 1765, AUL, MS2226/131/47.
22 2nd Lord Fife to William Rose, 12 August 1765, AUL, MS2226/131/37.
23 2nd Lord Fife to William Rose, 30 September 1765, AUL, MS2226/131/42.
Fife’s writing, which nevertheless make a strong impression. These are mostly lack of concord (see Quotation G), confusion in the use of past tense and past participle, inappropriate use of punctuation and non-standard spelling. Strangely enough, instances of all these categories occur together in two lines from one early letter of David Skene, together with an instance of the progressive and a Scotticism from James Beattie’s list of 200 Scotticisms published in 1779: ‘M’ Monro begun his osteology last Day, & D’ Rutherfoord is still going on slowly—There has been a good many operation’s in the Infirmary . . .’

As ever in historical linguistics, conclusions about language in a general population can often only be deduced using evidence left by a very small proportion of that population, but it is certain that those writers who left evidence had a range of codes at their disposal. They also seemed to be very willing and capable of conforming to whatever language the grammarians imposed; the ability, or desire, to introduce lasting changes to the written language has yet to be ascertained and, even then, it might be questioned that what held true in the age of conformity in eighteenth-century Scotland may not apply today.

University of Aberdeen

Appendix 1 Hume’s Scotticisms (1753)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hume’s Scotticisms</th>
<th>Suggested English Equivalents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adduce a proof</td>
<td>produce a proof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advert to</td>
<td>attend to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cause him do it</td>
<td>cause him to do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compete</td>
<td>enter into competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cry him</td>
<td>call him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut out his hair</td>
<td>cut off his hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deduce</td>
<td>deduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>denuded</td>
<td>divested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drunk, run</td>
<td>drank, ran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effectuate</td>
<td>effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evite</td>
<td>avoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exeemed</td>
<td>exempted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24 David Skene to his father, circa November 1751, AUL, MS38/20.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Hume's Scotticisms</strong></th>
<th><strong>Suggested English Equivalents</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>incarcerate</td>
<td>imprison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn</td>
<td>teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maltreat</td>
<td>abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind it</td>
<td>remember it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>misgive</td>
<td>fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>part with child</td>
<td>miscarry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pled</td>
<td>pleaded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prejudge</td>
<td>hurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proven, improven, approven</td>
<td>prov’d, improv’d, approv’d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rebuted</td>
<td>discouraged by repulses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think shame</td>
<td>asham’d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to condescend upon</td>
<td>to specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to crave</td>
<td>to dun, to ask payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to depone</td>
<td>to depose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to discharge</td>
<td>to forbid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to extinguish an obligation</td>
<td>to cancel an obligation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to open up</td>
<td>to open or lay open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to remeed</td>
<td>to remedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to send an errand</td>
<td>to send off an errand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to take off a new coat</td>
<td>to make up a new suit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to want it</td>
<td>to be without a thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a chimney</td>
<td>a grate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a compliment</td>
<td>a present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a park</td>
<td>an enclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a wright</td>
<td>a carpenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>annualrent</td>
<td>interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bankier</td>
<td>banker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>common soldiers</td>
<td>private men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>debitor</td>
<td>debtor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discretion</td>
<td>civility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dubiety</td>
<td>doubtfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for my share</td>
<td>for my part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forfauture</td>
<td>forfeiture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friends and acquaintances</td>
<td>friends and acquaintance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in no event</td>
<td>in no case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>superplus</td>
<td>surplus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thucydide, Herodot, Sueton</td>
<td>Thucydidides, Herodotus, Suetonius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to get a stomach</td>
<td>to get an appetite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vacance</td>
<td>vacation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hume's Scotticisms</td>
<td>Suggested English Equivalents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alongst</td>
<td>along</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anent</td>
<td>with regard to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come in to the fire</td>
<td>come near the fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contented himself to do</td>
<td>contented himself with doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in favours of</td>
<td>in favour of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lookt over the window</td>
<td>lookt out at the window</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marry upon</td>
<td>marry to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>notwithstanding of that</td>
<td>notwithstanding that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rather chuse to buy as sell</td>
<td>rather chuse to buy than sell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tear to pieces</td>
<td>tear in pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to be angry at a man</td>
<td>to be angry with a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to furnish goods to him</td>
<td>to furnish him with goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to inquire at a man</td>
<td>to inquire of a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with child to a man</td>
<td>with child by a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amissing</td>
<td>missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big coat</td>
<td>great coat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big with a man</td>
<td>great with a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bygone</td>
<td>past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conform to</td>
<td>conformable to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defunct</td>
<td>deceast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh weather</td>
<td>open weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heritable</td>
<td>hereditary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>notour</td>
<td>notorious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tender</td>
<td>sickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terrible argument</td>
<td>good argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to be diffculted</td>
<td>to be puzzled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allenarly</td>
<td>solely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alwise</td>
<td>always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evenly</td>
<td>even</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for ordinary</td>
<td>usually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the long run</td>
<td>at long run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in time coming</td>
<td>in time to come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on a sudden</td>
<td>of a sudden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of hand</td>
<td>presently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>readily</td>
<td>probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simply impossible</td>
<td>absolutely impossible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There, where</td>
<td>thither, whither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yesternight</td>
<td>last night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a pretty enough girl</td>
<td>a pretty girl enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hume's Scoticisms</td>
<td>Suggested English Equivalents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as ever I saw</td>
<td>as I ever saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>butter and bread</td>
<td>bread and butter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper, pen, and ink</td>
<td>pen, ink, and paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pepper and vinegar</td>
<td>vinegar and pepper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>’tis a week since he left this</td>
<td>’tis a week since he left this place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nothing else</td>
<td>no other thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>several</td>
<td>several</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some better</td>
<td>something better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>’tis a question if</td>
<td>’tis a question whether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as I shall answer</td>
<td>I protest or declare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Published six years after the Act of Union, Sydney Owenson’s *The Wild Irish Girl* explores the joining together of England and Ireland. *The Wild Irish Girl*, subtitled ‘A National Tale’, is for the most part, an epistolary novel, where the protagonist Horatio M—writes all but a few of the ‘Introductory Letters’. Excluding Owenson’s break from the epistolary form at the end of the text, Horatio maintains control of the narrative so that everything we experience as readers is rendered through his eyes/voice. The story of *The Wild Irish Girl* is fairly simple: Horatio is exiled to his father’s estate in Ireland, where he is to remain until his father, the Earl of M—, returns promising to bring with him a wife for Horatio. When Horatio first enters into Ireland, he is bored by the immutability of his father’s estate and takes it upon himself to explore the island, making a sort of ‘spatial tour’ of his stay.

Throughout his wanderings, Horatio must confront his misconceptions of Ireland and its people, reconciling their poverty and destitution with the actions of his Cromwellian ancestors. Recognising his responsibility for their situation, Horatio becomes responsible to them. His growing love for the land and its people is directly expressed by his love for Glorvina—the only surviving heir of those displaced and defeated by Horatio’s ancestors. To resolve his own guilt and responsibility, Horatio intends to marry Glorvina and restore her and her family to their former glory. Ironically, Horatio’s father has the same intention, creating an odd incestuous/Oedipal narrative that is resolved when the Earl of M— rescinds his proposal and recommends Horatio and Glorvina to be married. Although Horatio and the reader are unaware of the Earl of M—’s proposal until the close of the novel, the earl courts her in secret throughout the narrative and it is the prince’s will that he and Glorvina are to be married.

This brings up two important points, first Glorvina’s marriage into the M—family is overdetermined (whether it be the father or the son), and second, as the Earl of M—’s intentions indicate, the marriage was for Ireland—to restore what belonged to Ireland. More specifically, the intended marriage of the earl of M—and Glorvina was for Ireland’s economic benefit (an economy which
would now be controlled by England). These two points orient Owenson’s relationship to the novel and to the Act of Union. Like Glorvina’s marriage, the Union between England and Ireland was deemed inevitable. Not only had it already occurred by the time she wrote this text, but also, without suffrage, Owenson had no voice in the Union. She turned to writing *The Wild Irish Girl* as a mode of entering into a discussion of it by performing the Act of Union on her own terms. This places her in the same position as Horatio—although he cannot change the marriage (nor does he seek to), he can, and does, negotiate the terms of the marriage.

Despite the fact that the marriage is for economic purposes, it is also a marriage of love, which at least professes to preserve respect for Glorvina and her Irish difference. In *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, E. J. Hobsbawm identifies nation-formation within a historical materialist narrative and cites the unification of nations as motivated by economic progress. With this perception of nation-formation, Hobsbawm makes the argument that a union with a larger nation does not negate the culture and identity of the smaller one. He explains:

> where the supremacy of the state-nationality and the state-language were not an issue, the major nation could cherish and foster the dialects and lesser languages within it, the historic and folkloric traditions of the lesser communities it contained, if only as the proof of the range of colours on its macro-national palette.¹

Owenson would probably disapprove of Hobsbawm’s hierarchy of ‘major nations’ and ‘lesser communities’, however, they both recognise union as effectually economic and not necessarily a negation of the smaller nation’s culture. Although the Act of Union identifies the nation as the ‘United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland’, Owenson’s marriage narrative indicates she was not completely convinced that Ireland’s national identity was secure within the Union, and consequently she used *The Wild Irish Girl* to preserve the possibility of Irish difference. The genre of the national tale accesses a space outside of the English-Irish binary where Owenson negotiated national identity.

Owenson’s fears of the negation and objectification of Irish difference are articulated in the opening lines of the novel. In Horatio’s first letter, he

describes his initial conceptions of the Irish; ‘I remember, when I was a boy, meeting somewhere with the quaintly written travels of Moryson through Ireland... an Irish chieftain and his family were frequently seen seated round their domestic fire in a state of perfect nudity’. Horatio’s reductive disclosure not only enunciates his preconceived assumptions of the Irish ‘barbarity’ as he later describes it, but also indicates where these assumptions originate. Horatio’s objectification comes from his childhood and his education in England. Although it is possible that his perception was unique, he adds to this disclosure that his ‘early formed opinion... has since been nurtured into a confirmed prejudice’. Owenson was suggesting that Horatio’s education did not correct or expand his perceptions, but concretised them; in Edward Said’s terms, England orientalised Ireland. Joseph Lew’s post-colonial reading of Wild Irish Girl draws on Said’s theory to demonstrate how Owenson presented Ireland as a colony of England. ‘Through a dense and interlocking pattern of oriental allusions and metaphors, Owenson transforms this small island west of England into England’s first oriental colony’. In this claim Lew contends that Ireland is orientalised both in the sense that it is tied to the orient through its history, and in the Saidian sense that it is identified and colonised through English colonial discourse. What is important here is that through Horatio, Owenson offered to the reader England’s depiction of Ireland as barbaric and singular.

With this in mind, Owenson proceeded to challenge Horatio’s reduction of Ireland throughout the novel through his inability to articulate his experience entirely through his letters. During his passage from England to Ireland, Horatio describes the bay of Dublin as ‘one of the most splendid spectacles in the scene of picturesque creation I had ever beheld, or indeed ever conceived’. Horatio’s use of the term ‘picturesque’ recalls Said’s exploration of

---

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid. Italics are Owenson’s
6 Lew pursues this argument to suggest that Owenson saw all of England’s colonies as ‘interchangeable’. Ibid., 48.
7 The term singular is used here, not in the Derridean sense of only being able to be performed once because of continually shifting text/context, but instead in the sense that Ireland is fixed and unchanging; it is able to be identified, tabled and categorised.
how a picture objectifies a thing for the observer.9 Natasha Tessone offers a similar argument, suggesting that Horatio seeks to appropriate not only Ireland but also Glorvina through a chain of metonyms.10 However, as he attempts to picture the bay of Dublin ‘the beautiful prospect which had fascinated our gaze, vanished in mists of impenetrable obscurity’.11 Horatio’s attempt to appropriate the beauty of Ireland for himself fails when it withdraws from his sight. No matter how hard he tries to objectify this place, Ireland and its people will always exist just beyond his gaze.

Owenson reinforced this argument in multiple ways. Her novel is a romantic fictional tale, yet she incorporated fact and truth both in the narrative text and in the footnotes, deliberately neglecting to distinguish the two, creating a new form that works with and beyond the romantic novel. In one of her footnotes, Owenson reaffirmed the veracity of a story her protagonist hears, stating, ‘Neither the rencontre with, nor the character or story of Murtoch, partakes in the least degree of fiction’.12 By removing the dates of events and disguising the surnames, Owenson was insinuating that this fiction contains truth and that fiction and truth do not exist in exclusively distinct categories but are at once apart and a part of one another. Emblematic of this conflation, she included a footnote that compares the Castle of Inismore to the Castle of Dunluce, saying, ‘Those who have visited the Castle of Dunluce, near the Giants’ Causeway, may, perhaps, have some of its striking features in this rude draught of the Castle of Inismore’.13 Her comparison not only reads like a travelogue, complicating the form of the romantic novel, but it implies that Owenson used Dunluce as the inspiration of her novel, certifying

9 In Orientalism, Said provides the example of Dante’s Inferno, which, he argues, ‘is at one and the same time [trying] to characterise the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager and actors are for Europe, and only for Europe’. Edward Said, Orientalism (New York, 1978), 71–2.

10 This quotation is drawn from Tessone’s statement, ‘Nor does the fantasy of possession mobilised by Owenson’s ethnographic (self)exhibitions—the desire to possess Owenson/Glorvina/Ireland through the power of the appropriating gaze—weaken because of the virtual nature of the novel’s performance. Indeed, once Horatio enters that museum-like region of Ireland his first impulse becomes the desire to possess “my wild territories.”’ Natasha Tessone, ‘Displaying Ireland: Sydney Owenson and the Politics of Spectacular Antiquarianism’, Éire-Ireland: a Journal of Irish Studies, 37 (2002), 169–86.

11 Owenson, Wild Irish Girl, 108, italics mine. Owenson’s appropriate and telling use of ‘gaze’ calls to mind both Said’s and Foucault’s panopticon and the privileging of the eye, or observation, as the means to forming ‘docile bodies.’

12 Ibid., 118.

13 Ibid., 139.
that although this is fictional it still contains truth. Similarly, Heather Braun points to the text’s performance of Ireland’s plural identity as emblematic of Owenson’s attempt to explode these categories of identity, by calling Irish culture a ‘mosaic’. In a way, Owenson was performing an act of resistance that disrupts the English colonial determinations, which reduces text to an either/or of fact and fiction.

The character Glorvina furthers this convention of pushing Ireland beyond its determination by English colonial discourse. She embodies a contradictory nature that defies Horatio’s description of her. Among one of their many encounters, he observes her charm, noting, “This elegance of manner, then, must be the pure result of elegance of soul; and if there is a charm in woman . . . it is this refined, celestial, native elegance of soul”. This stream of contradictions does not fit into Horatio’s childhood conceptions of the Irish, much less into any sort of simple and objectified definition. Two letters after this already contradictory observation, he attempts to teach Glorvina how to draw, but gives up in frustration when she is unable to sketch a straight line, concluding that drawing ‘is . . . too tame a pursuit for the vivacity of her genius’. Somehow Glorvina is able to maintain ‘elegant manners’, yet is incapable of drawing because of her ‘vivacity’. Horatio neglects to account for these contradictions because he cannot, he is unable to.

---

14 Heather Braun, ‘The Seductive Masquerade of The Wild Irish Girl: Disguising Political Fear in Sydney Owenson’s National Tale’, Irish Studies Review, 13 (2005), 59. Braun explores Owenson’s performance of Ireland by examining symbols, references and allusions, demonstrating that ‘The Irish are linked, not just to their Phoenician progenitors, but to Egyptians, Israelites and Hindus as well. Their culture is a mosaic, both geographically and historically’. Ibid., 59.

15 Owenson, The Wild Irish Girl, 163.

16 Ibid., 179.

17 Tessone argues that Owenson is the Orientalist displaying Ireland for England: ‘Her self-display inhabits a dangerously liminal space; in such territory acts of resistance are easily co-optable by the dominant culture.’ Tessone, ‘Displaying Ireland’, 169. However, by doing this Tessone reduces Owenson to simply performing for England. Although this performance does not intentionally offer itself up for England/Horatio’s possession, Tessone argues that this is exactly what does occur however inadvertently. What Tessone does not consider is that The Wild Irish Girl is not simply a performance for England, but it is also a performance of. By neglecting to acknowledge this, Tessone is unable to recognise that The Wild Irish Girl is not just a cultural spectacle, but an enunciation of cultural difference intended to exist alongside other enunciations of Irish identity, such as Maria Edgeworth’s Castle Rackrent and The Absentee. The edition of The Wild Irish Girl that I am reading from articulates this by publishing both Castle Rackrent and The Wild Irish Girl in the same volume under the title Two Irish National Tales, suggesting that Irish national identity
Similarly, critics’ attempts to identify and concretise metonyms in *The Wild Irish Girl* that might be useful for understanding the text ultimately fail under close examination. Tessone discusses the ‘metonymic chain Owenson/Glorvina/Ireland’, but these do not work in Owenson’s deliberately complicated text. If these metonyms exist at all, they do not function in a simple linear progression as Tessone suggests. Instead they work in pairs, a sort of irreducible doubling. Glorvina represents Ireland’s present, only if the Prince represents Ireland’s past, both of whom live side-by-side in an a-historical moment. Similarly, the Castle of Inismore serves as a metonym for Ireland’s economic status alongside the Earl of M’s estate (which is also divided between the estate itself and the Lodge); even England is represented by both the Earl of M and his son Horatio. Trimming down these metonyms into one individual or place is a negation of the text’s complexity.

Owenson used all these methods (performing Ireland’s beauty, the form of the novel, Glorvina’s contradictory nature and the problem of metonyms) to elude reduction, to step beyond but not outside of English colonial discourse. As Owenson saw it, to engage English colonial discourse as Irish is a denial of self, to engage this discourse as English is a denial of Irishness. For Ireland to engage England, as Ireland-for-itself and not Ireland-for-England, Owenson found it necessary to create, as Homi Bhabha terms it *The Location of Culture*, ‘a hybrid cultural space’ for enunciating difference. ¹⁸ This third space ‘is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest or cultural value are negotiated’.¹⁹ As English colonial discourse is represented as binary in *The Wild Irish Girl*, there is no room for this hybrid cultural space. England is the imperial coloniser (the self) and Ireland is the colonised (the other). This binary extends through every character of English identity. England is Protestant as opposed to Ireland’s Catholicism and paganism. England is Roman, whereas Ireland is Greek and Oriental (Egyptian, Phoenician). Even language is divided into this binary, where England has command of all European/Western languages such as English, French and Latin, in contrast to Ireland’s native Gaelic. Owenson clearly elucidated this last binary when Horatio encounters Gaelic for the first time by recounting that ‘the old woman addressed me sans ceremonie, and in a

---

¹⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 2005), 11.
¹⁹ Ibid., 2.
language I now heard for the first time’. Horatio can only report his ignorance of the Irish native language by expressing it in a performance of more privileged understanding of European languages. These binaries are exactly what Owenson had to escape from to allow for a negotiation of English and Irish national identity. Consequently, a synthetic unification of these binaries created by the Act of Union is not enough. Owenson needed to ensure that Irish national identity and history was preserved. This necessitates Bhabha’s hybrid cultural space that is both non-English and non-Irish, yet still exists on the borders of England and Ireland for the purpose of discussing their relation. Where a synthetic Anglo-Irish identity would negate cultural difference, a hybrid identity would allow for a plurality of difference that emerges out of cultural intermingling.

Owenson articulated this space in several different ways. She did it first through her own identity as a female Anglo-Irish writer. Her birth is shrouded in mystery and even complicated by Owenson’s own contradictory assertions concerning it. In Mary Campbell’s biography Lady Morgan: The Life and Times of Sydney Owenson, she records Owenson’s initial claim that ‘[o]n a rough sea crossing, in a small boat on Christmas Day, 1776, [Jane Owenson] gave birth to their first child, a daughter. Or so it is said, in the much worked-over legend of Lady Morgan’. Campbell observes that later in life Owenson changed the story of her birth. However, what is important here is that around the time Owenson wrote The Wild Irish Girl she wanted to see herself as originating between England and Ireland. In her essay ‘Acts of Union’, Julia Anne Miller argues this point in depth, stating, ‘Without full citizenship in ‘native’ or imperial culture, the Anglo-Irish woman writer is a double agent, uniquely positioned for resistance and/or collaboration with British policy in Ireland.’

This unconsciously invokes Said’s commentary on the role of the ‘intellectual or artist in exile’ in Culture and Imperialism. By claiming a migrant/exilic origin,
Owenson deliberately positioned herself in this in-between space, where she could discuss and engage English colonial discourse without retaining a strictly English or Irish identity.

Just as Owenson oriented herself as a mediator, Horatio performs this same role of mediating for the reader, who is presumably English. Braun recognises that ‘Glorvina...never speaks directly to us; her words are always filtered through the perspective of another outsider’.

Extending Braun’s observation a bit further, Ireland, like Glorvina, is never presented to the reader in-itself, but only through Horatio. Yet Horatio is more than just an outsider to Ireland, as an exile he is also now an outsider to England. At one point in the text he even comforts himself in this foreign land by invoking the relationship Greenlanders have with strangers. According to Horatio, although Greenlanders are ‘the most gross and savage of mortals’, they recognise strangers as equals. This remark severely orientalises both the Greenlanders and the Irish by placing them in comparison and calling them both savage. However, it is valuable, because it demonstrates that even Horatio realises he can enter into Ireland more easily as a stranger than he can as an Englishman.

Ina Ferris describes this as the ‘gesture of coming nearer’ in The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland. She states: ‘This gesture, reducing but not eliminating distance, represents the desire behind the narrative address of the national tale: its wish to turn the foreigner into the stranger-who-comes-nearer’. As a stranger/outsider, Horatio is in a position much closer both to the English and the Irish than the English and Irish are to each other.

The national tale functions in much the same way. It does not exist in a fixed space, or within a fixed discourse but in an unsettled space of in-betweenness. Ferris refers to this when she says ‘the national tale, as a genre from the sidelines, moves on to the “alien territory” of a dominant discourse...’. Said, Culture and Imperialism, 332. This statement not only articulates Owenson’s position as a writer, but is also emblematic of the Wild Irish Girl and the national tale as an unfixed text existing between England and Ireland.

26 Ina Ferris, The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland (Cambridge, 2002), 60.
27 Francesca Lacaita makes an interesting argument that national tales do not in fact deal with nationalism, and shows that these narratives are actually concerned with the identity of hyphenated cultures and the hierarchical relations between these cultures. Francesca Lacaita, ‘The Journey of the Encounter: The Politics of the National Tale in Sydney Owenson’s The Wild Irish Girl and Maria Edgeworth’s Ennui’ in Alan A. Gilles and Aaron Kelly (eds.), Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture (Dublin, 2001), 148–54.
so as to wrest a place for its own utterance “against” the apperceptive background of that discourse.\textsuperscript{28} Here we must take leave of Ferris, because, though she is right to argue that the national tale begins on the sidelines, I believe that it remains in this third space, which is distinct from, but in relation to, the dominant discourse. Although Hobsbawm only saw nation-formation as economic and not also in cultural terms, he was right to recognise the possibility of difference in a ‘macro-national palette’.\textsuperscript{29} Owenson’s \textit{The Wild Irish Girl} demonstrates that the positioning of England and Ireland in the ‘United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland’ is not fixed, nor should it be determined by a dominant discourse, but is instead articulated by the dialogue of difference from this third space. The possibility of an identity of cultural difference maintained within the unity of the United Kingdom emerges out of this third space of enunciation.

The binary set up by Owenson at the beginning of the text is deliberately problematic, exposing the brutalising reduction of the British colonial narrative. Her uncovering of this violent narrative creates a need for either iterating Irish difference, or at least providing a place for this iteration. \textit{The Wild Irish Girl} performs both by opening a space of in-betweenness for cultural negotiation and occupying that space with a presence that disregards privileging. By neglecting to distinguish fact and truth, by eluding Horatio’s ‘picturing’, by stepping beyond genre, Owenson accomplished this. Her space of enunciation offers a place for negotiating Irish and English difference which maintains and determines the identity of the United Kingdom and unsettles this determination by remaining open for continual re-evaluation.

\textit{Binghamton University}

\textsuperscript{28} Ferris, \textit{The Romantic National Tale}, 49.

\textsuperscript{29} Hobsbawm, \textit{Nations}, 35. Although Claire Norris does not acknowledge Hobsbawm or any Marxist critics, her argument serves as an appropriate defence of Hobsbawm economic nationalism. She suggests the Castle of Inismore is a metonym for the economic and social deterioration of the Irish nation. Claire Norris, ‘The Big House: Space, Place and Identity in Irish Fiction’, \textit{New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua: A Quarterly Record of Irish Studies}, 8 (2004), 107–21. Following in this vein, Mary Jean Corbett emphasises how important it is for England to recognise the need to ‘love’ Ireland, getting the most out of its relationship with ‘her’ by realising who ‘she’ is and allowing that subjected identity to flourish. Not only does this argument maintain Hobsbawm’s hierarchy as it genders the relationship between England and Ireland, but it conceptualises the Union as exclusively economic. Mary Jean Corbett, ‘Allegories of Prescription: Engendering Union in \textit{The Wild Irish Girl}, Eighteenth-Century Life, 22 (1998), 92–101.
The ‘ethno-symbolic reconstruction’ of Scotland: Joanna Baillie’s The Family Legend in Performance
Penelope Cole

On 29 January 1810, Joanna Baillie’s ‘Highland Play’ The Family Legend premiered at the newly remodelled Edinburgh Theatre Royal. By 1810, Baillie was an established author, a light in the literary circles of England and Scotland. She had published a critically acclaimed volume of poetry, written and published the first two volumes of her plays on the passions, and seen her play, De Monfort, grace the stage of the Drury Lane theatre in London. She was celebrated as ‘one of the brightest luminaries of the present period’ by the British Critic as early as 1802.¹ In A History of Scottish Theatre, Barbara Bell states: ‘She was without a doubt the best-known Scottish playwright of her time’.²

One can only imagine the excitement surrounding the debut performance of The Family Legend. While none of her plays had previously been performed in Scotland, this new play, set in Scotland and based on an ancient legend featuring a clash between two prominent Highland clans, stirred the imagination and national sentiments of the Edinburgh audience. Add to this that the production was expertly costumed in ‘authentic’ Scottish plaids by Walter Scott and performed by the famous son of an even more famous and revered actress,³ the resounding applause of the first night audience can be understood.

Baillie’s close friend Walter Scott wrote to her about the first performance of the play in a letter dated 30 January 1810: ‘You have only to imagine all that you could wish to give success to a play, and your conceptions will still fall short of the complete and decided triumph of the Family Legend’.⁴ The

³ Henry Siddons, son of actress Sarah Siddons, was the manager and principal actor for the Edinburgh Theatre Royal in 1810.
commentator from *The Correspondent* concurred that the play was well received and further noted that, ‘Its success here was evidently owing to this nationality. . . . Applause was conferred almost entirely upon those parts in which high compliments were paid to the Scotch’. From these accounts it is clear that the play, as a performed text, delivered images and symbols of Scotland in a compelling and immediate manner to the citizens of Edinburgh.

Walter Scott, principal supporter of the Edinburgh Theatre Royal, was the primary force behind this first production of Baillie’s play. Intriguingly, an examination of the published text as compared to accounts of the play in performance reveals striking differences between the intent of the author and the objectives of the producers. In seeking to clarify the ways in which Scott’s personal views, as well as the political and theatrical realities of the time impacted and altered the text in performance, I will (in part) reconstruct the 1810 production. As no prompt script has been located at this time, this reconstruction will be based on letters between Baillie and Scott, comments found in Baillie’s introduction to the published edition, the letters of Henry Siddons (manager of the Edinburgh Theatre Royal) to Scott and contemporary reviews of the production.

In addition, both Baillie and Scott were participants in the re-visioning of Scotland through the rehabilitation and appropriation of both the real and invented images of the culture and traditions of the Highlands. I will examine how this re-visioning is evident through both the writing of the play as well as the text changes and production choices made by Scott.

‘This strange, unnatural union of two bloods, / Adverse and hostile, most abhorred is’: these uncompromising words, referring to the union, through marriage, of the clans Maclean and Campbell, are uttered in *The Family Legend* by Benlora, a tradition-bound Highland warrior and vassal. Based on a purportedly true story, the legend recounts the ill-fated marriage between Helen, the daughter of the lord of Argyle of the clan Campbell, and a chief of the Maclean clan in the early 1500s. The details of the legend vary, but Maclean eventually turned against his wife, stranding her on a rock in the middle of the strait that separates the Isle of Mull from the mainland. She was saved from certain drowning by a passing fisherman who returned her to her father’s home. Ultimately, the Campbells avenged the attempt on their kinswoman’s

---

5 Review quoted in Margaret Carhart, *The Life and Work of Joanna Baillie* (New Haven, 1923), 146.
life and the violation of the bonds that united the two clans by murdering the cruel and faithless husband, Maclean.

Baillie took the bare bones of this story and shaped them into a complex debate on the nature of identity, specifically Scottish national identity, examining the possibility of a discrete Scottish identity existing within the construct of Great Britain. While the plot of the play may be viewed as straightforward (certainly there are no surprises embedded within the dramatic action of the play), Baillie’s telling of that story and the creation and interactions of her characters are far from simplistic. Utilising the framework of the marital union of the two warring clans to explore the ramifications of the political and economic Union of 1707 between England and Scotland, Baillie ultimately posited a new kind of Scottish identity. This new identity is signified by a character of Baillie’s invention; the infant son of the luckless marriage of Helen and Maclean. The child is completely disregarded by both of the clans throughout the play. Reviled by the Macleans as a vile mongrel and seemingly forgotten altogether by the Campbells, this infant occupies a previously un-imagined site wherein simultaneously a unique, exclusive Scottish identity and a new, inclusive British identity might be formed and potentially reconciled.

The history of Scotland post-union is a study of negotiation as the Scots have continually and consciously engaged in a variety of activities in the attempt to create and maintain a unique and ‘different from England’ national identity within the larger entity of the British Empire. National identity is, according to Anthony D. Smith, “The continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identification of individuals with that pattern and heritage and with its cultural elements.”

The Scottish theatre has provided an important space in which this reproduction and reinterpretation of the elements that comprise national identity has been carried out. By actively performing ideas of national identity on the stages of Scotland these ideas are transmitted directly to individual members of the nation, thus creating the potential for the recognition of oneself within the patterns and heritage enacted. In the case of The Family Legend, both Baillie, through the text, and Scott, in the production, identified, selected and then reproduced and reinterpreted distinctive Highland values, symbols and traditions in the telling of the story, engaging the contemporary audience by

---

focusing their attention on the similarities between the character’s struggles, fears and choices, and their own current political situation.

Furthermore, through artistic creation and public performance, theatre engages in what Smith refers to as a ‘process of ‘ethno-symbolic reconstruction’ [which] involves the reselection, recombination and recodification of previously existing values, symbols, memories and the like, as well as the addition of new cultural elements by each generation.’ Joanna Baillie’s play, *The Family Legend*, participates in this program of ethno-symbolic reconstruction in a variety of ways. At the core of the play is the discussion and active negotiation of place, as the two rival clans attempt to forge a new union in spite of the long-held prejudices, enmity and cultural superstitions of the clan members. The characters of the drama question the institutions and traditions which have governed them in the past, debate vociferously the appropriate reaction to the changes in that governance and individual status and actively test a number of responses which are variably seen to lead to success or failure (failure in this instance usually meaning death). In addition, by placing the action of the play in the Highlands of Scotland and using as her plot a story taken directly from a centuries-old Highland legend, Baillie participated in both the rehabilitation of Highland culture and tradition and the appropriation of that culture as symbolic of the whole of Scotland. The images of the tartan, the bagpipe and the perceived values of the clan society (duty, honour, loyalty and sacrifice) as well as the less admirable superstitions, ready violence and prejudices of the culture are woven into the fabric of the text. Through Baillie’s sympathetic characterisation and careful construction of argument, which includes at least three equal and opposing views of each conflict, these signifiers of Scotland are given a voice, dignity and status that had not been seen before on the stages of Scotland or England in quite this way.

Walter Scott, believing that the theatre was a potent site for cultural negotiation wrote, ‘In short, the drama is in ours, and in most civilised countries, an engine possessing the most powerful effect on the manners of society’. This conviction would lead Scott to take an active hand in the negotiations for the patent of the Edinburgh Theatre Royal when it came up for renewal, helping to secure the patent in 1809. Christopher Worth suggests that Scott saw the opportunity to ‘reform the Edinburgh theatre, and provide a civilised Scottish model to the corrupted English theatrical system’.

---

8 Ibid., 20.
10 Christopher Worth, “A Very nice Theatre in Edinr.”: Sir Walter Scott and Control of
The ‘ethno-symbolic reconstruction’ of Scotland

The patent was awarded to a consortium of Edinburgh’s literati and political élite, which included Scott, Henry Mackenzie, William Erskine and the Dundases. Scott enthusiastically engaged in the organisation and articulation of the direction the Theatre Royal would take, securing a high profile manager in Henry Siddons and aiding in the financing of the renovation of a theatre space in New Town Edinburgh. In *The Family Legend* he found a play that must of have seemed tailored made for presentation in his new theatre.

The letters between Scott and Baillie indicate that he was involved in every portion of the production. He researched the appropriate costume for a Highland lady (and helped the leading lady, Harriet Siddons, to learn how to wear said costume), identified the clan tartans of the Macleans and Campbells, provided fireworks to spice up a boring exit, edited the text, changed the names of certain characters, wrote the prologue and orchestrated the composition of the first-night audience. While many of the textual changes cannot be verified with any certainty in the absence of a prompt script, the alteration to characters, including the changing of certain names, the portions of the text which most likely received considerable editing and some details of the actual staging can be discussed with confidence based on the available contemporary accounts of the production.

‘I will put all the names to rights and retain enough of the locality and personality to please the Antiquary without the least risqué of bringing Clan Gillian about our ears’: Scott wrote to Baillie on 27 October 1809. Several of the names were indeed changed for performance, most notably Maclean to Duart, the clan Maclean to clan Gillian and Sir Hubert De Grey to Sir Malcolm De Grey.

It is quite easy to understand the reasons behind the change in the name of Maclean. As Scott himself noted, ‘The highland prejudices are still glowing through the embers and we really find it would be most unsafe to venture upon what a numerous and hot-headed clan might, though unjustly, take in Dudgeon’. That Scott had done his research is evident from the substitution of Duart for Maclean, as Duart is the name of the castle which was, and still is, the traditional seat of the Macleans (although it was not in their control in 1810). In this way he appeased the ‘Antiquary’, somewhat distanced the

\[\text{the Edinburgh Theatre Royal}, \text{Theatre Research International}, 17 (1992), 88. \text{This is an excellent article detailing the political maneuverings that led to Scott and his friends gaining control of the theatre.}\]

\[\text{11 Walter Scott to Joanna Baillie, 27 October 1809, NLS, Ms 851 ff. 4–5.}\]

contemporary clan members from the negative representation of their clan in the play and, at the same time, maintained a connection to the heritage of the Macleans.

The character of Sir Hubert De Grey, the only English character in the play, is the model of moderation in the play. In love with Helen, he is the only character to view and value Helen as herself and not as member of a certain clan. He is also the only one to recognise the value of Helen’s child, prizing the child as part of Helen. A pivotal character he was subjected to a name change. Hubert De Grey, son of a northern England nobleman, bears a Norman name, indicating that his lineage can be traced back to the invasion of 1066. Seemingly, this association with the ancient history of England would have been acceptable except for the fact that the Normans originated from an area of France, the nation with whom Great Britain was currently at war. Beth Friedman-Romell has suggested that Hubert was too French a name to be readily accepted by the Edinburgh population. While this makes a great deal of sense, I think it is equally, if not more, instructive to speculate on the choice of the new name; Sir Malcolm De Grey.

Malcolm was the name of several ancient kings of Scotland, including the man who defeated Macbeth for the throne of Scone. Each of the four kings of Scotland who bore the name Malcolm had close ties to the southern areas of Scotland, including Lothian, and northern England, most significantly Northumbria. In addition, Scott chose to retain the surname De Grey. The elision of the name Malcolm with the typically Norman/French surname De Grey resonates on many levels. The signification of the name Malcolm indicates that the character has an ancient tie to Scotland, which infers an interest in, and a potential commitment to, the maintenance of a Scottish nation. By virtue of the surname De Grey the character also has a tie to the ancient history of England. This balance of interests can be seen in De Grey’s characterisation as a man of moderation, one who exists between worlds, negotiating a new identity from the best of both cultures. Through this name change, Scott not only romanticised the character by providing him a connection to Scottish history, he also created a space within which the elision of the Scottish and English identities could be explored.

While Baillie’s interest in providing the reader with a multi-dimensional viewpoint of the issues examined is evident in the text, in Scott’s production

13 Beth Friedman-Romell, Producing the Nation: National and Gender in the Theatre of Hannah Cowley, Elizabeth Inchbald and Joanna Baillie, Ph.D. dissertation (Northwestern University, 1999).
the arguments were undermined and the potential for the expression of a wide range of viewpoints was diminished. In the case of the vassals to Maclean, Baillie provided three contrasting figures: Benlora, the traditional Highland warrior; Lochtarish, a smart and duplicitous power grabber; and Glenfadden, a man somewhere in the middle, honourable yet scheming, a follower, not a leader, who at every step must actively decide what course of action to take.

Scott reported that Siddons was ‘forced from mere necessity to reduce Glenfadden to a walking gentleman’. Siddons indicated that he chose to limit the role of this character due to a lack of suitable actors he could trust to play the roles of the conspirators. In this instance, a character’s role was substantially changed due to the realities of the theatre business. Unfortunately, in the loss of Glenfadden’s lines, the audience loses a moderating voice in the debate surrounding the appropriate response of individuals to the problems of governance, tradition and kinship. Furthermore, Glenfadden is the one character in this triumvirate of Macleans who is actively making decisions. Unlike the concrete positions of Benlora and Lochtarish, Glenfadden has moments of contradiction and decision and this loss of his voice simplifies the debate and distils the argument.

In their correspondence, Baillie and Scott discussed the possible alteration in six scenes of the play. Of these, the alteration or omission of three crucial scenes, the Cavern scene (betrayal of / by Maclean) and the two scenes in which De Grey takes leave of first Argyll and then Helen, had the most impact on the reception of the ideas embedded in the play.

Baillie was interested in delving into the ramifications of the Act of Union on the individual, exploring the very real fears of extinction expressed by the clan Maclean and presenting diverse views and attitudes towards political and social institutions. Dramatically this is evident in the fact that the longest scene in the play is the Cavern scene in which the three Maclean vassals discuss their current situation and propose remedies, which include the death of Helen. Scott wrote that he was concerned about the length of the scene and Baillie indicated in a letter to Scott dated 21 October 1809 that she would endeavour ‘to shorten the Cavern Scene’. What specific changes were made are unknown but, as previously discussed, the role of Glenfadden, one of the three principle Maclean vassals, was severely reduced. Therefore it is quite likely that Glenfadden’s lines in this central scene were among those to be cut.

Scott also encouraged Baillie to remove the repetition of certain portions of

---

14 Walter Scott to Joanna Baillie, 27 October 1809, NLS, Ms 851 ff. 4–5.
15 Joanna Baillie to Walter Scott, 21 October 1809, NLS, Ms 3878, f. 180–4.
the argument, specifically references to omens and the superstitions of the clan, most of which are delivered by Glenfadden.

Whatever changes Baillie may have made or however the changes may have been implemented in performance, any compression of this scene diminishes its power. Baillie built the arguments in the Cavern scene carefully, adding layer upon layer of appeals to the vassals’ sense of tradition, kinship, guilt, superstition and pride. The weakening of any of the arguments, but especially those based on superstitions that reflect and prey upon the vassals’ fears of their clan’s annihilation, reduces the vassals’ motives for the betrayal to selfish ones.

De Grey, as the ambassador for the English to the Scottish clan society, provides an important and potent site for the negotiation of Scottish identity within the Union that both Baillie and Scott were interested in exploring. Scott referred to De Grey as ‘the most delightful stage lover I have the honour to be acquainted with so we must leave no blot on his scutcheon nor even the appearance of one’. For Scott, it appears that it was important to have this character represented as completely blameless, above the petty machinations of the clans, and possessing the qualities of leadership, compassion and rational thought to which the clan chieftains should aspire. To this end, changing the first name of this character to Malcolm further legitimises the rights of the Englishman De Grey to be viewed as the ideal leader. In this representation Scott’s unionist politics are quite obviously served.

Baillie’s attachment to the character was a bit more complex and even a bit ambiguous. De Grey is an Englishman but Baillie made him a northerner, one who has a great deal of experience with and regard for Scotland, its land and people. There is even the suggestion of a shared history in the possibly un-performed scene between Argyll and De Grey, as Argyll begs to be remembered to De Grey’s father. Baillie presented him as emotionally tied to Scotland as he is emotionally tied to Helen. The union between De Grey and Helen is one to be wished for but is, significantly, by no means certain to succeed in the text as Baillie wrote it.

The scenes in which we see De Grey interact with Argyle and with Helen provide us with important information regarding De Grey’s emotional attachments to Scotland, the Campbells and Helen. In these scenes, in particular the scene with Helen, we see De Grey actively struggling with the concepts of identity and status. In Baillie’s text, as the play unfolds, we are asked to accept Helen as a metaphor for Scotland, De Grey as a metaphor for England and

---

16 Walter Scott to Joanna Baillie, 15 August 1809, NLS, Ms 851, f. 1–3.
their platonic ‘love affair’ as the site of negotiation. It is in this potentially omitted scene that the active negotiation of these two characters / countries is explored and exposed most fully, a scene in which De Grey is seen to be uncomfortable and insecure and Helen in control. Both characters are diminished by the loss of this scene as each is reduced to a one-dimensional symbol: Helen / Scotland, the victim, and De Grey / England, the source of knowledge and gain.

Scott was also very concerned with the visualisation of the play and to that end undertook the researching of the appropriate dress for a Highland lady and the clan tartans of the Macleans and Campbells. The use on stage of the tartan, as well as the re-conceptualised clothing of the Highlander, contributed to the re-signification of these images, their acceptance as a ‘true’ representation of the Highland culture, and the appropriation of these redefined and re-designed images by the whole of the Scottish nation.

In many ways the tartan serves to this day as a Scottish flag, an emblem of a specific nation, Scotland, while at the same time attempting to both preserve and create the identity of the individual within the generic tartan through the use of specific colours and patterns. Therefore, Baillie indicated that when Helen is saved from drowning she is seen wrapped in a tartan, not a flag bearing the Cross of St Andrew which had been visually merged with the Cross of St George of England since the Union of the Crowns in 1603. Whether Helen appeared thus wrapped in performance is unknown but the image described by Baillie of Helen enfolded in a tartan is a compelling one. Given Scott’s adherence to the use of tartan for the clans it is quite probable that the tartan was used in the tableau vivant at the end of Act III. In any case, it is this image of a tartan wrapped, nearly insensate Helen, supported by the common people of Scotland with De Grey at her feet that secures her place as a metaphor for Scotland in Baillie’s play.

In the text of the play Baillie downplayed the peril to the heroine of the play, Helen, by condensing the action of her abandonment, imminent death and ultimate rescue into three extremely short scenes and having the major action, her rescue, take place off stage. Furthermore, following Helen’s off-stage rescue are two more complete acts which take place not on Mull or on the sea, but in Argyle, providing a point of comparison between the two clans.

---

17 The stage directions read ‘Enter Helen, extremely exhausted, and almost senseless, wrapped closely up in one of their plaids and supported by the other two fishermen.’ As De Grey is overcome by her presence the stage directions indicate he is on his knees in tears. See Joanna Baillie, ‘The Family Legend’, 41.
another opportunity for debate of the appropriate behaviour of a Scotsman or woman, and the prospect of imagining a new place for the Scots within the world.

In an examination of the reviews from the time period, however, it seems clear that the scene was skilfully executed to maximise the affect of the peril of the heroine. As Scott wrote to Baillie, ‘The scene on the rock struck the utmost possible effect into the audience, and you heard nothing but sobs on all sides’.18 So too the reviewer for the *Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* stated, ‘The situation of Helen, left alone on the rock, with the waves roaring around her and venting her despair at the view of her rapidly approaching fate, is one of the wildest and most singular that ever was presented to an audience’.19 The staging of these scenes and the visual and aural impact of the performance focused the audience’s attention on the danger to and the victimisation of Helen/Scotland, again reducing Baillie’s complex representation into a more easily identified and named image. Furthermore, the focus on Helen/Scotland as victim negates the potential for an active exploration of a new definition of Scotland and releases the Scottish characters in the play from a certain amount of responsibility for their actions and their own political destinies.

The nature of the Union of 1707 and the possibility of a distinctive national identity within a multiplicity of nations is the debate in which Baillie engaged in *The Family Legend*. Both within the written text of *The Family Legend* and on the stage, the de-fused signifiers of the clan society of the Scottish Highlands are gathered and viewed in conjunction with symbols of the new order. Appropriated, re-imagined and placed in a new context, the bagpipes, the tartan and the values of the clan (duty, honour, loyalty and sacrifice) are given a fresh potency in relation to the current power structure. Helen and Maclean’s child is representative of a new kind of Scot, for whom both the Scottish leader Argyle and the Englishman De Grey are responsible in the play as written. In this play Baillie articulated the potential for a new Scottish identity that is of equal importance within the societies of Scotland and England: Great Britain.

In the first performance, based on the circumstantial evidence available, Baillie’s moderating voices (Glenfadden and De Grey most significantly) were

all but silenced through cutting of scenes and modifications to characters; script changes that simplified the arguments and vilified the detractors. While there remained much for the Scots to celebrate in *The Family Legend* (including the fact that none of the Scots represented on the stage were the typical ‘Scotch’ boobs and ninnies seen on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English and Scottish stages), the opportunity to engage in an active discourse on the subject of their own national identity seems to have been mostly denied them. In performance, as produced by Walter Scott in 1810, *The Family Legend* was presented as a patriotic anthem in support of the Union. An anthem which indeed celebrated a revisioned, united Scotland, but that ultimately reinforced the inequality of the Scots within the governance of Great Britain.
'Ever since the passing of the Act of Union, they have been the steadfast supporters of the British connection': so wrote the Presbyterian minister and ecclesiastical historian William Dool Killen, of his co-religionists, in the early 1850s. Though it reflected an innate political and theological conservatism, Killen’s claim is one that most modern historians would concur with. As the late R. Finlay Holmes, one of Ulster Presbyterianism’s more astute scholars, observed:

That many Presbyterians in Ulster were deeply involved in the United Irish movement in the 1790s...and that many of their children and grandchildren became ardent unionists, utterly opposed to any weakening of Ireland’s links with Britain, are incontrovertible facts of Irish history.

Incontrovertible they may be, but they also rank among Irish history’s more inscrutable facts, for the process by which Ulster Presbyterians became unionists is by no means fully understood. While the sectarian atrocities that occurred in Wicklow and Wexford in 1798 and the emergence of an increasingly aggressive Catholic political voice under the leadership of Daniel O’Connell have long been recognised as factors that influenced the political realignment of Ulster’s Presbyterians in the early nineteenth century, it remains the case, as Ian McBride has recently noted, that ‘[l]ittle is known

1 Killen’s comments can be found in the third volume of James Seaton Reid’s epic History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Reid died before finishing the final volume of his work and Killen was appointed to complete it. In doing so, he interpreted the events of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in a markedly conservative manner. See James Seaton Reid, History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (3 vols., Belfast, 1853), III, viii and 444.

about Presbyterian attitudes during the years after 1798’.3

Arguably, the most significant study of this question remains the earliest one, A. T. Q. Stewart’s unpublished M.A. thesis, ‘The Transformation of Presbyterian Radicalism in the North of Ireland, 1792–1825’.4 In a revealing interview that appeared in the History Ireland magazine in 1993, the year of his retirement from full-time academic life, Stewart reflected on how he had come to undertake the research that led to his groundbreaking and influential thesis.5 ‘J. C. Beckett, my tutor in Irish history’, he recalled:

suggested that I. . .look at the problem of why the Presbyterians were nationalists and radicals at the end of the eighteenth century and conservatives and unionists at the end of the nineteenth. . .I limited it to 1792–1825, so a large part of my M.A. thesis was about the channels into which radicalism was dispersed.6

These comments raise some interesting points.7 First, they suggest that

---

4 A. T. Q. Stewart, The Transformation of Presbyterian Radicalism in the North of Ireland, 1792–1825, M.A. dissertation (Queen’s University, Belfast, 1956).
5 The influence of Stewart’s work can be seen in the subsequent scholarship of David W. Miller and Ian McBride. In his 1978 article, ‘Presbyterianism and “modernization” in Ulster’, Miller developed Stewart’s argument that Presbyterians of all theological dispositions, and not just theologically liberal ‘New Light’ Presbyterians, had been involved in the 1798 rebellion, and argued that the interpretation of the 1790s propagated by nineteenth-century Presbyterian historians had consciously overemphasised the involvement of theologically liberal Presbyterians in the rebellion. More recently, Ian McBride has developed this thesis further and shown that eighteenth-century Presbyterian radicalism was a complex mentalité which could accommodate both advanced political ideas and theological conservatism. See David W. Miller, ‘Presbyterianism and “modernization” in Ulster’, Past and Present, 80 (1978), 66–90 and McBride, Scripture Politics, 207–24. For a fuller examination of the literature on this subject see Gary Peatling, ‘Whatever Happened to Presbyterian Radicalism?’ The Ulster Presbyterian Liberal Press in the late Nineteenth Century’ in Roger Swift and Christine Kinealy (eds.), Politics and Power in Victorian Ireland (Dublin, 2006), 155–7 and Andrew R. Holmes, The Shaping of Ulster Presbyterian Belief and Practice, 1770–1840 (Oxford, 2006), 7–23.
7 It would, however, be somewhat disingenuous to subject these casual reminiscences of
Stewart approached the study accepting as a given that Presbyterians had transformed from liberals and nationalists to conservatives and unionists; rather than seeking to show that this was the case, he attempted to explain why it had happened. More pertinently, they suggest that he conflated radicalism with nationalism, and unionism with conservatism. On the whole, it is hard to disagree with the claim that, by the late nineteenth century, the Ulster Presbyterians had become marked by conservatism and unionism, but, when dealing with the period immediately following the 1798 rebellion, this conflation becomes rather more problematic; it was, in fact, quite possible for Presbyterians to support the Union and hold advanced reforming views. Still more problematic is the conflation of radicalism with nationalism. Though the United Irish movement did advocate separatism, the Presbyterian radicals of the late eighteenth century should not be considered as nationalists in the nineteenth-century sense. Indeed, to consider them as such is to tie the development of pro-union sentiment to the decline of radicalism: these should, instead, be viewed as separate processes. While they were, in some instances, closely linked, the one did not necessarily imply the other, and just as it was possible for radicals to support the Union, it was possible for conservatives to oppose it. This paper will attempt to illustrate these points by examining the response of the Belfast Presbyterians to the Act of Union. In doing so, it will reject the radical/nationalist and unionist/conservative paradigm and highlight the role that Belfast itself played in the formation of a coherent unionist ideology. It is hoped that this will contribute to the development of a more nuanced understanding of the political and intellectual diversity of Ulster Presbyterianism.

8 As Ian McBride has observed, ‘[t]he rejection of nationalism . . . implied no repudiation of liberal values’. See McBride, Scripture Politics, 228.
9 Conservatives were, indeed, particularly prominent among opponents of the Union. Members of the landed gentry composed one of the ‘three powerful vested interests’ identified by Hereward Senior as composing a ‘hard core of resistance to the idea’, the other two being the legal profession and the leading citizens of Dublin. In addition, ‘most Orangemen were among the violent anti-unionists’, though they were, in the long term, to become ‘first among unionists’. See Hereward Senior, Orangeism in Ireland and Britain, 1795–1836 (London, 1966), 121, 123 and 137.
When examining the reaction of the Belfast Presbyterians to the Act of Union, it quickly becomes apparent that, when the question was first mooted in the autumn of 1798, it aroused little interest. Indeed, reports from government sympathisers suggest that the north of Ireland looked upon the Union with a mixture of quiescence and indifference. On 10 December 1798, the earl of Londonderry, Lord Castlereagh’s father, in response to his son’s request that he furnish him with information on the north’s sentiments towards the Union, wrote: ‘[f]ew in this county know that this question is to be positively agitated. . . . it is not talked of seriously, nor with much earnestness. . . . I infer the popular current will not be very strong in this corner of the north against the measure’. Though Londonderry was here referring to the north-west of Ulster, he went on to predict that the people of Belfast would view the Union in a similar light. The letters of the irascible Belfast woman, Martha McTier, suggest that his judgment reflected rather more than wishful thinking and imaginative speculation. Writing to her brother, the Dublin-based doctor and founding member of the United Irishmen, William Drennan, on 13 December 1798, McTier noted of the town, ‘union or no union seems equally disregarded’. Likewise, five days later, on 18 December, she pointedly observed that ‘[t]he Union is never heard of in this place’. ‘The silence of the whole north on any great political subject’, she continued, ‘is a new feature, whether dignified or stupefied, ministry perhaps can guess’.

This contrasted sharply with the response of Dublin. With its lawyers fearing that the dissolution of the Irish parliament would have a catastrophic impact

---

10 See, the earl of Londonderry to Lord Castlereagh, 10 December 1798, and Alexander Knox to Lord Castlereagh, no date (probably December 1798) in Charles Vane, marquess of Londonderry (ed.), Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, second marquess of Londonderry (4 vols., London, 1848), II, 39–40 and 45. In a similar vein, Alexander Knox reported that Edward Cooke’s pro-union pamphlet, Arguments for and against an Union between Great Britain and Ireland Considered, had been well received in Armagh and Derry.


on their career prospects, and its merchants fearing the impact of English competition, the capital had quickly emerged as the ‘focal point of anti-unionism’.\textsuperscript{13} As early as 10 September 1798, Castlereagh’s confidant, Edward Cooke, was writing to inform him that the debates on the measure conducted by the young barristers of the city had been ‘vociferous and violent, in clamour and language’.\textsuperscript{14} By the end of the year, the situation had deteriorated significantly and, in a letter dated 19 December 1798, J.C. Beresford supplied Castlereagh with the altogether more alarming information that the controversy ignited by the Union had revived the United Irish movement in the capital. ‘The conversations on this subject’, he ruefully observed, ‘have given the almost annihilated body of United Irishmen new spirits, and the Society is again rising like a phoenix from its ashes’.\textsuperscript{15} In light of this, it is small wonder that the government looked on Belfast with equanimity. Reporting on the state of Ireland in a letter to the duke of Portland in January 1799, the lord lieutenant, the marquess of Cornwallis, confidently declared that, in so far as the Union was concerned, ‘appearances in the north are by no means discouraging’ and that Belfast had ‘shown no disinclination’ to the measure.\textsuperscript{16}

At the same time, it was equally true that Belfast had shown no significant signs of inclination. Certainly, in the aftermath of the rebellion, some of the town’s more prominent citizens attempted to cultivate a reputation for loyalty. A yeomanry corps had been established in the town in 1797 and, in a declaration printed in the \textit{Belfast News-Letter} on 18 June 1798, its members avowed their:

\begin{quote}
utter abhorrence and detestation of all foreign interference in the affairs of the kingdom, of the atrocious insurrection now existing in it, and of all secret cabals and privy conspiracies to subvert or new model the constitution, without the joint consent of kings, Lords and Commons in parliament.\ldots\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] Edward Cooke to Lord Castlereagh, 10 September 1798 in Londonderry (ed.), \textit{Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh}, I, 344.
\item[15] Likewise, on 15 December 1798, Cooke had warily observed that ‘Dublin violence increases’. Edward Cooke to Lord Castlereagh, 15 December 1798 and J. C. Beresford to Lord Castlereagh, 19 December 1798 in ibid., II, 8, 46 and 51.
\item[16] Lord Cornwallis to the duke of Portland, 2 January 1799 in ibid., II, 80.
\item[17] \textit{Belfast News-Letter}, 18 June 1798. For the establishment of the Belfast yeomanry see Allan Blackstock, \textit{An Ascendancy Army: The Irish Yeomanry, 1796–1834} (Dublin, 1998),
\end{footnotes}
One of the yeomanry’s members, the Reverend Dr William Bruce, minister of First Belfast Presbyterian Church and Principal of the Belfast Academy, went further and publicly castigated the rebels. In November 1798 McTier wrote to Drennan to inform him of a sermon that Bruce had recently delivered. ‘It was’, she related,

a thrice told tale on parental authority, pieced out by scraps suited to the times—the evils of which he deduced from want of this patriarchal tie. He talked of rebels with contempt and horror. . . .and one of his expressions was, “do not let any father hope to receive respect or obedience from a rebel or an atheist”.18

None of this, however, equated to a groundswell of support in favour of the Union. Indeed, while the weeks and months following the rebellion saw the columns of the town’s sole newspaper, the pro-government Belfast News-Letter, frequently given over to pro-union petitions, it is striking that no such petition was submitted by the citizens of Belfast itself.19

It was not, in fact, until October 1799, when the town was visited by the lord lieutenant the marquis of Cornwallis, that any significant display of pro-union sentiment was made. Upon arrival in Belfast on 7 October, Cornwallis was immediately waited on by the town’s sovereign and burgesses who declared him a freeman of the city and presented an address expressing their approbation of the Union. Following this, he was entertained at a public dinner ‘attended by all the principle merchants and gentlemen in the town and neighbourhood’.20 So, at any rate, reported the News-Letter. In reality, the

---

18 There seem to have been some in Bruce’s congregation who disapproved of such ostentatious displays of loyalism: thus McTier went on to observe that ‘[t]he discourse was delivered with great animation, approved of by some and stabbing others, who hardly prevailed on themselves to sit’. In typically acidic fashion, McTier herself ‘expressed disappointment’ that the sermon was not followed by a rendition of ‘Croppies lie down’. See, Martha McTier to William Drennan, 30 November 1798 in Agnew (ed.), The Drennan McTier Letters: Volume 2, 428. For further discussion of Bruce and of expressions of loyalism during this period see John Bew, ‘Introduction’ in William Bruce and Henry Joy, Belfast Politics, John Bew (ed.) (Dublin, 2005), 1–23 and Allan Blackstock, Loyalism in Ireland, 1789–1829 (Woodbridge, 2007), 97 and 99–103.

19 See, for instance, Belfast News-Letter, 11 October 1799.

20 Belfast News-Letter, 9 October 1799. In his autobiographical reflections, published in 1848, William Grimshaw gave an interesting account of Cornwallis’ reception. He recollected that ‘[a] dinner having been given, on his account, at the Exchange, he
event was stage-managed to ensure that those who opposed the Union did not attend. William Dickson, the bishop of Down and Connor, for example, was informed that ‘as an avowed enemy to the Union’ his presence ‘would have interfered with the object of the meetings’ and was asked not to attend. So, too, was the Belfast reformer, bastion of middle-class Presbyterian society and emphatic opponent of the Union, Dr Alexander Haliday. Such men would undoubtedly have appeared conspicuous by their absence, and it is presumably for this reason that the News-Letter’s editor declined to attach a list of those who had attended the dinner to his report of the proceedings. G.C. Bolton has presented Cornwallis’ visit as the occasion of Belfast’s ‘most convincing display of unionist sympathies’, but it is clear from Castlereagh’s correspondence that it was a manufactured event, contrived, in large part, by Edward May, father-in-law to the marquis of Donegall, the landlord of Belfast. If, then, Cornwallis’ visit did provide the occasion for Belfast’s ‘most convincing display of unionist sympathies’, it said little for the strength of pro-union sentiment in the town.

At the same time, opposition to the Union was scarcely more impressive. While Haliday opposed it on principle, believing it to be ‘the most deadly blow ever aimed’ at Ireland, he seems to have kept his views private. What

---

[21] Bolton, The Passing of the Irish Act of Union, 138. Haliday expounded his anti-union viewpoints in a lengthy letter written to the second earl of Charlemont shortly after the death of his father, James Caulfield, the first earl. Caulfield and Haliday had been close friends, and it is clear that in writing to the second earl Haliday was attempting to persuade him to follow his father’s example and oppose the Union. See Dr Haliday to second earl Charlemont, 24 November 1799 in Historical Manuscripts Commission: Thirteenth Report, Appendix, part VIII: The Manuscripts and Correspondence of James, first earl of Charlemont: Volume II: 1784–1799 (London, 1894), 356–8.


[23] Dr Haliday to the second earl of Charlemont, 24 November 1799 in The Manuscripts and Correspondence of James, first earl of Charlemont, 356.
little opposition that did emerge took the form of carefully worded petitions that raised questions regarding the Union’s economic implications. Some of the Dublin pamphleteers had predicted, gloomily from their perspective, that the Union, while devastating the capital, would bring prosperity to provincial towns such as Belfast and Cork. The businessmen of Belfast were, however, equally alarmed about the potential impact of the measure and, between 5 February and 13 March 1800, three petitions were forwarded to Dublin. These petitions, one a general one from the town’s ‘Merchants, Traders and Inhabitants’, another from its ‘Cotton Manufacturers’ and a third from its ‘Sugar Refiners and West Indian Traders’, expressed fears that the imposition of unfettered free trade between England and Ireland would bring financial ruin upon the town. It was in the face of these and similar petitions from elsewhere in the country that Pitt agreed, in March 1800, to accompany the Union with protective measures designed to safeguard the cotton trade.

The seemingly restrained attitude of Belfast’s Presbyterians towards the Union is further reflected by the paucity of the pamphlet literature that emerged from the town. Newspaper advertisements indicate that the printer William Magee was both importing pamphlets from Dublin and re-printing titles that had already been published there, actions that point to the existence of a market for literature outlining the various arguments for and against the Union. Yet, while the citizenry of Belfast may have taken an interest in these arguments, they seem to have made little effort to contribute to them themselves. Writing to McTier from Dublin in December 1798, Drennan observed that ‘pamphlets are raining down on us’. McTier could make no similar claim, for Belfast’s first and only foray into the pamphlet war, William Percy’s *Irish

---

24 See, for example, [Anonymous], *The Commercial System of Ireland Reviewed and the Question of Union Discussed in an Address to the Merchants, Manufacturers and Country Gentlemen of Ireland, Second Edition with an Introductory Preface* (Dublin, 1799), 36–7.

25 These petitions, which do not seem to have been published in the *Belfast News-Letter*, were discovered by the Belfast historian and antiquarian Samuel Shannon Millin in the Four Courts, Dublin, in 1915. While the originals were unfortunately destroyed when the building was occupied during the civil war, transcriptions can be found in S. S. Millin, *Sidelights on Belfast History* (Belfast, 1932), 51 and 68–70.


Salvation Promulgated, did not appear until May 1800. Moreover, as a rather simplistic offering, taking the form of a congenial dialogue between a teacher—‘Teachwell’—who supported the Union, and a farmer—‘Ploughwell’—who opposed it, Irish Salvation offered little to boast about and was unlikely to have monopolised conversation in the drawing rooms and parlours of middle-class Belfast.

At this point, McBride’s assertion that evidence relating to the north’s response to the Union is ‘stubbornly resistant to generalisation’ seems apposite. Belfast, clearly, had both its opponents and proponents of the Union, and the only meaningful generalisation that can be made is that public discourse on the subject, what little of it there was, was conducted with little heat or rancour. While the Presbyterians of Ulster are frequently characterised as argumentative and cantankerous, it seems that Belfast’s Presbyterian community had little appetite for an argument about the Union. The obvious question this begs, is why?

29 It had been rumoured in December 1798 that Bruce was writing a pamphlet in support of the Union, but nothing seems to have come of this. See Martha McTier to William Drennan, no date (late December 1798) in Agnew (ed.), The Drennan McTier Letters: Volume 2, 444.

30 William Percy, Irish Salvation Promulgated; or, the Effects of an Union with Great Britain, Candidly Investigated in an Evening’s Conversation between a Farmer and Schoolmaster (Belfast, 1800). For a useful discussion of this pamphlet see McBride, ‘Ulster Presbyterians and the Passing of the Act of Union’, 82.


32 A. T. Q. Stewart, for example, has argued that ‘The Presbyterian is happiest when he is being a radical. The austere doctrines of Calvinism, the simplicity of his worship, the democratic government of his church, the memory of the martyred Covenanters, and the Scottish refusal to yield or dissemble—all these incline him to that difficult and cantankerous disposition which is characteristic of a certain kind of political radicalism’. See Stewart, The Narrow Ground, 83. More recently, Miller has drawn attention to the significance of congregational ‘haggling’, whereby ‘the literate but unreflective could challenge the well-read, perhaps even well born minister’. For Miller, such behaviour, which could range from ‘grilling ministerial candidates’ to ‘withdrawing altogether from the pastoral care of one’s minister to join a nearby Seceding congregation’, served ‘as a means of sustaining the social order by turning the world upside down, if only for a day’. Naturally, the campaign, led by Henry Cooke, to enforce subscription to the Westminster Confession within the Synod of Ulster reduced the scope for such theological haggling. Thus Miller has observed, with his tongue, one imagines, firmly in his cheek, that ‘Cooke took all the fun out of being a Presbyterian’. David W. Miller, ‘Did Ulster Presbyterians have a Devotional Revolution?’ in James H. Murphy (ed.), Evangelicals and Catholics in Nineteenth-Century Ireland (Dublin, 2005), 41–2 and 46.
One potential answer to this question is that in the aftermath of their failed rebellion, those who had so recently attempted to sever Ireland’s ties with Britain, the United Irishmen, were in no position to organise opposition to the Union. Problematically, however, this assumes that the United Irishmen, would, as a body, have opposed the Union, had it been possible for them to do so. Undoubtedly, many of its members did oppose the measure, but equally, others, such as Samuel Neilson and Archibald Hamilton Rowan, both of whom declared themselves in favour of the Union in the first half of 1799, supported it. Naturally, doubts have been expressed over the reliability of Rowan and Neilson’s pro-union declarations, but they need not be viewed as implausible.

While it is clear that the United Irish movement moved towards separatism in the mid-1790s, questions remain as to whether this course was adopted as a means to an end, or as an end in itself. In his Address to the People of Ireland,
published in 1796, Wolfe Tone argued that the Irish were faced with a stark choice, a choice between ‘union or separation . . . slavery and independence’; there was, he insisted, ‘no third way’. Yet, while Tone saw things starkly, the evidence gathered by the secret committee of the Irish House of Lords in August 1798 would suggest that the opinions of his colleagues were rather more indefinite. Granted, when the subject was raised during Thomas Addis Emmet’s interview with the committee, he reiterated Tone’s position, and went so far as to claim that Ireland, if separated from England, ‘would be the happiest spot on the face of the globe’. William James MacNeven, on the other hand, appears to have been rather more ambivalent; he maintained that separatism was ‘a measure we were forced into’ and conceded that the ‘interest’ of an independent Ireland ‘would require an intimate connection’ with Britain. Likewise, James Quinn has shown that Thomas Russell’s thoughts on the question were, when placed under scrutiny, ambiguous, if not self-contradictory.

In the aftermath of the failed rebellion, moreover, there were compelling reasons for radicals such as Rowan and Neilson to reconcile themselves to the proposed union. While some of the United Irishmen exiled in France continued to plot and intrigue, separation became an increasingly unrealistic aim and the Union offered the best chance of fulfilling the United Irish movement’s original objectives of parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation. Writing in December 1798, the earl of Londonderry remarked that ‘most of those who were actuated with a strong reforming spirit entertain such a dislike and antipathy to the present subsisting parliament of the country, that they will not be very adverse to any change that will rid them of what they deem so very corrupt a legislature’. It was on precisely these grounds that Rowan supported the Union. Thus in a letter to his father, written in January 1799, he


35 Wolfe Tone, An Address to the People of Ireland, on the Present Important Crisis (Belfast, 1796), 4. For a useful analysis of this pamphlet see Stephen Small, Political Thought in Ireland 1776–1798: Republicanism, Patriotism and Radicalism (Oxford, 2002), 250–3.

36 William James MacNeven, Pieces of Irish History, Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen; and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government (New York, 1807), 196 and 218. My thanks to Professor S. J. Connolly for alerting me to these comments.

37 James Quinn, Soul on Fire: A Life of Thomas Russell (Dublin, 2002), 287.


39 See the earl of Londonderry to Lord Castlereagh, 10 December 1798 in Londonderry (ed.), Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, II, 39–40.
expressed his approbation of it, reasoning ‘[i]n that measure I see the downfall of one of the most corrupt assemblies, I believe, ever existed’.\textsuperscript{40} Later that month, in a letter to his wife, he stated his case more piquantly: ‘[i]t takes a feather out of the great man’s cap’, he noted, ‘but it will, I think, put many a guinea in the poor man’s pocket’.\textsuperscript{41} In addition to this, it was envisaged that Catholic emancipation would accompany the Union. George III’s obstinate refusal to assent to this concession was not to become evident until 1801, and it was therefore possible, in the months prior to its coming into force, to believe that the Union would fulfil this other key United Irish objective.\textsuperscript{42}

While considerations of this nature reconciled some United Irishmen to the Union, the treatment that such individuals had received at the hands of the government served to stifle debate in Belfast. Though the town remained quiet during the rebellion, it had, nevertheless, been heavily implicated in the United Irish conspiracy. Speaking in the Irish parliament in February 1798, John Fitzgibbon, the Lord High Chancellor of Ireland, went so far as to declare Belfast ‘the rankest citadel of treason in the kingdom’.\textsuperscript{43} A heavy, and potentially hostile, military presence daily reminded the town’s populace that they were considered to be untrustworthy and, were this not eloquent enough testimony to the perils of political fervour, the appearance, in the weeks following the rebellion, of the decapitated heads of rebels, impaled on pikes and displayed above the town’s market house, provided a visceral aide memoire of the fate that could befall the disloyal.\textsuperscript{44} All this, it might be supposed, led those who did oppose the Union to keep their opinions to themselves.

\textsuperscript{40} Rowan, \textit{Autobiography}, 340.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} For George III’s attitude to Catholic emancipation see Jeremy Black, \textit{The Hanoverians: The History of a Dynasty} (London, 2004), 136–7 and 151 and, for Pitt’s attitude to the same, Patrick M. Geoghegan, \textit{The Irish Act of Union: A Study in High Politics, 1798–1801} (Dublin, 2001), 90–6 and 222–6.
\textsuperscript{43} John Fitzgibbon, earl of Clare, \textit{The Speech of the Right Honourable John, earl of Clare, Lord High Chancellor of Ireland, in the House of Lords of Ireland, Monday February 19, 1798, on a Motion made by the earl of Moira} (Dublin, 1798), 30.
\textsuperscript{44} See \textit{Belfast News-Letter}, 3 July 1798. This practice was widespread. William Grimshaw recollected seeing it practiced in Lisburn and Carlin. Grimshaw, \textit{Incidents Recalled}, 42. So too, passing through Carlow, in May 1802, the diarist Anna Walker recorded ‘the jail is a handsome looking building; over the gate are 5 heads of some rebel chiefs who were taken, tried & condemned in 1798. . .Some of the hair yet remains, & some of the skin, but the bone of the skull is quite white. The country round this town’, she went on to comment somewhat incongruously, ‘is extremely pretty’. Anna Walker Diary, PRONI, T/1565/1–2, f.20 and McBride, ‘Memory and Forgetting’, 480.
Such behaviour was certainly not unprecedented; when war with France had been declared in 1793, some of the town’s politicians had pursued just such a course. As the young United Irishman John Tennent informed his brother, Robert, in June of that year, ‘[g]reat alterations have taken place here within these few months in political opinions . . . it is found the safest way either to say nothing about politics or, to be a vehement supporter of government let your real sentiments be what they may’.45

Furthermore, Belfast’s small and close knit populace was doubtless somewhat traumatised by the arrests and executions that had taken place during the summer of 1798. This, too, stifled debate, particularly when combined with frequent reports of imminent invasion and renewed insurrection. Though the majority of these reports proved to have little basis in reality, they were rendered all too believable by the continuing depredations taking place in the country surrounding Belfast. On 21 April 1800, the Seceding minister John Tennent, writing to his eldest son, William, from Roseyards, County Antrim, reported, ‘of late here very numerous have been deaths some in an ordinary [way] some violent under force of law others alas murders’.46 In a similar vein, McTier, writing in December 1799, had noted darkly, ‘[h]ow near and frequent murder is become here, the papers can inform you’.47 Indeed, with rumour and counter-rumour rife, Belfast’s inhabitants seem on occasion to have been on the verge of hysteria. Thus, on 26 December 1798, McTier wrote to her brother and reported:

I am writing this composedly at twelve o’clock the 25th, the day report says this town is to be attacked by the rebels . . . Tis said a number of letters have been received giving information of this design . . . This you may believe has raised a panic and last night at ten o’clock, the bells ringing for five minutes during a very high wind I suppose added almost certainly to fear.

45 John Tennent to Robert Tennent, 15 June 1793, PRONI, Tennent papers, D/1748/C/1201/7.
47 Martha McTier to William Drennan, 15 December 1799 in Agnew (ed.), The Drennan McTier Letters: Volume 2, 543. While the major hostilities of the 1798 Rebellion ended in September of that year with the defeat of the French invasionary force in the west of the country, it is clear that skirmishing and disaffection continued long afterwards. For a useful study of this see James G. Patterson, ‘Continued Presbyterian Resistance in the Aftermath of the Rebellion of 1798 in Antrim and Down’, Eighteenth-Century Life, 22 (1998), 45–61.
More humorously, she went on to recount the disruption that had been caused when the receipt of a letter, falsely detailing the death of Napoleon Bonaparte, was announced in the middle of a church service; ‘the ladies’, she quipped, ‘fainted or tried to do it’.48

In this milieu, some chose to disclose their true opinions of the Union while others, without necessarily displaying any enthusiasm, tacitly accepted it in the hope that it would usher in a new era of peace and prosperity. Speaking in the Irish parliament, in February 1800, the recently elected MP for Belfast, Edward May, asserted that, among supporters of the Union in Belfast, ‘a part thought it would give a perpetual protection to the commerce of Ireland, but much the largest part thought it would produce tranquillity and end all political jealousies’.49 That such sentiments existed is eloquently confirmed by the young Belfast woman, Eliza McCrone. Writing to the Reverend John Tennent, two days after the Union had come into force, she noted:

Yesterday we became united with the mother country. . . . It was feared there would have been some adverse to it, and that perhaps more disputes would be the consequence, but thank goodness all was quiet as if nothing had happened. Long may we continue so. I will never again be an advocate for any opinion, that persevering in, will be attended with bad consequences to any of my fellow creatures—had a good part of the world been so inclined, so many would not now have been from their families and friends, but I trust the day is not far distant that reunite them. . . .50

In referring to absent friends in this way, McCrone touched upon yet another powerful reason why people who did not necessarily support the Union were able to look upon it with equanimity; it was anticipated that its passage would be followed by the return of those who had been exiled or imprisoned in the aftermath of the rebellion. As McCrone herself went on to note:

it is pretty generally thought that this Union will be attended with some happy consequence, and that all our friends will be permitted to return

49 Belfast News-Letter, 7 March 1800.
50 Eliza McCrone to Reverend John Tennent, 3 January 1800, PRONI, Tennent papers, D/1748/A/1/2/1. Though dated the 3 January 1800, it is clear from the content of this letter that it was written in January 1801.
home by giving good bail for future good behaviour. . . . how many cheerful faces would then appear, that have long been clouded by grief, and shadowed by anxiety and disappointment.51

The persuasive power of such considerations becomes apparent when we consider, as McCrone doubtless did, the impact the rebellion had had on the Reverend Tennent’s family. His eldest son, William, a founding member of the United Irishmen, was imprisoned in Fort George, while a younger son, Robert, who McCrone was eventually to marry, was lobbying frantically in a bid to secure his brother’s release, and a third son, John, was in exile in France, from whence he was never to return.52

III

The immediate response of Belfast’s Presbyterians to the Union was, then, complex. If anything, it is ‘ambivalent’, rather than ‘steadfast’, that best captures the nature of their attitude to the British connection. Yet, as the nineteenth century progressed, a more resolute adherence to the Union was to develop, one manifestation of which can be seen in the trajectory of William Drennan’s political thought. Despite claiming to be more interested in his own impending marital union with the young English Unitarian, Sarah Swanwick, Drennan produced three pamphlets in opposition to the Union during the period 1798–1800.53

51 Ibid.
In contrast to the productions of the ‘pamphleteering barristers’ of Dublin, who he critiqued for debating the Union ‘without a spark of Hibernicism’, these were markedly nationalistic in tone.\(^{54}\) Indeed, McBride has gone so far as to suggest that they ‘anticipated the full-blown romantic nationalism of the nineteenth century’.\(^{55}\) Nevertheless, by September 1810, Drennan was using the pages of the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, the literary journal he had established in 1808, having resettled in Belfast some two years previously, to advocate adherence to the Union and attack the calls for repeal that had been raised by the Dublin guilds.\(^{56}\)

As a fervent reformer who came to support the Union, Drennan was by no means unique; but, while Rowan and Neilson’s advocacy of the Union seems to have been founded on its potential to fulfil, if only in part, the frustrated aims of the United Irish movement, Drennan’s position was the result of a more comprehensive shift in political outlook. Put simply, he had stopped looking at Irish problems from an Irish perspective, and had begun to develop a ‘British’ political outlook. This development may, in part, be attributed to his marriage to Swanwick, for it strengthened his connections with the English Unitarian community and drew him, in particular, into radical Unitarian circles in Wem, Shropshire; circles which were also frequented by the celebrated essayist and radical, William Hazlitt.\(^{57}\) Accordingly, in opposing the Dublin guilds’ calls for repeal, in September 1810, Drennan referenced the English reformer Sir

---

56 Between August and October 1810, twelve of Dublin’s twenty-five guilds, alarmed by an economic depression and a rise in the window tax introduced in a bid to meet Ireland’s national debt, declared themselves in favour of repeal. The controversy rumbled on into November 1810, but abruptly ended when it was made known that George III had once again succumbed to porphyria. Under such circumstances, the guilds did not wish to run the risk of appearing disloyal. See, Hill, *From Patriots to Unionists*, 266–9 and *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, 26.5 (30 September 1810), 223–4.
57 Swanwick’s brother, Joseph, was a close friend of Hazlitt (the two attended Hackney New College together in the 1790s) and her family worshipped at the Wem church ministered to by Hazlitt’s father, also named William Hazlitt. Noting these intriguing links, the literary critic Tom Paulin has tentatively observed, ‘we can begin to trace, I believe . . . a particular dissenting counter-culture which embraces among others Hutcheson, the Drennans and the Hazlitts’. See Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty*, 67–8. For an examination of Hazlitt’s thought and his significance in the culture of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain see A. C. Grayling, *The Quarrel of the Age: The Life and Times of William Hazlitt* (London, 2000).
Francis Burdett and tetchily noted that his ‘struggle for liberty and reform did not produce one sympathetic movement in that city’. It was, he argued, only self-interest, brought about by economic hardship, which had raised Dublin from its ‘torpid apathy’.\(^{58}\) For Drennan, the passing of the Union had signalled the death of the Irish nation; having discovered, on the day of its ratification, that his wife had fallen pregnant with their first child, he observed, in a letter to his mother:

> Strange co-incidence that the day in which my country died should be the happiest day which I have spent on this earth, the day in which I begin to live, out of myself. My country is now contracted into the limit of this house. I have done my duty to that parent, without much pleasure or advantage, and now that she has died without a groan or a struggle, I should not wish to be employed in writing her epitaph. I cannot praise her character or her conduct, her morality, or her spirit. We have now no country. We are individuals. The world is all before us where to choose and adopt a country, and whether that be England, or France, or America, the liking of each individual must direct him. I am no longer Irishman or petty pamphleteer, but I am a husband and I hope will be father. If I be so, I should not envy the childless Bonaparte.\(^{59}\)

While Drennan continued to support and propagate the cause of reform, he excoriated those who he believed disingenuously used the patriotic language of nation for selfish demagogic ends. Thus, when Henry Grattan spoke of an ‘Irish feeling’, an ‘Irish interest’ and an ‘Irish heart’ at a dinner in support of Catholic emancipation held in Dublin in December 1811, Drennan used the pages of the *Belfast Monthly Magazine* to lambaste his inconsistency, and declared that ‘the best way of annihilating the Irish feeling and the Irish heart, and the Irish question, is to accede as soon as possible to Catholic emancipation’. ‘There is not union, now’, he continued,

> neither in spirit nor in fact, but the only means by which it can ever be accomplished, is by the perfect and complete abolition of all civil and political distinction. Then indeed the Irish feeling that still burns under the ashes of national independence, may be gradually

\(^{58}\) *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, 26.5 (30 September 1810), 223.

extinguished: then the fondest wish of our hearts may be obliterated, and we may say at least say to each of our children—Be Britons with all your souls—and forget that your father called himself an Irishman.60

For those who did not share Drennan’s political perspective, the exponential economic expansion that Belfast experienced in the early years of the nineteenth century offered an equally powerful incentive for them to reconcile themselves to the Union. Between 1791 and 1831, the town’s population grew from 18,320 to 53,287, and it was in these years that it began to undergo the rapid industrial expansion that was to turn it into one of the workshops of the empire.61 The extent to which this can be attributed to the Union is unclear; Belfast was by no means a backward town in the years before the Union.62 Nevertheless, in the minds of its merchants and manufacturers, Belfast’s prosperity seems quickly to have become associated with the Union. Thus, when the merchants and bankers of the town met, on 30 December 1830, to discuss the propriety of issuing a declaration setting out their position on the question of repeal, they agreed that a revocation of the Union was undesirable and that, as Robert Grimshaw noted, ‘[t]hey derived great benefit from a close connexion with England’.63

The Reverend Dr Henry Cooke, the Presbyterian divine considered by some to be the founding father of Ulster unionism, famously articulated such thinking in a speech delivered to the town’s anti-repeal conservatives, on 21 January 1841. ‘[B]efore the Union’, he declared:

Belfast was a village; now it ranks with the cities of the earth. Before the Union it had a few coasting craft, and a few American and West Indian ships—and that open bay, which now embraces the navies of every land, was but a desert of useless water. . . . The centre of our town was studded with thatched cottages, where now stands one of the

60 Belfast Monthly Magazine, 41.7 (31 December 1811), 489.
62 Green, ‘Early Industrial Belfast’, 78.
63 They did, however, disagree over the propriety of issuing a statement on the question, with some objecting that to do so would merely serve to provide O’Connell with publicity. Belfast News-letter, 9 November 1830.
fairest temples to the genius of industry and commerce... Look at Belfast, and be a Repealer—if you can.  

Cooke’s grandiloquent oratory greatly exaggerated the nature of the transformation that had taken place in Belfast. With a population in 1791 of over 18,000, Belfast before the Union was rather more than a village. While it was not until the nineteenth century that the town underwent the development that was to see it emerge as a major centre of British industrialism, it was nevertheless the case, as E. R. R. Green has observed, that late eighteenth-century Belfast was no ‘mere market town’. Quite the reverse, it was ‘a thriving seaport with considerable foreign trade’. Yet, to focus on the inaccuracies of Cooke’s hyperbolic rhetoric is to miss the point somewhat, for it remains the case that, in the years following the passage of the Act of Union, Belfast and its hinterland flourished, while the rest of Ireland did not. This fact, in itself, provided a powerful ‘economic argument’, which, as R. Finlay Holmes has observed, ‘was to become one of the principal foundation stones of the edifice of Ulster unionism’. Moreover, while Cooke presented this argument to a meeting of the town’s anti-repeal conservatives, it appealed also to the town’s liberals. Indeed, two weeks prior to Cooke’s speech to the Belfast conservatives, a similar argument had been outlined in the liberal Belfast newspaper, the *Northern Whig*, and, by October 1844, Mary Ann McCracken could legitimately aver, in a letter to R. R. Madden, that ‘many sincere and ardent liberals who were violently opposed to the Union before it took place, are now as much opposed to Repeal’. Though they had initially looked upon it with indifference, it seems that the Presbyterians of Belfast were, by the 1840s, well on their way to becoming ‘steadfast supporters of the British connection’.

IV

Recent research, carried out under the auspices of the Northern Ireland

---


65 Green, ‘Early Industrial Belfast’, 78.


67 Ibid., 148 and Mary Ann McCracken to R. R. Madden, 15 October 1844, PRONI, McCracken letters, T/1815/46.
Life and Times Survey, suggests that Ulster Presbyterianism continues to be strongly marked by an adherence to the Union. Some 70% of Presbyterians surveyed in 2001 used the term ‘unionist’ to describe themselves.\(^68\) While such continued devotion to the Union suggests that there is something inexorable about the unionism of Ulster Presbyterians, the initial ambivalence displayed towards the Union by the Presbyterians of Belfast, and the significance of Belfast’s economic growth in reconciling them to the British connection, should remind us that its initial development was by no means unthinking or illogical. There were, certainly, other factors at play in the development of unionism; besides ‘economic self-interest’, McBride has pointed to the impact of ‘anti-Catholicism . . . and an emerging sense of historical and cultural apartness’.\(^69\) Yet, whatever else may have influenced it, it is clear that among the Presbyterians of Belfast the development of unionism reflected something more complex than a counter-revolutionary knee-jerk to the 1798 rebellion and the emergence of a disciplined Catholic voice under O’Connell.

Queen’s University, Belfast

\(^{68}\) In addition, this research reveals that, since the signing of the Belfast agreement, Ulster Presbyterians have increasingly emphasised their ‘Britishness’ and de-emphasised their ‘Northern Irishness’. See Duncan Morrow, *Presbyterians in Northern Ireland: Living in a Society in Transition* (ARK Research Update 21, Belfast, 2004), 2. Alternatively, view http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update21.pdf [15 August 2008]

\(^{69}\) McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 226.
Scotland is Britain: 
The Union and Unionist-Nationalism, 1807–1907
Graeme Morton

In the spring of 1898 it seemed to some that the Scottish nation was under challenge. It was no new threat causing the agitation, but a re-run of anxieties raised forty-five years earlier.\(^1\) Centred on the persistent public use of ‘England’ when ‘Britain’, ‘Great Britain’ or ‘British Empire’ was intended, it was a sign of wider ills, a fear that the institutions, history and ethos of the nation were diluted, just as Malachi Malagrowther had predicted would happen back in 1826.\(^2\) It was a continuing refrain of nomenclature, yet not one borne by the non-use of ‘Scotland’. Now, less than a decade shy of the bicentenary of the creation of Great Britain, that ancient name was still in vogue, still drawn upon, still with an everyday as well as international profile. ‘Scotland’ was not the issue. Nor was ‘North Britain’ bemoaned; that eighteenth-century term had grown into acceptable usage in the Victorian years.\(^3\) Rather, it was ‘Britain’, the name that had emerged to encompass the new political creation; the name for the expansion of England’s empire, with ‘British Empire’ used only a year after union.\(^4\) It was ‘Britain’. These Scots wanted the term ‘Britain’ to be used.

The author wishes to thank Elizabeth Ritchie, North Highland College, for help researching the centenaries of Union.

\(^1\) The wrongful use of ‘England’ for Britain and the incorrect presentation of Scotland’s heraldry were raised by the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights in 1853. See Graeme Morton, ‘Scottish Rights and “Centralisation” in the Mid-Nineteenth Century’, Nations and Nationalism, 2 (1996), 267–9.

\(^2\) Malachi Malagrowther, Thoughts on the Proposed Change of Currency, and Other Late Alterations, as they Affect, or Are Intended to Affect, the Kingdom of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1826). See also his second and third letters (also 1826).

\(^3\) See the discussion in Paul Langford, ‘South Briton’s Reception of North Briton, 1707–1820’ in T.C. Smout (ed.), Anglo-Scottish Relations from 1603–1900 (Oxford, 2005), 143–70.

Measuring the strength of Scottish national identity in any period is not straightforward. The biggest number ever ascribed to its nationalist cause in the nineteenth century was 104,647, the list of names garnered to petition Queen Victoria in 1898 about this wrongful use of the term ‘England’. The wider reception of the campaign is unclear yet that is not untypical for any group working on the margins. From those that took notice in England, it appeared a non-issue. Writing first in the *Positive Review*, the journal for which he was editor, the noted positivist and critic Frederick Harrison (1831–1923) suggested the petition was unwarranted and misconceived. Harrison had stood unsuccessfully as a Liberal home ruler in the 1888 general election when the concern was Ireland not Scotland. Responding to the criticism directed at him by the Reverend David Macrae, joint leader of the petition, Harrison was prepared to insist that Scotland’s name should not be absorbed into that of England, yet dismissed the legal basis of the argument. That the royal title and that of her realm was changed in 1707 he agreed, but that title could not now be asserted because it had itself been altered in 1801 upon union with Ireland.

The attack on Harrison then fell to Macrae’s partner-in-petition, Theodore Napier: ‘Scotland’s sons will not tamely submit to have their treaty rights trodden on, and their identity lost, in the name of their ancient enemy of England’. In response to the specific accusation concerning 1801, Napier contended the term ‘Great Britain’ had not been removed, it had merely added the words ‘and Ireland’. He was not alone in filling the letter pages of the newspapers with ire. Another condemnation directed at Harrison suggested ‘the ludicrous attempt to call the United Kingdom “England” is not worth commenting upon; why not call it “Cockniania” such was the London-centeredness of the view’. It was a short flurry of excitement. The Under-Secretary for Scotland Colin Scott Moncrieff dismissed the petition on behalf of her majesty: she was ‘not pleased to issue a command thereon’.

---

7 *The Scotsman*, 31 March 1898.
8 *The Scotsman*, 2 April 1898.
9 Ibid.
While the size of the petition does suggest the blanket use of ‘England’ for all parts of Britain and its Empire was unwelcome, does the evidence indicate that Scots generally, not just these petitioners, felt their national identity to be in imminent danger? Only three months later, on 24 June 1898, ‘no more than two dozen strangers . . . half drenched . . . huddled in a corrugated iron hut at the Bore stone, and three barefooted boys sheltering under the wayside hedge’ commemorated the anniversary of the battle of Bannockburn. The weather was blamed for the low turnout, as were the alternative attractions of a circus, a cricket match and a cattle show. The management of the event, having no-one there other than Macrae, Napier and Isaac Low, President of the Kilt Society, to address the gathering, was equally lambasted.\(^\text{11}\) It was no march of solidarity. Yet five years earlier an almost unbelievably appropriately named American Consul, Wallace Bruce, Esq., had joined Napier to unfurl the Scottish Standard and the British Ensign to what seems to have been greater effect. Both were thanked in verse for their efforts in creating great national interest:

\begin{quote}
The mighty crowds, the loyal mind  
Are with us year by year  
They gather home from any lands  
And join us brothers in our bands.  
And Napier, how shall words express  
In common speech to thee  
How Scotland’s heart goes forth to bless  
Her sons far o’er the sea  
How mother-love so warm and true  
Goes from the old world to the new.\(^\text{12}\)
\end{quote}

It was again a time of appealing. The House of Commons had debated Home Rule for Scotland the previous evening, without doubt its sponsor having an eye on his timing. Yet Hebert Maxwell (1845–1937), who would continue to do much to thwart the nationalists, argued there was no serious support amongst the Scottish people, to which other voices were added. Dr Gavin

\(^{11}\) *The Scotsman*, 27 June 1898.

\(^{12}\) Agnes H. Bowie, ‘Lines written on the occasion of the anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn, June 24th 1893: Inscribed to Wallace Bruce, Esq., American consul at Edinburgh, and Theodore Napier, Esq. of Magdala, president of the Scottish National Association of Victoria, on the occasion of their unfurling the Scottish standard and British ensign from the flagstaff at the borestone’. NLS, RB.m.143f.111.
Brown Clark’s motion to devolve upon a Scottish legislature the Scottish busi-
ness that the Imperial parliament was unable to engage was defeated by 168
votes to 150.13

I Scotland’s Nationalism

Given such an unpromising contemporary assessment, is it worthwhile to
examine Scottish nationalism through the sentiment of a few activists on the
margins huffing and puffing, writing a lot of letters, perhaps in green ink, but were supported by . . . who exactly? It is difficult to deny the difficulty, as
the one thing nationalist groups in Scotland have traditionally lacked is
paid-up members. Those who might have supported the realignment of con-
stitutional powers have long been reluctant to shell out even a few shillings
to join nationalist organisations. Nor have they been keen to come out for
the cause. The 100,000-strong petition of 1898 was no match for the mon-
ster rallies gathered by O’Connell in the 1830s or 1840s or for the eighty-five
MPs who pledged their support, and that of their constituencies, to Parnell’s
home rule cause in the 1880 general election and his activities until 1891.
The present author has argued elsewhere that an analysis of Scottish nation-
al identity and nationalism focusing on parliamentary activity and political
membership, while valid on its own terms, is able to provide no more than
partial explanation of the phenomenon in the nineteenth century. From
that, the concept of unionist-nationalism was coined to root the language of
identity and nationalism in its sociological moorings.14 Being neither politi-
cal nor cultural in essence, Scottish nationalism is best understood through
such a construction.15 To précis the argument against which that and the
present text contends, because there was very little in terms of a national-
ist movement to model, explanations were instead sought for what was not
occurring; explanations were sought for ‘failure’. It was mooted that a stage
had not been followed, a step had not been taken, and that therefore national
identity had not become nationalism, had not advocated independent nation-
hood, as it should or could have done. Likewise, it was posited that Scottish

13 The Scotsman, 24 June 1893. Clark was returned to parliament as the crofter candidate
for Dingwall in 1884.
14 Graeme Morton, Unionist Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, Scotland 1830–1860
(East Linton, 1999).
15 David McCrone, Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Nation (2nd edition; London,
2001).
national identity was pushed off the correct trajectory by nefarious means, be it Anglicisation, reformism, abdication by its hegemonic leaders, with the bourgeoisie and intellectuals being the first targets in line, or, by worker concerns that were British, and later international, but resulting in a cultural politics with no desire to push for a Scottish parliament with lesser or greater devolved powers.

The need to look beyond Scottish nationalism as a party political movement striving to match nation and state must deal with an apparent quandary. As it developed from the second half of the nineteenth century, the nationalists focused on the most important political event in Scotland’s history—the Union of 1707; moreover it was a political event which placed the people (read nationalism) against the actions of its political leaders (again nationalism). It is no surprise that commentators have taken nationalism as their focus, and they have come up against the problem identified: there were smatterings of republicanism, of advocacy for local-national parliaments, and of a home rule movement in the final two decades of the century, but few shibboleths were slain in the cause of independence by party or extra-parliamentary groups. Instead, the institutional differences which gave Scotland its independence within the Union were made to mark the nation through the highest political events of modern Scotland.\(^\text{16}\) This quandary is all the more acute because the Union became fundamental to Scotland’s independence, not by its removal, but by its re-statement.\(^\text{17}\) The wrongful use of ‘England’ when ‘Britain’ was meant struck out at this principle. Whenever realignment in the constitutional structure reached the agenda of Scottish nationalists, the product of the sociological structure of their day meant they used the Union of 1707 to mark their freedom. At this time, to these people, Scotland is Britain: the Union of 1707 made it so.

\section*{II Union in Politics}

The Union settlement was debated at length and with no little agitation in the years leading up to parliamentary reform in 1832. ‘Give Scotland a


\(^{17}\) The best analysis of the reasons for union is C.A. Whatley, with Derek J Patrick, \textit{The Scots and the Union} (Edinburgh, 2006).
Representative Government’ declared the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons Lord Althorp when plans were formulated in 1830 for reform throughout Britain. Afterthought, irritation or obligation, when reform for Scotland was entrusted to Lord Advocate Francis Jeffrey (1773–1850) and Solicitor-General Lord Henry Cockburn (1779–1854), a related but in many important ways separate activity held sway from England, Wales and Ireland—made necessary by the distinct legal systems. Gordon Pentland shows that the Scottish MPs’ main concern was the kind of reform that could be achieved rather than opposition to electoral expansion, although Tories such as Archibald Alison (1792–1867) and Walter Scott (in his final months, he died in September 1832) were critical. It was part of a debate in which Scotland’s political élite could and did employ an appeal to the Union settlement in matters of national concern. It could be done as a good moan just as N.T. Phillipson has argued reform of the Court of Session met ‘noisy inaction’ to enable only change that was regarded as being in the interests of Scotland to pass. In 1807 the Court of Session debated the ‘great evil’ which resulted from the number of cases dealt with from Scotland and asked whether a Court of Review would be contrary to the eighteenth and nineteenth Articles of Union. The process, and the re-statement of the 1707 agreement, was a claim to ‘semi-independence’ status. While debating the English reform bill, Lord Gower (1758–1833) argued that even the federalist Fletcher of Saltoun or those who rioted in the burghs at the conclusion of union would have been in favour of the kind of political reform under discussion. Reflecting on the insoluble links between Ireland and England the next year, Alison concurred that ‘all the prosperity of Scotland has been owing to English influence: how has it that the same influence at the same time has been the cause of all the misery of Ireland?’ His answer was that Scotland had gone into union as independent whereas Ireland was won by the sword. It was not that the Union had replaced the now defunct institutions of Scotland that made it so successful. Even for

19 Ibid., 102.
21 Glasgow Herald, 27 April 1807.
22 Phillipson, ‘Nationalism and Ideology’, 168–9; Morton, Unionist-Nationalism, 10, 17.
opponents of parliamentary enfranchisement, it was this sense of nationality, wherein Scotland equated its independence with its status in the Union settlement, which made Britain.24

Parliamentary reform opened up reflections on Scotland’s constitutional heritage. It was an opportunity to revisit the number of MPs sent to Westminster with Scotland’s wealth having increased, to end the Union being ‘violated’ by unfair representation.25 Similarly, in Scotland’s Appeal to her Sons, a bill posted in Edinburgh in June 1832 and addressed ‘to all Scotsmen, whether Whigs or Tories, Reformers or Anti-Reformers’, the number of MPs allocated to Scotland was condemned: ‘Because Scotland was cheated at the Union, does that afford any good reason for her being ALWAYS cheated?’ it wailed.26

Street literature is a useful indicator of how complex constitutional debates could be essentialised. As the first reform hustings got under way, support for William Aytoun in Edinburgh (prior to the withdrawal of his candidature, and note his colour was the ‘livery of nature’) built the benefits of reform upon the newly expanded Britain: ‘Let them boast of the Shamrock, the Thistle and the Rose/I sing of what is fairer than any of those—/Of the cause of Reform and the Garland of Green.’27 Here, parliamentary reform was to make union all that it should be; reform was to give Scotland access to the institutions and representativeness that had been missing in 1707, or had been undermined since.28 The electors of Haddington were told that franchise reform would give them the kind of equality with England that had not happened in 1707, a ‘real’ union rather than ‘one of humility’.29 When the parliamentary franchise was to be opened up for a second time in 1867 the speeches advocating the benefits of constitutional stability noted that good government had been the result of 1832 and that it was time to spread the privilege of voting to others of substantiated loyalty. With pro-reform rallies in Glasgow and Edinburgh attended in the tens of thousands, the pro-reform banners spoke of liberty that was both Scottish and British and invested in the state. In 1884, when the country franchise was to be enacted, workers’ justice was commensurate with


26 Scotland’s Appeal to her Sons, NAS, Buccleuch Muniments, GD224/507/31, printed in Pentland, ‘Scottish Parliamentary Reform’, 114.

27 Huzza for Reform and the Garland of Green! A New Song (1832), NLS, RB.m.143(172).

28 Ibid., 121.

29 Ibid., 122.
a strong constitution where liberty was guaranteed through the success of union, linking the rights of men with their privileges as citizens ‘animated by the spirit of sincere patriotism’.30

III Origins of a Concept

The most explicit nationalist use of union-created Britain to better secure Scotland’s independence came two decades on from the creation of the £10 franchise with the campaigning of the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights (NAVSR).31 This short-lived organisation grew from a challenge issued through the letters page of the Edinburgh Advertiser on the eve of the 1852 general election, exhorting the prospective candidates to resist any further centralisation of the function of government within the civil service in Whitehall.32 The plea came from John Grant, but it was his brother James who would carry the movement forward. The public reputation of James Grant (1822–87) had been established with a fast-paced historical novel based on the Peninsular War (1808–1814) The Romance of War, or, The Highlanders in Spain, first published in 1846. It developed Grant’s fascination with the romantic historical memory of Scotland but in this inaugural novel he focused on the Spanish people, the pride and earnestness of their men, the beauty of their women, the patriotism of General Espoz y Mina (1781–1836) and of the Basque guerrilleros. It compared the straightforward and plain, yet successful and admired, military strategy of General Wellington with the noble instinctiveness of General Mina, just as others had contrasted Wellington with Napoleon.33 Grant’s father served during that war while Grant himself took up an appointment as ensign in the 62nd Foot Regiment in Chatham, Kent. In 1843 he turned to writing, producing The Romance of War from his father’s experiences. While working on his second novel Jane Seton:


31 Morton, Unionist Nationalism, 133–54.

32 Edinburgh Advertiser, 13 April 1852. The challenge was first picked up by the Free Church liberal Charles Cowan who was returned to parliament along with Thomas Babington Macaulay in the July election.

Or, The King’s Advocate, a Scottish Historical Romance (1853) Grant identified the need for the NAVSR.

From the off, its protagonists took great care to establish that its aims, the ‘national rights’ of Scotland, could and should be established only by the proper working of the Union relationship with England. Grant was co-secretary of the NAVSR with his brother John, and their chosen figurehead was Archibald William Montgomerie, 13th earl of Eglinton and 1st earl of Winton (1812–61). Lord lieutenant of Ireland (1852), rector of both Marischal College in Aberdeen (1851–3) and Glasgow University (1852–4), Eglinton served with Lord Derby’s governments in 1852 and 1858–9. Like Grant, who toyed with the Jacobite sympathies of his father, Eglinton was an intellectual romantic, living in a Gothic castle in Ayrshire and noted for organising the grandiose chivalric tournament in 1839 that took his name.34 His conviction that he would not have joined the NAVSR if the Union were in any way to be threatened was aired at their first public meeting. Hugh Scott of Gala denounced accusations that the movement posed a threat to the Union, suggesting that was ‘a “got up” affair’. Claiming to be the first national movement since 1708 he declared: ‘We take our stand upon the Treaty of Union, and by that Treaty do we stand or fall’.35 They complained that Scotland’s rights had been infringed by public offices under English Board control, most notably Customs, Excise, Stamps and Taxation.36 The Lord Provost of Perth proclaimed at a meeting of the movement held in that town in March 1854, that ‘the object in view was to defend the rights given to Scotland by the Treaty of Union’. On the same platform, the political theorist and Free Churchman Patrick Edward Dove (1815–73) moved the resolution that ‘the Union provided for the national laws and institutions of Scotland, and any attempts to place these under English control, under centralisation, was against the principles of the Union’.37 In 1857, 150 years after union, the benefits of the English county system applied to Scotland were advocated for ‘all friends of the national rights of Scotland—the admirers of Wallace—the welcomers of

35 Hugh Scott, Progress of the Scottish National Movement, No. II (Edinburgh, 1853), 4, 5.
36 ‘The Scotsman versus Truth, to the editor of the Caledonian Mercury’ (NAVSR, c.1853).
37 The Times, 10 March 1854.
the brave Hungarian exile’ (Louis Kossuth). In the same week, the writer and politician Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803–73) proclaimed to great applause that ‘every English victory was to be a Scottish triumph and every Scottish glory an English boast’. The words were spoken on the occasion of his installation as Rector of Glasgow University.

IV Rhetorical Balance

The language of unionist-nationalism was a fine line to tread, making it open to misinterpretation. In all their public utterances the leaders of the NAVSR made it clear that their loyalty was to the current monarchical line and to the constitutional arrangements established in 1707. It appears to have been an argument developed in the period between the initial call to form the association and its first public meeting in Glasgow chaired by Eglinton. But in an unpublished essay which Grant dates as being ‘Written about the time we formed the Scottish Rights Association’ he struck a much more ambivalent stance on the benefits of union. He took the unionist-nationalist line that it was not for the present poor level of government that his ancestors had signed the Treaty of Union, yet continued by suggesting that in so doing, they had ‘designated the ancient kingdom of Scotland to the rank of an English county’. His earliest musings suggested that no-one could argue that Scotland owed its prosperity to union, for only now was the country recovering from the immediate effects of 1707 when there was starvation and misery, towns that fell into ruin, villages that disappeared and old established families that decayed. Anticipating local government participation in the movement he formed, Grant identified how the immediate passage of the Union had weakened the Scottish burghs: Falkirk was now a ‘shambles’, the fleet of merchant ships which had operated out of Kirkcaldy was reduced to ‘one coasting slope of sixty tons and two ferry boats’, a similar fate befell the boats operating out of St Andrews, while Culross lost its great salt pans. Glasgow’s population was estimated to have dropped by 3,000 people and the grass grew green on Edinburgh’s High Street, such was the effect of depopulation on its once renowned bustle. Grant raised the prospect that the office of Commissioner to the General Assembly, and even the General Assembly itself, would be

38 The NAVSR’s James Begg writing in the *Elgin Courant*, 16 January 1857.
40 NLS, MS 8878–85 (iv).
threatened in the same way as the Court of Session and the Convention of the Royal Burghs had been undermined. He argued that Catholicism and Puseyism had made such inroads into British public life of late that ‘a time may come when the Moderator shall be dragged from his Chair and the assembly dispersed by sound of trumpet as in the days of Cromwell “the blasphemer”’.41

Grant’s unpublished criticism of the Union was one of blame, with emphasis on the ills that followed its immediate passage and being decidedly apocalyptic on how its current operation would impact on the burghs and institutions of Scotland. Yet publicly the Union was the nation’s future. Grant had already formed an argument blaming administrative centralisation for undermining the otherwise beneficial local independence established through the institutional separateness of union-created Britain. It is noticeable that it was the provosts and councillors from burgh and county councils who were to bulk out the office bearers of the NAVSR, arguing for greater powers of operation to be directed to them.42 If the principle of union was right, but its operation had been undermined, then there were grounds for a common cause with the localities. But if the principle of union was flawed, then it would be uncertain whether local government would benefit from legislative power returning to Edinburgh—that, after all, was centralisation, too.43

Grant’s castigation of the Oxford movement and more generally the Roman Catholic Church as part of the centralisation threat was also less than straightforward. If the British state was no longer the guarantor of Protestantism, but instead a means by which Catholicism could be promoted within Scotland through its ‘infiltration’ of Westminster, then all the more reason to curtail the ever growing power of the British state over an administratively emaciated Scotland. Yet Grant’s fictional work was more ecumenical. Despite writing of Scottish Presbyterian soldiers who would ‘sooner hearken to the devil than the Catholic priests’, Grant’s primary character in The Romance of War, Robert Stuart, is brought closer to God through the experience of assisting at Mass in the Cathedral of Mérida.44 Yet, in the NAVSR, Presbyterianism was identified as a central pillar of the Scottish nation, one which centralisation would

41 Ibid.
42 Scottish Rights Association, Address to the People (Edinburgh, 1855), 8–18.
43 The argument that even centralisation of government within Scotland, through parliament or a Scottish secretary, would produce poor legislation is analysed in anonymous, Scottish Rights and Grievances: A Letter to the Right Honourable Duncan McLaren, Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh by A Scotchman (Edinburgh, c.1854), 12–13.
offer nothing but harm. How, Grant mused, can we maintain the faith of the sovereign and ‘maintain inviolate a Treaty which every year is deliberately broken’. He went on: ‘Even though we are all Presbyterian, and staunch as Knox himself’ the threat was a ‘body of 600 men, belonging to a country proposing laws and religion so diametrically opposite’. Yet as with his fiction, it is not straightforward: Grant converted to Roman Catholicism in 1875 and his son Roderick became a Roman Catholic priest.

In the 1880s James Grant completed his ambitious *Old and New Edinburgh*. Originally a periodical, it was later collated and published by Cassels in six volumes. It gave him the opportunity to weave tales of Scottish history with those of his beloved Edina, and offered another platform to reanalyse the effects of the Union on Scotland’s long-term development. Grant included engravings of the pre-1707 Scottish mint and of some of the tools used in the production of money to make plain what had been given up in the bargain. He identified ‘the great national tragedy which the Parliament House witnessed in 1707 – for a tragedy it was then deemed by the Scottish people’. It was assumed to be ‘a matter of common history that the legislative Union between Scotland and England was carried by the grossest bribery’. He made plain it was signed under mob threat in the Union Cellar of 177 High Street, with the clear implication that it was a nefarious rouse upon the Scottish people. It was a much more anti-union rhetoric than that found thirty years earlier. Grant even suggested mischievously that the city’s Union Club would undoubtedly fold because of the unpopularity of its name. Despite selecting words written at the time of the formation of the NAVSR he talked no longer of a workable union, but of a union failing now, and by extrapolation, which had always failed. The ruin and stagnation that resulted in the towns was confirmed with the words of the capital’s mid-Victorian Lord Provost William Chambers “In short, this may be called, no less appropriately than emphatically, the dark ages of Edinburgh”. Yet Grant talked of the great growth that had taken place in Scotland in the Victorian age, increasing its revenue to the Exchequer, but increasing its national revenue to a much greater extent:

45 NLS, MS 8878–85 (iv).
47 Ibid., I, 162.
48 Ibid., I, 163–4.
49 Ibid., V, 122.
50 ‘Scotland: Ex Picturesque Europe No. 44’, Fragment of NLS, MS.8882 (c.1878).
'Scotland rose to what she is today, by her own exertions, unaided, and often obstructed'.\textsuperscript{52} Grant’s public view had now shifted; the Union could no longer be endorsed as a good deal undermined by developments of modern government, but was to be considered as a flaw which Scotland had had to overcome. He concluded the sixth and final volume of this history by confirming this national struggle. The ‘dark shadow cast by the Union has long since passed away’. But while he had once argued that Scotland benefited from administrative neglect at Westminster, now that neglect was a hindrance: ‘it is owing alone to the indomitable energy, the glorious spirit of self-reliance, and the patriotism of her people, that we find the Edinburgh of today what she is, in intellect and beauty, second to no city in the world’.\textsuperscript{53}

V Invisibility of Union

From the 1880s the unionist cause was that of 1801 in the British parliament’s debates over the Irish question.\textsuperscript{54} This concern would frame attempts by the Scottish Home Rule Association (formed in 1886) to campaign for legislative control on Scottish matters within the Empire.\textsuperscript{55} In England, union maintained its military cache. The Union Jack Club was established in 1904 for soldiers and sailors staying in London while in transit. Ethel McCaul, a Red Cross nurse during the Boer War whose public work grew in influence, proposed the idea to help returning soldiers avoid the ‘debauchery and wickedness’ of the city.\textsuperscript{56} It officially opened in 1907 in the presence of King Edward VII, the queen, and the prince and princess of Wales.\textsuperscript{57} But there is otherwise remarkably little comment on the Union, or use of union terminology, to be found when surveying the Times, The Scotsman or Glasgow Herald newspapers.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., I, 165.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., VI, 368.
\textsuperscript{55} SHRA, The Union of 1707 Viewed Financially, reprinted from the Scottish Review, October (1887).
\textsuperscript{56} The Times, 26 February 1903. McCaul’s Under the Care of the Japanese War Office (London, 1904) was the result of a visit to the Red Cross Society of Japan sanctioned by Alexandra, queen consort to Edward VII; New York Times, 18 March 1905.
\textsuperscript{57} The Scotsman, 15 June 1903.
\textsuperscript{58} The Glasgow Herald’s collection of bi-centenary essays were edited by P.Hume Brown. see his ‘The Union of the Parliaments of England and Scotland, 1707’, Scottish Historical Review, 4 (1907), 121–34 and, in the same issue, ‘William Law, ‘The Union
invisibility of union, then, is a final variant of unionist nationalism: did it no longer focus the nationalist cause? There is some evidence for this. On 1 May 1907 *The Scotsman* marked the bicentenary with a thoughtful essay by James Mackinnon. It was subtitled ‘The Inauguration of the Union’ and made mention of the not altogether immaculate diary of events kept by Sir John Clerk of Penicuik and the sermon preached that day by the Lord Bishop of Oxford. Mention was made of the musical composition to provide thanksgiving and the ringing of church bells at banquets and illuminations in London, and here Clerk is quoted, ‘at no time were Scotsmen more acceptable to the English than on that day’.59 Fletcher of Saltoun and J.G.Lockhart were cited for ‘their vexation in angry outbursts and predicting the ruin of their country’, but the article is dismissive of, if bland about, any contemporary opposition.60

Others, including the Convention of Royal Burghs, were also reluctant to give the approaching anniversary much priority on their agenda: ‘The subjects to be discussed include the bi-centenary of the parliamentary Union of Scotland with England, the regulation of ice cream shops and places of refreshment other than hotels and public houses, school history books, the treatment of consumption . . . ’61 The day itself proved problematic to organise. With the Lord Mayor of London unable to attend, the Convention sought to remove the toast to ‘The United Kingdom’ since no Englishman would be present to reply. It was noted that few if anybody knew that the bicentenary was to be celebrated and that a great many ‘entertained difference of opinion of the matter, because they believed Scotland had not been treated well at the hands of England in the matters of legislation and public grants’. Compromising on it being no celebration, just the marking of a great historical event, it was decided that when the Under Secretary of the Colonies proposed the toast of ‘The United Kingdom’, he would be on his guard not to give away either the Convention or Scotland.62

Having been sidelined by the Irish question, was the Union, then, ‘Our Only Game’?63 This *Scotsman* article chose to ask what point there was in debating the Union on its bicentenary—it was, at the time, the only game in town. Was it failure, the author asked, if it ‘gave to Scotsmen, equally with

---

59 *The Scotsman*, 1 May 1907.
60 Ibid.
61 *The Scotsman*, 14 March 1907.
62 Ibid.
63 *The Scotsman*, 1 May 1907.
Englishmen, the government of a great Empire, bounded by distant seas, not the narrow limits of an insignificant island.64 While admitting that there had been disputes about the Union articles covering free trade, friction over the payment of the Equivalent and the loss of the Scottish Privy Council, and while the Jacobite threat had been there to exploit the initial discontent, the underlining assumption was that Union was a reality and its removal would only be detrimental to Empire.

In the century between the first and second centenary of 1707, commentators had offered alternative interpretations but still regarded the Union as inviolate, because it created Britain. Through the sometimes difficult semantics employed by James Grant and those whose views he reflected, union was first the means for Scotland’s institutional independence, and then a hindrance but not an obstacle to Scotland’s growth, and then a fixture as Empire reached its pinnacle.65 It was why ‘England’ failed as the label for the constitutional basis of Scotland in the nineteenth century; no longer could the name be proffered as David Hume had famously used it.66 Scotland was part of Britain, not England, and commemoration fell on ‘the “steady virtue” we owe the settlement of 1707’. Recalling the words from Viscount Tarbat (1630–1714) in the lead up to 1707, the importance of Britain to Scotland’s future was restated:

> Unless we be part of each other, the Union will be a blood puddin’ to breed a cat—that is, till one or the other be hungry, and then the puddin’ flyes. May wee be Brittains, and down goe the old ignominious names of Scotland and England. Scotland or England are words unknown in our native language. England is a dishonourable name imposed on Brittain by Jutland pirates and mercenaries usurping on their lords.67

It was perhaps a curious quote to dredge up as the bicentenary day approached, but it indicates the continued importance of nomenclature to Scotland as Britain.

---

64 Ibid.
65 Even with the demand for a Scottish parliament, maintaining the integrity of Empire was one the ABC’s of Home Rule, ‘The Union of 1707 Viewed Financially’.
67 *The Scotsman*, 3 April 1907.
Don’t put N.B. on your paper; put Scotland and be done with it. Alas, that I should be stabbed in the house of my friends! The name of my native land is not North Britain, whatever may be the name of yours.¹

This scolding is from a letter written by Robert Louis Stevenson in April 1888 to the novelist S. R. Crockett, author of The Lilac Sunbonnet and one of a group of late Victorian Scottish writers most often characterised as ‘kailyard’ (or ‘cabbage-patch’) writers. Stevenson’s comments are interesting for a number of reasons: for their confirmation that in the late nineteenth century ‘North Britain’ was still in currency as the unionist name for Scotland, despite a growing movement for Home Rule; and that it appeared to be accepted as such by Stevenson’s kailyard correspondent, thus suggesting that there is indeed a relationship between provincial status and parochial writing. The quotation is interesting on another level also for the temptation it offers to characterise Stevenson himself as a kind of honorary or proto-interwar Scottish Renaissance writer committed to the recovery of a distinctive self-determining national identity for his country.

Yet, it is not quite accurate to enlist Stevenson in the ranks of MacDiarmid and Company on the basis of this letter, tempting as it might be. Stevenson, in his novels and short stories, clearly pointed towards the Modernist world of psychological fiction. However, as a Scotsman, and despite his obvious attachment to his native land, he more characteristically shared Walter Scott’s aim of ‘tracing the evanescent manners of his own country’ rather than the active regenerative impulse of the interwar revival movement.² For example, in his introduction to the Scots-language poems in his 1887 collection Underwoods, Stevenson commented that ‘the day draws near when this illustrious and malleable tongue shall quite be forgotten; and Burns’ Ayrshire, and

Dr MacDonald’s ‘Aberdeen-awa’, and Scott’s brave, metropolitan utterance will be all equally the ghosts of speech. And he added: ‘Till then I would love to have my hour as a native Maker, and be read by my own country-folk in our own dying language: an ambition surely rather of the heart than of the head, so restricted as it is in prospect of endurance, so parochial in bounds of space.’ And however enjoyable they may be to read, the character of the Scots-language poems in *Underwoods*, formally and in ideas, points us to the past rather than towards a revitalised future.

Stevenson’s elegiac plea for Scotland’s distinctive language—a plea which could be extended metaphorically as an elegy for the distinctive identity of Scotland itself—is completely at variance with the ambitious aims of the revival movement of the 1920s, given impulse and direction by C. M. Grieve/Hugh MacDiarmid in the years immediately after the end of World War I, but soon attracting and involving a wide range of writers and other activists committed to working for a new Scotland. What made this literature-led revival movement (a movement which soon became popularly known as ‘the Scottish Renaissance’) unique among Scottish cultural movements was the belief of those involved that any regeneration of the nation’s artistic culture could not be separated from revival in its social, economic and political life. This was something new in Scottish affairs and essentially different from earlier patriotic attempts by writers such as Scott and Stevenson to preserve something of vanishing Scottish traditions; and different too from the turn of the century ‘Renascence’ associated with Patrick Geddes and his *Evergreen* magazine, which did not have an ideological agenda which involved self-determination but did have a relationship with the backward-looking Celtic Twilight movement and the writer William Sharp/Fiona Macleod. Neil Gunn’s critique of Walter Scott’s fiction during his *Scots Magazine* review of Edwin Muir’s *Scott and Scotland* in 1936 makes clear the distinction between these earlier Scottish patriots and the new interwar movement. Speaking of Scott’s historical novels, Gunn said:

> It was not that the history was untrue or was inadequate subject matter for his genius; it was that it no longer enriched or influenced a living national tradition; it had not even the potency of pure legend; it was story-telling or romance set in a void; it was seen backwards as in the round of some spyglass and had interpretive bearing neither upon

---

The Importance of Little Magazines in the Interwar Movement for Scottish Renewal

In other words, while Scott and Stevenson looked elegiacally to Scotland’s past, the objective of the interwar reformers, in literature and in life, was to create a Scotland that would throw off its acquired dependent status as a North British province and move forward to retake its place as a self-determining European nation.

There were therefore two different but related aspects of the movement for national renewal begun in the years immediately after the end of World War I. First of all, there was its identity as a Scottish manifestation of Modernism as evidenced in its artistic activities, and especially in the literature of the post-1918 period. Secondly, there was the agenda for national renewal, not just in the arts, but in the social, economic and political life of the nation. In this regard, ‘the condition of Scotland’ became a major theme of the period in discursive as well as creative writing. What both elements needed in order to make progress was some public forum for the dissemination and discussion of new ideas and the challenging of outworn traditions.

With regard to the avant-garde art of the Modernist period generally, this role was undertaken to a large extent by the numerous small magazines emanating from the cities of Europe, from London and from the USA: publications that were irreverent, most often short-lived, but which created an atmosphere receptive to change. There was nothing of this nature in Scotland. The great days of the Edinburgh Review and Blackwood’s were over, although Blackwood’s achieved a temporary period of increased popularity as part of the war propaganda machine during the First World War. Hugh MacDiarmid’s letters from Salonika and Marseilles during the war make it clear that he was very aware of new developments in London as well as in Europe, such as, for example, the editing and writing activities of Ezra Pound and the founding of Wyndham Lewis’s Blast magazine in response to the success of Marinetti’s Futurist manifestos and campaigns. In the first ‘Causerie’ (as he termed his editorials) of his new Scottish Chapbook magazine in August 1922, MacDiarmid ironically lamented Scotland’s lack of such ‘phenomena recognizable as a propaganda of ideas’; and he continued:

None of these significant little periodicals—crude, absurd, enthusiastic, vital—have yet appeared in Auchtermuchty or Ardnamurchan. No new

---

publishing houses have sprung up mushroom-like. . . It is discouraging to reflect that this is not the way the Dadaists go about the business!\textsuperscript{5}

His response, as so often in his life, was to provide his own solution to the problem, and the revolution he instigated through a series of Scottish little magazines was orchestrated from the small east-coast town of Montrose: a Modernist revolution from the periphery of what had become a peripheral nation, as opposed to one emanating from a European metropolitan centre. His little magazines, however, played a similarly challenging role in Scotland to that of their counterparts in the wider world.

In this short discussion, I will limit detailed discussion of the new interwar literary magazines to MacDiarmid’s \textit{Scottish Chapbook}, and in particular to its important role in the revival of the Scots language as a literary language for a new, modern—and Modernist—Scottish literature. I will then move on to the role played by little magazines and periodicals of a more general nature in the attempt to revitalise the wider social, economic and political life of Scotland.

\textit{The Scottish Chapbook} appeared in 1922, that memorable year of Joyce’s \textit{Ulysses}, Eliot’s \textit{The Waste Land} and the establishment of the \textit{Criterion} magazine under Eliot’s editorship. MacDiarmid’s \textit{Chapbook} just beat the \textit{Criterion} on to the periodical stage, its first issue appearing in August 1922 prior to the \textit{Criterion’s} appearance in October. With its red cover, lion rampant cover-image and motto, ‘Not Traditions—Precedents’, the \textit{Scottish Chapbook}’s aim was overtly revolutionary. Among its aims were: ‘to encourage and publish the work of contemporary Scottish poets and dramatists, whether in English, Gaelic or Braid Scots’; and ‘to bring Scottish Literature into closer touch with current European tendencies in technique and ideation’.\textsuperscript{6} This second aim is significant because it makes clear that at the very outset the movement’s agenda was an international and non-parochial one, as opposed to the charges of something called ‘national essentialism’ so often raised against it by present-day cultural critics and literary theorists. Similarly, the aim to encourage writing in all three of Scotland’s languages shows that, even if these activists had not yet had the opportunity (like their later critics) of reading Bakhtin in translation, they were themselves already well attuned to Scotland’s polyphonic language situation.

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Scottish Chapbook}, 1.1 (August 1922); reprinted in Alan Riach (ed.), \textit{Hugh MacDiarmid: Selected Prose} (Manchester, 1992), 7.

The contents of the *Chapbook* itself included poetry in English and Scots, a play in Gaelic, creative prose and translations of MacDiarmid’s Scots-language poems into French. There were also references to European philosophers and biographies of Scottish writers, the latter an important item for a revival aimed at educating its readers in a new Scottish literature and new Scottish authors. This was therefore a magazine for a revival that was to be neither parochial nor North British provincial, but one which would bring a distinctive Scottish presence onto the European stage.

MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir had both been educated in what one might call ‘European Studies’ by the *New Age* magazine, edited in London by A. R. Orage from the early years of the century. Muir had become a regular contributor, with his first book *We Moderns* of 1918 having initially been published as a series of articles in the *New Age*. As a result of its success in America, he obtained a contract with the American *Freeman* magazine which enabled him and his wife Willa to travel in Europe in the early 1920s and so to acquire a first-hand as opposed to a print-based knowledge of European affairs. Some of his contributions to MacDiarmid’s *Chapbook* and to his second magazine *The Scottish Nation* were sent from Europe during this period. MacDiarmid too had acquired much of his knowledge of European philosophers and artists via the articles in the *New Age*, although he himself did not become a regular contributor to it until the mid-1920s. Orage’s magazine was, however, a strong influence on his own approach to periodical publication.

As it happened, however, it was the second magazine, *The Scottish Nation*, which proved closer to the *New Age* ‘in technique and ideation’; for the *Scottish Chapbook* soon became the centre of a controversy as to whether the Scots language could be revived for literary purposes; and it is therefore for the editorial arguments leading to ‘A Theory of Scots Letters’ in the spring of 1923, together with the appearance of the new Scots-language poet ‘Hugh M’Diarmid’ in its third issue of October 1922, that this first Scottish Renaissance, or Scottish Modernist, periodical is chiefly significant.

The Scots-language controversy had initially come about as a consequence of the London Robert Burns Club proposing in March 1920 to establish a Vernacular Circle of the Club in the attempt to stop the decline of the Scots language: a proposal strongly supported by prominent Scots such as John Buchan and the poet Violet Jacob.7 This proposal therefore came from a similar impulse to revive distinctive features of Scottish life as did MacDiarmid’s

---

new ventures, but the promotion of Scots-language speaking and writing competitions in schools was not the Modernist revolution he had in mind. In relation to this, it is useful to remember that MacDiarmid’s postwar literary ambitions for himself and his country initially had little place for the Scots language as an avant-garde literary language. He argued that most Scottish literature ‘is, of course, and must continue to be, written in English. But it is not English on that account. . . . It is no more English in spirit than the literature of the Irish Literary Revival, most of which was written in the English language, was English in spirit’. In an acrimonious correspondence in the *Aberdeen Free Press* in late December 1921 and January 1922, some months before the founding of the *Scottish Chapbook*, he attacked the London Burns Club for its interference in attempting to revive Vernacular Scots and insisted that ‘any attempt to create a Doric “boom” just now. . . .would be a gross disservice to Scottish life and letters.’ Inconsistency in relation to language is one of an array of such charges regularly levied against MacDiarmid, but I think it is often forgotten that his postwar aim in relation to literature was to bring about a revival where a distinctive modern Scottish literature—and he himself as a distinctive modern Scottish poet—could take a place alongside avant-garde writers such as Eliot, Pound, Yeats and a French poet such as Valéry. The narrative of his conversion to Scots is an intriguing and sometimes a controversial one, but one has to remember that what he was primarily interested in was Scots as a literary language able to produce a modern, forward-looking literature that was distinctively Scottish; not a revival of demotic Scots for everyday purposes.

*The Scottish Chapbook* was therefore launched as a monthly magazine in August 1922 in the context of this developing dispute over the viability of Scots as a modern literary language. Its ‘Causerie’ sections between this first issue and March 1923 provide an intriguing demonstration of its editor’s shifting position—and of the usefulness of little magazines in the furtherance of new directions such as this. What precisely brought about MacDiarmid’s change of view is not certain, but his own successful experimentation with Scots in the short lyrics published in the magazine from October 1922 onwards must have had something to do with it; as also, perhaps, had the recognition that, as with other small countries, a distinctive

---


language could be a signifier of a distinctive nationhood. MacDiarmid’s biographer Alan Bold suggests that it is very probable that he obtained an early copy of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* when it was published by Sylvia Beach in Paris in February 1922 and that his excitement at Joyce’s linguistic experimentation encouraged his own experiments with the Scots language.\(^{10}\) Whatever lay behind his change of heart, what he stressed again and again in his editorials was the importance of the ‘modern’; any use of Scots had to be able to take both language and ideas into the modern world.\(^{11}\) At the same time, and in accordance with the interest in mythology and the primitive which was also part of the Modernist cultural experience, his own experimentation appears to have uncovered the psychological potential in Scots: ‘the extent to which it contains lapsed or unrealised qualities which correspond to “unconscious” elements of distinctive Scottish psychology’.\(^{12}\) By February and March 1923, in the series of Causeries titled ‘A Theory of Scots Letters’, while he was still insisting that any revival of the Scots language must be alive to the needs of the modern world and not lead to ‘a sort of museum department of our unconsciousness’, he was sufficiently confident to proclaim that ‘the Scots Vernacular is a vast storehouse of just the very peculiar and subtle effects which modern European literature in general is assiduously seeking.’ He described Scots as ‘an inchoate Marcel Proust—a Dostoevskian debris of ideas—an inexhaustible quarry of subtle and significant sound.’\(^{13}\)

MacDiarmid’s second periodical *The Scottish Nation*, a weekly magazine on the pattern of Orage’s *New Age* and with an explicitly international agenda, was founded in May 1923 and ran in parallel with the *Scottish Chapbook* until December 1923 when both ceased. Both were edited, published and financed by MacDiarmid himself from Montrose where he was a journalist with the *Montrose Review*. This may have given him significant editorial freedom, but commercially it was not a sustainable situation. His next periodical was the *Northern Review*, founded in May 1924, which returned to a monthly format. This was published in Edinburgh with the help of two assistant editors and a London agent, but lasted only until September 1924.

Although these little magazines founded and edited by MacDiarmid were

---


\(^{11}\) See, for example, *Scottish Chapbook* 1.3 (October 1922), 62–3; 1.7 (February 1923), 182–3; McCulloch (ed.), *Modernism and Nationalism*, 24–5, 26–7.

\(^{12}\) C. M. Grieve, *Scottish Chapbook* 1.3 (October 1922), 62; McCulloch (ed.), *Modernism and Nationalism*, 25.

\(^{13}\) McCulloch (ed.), *Modernism and Nationalism*, 27–8.
short-lived, they, like many small avant-garde magazines of the period, had an impact out of all proportion to their short lives. By the mid-1920s the name ‘Scottish Renaissance’ was regularly used to describe the new movement in literature and culture, and the principal Scottish newspapers published letters and articles on the new developments. A significant departure took place in May 1925 when the *Scottish Educational Journal* commissioned MacDiarmid to write a series of assessments of Scottish literary figures. This caused much controversy in the journal’s pages, but the commercial support it was able to offer did much to further public awareness of MacDiarmid himself, the writers he discussed, and the objectives of the revival movement. MacDiarmid’s own Modernist Scots-language lyrics and his long dramatic monologue *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* were the outstanding artistic outcomes in the 1920s of the language debates and the Scottish and European material reviewed in his own magazines as well as in the pages of other such periodicals. At the same time the Porpoise Press, a small publishing company founded in 1922, was bringing a number of recent and new poets into publication, most of them writing in Scots and encouraged by the new climate to experiment with language and poetic form.

Another important effect of the MacDiarmid magazines and the climate of change that they encouraged was the appearance of other new periodicals, not edited by him and not specifically literary or avant-garde in nature, but all committed to regeneration in various areas of Scottish life: social, economic and political as well as cultural. These included the *Scots Observer*, ‘A Weekly Review of Religion, Life and Letters’ founded in 1926 with the support of the Scottish Protestant Churches. It was edited by William Power who had greatly assisted the literary revival when on the editorial staff of the *Glasgow Herald* and it covered cultural matters of a quality nature as well as the Kirk’s preoccupation with the slums of Scotland’s cities. *The Scots Independent*, a nationalist political magazine, was also founded in 1926, and provided a platform for the growing nationalist movements (the Nationalist Party of Scotland was founded in 1928), while the *Pictish Review*, which was published briefly from 1927 to 1928 was edited by the Celticist R. Erskine of Marr whose inaugural editorial proposed ‘to present a Pictish view of things in general; to re-elucidate the values implicit, and explicit, in Pictish history and civilisation’.14 His later book, *Changing Scotland*, which set out his ideas for a Scotland which would be entirely Gaelic-speaking with a distinctive identity based on the country’s

---

Celtic culture, was adversely received by an anonymous reviewer in the *Modern Scot* in its winter 1931 issue.\(^{15}\)

The *Modern Scot* was itself founded in St Andrews in 1930 by the young American James Whyte, whose private income gave the magazine a much more secure foundation than the periodicals edited earlier by MacDiarmid. Whyte took over MacDiarmid’s avant-garde role in periodical publishing from 1930 to 1936, his magazine maintaining the links with Europe which were an important element in the Scottish Renaissance programme, as well as giving a platform to the new writing and criticism being produced in Scotland and Britain as a whole. As he was able to pay his contributors, Whyte had a more extensive group of writers to call upon, both from Scotland, London and at times from the continent. Many of the Renaissance writers—for example, Edwin and Willa Muir, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Catherine Carswell, Naomi Mitchison, MacDiarmid himself—were both contributors to the magazine and had their work reviewed in it. The *Modern Scot* also contributed to the social and political questions of the time, discussing the difference between ‘national’ and ‘nationalist’ literature, and severely criticising Wyndham Lewis’ supportive book on Hitler. In 1936 it merged with the *Scottish Standard* to form *Outlook*, and in this manifestation it carried the pre-publication excerpts from Edwin Muir’s infamous *Scott and Scotland* which proposed that the only language for an ambitious writer in Scotland to use was English, and so provoked a breach between him and MacDiarmid which was never healed. Follow-up articles on the controversy by both Muir and MacDiarmid (which give Muir’s position, as seen by himself, a slightly different aspect from that now considered almost ‘canonical’ in Scottish criticism) were later published in the *Bulletin* newspaper in January 1938.\(^{16}\)

Another new magazine in the early 1930s was the *Free Man*, founded in 1932 by Robin Black which, although clearly sympathetic to the nationalist cause, claimed to be ‘attached to no party, nor . . . thrilled to any particular policy’.\(^{17}\) It included a wide range of social, economic and cultural articles which analysed Scotland’s current situation and proposed remedies, including the series ‘Whither Scotland?’ in the October 1932 issue with contributions

---

\(^{15}\) Unsigned review of *Changing Scotland, Modern Scot* 2.4 (winter 1931), 345–7; McCulloch (ed.), *Modernism and Nationalism*, 177, 287–8.


from literary figures including Edwin Muir, Naomi Mitchison, Eric Linklater, William Soutar, Compton Mackenzie and James Whyte. It produced some of the clearest explanations of Douglassite economics in the magazines of the period, discussed schemes for assisting the unemployed through the provision of allotments and, in the international context, published articles warning of the increasing dangers of fascism by the nationalist Nannie K. Wells and other contributors. *The Free Man* was also important for its articles on the condition of the Highlands, the decline of Gaelic and proposals for regeneration.

Some of the most important little magazine contributions of the 1930s were the articles written by Neil M. Gunn in the *Scots Magazine*, which acquired a kind of Scottish Renaissance status under the editorship of J.B. Salmond by virtue of Gunn’s energetic writing about literature, nationalism and internationalism, the condition of Scotland generally, and, especially, the need for economic, social and cultural renewal in the Highlands.

An important development from outside Scotland, in addition to the increasing number of books coming out from London publishers on Scottish topics, was the editorial policy announced by the *Spectator* magazine in October 1933 of regular coverage of Scottish affairs because ‘developments are in progress in Scotland that are far too little understood or discussed outside Scotland. . . . The cultivation of Gaelic and the conscious development of a modern Scottish literature are movements demanding not only observation but discussion.’ Many of Edwin Muir’s articles on Scottish literature in the 1930s were published in the *Spectator*, as were reviews of Scottish work by Catherine Carswell.

In 1934 Routledge followed the *Spectator*’s lead with the initiation of the *Voice of Scotland* series, initially under the general editorship of Lewis Grassic Gibbon but passing to MacDiarmid after Gibbon’s early death. This important series of books succeeded MacDiarmid and Gibbon’s *Scottish Scene* or *The Intelligent Man’s Guide to Albyn* (1934), and included Edwin Muir’s *Scott and Scotland*, Willa Muir’s *Mrs Grundy in Scotland*, William Power’s *Literature and Oatmeal* and Compton Mackenzie’s *Religion in Scotland*. Equally, there were many other serious, questioning books about the condition of Scotland emanating from London publishers at this time which owed their existence to the new climate created in the previous decade and created to a large extent as a result of the forum for debate provided by the little magazines.

---

18 *Spectator*, 6 October 1933, 434.
My final little magazine of the 1930s brings MacDiarmid back into periodical publishing with *The Voice of Scotland*. He edited this from 1938 until the outbreak of war in 1939 from the Shetland island of Whalsay with the support in Edinburgh of a young assistant editor, W.R. Aitken, who saw it through the publishing process. This was a very different magazine from the *Scottish Chapbook* which began MacDiarmid’s editorial career. Although it still published new and challenging poetry—often his own which he had difficulty in placing elsewhere—its pages seem dominated by the competing political ideologies of the time, by the fears of a coming war, and by its editor’s own political and artistic frustrations.

In the 1930s, MacDiarmid had managed to be expelled from both the Scottish National Party for his communist affiliations and from the Communist Party for his nationalism; yet from his early years onwards there had been no contradiction in his own mind between nationalism and socialism—as with nationalism and internationalism they were to him two sides of the one coin. Now, the first editorial of the *Voice of Scotland* proclaimed ‘The Red Scotland Thesis’ and ‘Forward to the John Maclean Line: The End of Scottish Nationalism and the Beginning of the Social Revolution’, an editorial which attacked English imperialism and the dangers of fascism, calling instead for a return to John Maclean’s idea of a Workers’ Socialist Republic in Scotland. Such anti-English sentiment was further developed by Wendy Wood in an article which demanded Scottish neutrality in any coming war with Germany: ‘He who in the coming war chooses to die for fascist England is a traitor to world democracy’. Throughout its short life, the editorials continued to have a hectoring style: ‘This is not a Communist periodical although the editor is a member of the Communist party. But it will be restricted to left-wing writers’. At the same time, attacks were made on the left-wing English poets of the thirties, while ‘the fact of the matter is that scarcely anything has been made of the class struggle yet in Scottish literature’. The impression left by this late magazine is one of overwhelming frustration and anger—both in relation to its editor’s loss of literary opportunities and at what seems to be irreconcilable political crises at home and especially abroad. It closed with the June–August issue of 1939 and without MacDiarmid’s angry anti-Chamberlain/anti-appeasement poem of 1938 ever having been published in

---

19 *Voice of Scotland*, 1.1 (June–August 1938), 7.
20 Ibid, 17.
21 ‘Notes of the Quarter’, ibid, 24.
its pages, despite numerous discussions of the feasibility of such a publication (under the pseudonym of A. K. Laidlaw) in letters between him and his assistant editor. Yet, ‘When the Gangs Came to London’, with its wonderfully belittling rhyme: ‘Even littler/Than Hitler’, perhaps gives a truer indication of his deeper political views at that time than the impetuous and polemical editorials of *Voice of Scotland*.23

Despite the *cul-de-sac* nature of MacDiarmid’s late *Voice of Scotland*—perhaps even because of it—I would emphasise the importance of studying at first hand the little magazine culture of the 1920s and 1930s if one wants to gain a more reliable understanding of the interwar national revival movement than can be found in many of the recent cultural histories which use this period as an exemplar of a delayed ‘romantic nationalism’ or an inward-looking ‘national essentialism’. This was a very complex historical period, nationally and internationally, politically and artistically; a period of new movements springing up and of changing viewpoints as these movements themselves changed direction. Fascism at the beginning of the 1920s did not mean the same thing as the fascism of the late 1930s; the excitement aroused by the Russian Revolution in 1917 had become more uneasy by the later 1930s. The Spanish Civil War was both a human nightmare and an event which destroyed the sense of easily discernible political boundaries. (MacDiarmid’s angry poem ‘The Battle Continues’ of 1937 attacking Roy Campbell’s support of the fascists in the war could not find a publisher until 1957, when its impact was mostly lost with the loss of its original context—no doubt one of the reasons behind MacDiarmid’s *Voice of Scotland* frustration.) Little magazines can catch in their periodical articles the particular moment of such crises and changes in political thought, as well as the movement of an individual’s ideological or artistic thought processes, with an immediacy not available in the after-the-event account. And they never fail to produce the unexpected insight into the spirit of the artist and his or her period.

Scotland’s little magazines of the interwar period chart a brave attempt to escape from both a parochial and a provincial North British status, artistically and in relation to the social, economic and political life of the nation. The movement they supported produced in its own time much fine modern—and Modernist—literature in particular, while its investigations and arguments about

---

the condition and future of the country laid the foundations for the increasingly confident and outward-looking Scotland we take for granted today.

University of Glasgow
Foreigners are, if you like, curable romantics. The illusion they retain, perhaps left over from their mysterious childhood epiphanies, is that there might somewhere be a place—and a self—instantly recognizable, into which they will be able to sink with a single, timeless, contented sigh. In the curious region between that illusion and the faint terror of being utterly nowhere and anonymous, foreigners live. From there, if they are lucky, they smuggle back occasional undaunted notes, like messages in a bottle, or glimmers from the other side of the mirror.

Alastair Reid

I ‘Elsewhere the olive grove. . .’

Alastair Reid was born in 1926, son of a Church of Scotland minister in Galloway. His first years were spent in the village of Whithorn, a place he describes as ‘isolated, seldom visited, closer across the Irish Sea to Northern Ireland than it seems to the rest of Scotland’. In his autobiographical writings, he talks of an idyllic country childhood there, with summers spent on Arran. His ‘time chart’, he says, ‘divides cataclysmically into two parts, two contradictory modes of being. The first part, brief but everlasting, embraces the rural permanence I was born into in Scotland, articulated by the seasons, with the easy expectation that harvest followed harvest, that years repeated themselves with minor variations. . . a time when I was wholly unaware of an outside world’. Leaving that childhood village was, for Reid, the ‘first loss’, leaving behind forever ‘the certainty of belonging’, a ‘movement from a once-glimpsed wholeness towards a splintering of time’. The ‘second part’ of his life, he writes, ‘erupted with the Second World War [in which he served in the Royal Navy], which obliterated the predictability of anything and severed all

flow, all continuity.² Reid left Scotland in the late 1940s, and has since lived variously in France, Spain, Mallorca, the United States, South America and even (briefly) on a houseboat in England, always returning at intervals to Scotland, but living what has been an essentially itinerant life for the last six decades. His existence post-World War Two he describes as ‘a long series of transitions’, inhabiting not that lost Edenic childhood garden but a series of ‘temporary gardens’ instead.³

There are some suggestive parallels here with Louis MacNeice, born in Belfast twenty years earlier, in 1907. MacNeice’s father was a Church of Ireland rector (later bishop); like Reid, MacNeice experienced a childhood loss which compromised any future sense of ‘belonging’. For MacNeice, that loss originated in the death of his mother, when, as he said in ‘Autobiography’, ‘the black dreams came’. The associated grief was also for the symbolic loss of a west of Ireland heritage and origin, as in ‘Carrick Revisited’ with its ‘pre-natal mountain . . . far away’.⁴ Childhood experience may partly explain in both poets what Reid describes as his adult immersion in an ‘absorbing present’ as ‘all there was’, or what Derek Mahon sees in MacNeice as a latching on to ‘the existential tingle of the passing minute’.⁵ Yet for both, too, writing may be partly about trying to capture a lost Eden—the childhood that is always, as Reid puts it, ‘by definition a never-never land . . . before we realised what time was”⁶—even if always with the simultaneous recognition it cannot be done. In the Irish tradition, MacNeice stands at a remove from John Hewitt’s well-known dictum that the writer must be a ‘rooted man’, but he remains bound by and to his past: as he wrote in ‘Western Landscape’, he is ‘neither Brandan / Free of all roots nor yet a rooted peasant.’⁷ Reid similarly locates himself as neither anchored nor free-floating in relation to Scotland: ‘Disclaiming my roots, I elected instead not rootlessness, since that implies a lack, a degree of unanchored attention, but a deliberate, chosen strangeness.’⁸ This is the ‘condition’ he describes from which I have taken my title in the epigraph quoted above:

---

³ Ibid., 89–90.
⁷ MacNeice, Collected Poems, 267.
⁸ Reid, ‘Digging up Scotland’, Whereabouts, 31.
that of being a permanent ‘outsider’, of manoeuvring uneasily between the ‘illusion’ of belonging, of nostalgia for that ‘once-glimpsed wholeness’ and the ‘faint terror of being utterly nowhere’.

For Reid, poems—those ‘occasional undaunted notes’, the ‘messages in a bottle’ from the traveller at sea—emerge out of that tension between romantic illusion and existential fear. It is a tension implied in the autobiographical title poem ‘To Lighten My House’ from Reid’s first collection in 1953:

My father’s grave voice preaching, in a parish rich with fishermen,
The chanted parables for faith, while a dark god
stormed in the unworded nights and wild eyes
of the boy I was,

the hard-bitten heather on hills, the drowned bird nursed like a sister
wearing death in its sweet breast, all spelled my fear
on the frightened nightfalling sea where I sailed,
growing up and growing old—

years where my head, turned loose in burning chapels of doubt,
turned back on my blood, with all the words for journeys—
war, and a war in my body to break
that one way back...9

This is a poem which on one level records the separation of the poet from his origins (‘I set this christened poem loose / to lighten my house’). He wakes, at the poem’s close, ‘in / the nowhere of the moment, single-willed / to love the world’. And yet its emotional pitch at times also makes this something of a paean to a far away ‘aging’ Scotland, a first-loved territory, a romanticised landscape. Reid’s ‘dark god’, like MacNeice’s ‘black dreams’, suggests the disturbing subconscious depths which may yet be the source of inspiration, as much as they epitomise fear and loss.

MacNeice’s complicated relation to his home ground, it has become a critical commonplace to note, is something which adversely affected his reputation earlier in the century. At one time—before his ‘reclamation’ by a later generation of poets including Derek Mahon and Michael Longley—MacNeice appeared to be in danger of disappearing between English and Irish traditions,

central to neither. One might also speculate that Reid’s itinerant life, and his
one-time disavowal of the tag a ‘Scottish writer’ have not always helped his
critical reputation in a climate where the tendency is to think of literature
along ‘national’ lines. And unlike MacNeice, recovered by and for an ‘Irish’
tradition, Reid lacks the influence that would in a sense rehabilitate him in a
similar way for the contemporary critical scene. To note his affinities with a
poet such as MacNeice (or with Edwin Muir) is not to make claims for Reid
that are excessive: he is, relatively speaking, a minor poet in his own right. 10
His poetic output between 1953 and 1978, when he published in Weathering
those poems which seemed to him to ‘deserve a continuing existence’, is fairly
slender; and he prefaced the book with the comment that it was ‘something of
a farewell on my part to formal poetry’. 11 Most of Reid’s subsequent work has
been as an outstanding translator of writers such as Borges and, most recently,
Neruda, or as a prose writer.

Yet given the affinity between MacNeice and Reid, it is not surprising
that echoes of Reid seem to surface in Mahon, for whom MacNeice was,
famously, the ‘familiar voice’ whispering in his ear. MacNeice must always be,
for Mahon, the more obvious point of comparison. But as I have suggested
above, perhaps part of that MacNeicean inheritance is a more generic ‘con-
dition’ which Reid, from a Scottish background that bears comparison with
MacNeice’s Irish experience, exemplifies too. The motifs of ‘To Lighten My
House’, for instance, with its seemingly pagan ‘dark god’ as a source of poetry
disturbing a Christian surface, may be found in Mahon’s own quasi-autobi-
ographical take on his childhood in ‘Courtyards in Delft’ as the boy ‘lying low
in a room there, / A strange child with a taste for verse’ and his invocation to
the ‘Maenads’ to bring ‘fire and sword’. 12 Whether affinity can be attributable
to direct influence in the case of Mahon and Reid is a moot point of course,
as is also the situation with Reid and MacNeice earlier, and whether Mahon
(born in 1941) was and is familiar with Reid’s 1950s and 1960s collections is

10 That said, Reid, who writes clean, deceptively simple lyrics, and is formally adept, may
suffer in the current critical climate anyway, in which one tendency is to advocate a
more modernist or neo-modernist aesthetic. Christopher Whyte, for instance, notes
of Edwin Muir that ‘His earlier work sets off unabashedly from the diction and
ideology of the English Romantics’ and that ‘Where prosody is concerned, he wrote
during much of his life as if Eliot, Pound and the Modernist generation had not
existed’. Whether this is necessarily a bad thing may be more a matter of opinion
than Whyte implies; indeed, from another point of view, this may be Muir’s singular
virtue. See Christopher Whyte, Modern Scottish Poetry (Edinburgh, 2004), 75.
not known. But Mahon spent a substantial part of the 1960s in Canada and the United States, and it seems unlikely he would not have seen Reid’s contributions to the *New Yorker* (of which Reid was on the staff for many years) as well as to the *Listener* or *Encounter*. In a sense, Mahon and Reid moved in similar freelance journalistic worlds through the 1960s and 1970s (and Reid was far better known in the United States at that time than in the United Kingdom or Ireland).

Those speculations aside, they also share a direct poetic forebear in Robert Graves. Reid worked closely with Graves through the late 1950s, at one time his most intimate literary friend (even, apparently, ironing Graves’ shirts for him on his American tours of this period—all of which were organised by Reid). The relationship ended abruptly in 1961 when Reid ran off with Robert Graves’ second muse, Margot Callas, but the influence remained. For Mahon, Robert Graves was one of the poets he absorbed during his undergraduate years at Trinity between 1960 and 1963. It is notable, too, given Mahon’s own fraught relation with ‘home’ (of which more anon) that the edition of Graves’ poems so influential on Mahon was that from 1959, in which Graves pointed out that his poems were written, variously, in England, Wales, France, Egypt, Switzerland, the United States and Spain, but that they ‘remain true to the Anglo-Irish poetic tradition into which I was born’.

In Mahon’s work, Graves’s influence meets Yeatsian rhetoric in a way we never see in Reid and so he does walk, stylistically, on the slightly wilder side than the Scottish poet. Yet one might feasibly suggest that both are drawn to similar things in Graves: his abandonment of ‘home’ in the famous *Goodbye to All That* of 1929; his peripatetic lifestyle (although he did ultimately settle in Mallorca); the sense of a break with the stabilites of the past—in Graves’ case, as for many other veterans, brought about by the experience of the First World War. And if Graves was a poet for whom the past, in a way, becomes a foreign country, he also turned his back on a fairly rigid and repressive Protestant family tradition. ‘We learned’, he said in *Goodbye to All That*, ‘to be strong moralists and spent a good deal of our time on self-examination and good resolutions. . . I had great religious fervour which persisted until shortly after my confirmation at the age of sixteen.’

Having finally ‘discarded Protestantism’ in his youth, Graves later embraced, in the

---

13 Robert Graves, *Collected Poems* (London, 1959). It is the only time he makes such a claim.
15 Ibid., 32.
1940s, an alternative mythology of the ‘white goddess’ which, whatever else it may be, is self-serving for the male poet’s creativity in a way his childhood religion could never be.

That said, from another perspective, Robert Graves’ *Goodbye to All That* also looks rather like a perpetual return to all that. (Graves followed his 1929 autobiography with a play in 1930 entitled *But It Still Goes On.*) *The White Goddess* sustains a quarrel with western Christianity redolent of a never entirely to be suppressed anxiety; Graves’ ‘elsewhere’—the ‘Majorcan mountain village, Catholic but anti-ecclesiastical, where life is still ruled by the old agricultural cycle’—is a counterpoint to, and therefore always in relation with, his place of origin. Something similar may be said of his poetic ‘successors’. For Reid, after his experience of World War II (like Graves in relation to England after World War I), his homeland proved too claustrophobic for him to stay there. ‘I felt’, he writes, ‘firmly severed from it . . . Put together a sniff of disapproval, a wringing of hands, a shaking of the head that clearly expects the worst, and you have some idea of how dire Scotland can be. All the other countries I have lived in have seemed comparatively joyful.’ Distanced by his education (grammar school and later Trinity College, Dublin) from his family background, Mahon, after passing his finals, also distanced himself literally from Ireland, embracing in the mid-1960s financial instability and an itinerant life; ‘I fled to Canada’, he says, ‘where they couldn’t find me. Truth to tell, I hardly did a hand’s turn in four years’. Or, as he puts that yearning for ‘elsewhere’ as opposed to Northern Ireland in the later ‘North Wind: Portrush’:

Elsewhere the olive grove,
*Le déjeuner sur l’herbe,*
Poppies and parasols,
Blue skies and mythic love.
Here only the stricken souls
No spring can unperturb.19

---

17 Reid, ‘Hauntings’, *Whereabouts*, 72.
II A Dark Country

Yet in spite of joyous escape the ‘yardstick’ (for the measuring of good or ill) in Mahon’s as in Reid’s writings remains the primal landscape of youth, the country of origin. Reid has more recently acknowledged that, however much he might be the ‘shifting opposite’ of the ‘rooted’ man, Scotland ‘exists spinal-ly... as a kind of yardstick against which I measure myself through time’.20 Mahon has always more overtly brooded on his roots, and the impossibility of severing those roots entirely. His ‘Elsewhere the olive grove’ is thus conditioned by the poem’s opening premise: ‘I shall never forget the wind / On this benighted coast’. As Edna Longley observes, those ‘Mediterranean longings’ in Mahon are not separable from his association of wind, rain and sea with the ‘agony of lost spirits’, and with his own Ulster Protestant origins.21

To probe further the affinities between Reid and Mahon—sometimes so noticeable in phrasal echoes as to be almost uncanny—one might look first of all to the weather. ‘In the beginning was the Irish rain’ wrote Louis MacNeice in his autobiographical fragment ‘Landslides of Childhood and Youth’, with a meteorological and biblical convergence appropriate not merely to his own experience of Ulster, but to the respective experiences of Reid and Mahon as well.22 George Bernard Shaw famously said in 1906 that ‘There is no Irish race any more than there is an English race or a Yankee race. There is an Irish climate, which will stamp an immigrant more deeply and durably in two years, apparently, than the English climate will in two hundred.’23 This is not to go down a road of meteorological as against racial essentialism, merely to note that those who describe Mahon as more a meteorological than geographical poet correctly identify a preoccupation that he and Reid unquestionably share.24 For Reid, indeed, he says, echoing MacNeice’s association of ‘the Word’ with ‘the Irish rain’ that ‘The beginning of poetry for me was the dazzling realisation of all that seemed to be magically compressed into the word “weather”’.25

24 Eamonn Hughes notes this characteristic of Mahon’s work in “Weird / Haecceity”: Place in Derek Mahon’s Poetry’ in Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (ed.), The Poetry of Derek Mahon (Gerrards Cross, 2002), 99.
25 Reid, ‘Notes on Being a Foreigner’, Passwords, 8.
rain, sea: there we have the dominant motifs at work in both poets, an elemen-
tal flux sometimes set in opposition to their respective communities of origin,
sometimes, in stormy weather, embodying the imminent apocalypse. The sym-
bolic play of light and dark, flux and permanence characteristic of their poetry
(as also that of MacNeice) finds climatic—sometimes climactic—embodiment
in the seasonal extremities of their first landscapes. As Reid writes:

The Scottish landscape—misty, muted, in constant flux and shift—in-
trudes its presence in the form of endlessly changing weather; the
Scottish character, eroded by a bitter history and a stony morality, and
perhaps in reaction to the changing turbulence of weather, subscribes
to illusions of permanence, of durability, asking for a kind of submission, an obedience. I felt, from the beginning, exhilarated by the first,
fettered by the second. Tramps used to stop at our house, men of the
road, begging a cup of tea or an old shirt, and in my mind I was always
ready to leave with them, because between Scotland and myself I saw
trouble ahead.26

The ‘trouble ahead’—Reid’s frustration with the Calvinist culture of his home-
land—is played out partly through meteorological motifs in his best-known
and most frequently anthologised poem ‘Scotland’:

It was a day peculiar to this piece of the planet,
when larks rose on long thin strings of singing
and the air shifted with the shimmer of actual angels.
Greenness entered the body. The grasses
shivered with presences, and sunlight
stayed like a halo on hair and heather and hills.
Walking into town, I saw, in a radiant raincoat,
the woman from the fish-shop. ‘What a day it is!’
cried I, like a sunstruck madman.
And what did she have to say for it?
Her brow grew bleak, her ancestors raged in their graves
as she spoke with their ancient misery:
‘We’ll pay for it, we’ll pay for it, we’ll pay for it!’27

27 Reid, Weathering, 39.
The poem sets light and movement—larks rising, the air shifting, the grass shivering—and the poet as ‘sunstruck madman’ against the rigidity of a culture that for Reid always expects the worse and cannot celebrate the changing present moment. Its alliterative qualities, and its celestial imagery come up against the harsh consonantnal final line, whose deadly repetitions are symbolic of a trapped culture, one in which even the living are coffined and confined in the graveyard of the past. The poem is set in St Andrews (where Reid was both a student in the 1940s and briefly resident in the 1970s), a place which, he says, ‘In its human dimension...embodied the Scotland I chose to leave behind me. The spirit of Calvin, far from dead, stalked the countryside, ever present in a pinched wariness, a wringing of the hands.’

Having done so, he set fire to his copy of the poem with the observation ‘We’re free of it, we’re free of it, we’re free of it!’. Whether that attitude was premature in relation to Scotland’s Calvinist culture is open to question. But the poem had undoubtedly become, for Reid, its own kind of ‘ball and chain’, tethering him, for readers, to an ‘old Scotland’ the poem itself critiques.

There is a certain irony to that position replicated in the writing and reception of Mahon’s ‘Ecclesiastes’, a poem equally savage in its indictment of ‘ancient misery’.

God, you could grow to love it, God-fearing, God-chosen purist little puritan that,
for all your wile and smiles, you are (the
dark churches, the empty streets,
the shipyard silence, the tied-up swings) and
shelter your cold heart from the heat.

---

29 There is scope for comparison, too, in poems about particular male family figures who subvert those oppressive Protestant ‘fathers’: Reid’s ‘Grandfather’, for instance (To Lighten My House, 18), with his ‘windy tales from the spells of his sailing life’ and his ‘deep down laughter’ resonates with the ‘Wicked avuncular fantasy’ of Mahon’s ‘My Wicked Uncle’ (Night-Crossing, 8).
30 See http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/04/brian_johnstone_setting_scotla. html [accessed 01 March 08].
of the world. From woman-inquisition, from the bright eyes of children. Yes you could wear black, drink water, nourish a fierce zeal with locusts and wild honey, and not feel called upon to understand and forgive but only to speak with a bleak afflatus, and love the January rains when they darken the dark doors and sink hard into the Antrim hills, the bog meadows, the heaped graves of your fathers. . . .

‘Ecclesiastes’ plays the same motifs of light against dark, fixity against fluidity. The poem’s syntactical structure, its running away with itself, is both a parody of evangelism, but also a symbol of the word unfettered: this poem is definitely not the ‘tied-up swing’. As with ‘Scotland’, it is therefore both a product, and disavowal, of the Protestant community of the poet’s origins. Both poems, written ‘at one remove’ to borrow Mahon’s phrase, from a particular Protestant sensibility nevertheless understand that sensibility from within. Ancestors it seems, raging or otherwise, cannot be easily discarded.

Fundamentalist religion and a windy coastline: these are Irish-Scottish points of comparison that do not need to be laboured perhaps, and yet in terms of modern Irish poetry, the comparison is rarely made. Rather, the tendency is, in the case of Mahon, to relate his seaboard imagination either back to MacNeice, or across the water in the other direction to Robert Lowell and New England. These are valid comparisons, certainly, and in the case of MacNeice the affinity with a later generation of Irish poets is a tangible instance of acknowledged influence at work. Nevertheless, such comparisons tend to overlook what is also an immediate and obvious parallel with Scottish poetry. As Edna Longley notes, the Mahon protagonist often emerges from a tension between ‘willed order and extreme unconscious chaos’ in ‘an environment where all imposed structures—suburban, urban, industrial, Protestant, human, cerebral, artistic—leave something out’. Against those imposed structures, and throughout Mahon’s work, the ‘sea-wind’ and the rain are unpredictable elements evocative of that ‘unconscious chaos’, the potential embodiment of ‘cosmic apocalypse’. Like Reid, Mahon is both ‘exhilarated’ and ‘fettered’. ‘Character’, ‘history’, ‘morality’—these are Reid’s own forms of ‘willed order’

set in opposition to the ‘endlessly changing weather’, the shifting landscape. The wind (more benign, less gale-force) blows through Reid’s first collection, To Lighten My House, too. We are never, as he suggests in ‘Directions for a Map’, ‘safe from weather and the ways of love’, disruptive and unpredictable elements that cannot be quantified or fixed in space and time, that are never subject to an act of will.33

That tension between order and chaos is central to Mahon’s aesthetic, and its source in his experience of growing up in Protestant suburban Northern Ireland may be seen in ‘A Refusal to Mourn’:

But the doorbell seldom rang
After the milkman went,
And if a coat-hanger
Knocked in an open wardrobe
That was a great event
To be pondered on for hours

While the wind thrashed about
In the back garden, raking
The roof of the hen-house,
And swept clouds and gulls
Eastwards over the lough
With its flap of tiny sails. . . 34

For Seamus Heaney, the first two lines quoted above evoke a condition of ‘unfulfilled expectancy’ that he identifies as characteristic of a younger generation in Belfast during the late 1950s and early 1960s—an expectancy met in part by the massive cultural and political changes towards the end of the 1960s.35 The poem also evokes the static and fettered condition of Northern Ireland before the eruption of the troubles, with its air of silent desperation, and yet its sense, in the violently thrashing wind, of imminent change.

That static society—at its most extreme on a Sunday—is familiar to poets such as MacNeice (as in ‘Sunday Morning’) or to the American poets Lowell and Wallace Stevens; it also strikes chords with Reid from a Scottish perspective:

33 Reid, To Lighten My House, 48.
Sunday in Scotland is the Sabbath, a day you might easily mistake for Doomsday if you were not used to it, a day that barely struggles into wakefulness . . . Houses are silent as safes, and silence as safe as houses; bottles are not only stoppered but locked; and, in the appropriate season, you can hear a leaf thud to the ground. Ecclesiastical ghosts stalk the countryside; the weather is the only noticeable happening.\(^{36}\)

Given the different (political and historical) context, Reid’s silent (Sunday) desperation is without the apocalyptic sensibility characteristic of Mahon. Yet his landscapes too can be an ominous indictment of the static, fettered human societies of ‘willed order’. In the early poem ‘The Village’ his childhood environment is ‘thick with silence’ in which ‘No one moves’ and ‘The village hangs / With more intensity than a heavy dream’. Yet (and in a manner pre-emptive of Mahon’s later ‘In Belfast’, with its ‘We could all be saved by keeping an eye on the hill / At the top of every street, for there it is— / Eternally, if irrelevantly, visible . . .’\(^{37}\)) the brooding landscape which surrounds the village can become judge and jury, curse or redemption, a mindscape that might one day engender change:

> But turn and you will find the mountains watching almost in judgement, like stone sentinels over your shoulder, critical as eyes behind the screen of distance, keeping watch. Nor in midsummer ever be deceived by silence, or by villages at peace. Behind your house, those hollow hills are hearing your quietest thoughts, as loud as thunder.\(^{38}\)

### III Renegades and the Unreconciled

As Edna Longley writes, Mahon’s poetry is ‘torn between a view of the human condition as “terminal” and a view of the human imagination as sheltering some “residual” spark’.\(^{39}\) In that zone Reid talks of between the illusion of a

---


\(^{38}\) Reid, *To Lighten My House*, 19.

stable place and self, and the ‘faint terror of being utterly nowhere’, Mahon tends, in a Beckettian sense, to be closer to the latter, with his ‘unreconciled, in their metaphysical pain’ who ‘Strangle on lamp-posts in the dawn rain’. The country of his imagination is darker than Reid’s, even though some of the same tensions underpin the work of both poets. Yet both, as I have suggested, still hanker after that illusion of a prelapsarian world, projecting it onto landscapes perfected in memory yet always compromised by the present moment. The contradictory impulses so often documented in Mahon—the desire to be ‘Through with history’, or to be released into history; to say that ‘Places as such are dead’ or that we are ‘in one place only’; the pull between ‘here’ and ‘elsewhere’, between innocence and experience—are symbolised in what are for Mahon, as also for Reid, the potentially transcendental, potentially burdensome images of sea and sky.

In Reid’s ‘Four Figures for the Sea’, the ‘foreshore cluttered / black with the tide’s untidy wrack’, and the night that ‘wore guilt like a watermark’ are familiar from Mahon’s ‘As God is my Judge’, where the tide rebukes the Titanic’s Bruce Ismay, leaving ‘broken toys and hatboxes / Silently at my door’. Yet the epiphanic light of the close of Reid’s ‘Four Figures’—‘singly I walked into singing light . . . Beyond / I faced the innocent sea’—is also familiar from Mahon’s ‘dream of limestone in sea-light’ of ‘Recalling Aran’: ‘Conceived beyond such innocence, / I clutch the memory still, and I / Have measured everything with it since’. For Reid, the Isle of Arran, in the poem of that title, works similarly as a place ‘where my world was stilled’, where ‘A mountain dreamed in the light of the dark . . . all thought a prisoner of the still sense’. And yet the memory clutched ‘still’ cannot stop release into time—Mahon’s ‘Four thousand miles away’ perspective; Reid’s ‘butterfly’ which ‘drunkenly began the world’. Aran and Arran may be versions of what Reid calls the ‘never-never land’ of childhood, where time does not exist; but as both poems suggest, that ‘never-never land’ is also an irrecoverable space, whose imaginatively evocation serves only to measure how far from it we have drifted or fallen.

42 Reid, To Lighten My House, 38; Mahon, Night-Crossing, 31.
44 Reid, To Lighten My House, 51.
Significantly, both poets evoke those landscapes from the perspective of America, as if the literal distance also provides an emotional distance from a repressive home ground of day-to-day existence. For Reid, his arrival in the United States in 1949 ‘felt like immediate liberation. I could sense the wariness in me melt, the native caution dwindle’. For Mahon, his own Canadian and American wanderings in the 1960s suggest a similar experience: that it is the view from America which permits the transcendental vision of ‘Recalling Aran’ as against the savage critique of ‘Ecclesiastes’. America, we might say, releases something of the (curable) romantic in both, where proximity to the supposed ‘romantic’ home ground cannot. Distance sustains a necessary aesthetic tension between ‘illusion’ and ‘terror’. And it may be for this reason that both have been, if to differing degrees, so invested in the idea of being the stranger, the visitor, the tourist, and yet fight shy of the (weighted) label ‘exile’.

As Mahon observes, ‘[t]he notion of exile has for centuries permeated the Irish consciousness’. Yet, he goes on to argue, ‘while it was true of writers like Joyce and Beckett in the recent past, it is hardly true in the same sense for young poets like Michael O’Loughlin and Harry Clifton, who spend most of their lives outside Ireland’—a situation true of Mahon himself in the 1960s and 1970s. The concept of exile, reliant as it is on a strong sense of ‘home’, is for Mahon no longer applicable because poets are ‘tied less to particular places—or parishes—than ever before’, instead part of a ‘global community’ of writers. Reid broods on the idea in more detail: ‘Exiles’, he suggests, ‘as opposed to expatriates, either wither away, or else flourish from being transplanted, depending on whether they keep alive any hope of returning to what they left, or abandon it completely as forever inaccessible. The hope of returning to the past, even at its faintest, makes for a vague unease, a dissatisfaction with the present.’ Instead, Reid opts for the description ‘foreigner’—never belonging, but immersed fully in the present moment of where he is. The ‘tourist’ is different from the ‘foreigner’ because ‘tourists have a home to go to and a date of departure’. Mahon destabilises this further when he writes of MacNeice: “A tourist in his own country,” it has

\[45\] Reid, ‘Hauntings’, *WHEREABOUTS*, 72–3.
\[46\] Derek Mahon, ‘Introduction’ in Peter Fallon and Derek Mahon (eds.), *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (London, 1990), xx. His argument here is inflected by the case he makes—contradicting an earlier position in which he argued for the distinctiveness of Northern writing—that ‘Northern Irish’ poetry is part of a ‘national’ and ‘global’ body of work.
been said, with the implication that this is somehow discreditable; but of what sensitive person is the same not true? The phrase might stand, indeed, as an epitaph for modern man, beside Camus’ “He made love and read the newspapers.” In effect, Mahon takes that surety of a return home away, embracing instead the condition of perpetual stranger. Brooding on ‘home’, Mahon argues, is habitual in modern Irish poetry not because of either an exilic or stay-at-home certainty as to place, but rather because of ‘an uncertainty . . . as to where [home] actually is’.

That uncertainty leaves both in what Reid identifies as the ‘curious region’ between prelapsarian innocence and metaphysical despair—Mahon tempted more towards metaphysical despair. (Mahon talks of ‘the metaphysical unease in which all poetry of lasting value has its source’.) As a result, both are habitually drawn to the figures of outsiders. Reid calls them ‘renegades’—‘dissident prophets and critics’ who ‘threatened the unanimous surface of things’—attributing their proliferation to the repressive ‘old Scotland’ of his youth: ‘Such a society’, he writes, ‘must inevitably generate renegades, and Scotland has always done so, in droves—those renegades who turn up all over the world’. The dissenters, the escapees, the itinerant artists: those ‘renegades’ are also there in a different form in Mahon’s ‘lost tribe’ of outsiders and tormented artists, the ‘unreconciled’ figures of Nerval, De Quincey, Van Gogh, Dowson, with whom he identifies in his early work.

For all the formal coherence and balance evident in their early work, both poets recognise, in the end, that the stable, unified self, however seductive it may be as a concept, is also a myth. There are, one might say, renegade selves in these poems too. Some observations from Reid’s essay ‘Notes on Being a Foreigner’ strike obvious chords here with MacNeice as well as Mahon, Reid’s phrases are familiar to readers of early Mahon because the attitudes are shared: ‘Belonging. I am not sure what it means, for I think I always resisted it . . . To alight in a country without knowing a word of the language is a worthwhile lesson . . . One is forced back to a watchful silence . . . If voices are anything to go by, then the idea of having a fixed, firm self is wildly illusory’. Every public self, as Reid is aware, is a kind of fiction or performance; that an

51 Reid, ‘Digging Up Scotland’, Whereabouts, 27.
52 ‘Notes on Being a Foreigner’, Passwords, 7, 9, 10.
essential and timeless ‘version’ underpins all the others is an illusion. As he puts it in ‘Disguises’:

My selves, my presences,
like uniforms and suits,
some stiff, some soiled, some threadbare,
and not all easy-fitting,
hang somewhere in the house . . .  

This is a far cry from, say, Heaney’s poetic sense of self: ‘not all easy-fitting’ suggests a condition of ‘strangeness’ that is echoed in Mahon’s (and Michael Longley’s) preoccupation with multiple ‘lives’—the title of Mahon’s second collection—through the early 1970s.

In ‘The Last of the Fire Kings’, Mahon echoes Reid’s hankering after an itinerant ‘strangeness’—the delight in the condition of being a ‘foreigner’, of multiple selves in disguise:

I want to be
Like the man who descends
At two milk churns

With a bulging
String bag and vanishes
Where the lane turns,

Or the man
Who drops at night
From a moving train

And strikes out over the fields
Where fireflies glow
Not knowing a word of the language. 

It is, Reid writes, ‘the strangeness of a place’ that ‘propels one into life’. Both Reid and Mahon—or early Mahon certainly—are on unpredictable journeys,

---

53 Reid, Passwords, 137.
55 Reid, ‘Notes on Being a Foreigner’, Passwords, 8.
poets always in transit. The ‘curious region’ in which the ‘curable romantic’ exists is one of perpetual heading into the unknown. In Mahon’s ‘Girls in their Seasons’, even the moment where he claims to remain ‘intact’ obliquely puns on ‘ourselves’ as multiple, therefore already divided.

No earthly schedule can predict
Accurately our several destinations.
All we can do is wash and dress
And keep ourselves intact.

Now all we have

Is the flinty chink of Orion and the Plough
And the incubators of a nearby farm
To light us through to the land of never-never.
Girls all, be with me now
And keep me warm
Before we go plunging into the dark forever.56

The ‘land of never-never’ or the ‘dark forever’: these are always, as Mahon knows, the two possibilities, the equivalent of Reid’s illusion and terror. Mahon’s journey is both into the past and into an unknown future. Certainty for both poets is the real illusion, not least because poems themselves are an unpredictable linguistic journey. In Reid’s ‘Directions for a Map’, the one-dimensional and static map symbolises a kind of ‘willed order’. On a map:

There are no signs of love and trouble, only
dots for a village and a cross for churches.

Here space is free for once from time and weather.
The sea has paused. To plot is possible.
Given detachment and a careful angle,
all destinations are predictable.

But this is, the poem shows, in the end an unsustainable fiction:

Somewhere behind a blurring village window,  
a traveller waits. The storm walks in his room.  
Under his hand, a lamplit map is lying.  
Pencils tonight will never take him home.\textsuperscript{57}

That the map is ‘lying’ tells us perhaps everything we need to know: that for Reid, as for Mahon, ‘home’ is forever out of reach.

\textit{Queen’s University, Belfast}

\textsuperscript{57} Reid, \textit{To Lighten My House}, 44, 48.
An Guth and the Leabhar Mòr: 
Dialogues between Scottish Gaelic and Irish Poetry 

Peter Mackay

In an article in *Translation and Literature* in 2000, Ian Galbraith suggested, in the context of a discussion towards an anthology of Scottish poetry in German, that parallel English translations are now so important to Gaelic poems that to exclude them from his anthology would be to remove ‘an essential component of the life of the Gaelic text in the context of its real cultural constituency’.\(^1\) The following discussion will use Galbraith’s tendentious phrase, the ‘real cultural constituency’ of the Gaelic text, as a springboard from which to discuss the translation of Gaelic poetry, parallels with the situation in Ireland, and collaborations featuring Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry over the last ten years. In response to the political overtones of Galbraith’s carefully chosen ‘constituency’, I offer the notion that these ‘devolved’ dialogues between Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry offer a way out of the impasse in which the translation debates and the pervasive and debilitating binary opposition between Gaelic and English appears to have placed Gaelic poetry.

Galbraith’s paper intervened in the debates over the soul of Gaelic poetry and the place of bilingual translation that had been underway from the mid-nineties. Since the Donald MacAulay edited 1976 *Nua-Bhàrdachd Ghàidhlig*, parallel translation into English has been the norm for collections of Scottish Gaelic poetry, although there has also been an outlet in Gaelic-only journals, *Gairm* and, following its demise in 2002, *Gath*. This prevalence of bilingual translations proved the subject of a virulent debate over the cultural and political significance of this mode of translation and the subsequent status of the Gaelic and English texts; a debate between what could be caricatured the ‘hello sailor’ and ‘every time we say hello I die a little’ attitudes to translation. It is not my intention to go over that argument again and, indeed, the main points have been summarised in Ronald Black’s *An Tuil* and articles by Corinna Krause.\(^2\) Suffice here to say that, on one side, those in favour of

---


2 Corinna Krause, ‘Translating Gaelic Scotland: The Culture of Translation in the
parallel translation generally returned to audience and reception—increasing the audience for Gaelic poetry and attracting more people to the language. Those against parallel translation (and especially, as in Christopher Whyte’s case, against parallel self-translation) generally felt that the Gaelic texts were undermined irrevocably to the extent, in Wilson McLeod’s phrase, that ‘with English being universal, Gaelic is no longer needed for communication, indeed no longer needed at all’.3

These debates merit comparison with the situation of Irish-language poetry. In Ireland it is different; the questions rising out of translation into English arose not out of the historical prevalence of such translation, but with a shift in the cultural landscape in which translation was becoming more common. Until the 1980s Irish-language poetry was published almost entirely in mono-lingual collections. Since then there has been a drift towards bilingual editions; however, these are still the exception rather than the rule. Self-translation is also not as dominant, as Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill’s Pharaoh’s Daughter (1990)—with multiple translators—or Frank Sewell’s translation of some of Cathal Ó Searcaigh’s 1996 Na Buachaillí Bána as Out in the Open (2000) testify. Yet, perhaps the most succinct statement of the problems with translation into English actually came from the Irish critic Michael Cronin, in Translating Ireland, as part of the debates in Irish literature about this growing trend towards parallel translation:

The translators and editors of translation anthologies defended their work on the grounds that the translations would bring the work of Irish-language poets to a wider audience. . . . The acceptance of translation by many prominent poets in the Irish language could be seen as an endorsement of a policy of openness, delivering poets in a minority language from the invisibility of small readerships. However, the target-language, English, was not innocent. In a situation of diglossia where the minority language is competing for the attention of the same

group of speakers, Irish people, then translation cannot be divorced from issues of power and cultural recuperation.4

Translation is—in Maria Tymoczoko’s words—‘a matter of power’, and translating into English risks ceding power to the very language which is pressing on and surrounding the linguistic group of Irish or Scottish Gaelic speakers.5 Thus the stance of a poet such as Biddy Jenkinson, who refuses to allow her Irish-language poetry to be published into English, is resolutely political and is an attempt to maintain whatever power the Irish language has in the face of English. (Seemingly aware of this, both sides in the debate about Scottish Gaelic explicitly held that their stances were political, and contributed towards the development and renewal of the language.)

The imbalance in power between English and Gaelic, or English and Irish allows translation practices which favour, in T. S. Eliot and George Steiner’s words, ‘translucencies’, versions which reveal the source language as an exotic other. For Steiner such translations are not possible for languages that are in close contact, that do not have ‘the innocence of great distance’, but are ‘complicated by a legacy of mutual contact’ and whose ‘determining condition is simultaneously one of elective affinity and resistant difference’.6 However, too often what is missing in translations into English is this ‘legacy of mutual contact’. Instead, what one is left with is precisely the ‘conventionally negotiated immediacy of exoticism’, in which Gaelic literature (even more so than Irish) as a whole functions as one thing only (whether it be anti-British resistance language par excellence, or dying grandmother in the attic, to borrow Whyte’s memorable, emotive phrase), rather than acknowledging the multi-faceted and often contradictory nature of contemporary Gaelic poetry, the complex historical relationship between the Gaelic and English languages (a relationship which has been little studied or theorised, one must admit), and the distance between the Scottish Gaelic cultural milieu and that of Scotland as a whole (or between Irish-language literature and the Irish cultural milieu—distances that are by no means equal).

Here I would like to take discussion of the reception of, and audience for, parallel translations a little further. This ground has partly been opened

---

by Corinna Krause, with her discussions of Scottish Gaelic literature in an interlingual ‘contact zone’. Krause quotes Mary Louise Pratt to the effect that a contact zone is ‘a place where cultures, previously separated, come together and establish ongoing relations’. Krause has related this to the tendency towards parallel Gaelic-English translations, suggesting that the ‘contact zone’ between Gaelic and English, with its combination of self-translation and bilingual en-face edition, provides a highly rigid format for Gaelic as literature and language, leaving little space for flexibility for the original with the interpretative engagement on the reader’s part occurring through English rather than Gaelic.

These two factors—the prevalence of self-translation and the dominance of parallel en face editions—bind and constrict Gaelic poetry. This ‘contact zone’ is, in effect, productive of what Galbraith viewed as the ‘real cultural constituency’ for Gaelic literature. For Galbraith, ‘Gaelic poetry from [Sorley MacLean’s] ‘Hallaig’ to [Aonghas Macneacail’s] ‘cùntas’. . . has existed in a permanent sense of tension with the English language’. To envision these poems outside the ‘permanent state of tension with the English language’—what Krause laments as the ‘highly rigid format for Gaelic as literature and language’—would be, for Galbraith, ‘to remove them to a convenient utopia—a non-place or un-reality—whose isolation from the current polyvocal site of their primary engagement would seem to add to rather than resolve their history of displacement’. As Krause has commented, Galbraith’s argument is inherently flawed. ‘Hallaig’, for example, appeared in Gaelic years before it appeared in English translation; similarly, a great deal of Gaelic poetry appeared first in the Gaelic-language journals Gairm and Gath, with their English doppelgängers only appearing at a later stage. This is not to say, however, that the tension with the English language is not present and pervasive. It can hardly be avoided since almost every Gaelic speaker is, in this day and age, also an English speaker, and indeed usually more confident and able in English. There is a risk that every speaker of Gaelic finds themselves bound within the rigid ‘contact zone’.

8 Ibid., 9.
10 Ibid.
As every Gaelic speaker is normally as fluent, if not more fluent, in English as in Gaelic, the question that Wilson McLeod raised—of whether Gaelic is needed at all in these collections—becomes the central one. Christopher Whyte goes even further when he comments that parallel text editions ‘cannot but be addressed primarily to a monoglot English-speaking public, and the original text is allotted the same amount of space as the facing translation, which usurps its right to our undivided attention’. The Gaelic text, from this viewpoint, has become no more than window dressing, providing the frisson of encountering an intelligible ‘other’, while the real work of the poetry takes place in the English text. It is not necessary to be quite so pessimistic, however; one would still hope, surely, that the ideal reader of Gaelic poetry is one who can fully appreciate the play of words and sound in the Gaelic text, and that the primary audience is still Gaelic speaking (even if the secondary, English speaking, audience outnumbers the primary audience by a ratio of some ten thousand to one). For this Gaelic speaking—and so bilingual—audience, however, the parallel translations present a distinctive reading experience. As Krause has noted, when faced with parallel translations even native Gaelic speakers will read the two texts together, using the English text to understand (or complicate) the Gaelic, line by line, stanza by stanza or poem by poem. In Eric Falci’s memorable phrase, everybody approaching these collections is ‘reading in the gutter’ between the two texts. The reading experience has been ‘decentred’ away from the Gaelic text, without coming to rest in the English text. Instead it balances in-between the two. There is a similar decentring for English speakers as the Gaelic text provides a pull away from the English, at least offering the frisson of difference, at most completely undermining the authority of the English text. Everybody

---

13 Krause, ‘Finding the Poem’.
14 This is the title of a paper that Falci gave at ‘The Way it Had to Be Said’, an Irish-Scottish Poetry Symposium held in Belfast in November 2007.
is reading in the gutter, although only some are looking at the Gaelic text.

The result is not that the texts are interchangeable, with a one-to-one equivalence; rather, the texts are in interlingual dialogue. The English text is, inevitably, at least subtly different from the Gaelic, either in terms of translation loss or gain (when the target language is more or less precise than the source language) and so the two texts modify and alter each other, changing the way we read the other text. With this comes the risk that—for Gaelic speakers more confident in English than in Gaelic (in other words the vast majority)—the English self-translated text is more familiar, more authoritative. The Gaelic text does not, however, cede power completely to the English text; instead, the ‘poem’ that is read by a Gaelic speaker is, in effect, the interlingual dialogue between the two languages—it is a text that is part Gaelic and part English, and which, strictly speaking, is centred in the white space between the two columns of print. The text that the (bilingual) Gaelic speaker reads is then in-between the Gaelic and English texts, or rather ‘outside’ them, to follow George Steiner’s discussion of Goethe and the Persian singer Hafiz: ‘This meeting and melting takes place “outside” German and Persian—or, at least, “outside” German as it has existed until the moment of translation’.16

The parallel text is, as Steiner claims, a new ‘entity’, a new poem or what would be in Foucault’s terms a new ‘statement’.17 For bilingual readers a Gaelic text alone and a Gaelic text with an English translation are different entities: a Gaelic speaker, confronting Sorley MacLean’s ‘Hallaig’ published in Gaelic alone in Gairm in 1954 and bilingually in Calgacus in 1975 is meeting two different texts, just as the translation of ‘Hallaig’ by Seamus Heaney that appeared in pamphlet form and then in the Guardian (without any Gaelic) in 2002 is a different text. Whyte notes that any poem in Gaelic ‘proceeds from the language and is an event, no matter how minor, in the life of that language’.18 The publication of ‘Hallaig’ in Gairm and Calgacus mark two distinct events in the

---

16 Steiner, After Babel, 273.
17 ‘Even if a sentence is composed of the same words, bears exactly the same meaning, and preserves the same syntactical and semantic identity, it does not constitute the same statement if it is spoken by someone in the course of a conversation, or printed in a novel; if it was written one day centuries ago, and if it now reappears in an oral formulation. The coordinates and the material status of the statement are part of its intrinsic characteristics’. Michel Foucault The Archaeology of Knowledge (L’Archéologie du savoir, 1969) (London, 2005), 112–3.
life of the language (and more troublingly still, so too might the publication of Heaney’s translation).

There are questions that the bilingual reading raises about the nature and accuracy of the translation, and so about the relationship between the two languages. Even though, as is still the case, the translations are generally literal with minor divergences or losses or gains in precision/imprecision, the Gaelic text is still, in Hewson’s words, ‘seen in the light of the translation it has undergone’. Thus, in ‘Toileachas’ [‘Happiness’], published as part of Meg Bateman’s recent collection Soirbheas/Fair Wind (2007), the adjective ‘òrbhuidh’ [golden] is applied to a communion in the Gaelic, while in the English the communion becomes ‘expansive’ and the adjective ‘golden’ slips down to the next line, to describe ‘awareness’. Such divergences bring to the fore questions that are always latent in the Gaelic–English text; questions of the equivalence between the two languages, between how the languages deal with different situations. Similarly, when in ‘Naomh’ [‘Saint’], there is the use of ‘geologists’ in the English where ‘eolaiche’ [experts] had been used in the Gaelic; the use of ‘geologists’ does not simply elucidate the Gaelic text, but it raises various questions about the nature of the relationship between the two languages and the twin subject areas of science and religion (with perhaps the suggestion that there is a more naïve or faux-naïve voice in the Gaelic text, which is then interrogated by the English). Bateman’s collection as a whole is inextricably tied up with questions of translation, from the near-scatological epigraph from Dwelly’s dictionary which translates the title variously as ‘Fair Wind on the Sea’ (for Gaelic speakers from Skye and wind/flatulence for people from Argyll) to the ‘Envoi’ which ponders the uncertain fates of the Gaelic and English texts (with the irony that the Gaelic text is already meeting its fate, to some degree, being faced by an English translation).

This last poem appears to be influenced by Ní Dhomhnaill’s ‘Ceist nan Teangan’, the final poem in Pharaoh’s Daughter (1990), where the poetess casts her poem off on the waters to be picked up by whoever (and whichever translator—in this case Paul Muldoon) finds it. Ní Dhomhnaill’s collection offers a tempting exemplar for Scottish Gaelic poets; the 2007 collection

---

20 This is not limited to Bateman’s work. Similar questions are raised, for example, in Aonghas MacNeacail’s work. In ‘am fior mhanaifeasto / the real manifesto’ the Gaelic text has ‘lergh do chunntas’, cunntas being a broad term covering ‘account’ or ‘enumeration’, while the English text has the more precise ‘read your invoice’. Aonghas MacNeacail, Laoidh an donais òig / hymn to a young demon (Edinburgh, 2007), 12–13.
edited by Christopher Whyte, *Dreuchd an Fhigheadair*, explicitly follows the example of Ní Dhomhnaill and attempts to assemble a stellar cast of translators to rival those who translated Ní Dhomhnaill’s work (although the Scottish poets had to work from literal cribs of the Gaelic texts). Peculiarly, to gain the full effect of the divergent English and Scottish Gaelic or Irish texts while reading *Pharaoh’s Daughter* or *Dreuchd an Fhigheadair* one needs to be bilingual. This is also the case with Frank Sewell’s translations of some of Cathal Ó Searcaigh’s poems from *Na Buachaillí Bána*, which again takes ‘Paul Muldoon’s co-piloting of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill’s *Astrakhan Cloak* voyage’ as its model. Sewell is quite explicit in noting that to ‘appreciate or, indeed, tolerate the dialogue between the Irish and English versions of these poems, the ideal reader must be bilingual’.²¹ This demand for a bilingual ideal reader is not a new phenomenon—George Steiner rather sniffily quotes Stephen MacKenna, who translated Plotinus’s *Enneades*, to justify the use of free translations:

> Like others who have thought the problem through, MacKenna favours a parallel text, but a free parallel. ‘My total testimony,’ he writes in 1919, ‘would be that nothing could serve the classics more than superbly free translations—backed of course by the thoroughest knowledge—accompanied by the strict text. The original supplies the corrective or the guarantee; the reader, I find, understands the depths of his Greek or Latin much better for the free rendering—again, I think of a chaste freedom, a freedom based rigidly on a preservitude’.²²

Though such a pompous attitude cannot be taken towards the classics any longer when the reading population is entirely bilingual, the use of free translations—whether chaste or otherwise—is more easily justified.

In light of this, a bilingual reader could complain that in Gaelic poetry, with the possible exception of *Dreuchd an Fhigheadair*, the dialogues initiated by parallel translation are rarely followed through: the translations tend not to be free enough, but are rather like dogs and wolves held on a tight rein which only occasionally escape to trouble the Gaelic text (partly because of the tendency towards self-translation which Whyte and Krause have written vigorously against). Even when Gaelic texts have only ever appeared with

---


English translations alongside them, a full dialogue between the two texts (and so a more challenging experience of the new bilingual entity for the bilingual reader) is rarely allowed or encouraged to develop. Writing interlingual entities for a bilingual ideal reader, as in Sewell’s translations and perhaps Drenchd an Fhigheadair, would liberate the English text and provide a much fuller experience for that ideal bilingual reader. By the very fact that it is a dialogue, interaction between the two texts would also then be maieutic rather than dogmatic, and perhaps avoid the ‘social conditions prevailing within Gaelic literature as a collective medium’ in which even the Gaelic-speaking readers are more confident and competent in English: as a dialogue, both sides are allowed their say.23

Another—and perhaps even more disturbing—feature that arises when Gaelic poetry is considered from the perspective of a bilingual reader appears in some Irish and Scottish Gaelic poems in which there is no English dop pelgänger present, but in which there is still felt the ‘latent presence of English’ (a presence felt by a readership that can respond to the use of English words or grammatical structures or Gaelic words that suggest English homophones, for example). In his response to Ian Galbraith’s article, and with Scots as his focus, Roderick Watson suggests that ‘there is a similar, implicit, “dual text” effect even in what is published on its own as a modern poem in full Scots’; that is, because the target audience (or ideal reader) for a Scots poem is necessarily bilingual, there may be the ‘latent presence’ of English in the Scots text.24

The latent presence of English is most intrusive in Gaelic or Irish texts where the structures—and indeed lexical elements used—are almost intelligible to an English speaker. This is relatively rare (although there is still a subtle shifting implicit, once more, when every Gaelic speaker is bilingual); however, one example of a poet whose work revels in such linguistic games is Gearóid Mac Lochlainn who is also one of the poets who plays most with the presence of bilingual texts and a bilingual reader. In ‘Rannta Mhic na Míchomhairle’ ['Verses of the Erring Son/Contrary Fellow/Scapegrace'], a rant about the narrator’s hates, italicised English and French words merge into the Irish text, while proper names recognisable to the vast majority of Irish people (or at

23 C.f. Krause, ‘Finding the Poem’, 8: ‘Indeed, the increased physical presence and interlingual influence of English on Gaelic poetry leading the bilingual reader to find the poem back and forth between the facing versions is not only the result of the bilingual nature of the individual author but rather has to be seen in the light of social conditions prevailing within Gaelic literature as a collective medium’.

least those with the most tenuous knowledge of the Irish language) appear in a mix of Irish and English. Mac Lochlainn’s bile is linked by two phrases ‘Is fuath leam’ (I hate) or ‘foc’, which is treated as an Irish word (and so is not italicised). Mac Lochlainn’s bile is linked by two phrases ‘Is fuath leam’ (I hate) or ‘foc’, which is treated as an Irish word (and so is not italicised). ‘Foc’, however, is most obviously and most entertainingly an Irish rendering of the English ‘fuck’, and so when Mac Lochlainn writes (and especially when he reads) ‘foc bocan Séamas ó Heaney is focan EMINEM’ most of the audience (whether they speak Irish or not) gets at least the gist. This is certainly not the first Irish or Gaelic-language poem to include English words, but it takes a rare delight in rampaging through the cordon sanitaire that tends to separate the two languages in poetry; it is—at a basic level—a denial of the pre-occupations and petty conceits of the unhappily bilingual Irish speaker, a scattershot attack at bilingual communities that are reluctant to acknowledge their bilingualism. When in the last three lines Mac Lochlainn slips into English for a disclaimer, ‘(And if you don’t get the joke, /Then your heart gets broke. /And remember, it could always get worse)’ the reader, whether or not they get it, does at least realise that the joke is on them.

Mac Lochlainn’s poem appeared in the annual anthology An Guth, edited by Rody Gorman, an anthology which goes some way to debunk Iain Galbraith’s argument about doppelgangers and the ‘real cultural constituency of Gaelic’, troubles Krause’s discussions to date of the ‘contact zone’ of Gaelic literature, and in doing so also contradicts any view of Gaelic that sees it first and foremost as a (homogenous) means of resistance to Britain, or indeed contender for the poison chalice of being ‘English’s other’. It is most valuable for showing how Gaelic literature can exist in a broader international context outside any rigid ‘contact zone’ defined by a lop-sided binary opposition with English; An Guth testifies to the fact that Scottish Gaelic literature can and does exist internationally, interlingually—and just in fact—outside its relationship with English.

While it has always been possible to publish poetry—if not collections of poetry—in Gaelic alone, in the journals Gath and its predecessor Gairm, and as is the norm in Ireland, the creation of An Guth provided the first international poetry journal linking the Irish and Scottish Gàidhealtachd. Communication between the realms of Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry was

25 The closest Irish word to Mac Lochlainn’s ‘foc’ is ‘focail’ [word]; this is, of course, germane to his linguistic games—he is the poet to put the ‘foc’ into ‘focail’. As has been noted, the poem reminds you of the old joke ‘Nìl focail Gaeilge agam’ [I don’t have a word/I have ‘fuck-all’ Irish].

26 Rody Gorman (ed.) An Guth -2 (Dublin, 2004), 129.
re-engaged in earnest in the late sixties and early seventies following more than two centuries of almost total mutual indifference, and has continued apace over the last ten years (with some political and financial backing). In his foreword to the first *Guth*, Gorman (a Dubliner who makes his home in the Isle of Skye and who writes in Scottish Gaelic, Irish and English) places *An Guth* firmly in a tradition of co-operations between Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry which stretches back to the annual international visits on the Bardic circuit which began in 1971, and which largely consists of occasional publication of poems in journals on either side of the Sea of Moyle and a series of poetry collections with parallel translations between Irish and Scottish Gaelic published by the Dublin-based Coiscéim (which also publishes *An Guth*). These collaborations go some way to justifying Christopher Whyte’s claim in his 2004 *modern scottish poetry* that ‘for the past four centuries...the significant intertext, rather than writing elsewhere in Scotland, would be writing in the Irish language of the same period’—although this is still a troubling claim for the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and there is no reason why there cannot be more than one ‘significant intertext’.  

The two most significant recent projects in this regard are the *An Guth* series of annual collections/anthologies, which first appeared in 2003 and which currently runs to four volumes and *An Leabhar Mòr/The Great Book of Gaelic* which was a touring exhibition in its first incarnation and a 2002 publication in one of its later forms.

These two projects, *An Leabhar Mòr* and *An Guth*, are substantially different; one of the things they do have in common, however, is that they were enabled by the constitutional changes in these islands (and subsequent funding for the cross-border initiatives in minority languages and the arts). In his introduction to the *Leabhar Mòr*, Malcolm MacLean, the director of the Gaelic Arts Project and general editor of the eventual book, describes how the project became possible as a direct result of constitutional change and the peace process, as well as sketching how the poetry (and art contained within the book) paralleled these processes. From its inception in 1997, the *Leabhar Mòr* was to be a celebration of ‘1,500 years of shared Gaelic heritage’—it was a millennial project, a retrospective that marked the nominal milestone of the turn of the millennium. MacLean links this celebration to an anti-national shared cultural heritage that does not respect state boundaries:

it transcends political boundaries to celebrate the unity and diversity of
Gaelic culture as an integral part of contemporary life in both coun-
tries. A language map of Europe reflects cultural realities that bear
little resemblance to political boundaries. This is particularly true of
Gaelic Scotland and Ireland. There are no two countries in Europe
with more in common. We share a mythology, three languages, a rich
music tradition and some significant history, and yet a great deal of this
enduring connection has been consistently glossed over or deliberately
obscured.29

There is a strange slippage here from talking about ‘Gaelic Scotland and
Ireland’ to ‘no two countries in Europe with more in common’: it is unclear
if it is Scotland or Gaelic Scotland that is being treated as a country. This is
perhaps beside the point, but it is also symptomatic of the sense of political
fluidity and possibility out of which the project arose.

However, for all the rhetoric of 1,500 years of shared culture in MacLean’s
introduction to the Leabhar Mòr, the ‘sharing’ within the collection is rather
limited. There are 100 poems in the Leabhar Mòr, each nominated by a poet,
the editorial panel or an interested party. Of these, ten were nominated by
the editorial panel, while twenty-nine were poems nominated by their authors.
The remaining seventy-one, however, suggest that the poets (and other
nominators) did not feel too comfortable outside their own poetic tradition.
Four poets in Scottish Gaelic nominated old or middle Irish poems (poems
from the period in which the two poetic traditions were in effect one and
the same), while only one Irish poet nominated a Scottish poem—Louis de
Paor (along with Hamish Henderson) nominating Sorley MacLean’s ‘Hallaig’.
This is testament, if nothing else, to the limited connections that there have
been between Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry over the last two and a bit
hundred years, and the task that the Leabhar Mòr set itself in trying to bring
the two communities back together in a mutual celebration. There are also
some more ingrained problems. Presented as a celebration the Leabhar Mòr
is, to some extent, an endstop, a fait accompli, and clears the way for a rela-
tionship between the Gaelic communities rather than attempting to develop
that relationship. More worryingly, with its use of English translations of the
Scottish Gaelic and Irish poems, as well as English introductions, covers and
supplementary material, it is clear that the Leabhar Mòr is primarily addressed

29 Ibid., 2.
not to the Irish and Scottish Gaelic communities but to the English-speaking world. Although this has undoubtedly helped the huge success of the project and the collection, it still leaves the feeling that the project is a celebration of the Irish and Scottish Gaelic literatures, but not necessarily for them. It also places the collection firmly in the rigid contact zone that Krause objects to (although there is a tendency—particularly amongst the Irish poets—away from self-translation).

*An Guth* is presented as a celebration of the Gaelic literatures, but also as a rather opportunistic project, designed to fill the gaps in Gaelic- and Irish-poetry publication that had recently arisen with the demise of the Gaelic quarterly *Gairm* in 2002 after fifty years of publication and of the Irish annual publication *Innti*, and, at least in part, born out of the establishment of *Iomairt Colmcille*, the Columba Initiative, in 1997 precisely to fund projects that involved a combination of Irish and Scottish Gaelic and which was and still is one of the main backers of the *Leabhar Mòr* project. However, *An Guth* tends to avoid the troubles that befall *An Leabhar Mòr*, and is able to largely because it exists in a space—both intellectual and poetic—partly cleared by the *Leabhar Mòr*. A series of annual anthologies, *An Guth* is very much an open-ended process, an attempt to create an ongoing dialogue between the two poetic traditions (although also an attempt which has only been partly successful). And the major difference between *An Guth* and the collections that had come before it was the decision (enabled by Gorman’s facility in the two languages) to publish translations from Scottish Gaelic to Irish and vice versa without an English intermediary text or with a glossary between the two languages. In its inception at least *An Guth* was viewed as a meeting point—a space in which Irish and Scottish Gaelic poets could meet, and translate each others’ work. This has not quite worked out—in the subsequent three volumes nobody else contributes translations between Irish and Gaelic, and although there is still a policy in favour of translations into the two languages, translation between the two has been replaced first by bottom of the page glosses and then by a glossary at the end of the collection (to the extent that there is no translation between Gaelic and Irish in *An Guth* 4 and the only translations from English into either language are Gorman’s own translations of some of Bob Dylan’s songs); and Gorman is thus left as the sole mediator of the meeting of these two cultures, a one man walking contact zone, as it were.

The experimentation with different ways of placing Scottish Gaelic and Irish together—translation, bottom of the page glossaries similar to those used between Scots and English, end of the book glossaries—suggests an
uncertainty about the status between the two languages, and the way in which this status should be reflected in the layout of the collections. This is not necessarily unhealthy, and certainly helps Gorman and his readers to discover different ways to pass between the two languages. It might simply be a matter of free play on Gorman’s part, a means of keeping the collections (and so the relationship between the languages) fluid and shifting: this is perhaps also one of the reasons (along with a healthy sense of mischief) why in the first Guth ‘Tá Seabhrán i mo Cheann’ [there is a buzzing in my head] Gorman’s Irish-language translation of a Gaelic poem by Dòmhnall MacAmhlaigh appears not with its Gaelic original, but with a glossary translating some of the words back into Gaelic. Far from there being a fixed relationship between the languages, translation between them is still fluid and can still be—dare one say it—fun.

The example of An Guth suggests that the ‘contact zone’ between Irish and Scottish Gaelic could, indeed, entail an entirely different form of translation than that between the two languages and English. Although translation from Scottish Gaelic to Irish and vice versa, or indeed between Gaelic and Scots can never be entirely ‘innocent’ either, due to the ‘legacy of mutual contact’ between the languages, there is not the same inequality of power, and so not perhaps the same guilt that the poet is hastening the demise of the grandmother in the attic (to once more borrow Whyte’s phrase). Whether devolutionary change and the dialogues that have followed them can help avoid her death remains unclear; they will certainly, however, postpone it.

Queen's University, Belfast
The New Linguistic Imperial Order: English as a European Union lingua franca or lingua frankensteinia?

Robert Phillipson

The European Union (EU) was in an intensive phase of unification from the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 until the French and Dutch rejection of the draft EU Constitutional Treaty in 2004. Yet, more has been achieved in unifying economic and monetary affairs than when seeking agreement on a joint foreign policy or on future visions for ‘Europe’. In the fields of culture, education and language the EU has had a legally enshrined right since Maastricht to fund activities, although the amounts involved have been modest by comparison with agricultural subsidies and with what governments spend domestically. These areas have traditionally been seen as an exclusively national prerogative. Language policy has not been an EU priority, over and above ensuring the machinery of institutional translation and interpretation services. A key reason for a laissez-faire approach to language policy is that it touches existential national nerves, as frankly conceded by the German Head of Mission at the EU: there is ‘no more emotional topic in the EU than the language issue’.1 Or in the words of a senior French Member of the European Parliament, ‘the topic can be considered explosive in Europe’.2

The complexity of language policy is due to the many different roles that languages play in member states and in European integration, and the many facets of the national-supranational communicative interface. To do justice to such issues demands book-length treatment, which I have attempted in English-Only Europe? Challenging Language Policy.3 This traces the origins of European languages; it assesses the impact of contemporary globalisation; describes EU practices; and suggests criteria that could guide

---

1 Wilhelm Schönfelder cited in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 1 April 2005. ‘Es gibt in der EU kein emotionaleres Thema als Sprachen’.
equitable language policies. The final chapter sketches out best- and worst-case scenarios, and lists specific proposals for what needs to be done to strengthen national and supranational language policy infrastructure. It also suggests how an improvement of the management of multilingualism in EU institutions could be achieved, and lists needs in key areas of the teaching and learning of languages and in research. In a short article, all I can do is touch on some current issues and challenges.

Addressing EU language issues is complicated because there is a great deal of fluidity in language policy in Europe. This relates to

- an unresolved tension between linguistic nationalism (based on the monolingual ideologies of the ‘nation’ state), EU institutional multilingualism and English becoming dominant in the EU;
- competing agendas at the European, state (national) and regional or local levels;
- much EU rhetoric endorsing language rights and linguistic diversity, but very uneven implementation at both the supranational level and in the twenty-seven member states;
- increasing grassroots and élite bi- and multilingualism, except in the United Kingdom and among the older generation in other demographically large EU countries;
- a largely uncritical adoption of Englishisation, English as the lingua economica or lingua americana.

At the political level, there is a mismatch between the broad sweep of Article 22 of The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (approved by heads of state but currently on hold as a result of the constitutional crisis) – ‘The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity’ – and the realities of how this is interpreted. The most extreme form of declaring that the Charter’s commitment is merely hot air was given voice by a senior French civil servant in a conference paper in the USA. Yves Marek, counsellor to Jacques Toubon4 when Minister of Culture and Francophonie, claimed blandly that ‘in the field of linguistic rights, like in other fields of human rights, there is no right but only . . . politics’. He also claimed that French understandings of national languages underlie how the EU handles multilingualism, and that

---

4 Toubon later became Minister of Justice, so that the name given to the legislation in France aimed at stemming the tide of the invasion of English in France in 1994 is popularly known as the Loi Toubon.
in France there are no linguistic minorities, hence ‘no discrimination between so-called minorities’.\textsuperscript{5} It is unusual for a government representative to be so openly cynical. It also exemplifies why it is so difficult to form policies inspired by human rights principles at the supranational level.

An additional factor that muddies the language policy international waters is that basic concepts like \textit{language}, \textit{dialect} and \textit{nation} mean different things in each language and state. Some countries are based on ethnolinguistic criteria, the cultural nation, as in Germany (Herder, Blut und Boden), others on a political, republican principle rather than consanguinity, as in France. Semantic mismatches, deeply embedded in different conceptual universes and cosmologies, make international ‘understanding’ problematical. In addition, each country has evolved legal systems along distinct national lines over centuries, with the consequence that when the rule of law and European legislation, which overrides national law, are supposed to have the ‘same meaning’ in twenty-three languages and twenty-seven states, European union in the sense of uniformity is an illusion. Even such an apparently straightforward concept as \textit{working language} is used inconsistently in media and political discourse, by both senior EU insiders and journalists. The result is often to obscure what rights speakers of various languages have in the EU system or in interacting with it. Analysis of EU language régimes is also often blurred because it is unclear whether what is being referred to relates to a specific institution, to speech or writing, or to a citizen in contact with the EU.

These problems are compounded by the fact that the EU is pursuing language policies that negate each other. On the one hand it proclaims a commitment to multilingualism and linguistic diversity. On the other, many of its working practices and policies strengthen English at the expense of (speakers of) other languages. This is, for instance, the case with the Bologna process, a key EU project with the very ambitious goal of integrating the research and higher education systems of forty-five European countries (with Australia and the USA as observers, since higher education is big business for them) into a single, unified ‘area’, i.e. market. This ‘internationalisation’ is in theory committed, by the original Bologna declaration of 1999 ‘within the framework of our institutional competences and taking full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of university autonomy—to consolidate a European Higher Education Area at the latest by 2010’.

At the bi-annual ministerial meetings (most recently in Bergen in 2005 and

\textsuperscript{5} For analysis, see Phillipson, \textit{English-Only Europe?} 45–7.
London in 2007), the main focus has been on structural uniformity (a single B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. system), on quality control (nationally and internationally), student mobility, recognition of qualifications and joint degrees—all of which are demanding tasks for most countries—and making European universities attractive enough to compete with the USA and Australia.

What is striking and shocking is that in the long communiqués from each meeting, there is not one word on language policy, on bilingual degrees or multilingualism in higher education. On the contrary, the impression is created that what internationalisation means is English-medium higher education. If this outcome emerges, it will strengthen the position of higher education in the Anglo-American world, including Ireland. It will also mean that the rhetoric of maintaining Europe’s linguistic diversity and cultural heritage will remain empty words on paper.

Prior to the 2007 London meeting, EU Commissioner Jan Figel stated:

Bologna reforms are important but Europe should now go beyond them, as universities should also modernise the content of their curricula, create virtual campuses and reform their governance. They should also professionalize their management, diversify their funding and open up to new types of learners, businesses and society at large, in Europe and beyond. . . . The Commission supports the global strategy in concrete terms through its policies and programmes.

In other words, universities should no longer be seen as a public good but should be run like businesses, should privatise and let industry set the agenda.

I speak from personal and institutional experience when writing that this is precisely what the right-wing Danish government that has been in power since 2000 is implementing. The latest Bologna buzzwords are that degrees must be ‘certified’ in terms of the ‘employability’ of graduates. ‘Accountability’ no longer refers to intellectual quality or truth-seeking but means acceptability to

---

7 Press release IP/07/656
8 The Royal Danish Academy of Letters and Sciences commissioned a study in the spring of 2007 that demonstrates how academic freedom and the freedom of speech of academics are being restricted. The issues are explored in Susan Wright and Jakob Williams Ørberg, ‘Autonomy and Control: Danish University Reform in the Context of Modern Governance’, *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences* (LATISS), 1 (2008).
corporate imperatives. Before European integration has taken on viable forms, universities are being told to think and act globally—through the medium of English of course—rather than remain narrowly national or European. This is insulting to universities, most of which have been internationally-oriented for decades, if not centuries.

Such developments make it important to explore who it is that is setting the agenda for European integration. The conventional wisdom of recent decades has been that the French and Germans occupy the EU political high ground. This is only part of the story. The role of the USA in shaping the post-1945 world (the creation of the United Nations; the Bretton Woods agreements; the World Bank; the International Monetary Fund; North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) is well known. What is less well known is that 'The process of European integration might never have come about had it not been imposed on Europe by the Americans'. This is the analysis of a top Danish civil servant, an adviser to the Danish Prime Minister at the time of Danish entry to the EU, and later employed in the EU system. The links between the pioneer European architects of what has become the EU, Jean Monnet in particular, and the US political élite, before and after World War II, are detailed in Pascaline Winand’s *Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the United States of Europe* (1993). While Monnet and many of the key Europeans were quite open about their wish to create a federal Europe on the model of the USA, the Americans were shrewd enough to influence policies decisively but to remain discreetly in the background.

By contrast there are now regular EU-US summit meetings. At the 2007 meeting, a Transatlantic Economic Integration Plan was endorsed, as well as coordination of foreign policy globally. In effect this means that the EU accepts corporate America’s global agenda, as loyal but junior partners. This fits well with the neoliberal project for the New American Century that was hatched by the likes of Richard Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Rumsfeld in the late twentieth century:

---


10 Erik Holm, *The European Anarchy: Europe’s Hard Road into High Politics* (Copenhagen, 2001), 34.

11 Holm bewails the lack of vision of present-day European leaders, their petty national agendas and inability to think long-term.
The plan is for the United States to rule the world. The overt theme is unilateralism, but it is ultimately a story of domination. It calls for the United States to maintain its military superiority and prevent new rivals from rising up to challenge it on the world stage. It calls for dominion over friends and enemies alike. It says not that the United States must be more powerful, or most powerful, but that it must be absolutely powerful.12

The dominion over friends has been worked through in the European Round Table of Industrialists, the Transatlantic Business Dialogue and the Transatlantic Economic Partnership as well as in all the main international fora.13 The United Kingdom has spearheaded the adoption of this model in Europe, with its key role in global finance and its energetic military engagements as visible symptoms of commitment to US strategic interests.

In the EU system the way English linguistic hegemony is asserted can be seen in the figures for choice of language over the past forty years in the initial drafting of EU texts. These reveal a dramatic decline in the use of German and French, and a progressive and accelerating increase in the use of English as the default in-house language. This clearly strengthens the interests of the English-speaking member states, and of the countries in northern Europe where proficiency in English tends to be high.14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>French</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is it reasonable and correct then to refer to English simply as a *lingua franca*? The origins of the term, its varying senses and uses, and the implications of misusing it in an age of US-dominated empire have been explored15

---

14 It is, however, doubtful whether Dutch or Swedish interests are served optimally when representatives of these countries use English in high-level negotiations. This issue, often pointed out by interpreters, can be addressed by analysing how the interpretation system operates, how it is managed and funded, and criteria of efficiency and equity in communication.
15 Robert Phillipson, ‘Lingua franca or lingua frankensteinia? English in European
as well as the history of the intensive promotion of English internationally since the 1950s. A few key points can be summarised here.

Reference to English as a *lingua franca* generally seems to imply that the language is a neutral instrument for ‘international’ communication between speakers who do not share a mother tongue. The fact that English is used for a wide range of purposes, nationally and internationally, may mislead one into believing that *lingua franca* English is disconnected from the many purposes it serves in key societal domains. English might be more accurately described as a *lingua economica* (in business and advertising, the language of corporate neoliberalism), a *lingua emotiva* (the imaginary of Hollywood, popular music, consumerism and hedonism), a *lingua academica* (in research publications, at international conferences and as a medium for content learning in higher education), or a *lingua cultura* (rooted in the literary texts of English-speaking nations that foreign language learning traditionally aims at, and integrates with language learning as one element of general education). English is definitely the *lingua bellica* of wars between states (aggression by the United States and its loyal acolytes in Afghanistan and Iraq, building on the presence of the United States’ military bases in hundreds of countries worldwide). The worldwide presence of English as a *lingua americana* is due to the massive economic, cultural and military impact of the United States of America.

Labelling English as a *lingua franca*, if this is understood as a culturally neutral medium that puts everyone on an equal footing, is simply false. It is an *invidious* term if the language in question is a first language for some people but for others a foreign language. It is *misleading* if the language is supposed to be disconnected from culture and very specific purposes. It is an *inaccurate* term for a language that is taught as a subject in general education. Ironically, there is a historical continuity in the way the term originated (from Arabic) as a designation for the hybrid language of European crusaders who were out to eliminate Islam from Asia Minor, while now English is viscerally connected to the crusade of global corporatisation, marketed as freedom and democracy. Human rights have been dropped from this rhetoric, as they are manifestly no longer on the agenda, except when criticising ‘enemies’. The role of the British, especially Tony Blair, in this global scenario, is captured by the play-
wright David Hare:

it is now impossible to imagine any American foreign policy, however irrational, however dangerous, however illegal, with which our present Prime Minister would not declare himself publicly delighted and thrilled. . . . They know we have voluntarily surrendered our wish for an independent voice in foreign affairs. Worse, we have surrendered it to a country which is actively seeking to undermine international organisations and international law. Lacking the gun, we are to be only the mouth. The deal is this: America provides the firepower. We provide the bullshit. 18

The elimination of linguistic diversity has been an explicit goal of states attempting to impose monolingualism within their borders: linguist policies favour the lingua frankensteinia and lead to linguicide. 19 This was the case in the internal colonisation of the British Isles and in most Europeanised parts of the world. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas avoids seemingly innocuous terms like ‘language death’ and ‘language spread’, concepts that obscure agency, by referring to killer languages, language murder, and linguistic genocide, basing this term on definitions in international human rights law and the historical evidence of government policies. 20 Similarly, John Swales, after a lifetime of work on scientific English, is so concerned about other languages of scholarship being on the way to extinction that he labels English a lingua tyrannosaura. 21 The widespread concern in political and academic circles in Scandinavian countries with domain loss signifies a perception that segments of the national language are at risk from the English monster, hence the concern that Danish, Norwegian and Swedish should remain fully operational in all domains.

There are many distinguished European voices that reject the prospect of English becoming the sole language to unify Europe. For George Steiner, ‘a

18 David Hare, Obedience, Struggle and Revolt: Lectures on Theatre (London, 2005), 207, 208.
global mass media créole founded on American English is a soul-destroying prospect. So is the continuation of inflamed regionalism and language hatreds’. For Pierre Bourdieu, globalisation simply means Americanisation: Englishisation entails symbolic imperialism and linguistic hegemony. He accuses speakers of the dominant language (currently English, and earlier French and German) of behaving as though their symbolic forms and values are universal. For Étienne Balibar, following Umberto Eco, ‘the only genuine “idiom of Europe”... is the practice of translation’, and ‘English cannot be the language of Europe’.

Such pronouncements presuppose proficiency in at least two languages, which is precisely what the EU and the Council of Europe recommend for all school pupils. The EU Commission has expanded its activities to strengthen multilingualism. In Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004–2006, the message is hammered home that ‘learning one lingua franca alone is not enough... English alone is not enough’. There is also a warning to continental countries which have opted to start using English as a medium of instruction that ‘in non-anglophone countries recent trends to provide teaching in English may have unforeseen consequences on the vitality of the national language’.

The ambitious Framework Strategy for Multilingualism (2005) recommends that member states undertake the following:

- the learning in education of mother tongue plus two,
- the formulation of national plans to give coherence and direction to actions to promote multilingualism, significantly including the teaching of migrant languages,
- improved teacher training for foreign language learning,
- early language learning,
- Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), i.e. the merging of a foreign language with another school subject,
- more study of multilingualism in higher education,

---

22 George Steiner (2000): In a speech when receiving the Prince of Asturias award in Oviedo, Spain, 2001.
24 Étienne Balibar, We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship (Princeton, 2004), 230.
26 Whether this refers to minority mother tongues or the dominant national language is left unclear.
• introduction of a European Indicator of Language Competence, a Europe-wide language testing scheme,
• greater use in language learning of Information Society technologies,
• the harnessing of languages to ‘the multilingual economy’.

There has been since January 2007 a Commissioner with a portfolio to promote multilingualism, Leonard Orban from Romania. In his many speeches at conferences all over Europe, he stresses three interlocking goals:

• ‘promoting the cultural dimension of languages to build inclusive societies and develop intercultural dialogue. I intend to promote the learning of all languages present in the European Union, including the languages of migrants . . .
• work with business, to help them identify how to build up their language capacities to enter new markets, and to improve job-satisfaction . . .
• a European space for dialogue with the citizens, to make sure that everyone can communicate with the institutions in their language, that the Community legislation is available to everyone in their languages’. 27

What the local impact of any of these initiatives and EU ‘actions’ will be is impossible to predict, since it is entirely up to member states to follow or to ignore what ‘Brussels’ decides. The same is true of a raft of language-policy activities that the Council of Europe engages in. Language-policy issues do not figure prominently on the agendas of the meetings of EU Ministers of Education. There is a modest system of reporting back to the Commission regularly on implementation, which may or may not represent naming and shaming (since the minutes of some meetings are available on the internet). Though there is increasing evidence of the Commission drawing on advice from independent experts, it is doubtful whether the career eurocrats who at any point of time might be attached to a language-policy unit are professionally qualified for liaising with national authorities or educationalists and making an impact. They might just as well be dealing with fish quotas, energy or air pollution, and may well be doing so in their next posting.

27 From ‘Languages are a bridge for intercultural dialogue’, speech, Brussels, 29 June 2007 to The Group of Intellectuals for Intercultural Dialogue.
This worry applies equally strongly to the European Parliament. When debating the Framework Strategy for Multilingualism, a majority in the parliament refused to approve a set of measures for strengthening work on language policies that had been recommended unanimously by the parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education. Essentially this meant that linguistic nationalists schooled in monolingualism did not wish to promote multilingualism nationally and failed to connect this defensive stance to the changes in language use that globalisation and European integration are bringing about.

On one of the rare occasions when the EU did commission a serious study of some language policy issues, it decided internally and totally undemocratically to ignore the advice they received. A feasibility study concerning the creation of a European Agency for Linguistic Diversity and Language Learning was requested by the European Parliament, and commissioned by the Directorate General for Education and Culture. The task was given to Yellow Window Associates, a consultancy with wide experience of servicing EU institutions. Their mandate excluded attention to the internal workings of EU institutions and migrant languages. Their report, of 18 May 2005, was made available on the Directorate General’s website. The detailed, 118-page study, on the basis of extensive consultation with a wide range of people concerned with many aspects of language policy, articulates an analysis of needs, conditions, and modalities. The report confirms that a wealth of professional expertise exists that decision-makers ought to draw on. It makes a strong case for either a Linguistic Agency, like other high-prestige EU agencies (dealing with the environment in Copenhagen and human rights in Vienna), or alternatively a network of Language Diversity Centres to strengthen policy formation and implementation, particularly for regional minority languages. The feasibility study reveals a widespread perception that there is a serious need for policy advice and information for national and EU decision-makers. This was overwhelmingly the case in new member states, whereas the established ones consider such functions ‘not useful’. The same pattern holds for research into language-policy issues. There was also near unanimity in responses in rejecting English as a sole lingua franca. The study concludes that ‘A no-action scenario would seriously undermine the credibility of the EU in this field’.

In fact the Linguistic Agency proposal was rejected unilaterally by the Commission. What it has done is to decide to support the Network on Promoting Linguistic Diversity within the framework of the programme...
'Integrated Lifelong Learning' (2007–2013). But funding for ‘regional and minority languages’ has been significantly reduced, from 1.2 million euro annually to 149,000 euro annually.\textsuperscript{28} This represents a massive downgrading of funding for languages. Whatever credibility the EU might have gained by creating a portfolio for multilingualism in its own right from 2007 is being seriously undermined by a ‘no-action’ scenario on an Academy and reduced action on minority languages. Most of the Commissioner’s speeches consist of platitudinous generalities about support for diversity and language learning, and it is probably in the nature of his role that they have to be. 

The final report of a High-Level Group on Multilingualism was published on 26 September 2007, analysing many aspects of language policy and making suggestions for activities to strengthen language learning.\textsuperscript{29} It was published in twenty-two languages (all official languages except Irish), reflecting the importance of the project. The Group’s many proposals relate to raising awareness and enhancing motivation for language learning; the potential of the media in evoking, enhancing and sustaining motivation for language learning; languages for business; interpretation and translation, new trends and needs; regional or minority languages; and research into multilingualism. The key issue is whether EU or government funds will be forthcoming for implementing such ideas.

The up-beat nature of these ideas contrasts with many symptoms of crisis in language policy in Europe, such as foreign languages other than English being learned less, and the way market forces are strengthening English in the Bologna process, as reported above, and in the internal management of multilingualism in EU institutions. Translators and interpreters for demographically ‘small’ languages like Danish and Swedish, as well as the newly arrived Baltic

\textsuperscript{28} Mercator\textit{news}, 3 September 2007, reports: ‘this new network aims at the strengthening of Regional and Minority Languages throughout Europe has been established on the initiative of the Welsh Language Board in Wales. The Mercator Research Centre is one of the partners of the network alongside organisations and regional authorities from Wales, Catalonia, Finland (Swedish speakers), Estonia and Ireland. Around one half of a million euro has been provisioned for the new network for three years—the project partners/regional languages will finance the necessary equity contribution. Until now, in the Action Programme 2004–2006, the Mercator Centres in Ljouwert, Aberystwyth and Barcelona had received earmarked financial support from the European Commission together with the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL). As a result of this mainstreaming operation of the European Commission the total sum of EU funding for Regional and Minority Languages has declined from 1.2 million euro annually to 149,000 euro annually’.

and central European languages, are convinced that their languages are being treated as second-class. There is evidently a conflict between the rhetoric of supporting all languages and the realities of linguistic hierarchies and marginalisation.

Any more detailed analysis of the current role of English in Europe would need to see it in terms of the English language as project, as process and as product. Nobody is questioning whether English ought to be optimally learned or not. There is no dispute about the fact that proficiency in English is massively useful in the modern world, and that English serves multiple purposes, some constructive, some benign and some evil. But while English opens doors for some, it closes them for others. More in-depth research is needed into how English functions globally and locally, for which the following pointers may be useful.

The lingua franca/frankensteinia project can be seen as entailing

- the imagining of a community, in the same way as polities are imagined, an English-using community without territorial or national boundaries;30
- the invention of traditions (in the sense of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger), customs, activities and discourses that connect people through a merging of the language with multiple agendas at many levels, the local, the national, the European, the universal and global;31
- ultimately the project reflects metaphysical choices and philosophical principles that underpin the type of community we wish to live in, the beliefs, values and ethical principles that guide us, in a world that is currently dominated by neoliberalism, unsustainable consumerism, violence and linguistic neoimperialism;32
- our choices can either serve to maintain diversity, biological, cultural and linguistic or to eliminate it, and current trends are alarming;33
- all of which lead to visions of and for English, in Europe and

31 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge, 1983).
33 See http://www.terralingua.org [accessed 31 July 2008]
elsewhere, and if these do not define *lingua franca* in such a way as to ensure equality and symmetry in intercultural communication, but are essentially one-sided promotion of English, the project tends to be more that of a *lingua frankensteinia*.

The *lingua franca/frankensteinia* process can be seen as entailing

- building communities of practice, of language use and language learning
- that people identify with at various levels
- which can be personal, interpersonal, intercultural and sub-cultural
- in contexts of use, discourses and domains
- which conform to norms of linguistic behaviour that are institutionally (re-)inforced, legitimated and rationalised,
- in societies that hierarchise by means of race, class, gender and language
- leading to English being perceived as prestigious, ‘normal’ and normative, hence the feeling of native speakers that the language is universally relevant and usable, and the need for others to learn and use the language, in some cases additively, in others subtractively.

The *lingua franca/frankensteinia* product

- interlocks with economic/material systems, structures, institutions and the United States’ empire
- is supported ideologically in cultural (re-)production and consumption
- in political, economic, military, media, academic and educational discourses
- through narratives of the ‘story’, the ‘spread’ of English, language ‘death’ or linguiside
- through metaphors of English as ‘international’, global, God-given, rich, its use being ‘natural’ in the modern world
- with the prestige code that of élites in the dominant English-speaking countries and embedded in the lexis and syntax of the language.
Heuristic ways of clarifying whether the advance of English represents *lingua franca* rather than *lingua frankensteinia* trends would entail asking a series of questions, and relating each of them to English as project, process and product:

- Is the expansion and/or learning of English in any given context additive or subtractive?
- Is linguistic capital dispossession of national languages taking place?
- Is there a strengthening or a weakening of a balanced local language ecology?
- Where are our political and corporate leaders taking us in language policy?
- What is the role of English Studies in the contemporary world?
- How can academics contribute to public awareness and political change?
- If dominant norms are global, is English serving local needs or merely subordinating its users to the American empire project?

Empirical studies of such questions are needed before firmer conclusions can be drawn, in tandem with a refinement of the theoretical framework for understanding these changes in the global and local language ecology.
The short answer to the question posed in my title—‘Does the United Kingdom Have a Language Policy?’—is ‘no’. With regard to English, the prevailing popular consensus, which is summed up recently by Dennis Ager, is that British people enjoy ‘unfettered freedom to do what we like with our words’.¹ That feeling is not shared by activists of any of the other ‘indigenous’ languages, for which recognition of existence, rights to speak and more importantly to be responded to in their language, have become the driving force of activism. Activism, whether popular or academic or a fusion of both, has reaped benefits for Welsh and Scottish Gaelic through the Welsh Language Act (1993) and the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act (2005); however, the possibility of an Irish Language Act for Northern Ireland has been pushed back for the meantime by the present Northern Ireland Assembly. Thanks to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), other languages have received some minimal formal recognition: Scots and, since 2002, Cornish.² Whereas there is no doubt for anyone that those United Kingdom languages other than Scots are not in any sense a form or variety of English but separate fully-fledged linguistic systems, the relationship and difference between Scots and English is a lot less clear-cut. As the charter is territory based, and whereas it rightly recognised the existence of Scots in Northern Ireland, it did not label that Scots simply ‘Scots’ as it should have done but ‘Ulster-Scots’, thereby aiding and abetting the activists’ claim that ‘Ulster-Scots’ was a separate ‘language’ in its own right—autonomous from Scotland Scots. So successful has the separatist claim been that the then permanent secretary of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Dr Aideen McGinley, was able to state in a letter to Gavin Falconer³ that, ‘I

² For the charter see: http://www.coe.int/T/E/Legal_Affairs_and_regional_Democracy/Regional_or_Minority_languages/1_The_Charter/List_Charter_versions.asp [accessed 1 September 2008].
³ I am grateful to Gavin Falconer for comments on a draft of this paper and for years of discussion on the issues raised in it.
cannot agree with your comment “that there is only one Scots language”.

English, certainly, has not had it all its own way—witness the strong complaints tradition in existence ever since Jonathan Swift’s *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue*, published in 1712, and culminating in regularly submitted letters to the press about low and lowering standards of grammatical usage in English right down to the present day, reinforced by prominent people such as the broadcaster John Humphrys, in books such as *Lost For Words: The Mangling and Manipulating of the English Language* (2004). Scots, too, has its own complaints tradition—some decrying Scots as an inferior form of English, others urging its recognition of its being still a fully-fledged independent language. Whereas various contributors to the *Edinburgh History of the Scots Language* show that Scots and English had converged, Falconer shows not only that, if it were convergence, it was asymmetrical convergence, with English giving not one inch, but also that, through asymmetrical convergence, Scots had become a dialectalised form of English. What is more, Falconer, in the latest of a distinguished line of scientific descriptions of Scots, argues that Scots has also become a genrified variety of English, becoming restricted in formal spoken and written registers to use as a vehicle for comedy, to which numerous stage and television dramas or broadcast comedians readily testify. Academic linguistic judgment has never been far removed from activism for Scots in Scotland; but activism for Scots in Northern Ireland has tended to deny the outputs of science and academia, preferring a more politicised and polemical line, reinforced by the Northern Ireland Executive’s uncritical acceptance of the European Charter’s provision. In terms of Scots, therefore, two policies have evolved since the signing and ratification of the ECRML by the United Kingdom government, with some incredulity in Scotland of the progress seemingly being made in Northern Ireland.

The complaints tradition proceeds by assuming that ‘everyone knows’ what is being talked about, what ‘bad English’ or ‘bad grammar’ actually are, and that the criticism being levelled at the language is right-minded, reasonable and irreproachable—plausible social judgments masquerading as linguistic descriptions. In fact, the opposite may often be the case—that cited instances of ‘bad grammar’ such as *he done it* or *I seen it* are arguably instances of ‘good grammar’ when viewed scientifically within a paradigm of historical language

---


change through process of regularisation within the language. Language policy depends on what ‘everyone knows’, and the European Charter was drawn up to represent the rights of, and give protection and a voice to, speakers of ‘minority’ or ‘regional’ languages—in this case, Scots—or, as the charter has effectively created, Scots and Ulster-Scots. In Scotland, as First Minister, the late Donald Dewar, once remarked in my presence, ‘everyone knows what Scots is’—for Dewar, what everyone knew was that Scots was a literary language in which people of today as much as people of the past write or wrote in, and that there is nothing to produce a policy or legislate for; rather, it was a laissez-faire attitude to let writers in Scots enjoy ‘unfettered freedom to do what we like with our words’.

Against that, present-day activists would maintain that what every activist knows—and moreover what every citizen of Scotland should come to know—is that Scots—the Scots language—is a fully-fledged, all-purpose national language, as it was in the days of the Stewart monarchy, but which is now ‘eclipsed’ by its kin-tongue English through the politics of union, and as such is similar in structure and function to many present-day national languages in Europe which are uncontroversially designated ‘national language’. In Scotland, whatever the descriptive facts of asymmetrical convergence or dialectalisation, in cognisance of its past unequivocal status, there is a rich mythology surrounding Scots’ language status and national emblematic symbolism, which fuels the activists’ cause. Government, by comparison, whether the Assembly or the Civil Service, seems to fall behind the syndrome of ‘doing nothing’ epitomised by Donald Dewar. In Northern Ireland, by contrast, where there is the prospect of Scots being promoted into the cultural weaponry of Northern Ireland, two views have come to prevail. For native speakers, the ‘Scotch’ (itself an English word for Scots) or ‘Braid Scotch’ was not only their tongue or ‘way of talking’ but, as they saw it, it was their tongue of English, too, their local Ulster English. Ulster people do not have that sense of Scots as a literary language or emblematic national tongue which is so prevalent in Scotland. As everyone knew that, there appeared utter surprise among native speakers that any one might hi-jack their linguistic birthright for political ends. And then there were the activists for whom it had become an incontrovertible, non-negotiable truth that Ulster-Scots was a separate language from Scotland Scots. For the activists, even if nobody knew about Ulster-Scots, they knew—they alone most certainly knew; after all, it was as a result of their efforts, not least before a Committee of Experts visitation, which persuaded the Council of Europe not merely worthily to recognise Scots in Northern
Ireland, but to call it ‘Ulster-Scots’. As for government—both the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Northern Ireland Civil Service—it was caught on the hop for nobody knew what this ‘Ulster-Scots’ phenomenon was, even less that it was supposedly ‘a language’. As the activist voice refused to go away, the government, instead of seeking advice from academic linguists, eventually capitulated, with the result of official statements and everyone-knows-like pronouncements, such as the permanent secretary’s statement quoted above. Whereas the Scottish Executive was for doing nothing as they believed that nothing was to be done, the Northern Ireland Executive believed that what was to be done was the will of activism, even though that will was out of line with descriptive science or the views and attitudes of the local native speakers.

And so it has come about that one linguistic phenomenon, whether or not a language, and regardless of the imbalance in the equation between Scotland and Northern Ireland, is recognised not only as a language but under two names in the European Charter. Whether a ‘minority’ or ‘regional’ language is beside the point, it is a language tout court; besides, in terms of the charter, as Scots most certainly is not in a minority to anything else, it has to be classified as a ‘regional language’.

I Spolsky Model

How may those contradictory views be further critiqued? In his scholarly monograph, Language Policy, the internationally-renowned language-policy scholar, Bernard Spolsky, presents a model or ‘theory’ of language policy. There are three parts to this model:

1. Language practices (which are observable)
2. Language beliefs and ideology
3. Language management or planning activities

For Spolsky, each of those parts is governed by three conditioning factors:

i. language policy is concerned with all levels that make up language (pronunciation, spelling, lexical choice, grammar, style,
bad language, racist language, obscene language, correct language... non-autonomous varieties, i.e. dialects, recognised autonomous standard languages, etc.)

ii. language policy operates within a speech community... within any defined or definable social or political or religious group or community

iii. language policy functions in a complex ecological relationship among a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic elements, variables and factors.

In short, Spolsky understands policy as covering a language’s entire structure and those systems of expression and exponence within it; he further recognises that a language is not an idea or artefact but a living natural entity whose users can be identified and labelled—and no doubt called upon for information of intuitive insights if required; and he finally recognises that language does not operate on its own but with other value systems in a shared communicative economy.

II Variety vs. Variant

To develop the comparison further, let me now look at the names used to denote the relationship between Scots in Northern Ireland and Scots in Scotland for the light it might shed on beliefs or management. The two names which I wish to focus upon are ‘variety’ and ‘variant’. The only truly legislative document where that relationship is mentioned is the Statutory Instrument 1999 No. 859, The North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, in which it is stated: ‘Ullans [i.e. Ulster Scots] is to be understood as the variety of the Scots language traditionally found in parts of Northern Ireland and Donegal.’ This statement makes it clear that what is found in Northern Ireland and Donegal is part of the Scots language; a variety from within it. Happily, this sole piece of legislation is in accord with description; unhappily, it is ignored by the Northern Ireland Executive.

The only problem with the above statement is its use of the term Ullans, a neologistic compound of Ulster + Lallans. In twentieth-century Scottish usage Lallans refers to literary, largely poetic writing, something occasionally deemed by some ‘synthetic’ or ‘plastic’ writing, epitomised by the early poems in Scots by Hugh MacDiarmid. Ullans, however, is best used to refer to recent, often disastrous attempts at creating a new artificial written version for official
documents conflating some current spoken forms and locutions with numerous others that are anachronistic and obsolete, and still more that borrow from or emulate phonetic notation, with a result that is counter-intuitive. It is hard to reconcile the desire for a policy for a living language with one that never existed and had to be invented.  

Falconer finds another difficulty with the Order’s statement: ‘There is no standard form, and rather than calling Ulster Scots a variety of Scots in Scotland, it might be more accurate to say that all Scots dialects are varieties of each other.’ One of the great strengths of Scots is that many of its structural features are of national reach, being shared among all regions of Scotland and by extension with Northern Ireland and Donegal. Other features are regional, but often systematically regional so that each region has its own distinctive form, as the Fifer reportedly said to Aberdonian, ‘Are you the fowk that caas fush feesh?’ Although *The Hamely Tongue* dictionary is a personal record of Scots in County Antrim by the compiler, James Fenton, my Scottish farm-born and -reared mother has shown me that she clearly knew more than half of the items in it.

So as a *variety*, Scots in Northern Ireland may be part of a whole, or one part among many, with much shared between each part. How does it fare as a *variant*? According to the *Scottish National Dictionary*, unquestionably regarded as the current authority on the vocabulary of language, Scots comprises four dialects: Insular, Northern, Mid (sometimes called Central) and Southern. Mid Scots has several sub-dialects: East Mid (a), East Mid (b), west Mid, and South Mid. ‘Ulster Scots is in the main a variant of wm. Scots’. That is, from that statement of derivation, the inference is that Ulster Scots is a sub-dialect of Mid-Scots, as shown below in schema (1), and is also most like West-Mid Scots, but it has other derivative features too.

That view has been confirmed by Caroline Macafee, who states that, ‘Ulster Scots is . . . clearly a dialect of Central Scots’, i.e. Mid-Scots, and by Paul Johnston who states, ‘Phonologically, Antrim dialects resemble South Mid (as

---

8 Falconer, *Scots: Decline, Revival, Divergence*.
10 *Scottish National Dictionary*, xli (my italics).
did Derry ones) and Down varieties resemble West Mid, but all have the same Gaelic substratal characteristics present that characterise all Ulster . . . varieties.’

A stronger version of the claim would consider Ulster Scots as a dialect of Scots, i.e. the language’s fifth main dialect. This view has in its favour that element of contact with Irish which has provided the Ulster dialect with substratal features recorded in *The Hamely Tongue* but certainly not shared with other sub-dialects of Mid Scots. By this argument, Ulster Scots is a dialectal variant of the Scots language, not a dialectal variant of a dialect of the Scots language, as shown in schema (2).

Description may yet have to reconcile the choice for Ulster Scots between its being a dialect or a sub-dialect. However, the activists’ claim of languageness for Ulster Scots offers a further alternative—that Ulster-Scots is equivalent to Scots at the level of language, as depicted in schema (3):

---


Falconer analyses several statements by activists and their critics and interprets them to the effect that the level at which Ulster Scots is perceived to be differentiated from (Scotland) Scots is at the level of language, thus allowing each to contain their own separate set of dialects. The difficulty with this activist view is that it goes beyond the descriptively observable and invokes beliefs about separate languages which are neither shared by activists in Scotland nor by native speakers in Scotland or Northern Ireland.

These views presuppose a linguistic entity which, on grounds of historical development, previous national language status, literary achievements, survival as a vernacular tongue and the amounts of scholarship devoted to its vocabulary, can be uncontroversially delimited as an autonomous linguistic system, a language. A major tenet in Falconer’s study is that present-day Scots as dialectalised English is not an autonomous system, but it has the potential to become one, to become ausbau-able, and extend its range of genre use across speech and writing to become a fully-fledged language again. That view of each Scots’ ausbau-able potential appears to be shared between Scotland and Northern Ireland, with each camp eager to see such a fully-fledged Scots standardised in its own image. Thereby, to such ends, strikingly different approaches to orthography are being pursued on each side of the North Channel. No doubt it is this separatist approach to standardisation and ausbau-ability in Northern Ireland that is substantiating the claim in Northern Ireland that Ulster Scots is a separate language and which is upheld by Civil Service officials. Having succeeded in ensuring the naming of Scots in Northern Ireland as the ‘language’ ‘Ulster-Scots’ in the ECRML, activists have set themselves the task of creating that language—except that the result is such an artificial mix of obsolete spellings and neologisms that it has utterly disenfranchised ordinary native speakers, most of whom, one suspects, believe neither that such texts are their tongue written down, nor that what they speak is anything other than their own ‘way of talking’, which for them by implication is apperceived to be their local form of English. Fieldwork testing has shown that native speakers in County Antrim much prefer the contemporary prose of Lallans magazine than any of the artificial Ullans translations.

---

13 Falconer, Scots: Decline, Revival, Divergence.
14 Ibid.
III European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

For those languages for which it has been ratified, the ECRML has been welcomed as an incentive for the provision of language policy in the United Kingdom. However, that basis does not accord with descriptive facts. The ECRML states that for ‘the purposes of the charter’, which is first and foremost organised by territory, it will regard Scots and Ulster-Scots as two languages. The central mechanism for ratification is the obligation by each signatory state to submit periodic reports on its implementation of charter provisions to a Council of Europe Committee of Experts (COMEX), and for that committee to issue a public response. In its response to the United Kingdom’s first periodic report, the COMEX recommended in 2004 that the United Kingdom’s government ‘create conditions for the use of Scots and Ulster Scots in public life, through the adoption of a language policy and concrete measures, in co-operation with the speakers of the languages.’ Three years later, in 2007, in its response to the United Kingdom’s second periodic report, the COMEX commented: ‘With respect to the recommendation of the COMEX concerning the creation of conditions for the use of Scots in public life, it does not seem that any steps have been taken in this direction.’ The COMEX Report continues:

In the last evaluation report, the COMEX noted that there was no policy or legal framework for Ulster Scots. Although positive steps have been taken with regard to acceptance of use of the language in public services, the

---

16 COMEX, The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: Application of the Charter in the UK, 1st Monitoring cycle, Strasbourg, 24 March 2004. (My italics in this and following citations). For an online version see: http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/regional_or_minority_languages/2_monitoring/2.4_Committee_of_Ministers%27_Recommendations/UK_CM_Rec.pdf [accessed 1 September 2008].

17 COMEX, The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: Application of the Charter in the UK, 2nd Monitoring cycle, Strasbourg, 14 March 2007, paragraph 67. For an online version see: http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/regional_or_minority_languages/2_monitoring/2.4_Committee_of_Ministers%27_Recommendations/UK_CM_Rec2.pdf [accessed 1 September 2008]. See also United Kingdom Government, European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: Second Periodical Report by the United Kingdom presented to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in accordance with article 15 of the Charter (2005): http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/regional_or_minority_languages/2_monitoring/2.2_States_Reports/UK_report2.pdf [accessed 1 September 2008].
language still remains nearly invisible in public life.\textsuperscript{18}

It had earlier stated:

The United Kingdom report indicated that this recommendation will be met within the National Languages Strategy mentioned in the Partnership Agreement, which will be developed in consultation with the relevant language organisations. Within this frame, local authorities and national bodies are to draw up language plans. However, Scots still does not have an overarching policy, although some local authorities (e.g. Angus and Moray Council) have adopted a Scots language policy of their own.\textsuperscript{19}

Whatever has happened for other languages, the charter has not led to a policy for Scots. As Ulster-Scots is treated separately, did it fare any better in the reports to and from the COMEX? In 2007, the COMEX reported that ‘regarding Ulster Scots... there is no overarching policy’ and that ‘the situation with regard to the consultation of Scots-speakers still remains unsatisfactory.’\textsuperscript{20} In the end, the COMEX recommended that the United Kingdom government of 2007 ‘strengthen the efforts to improve the position of Scots and Ulster-Scots’.\textsuperscript{21}

IV Strategies for Scots in Scotland

So what happened? The first, Labour-dominated Scottish Executive produced a National Cultural Strategy in 2000, in which responsibility for Scots is shifted to university research.

The Scots language continues to be widely spoken today and has a long and important history. It is a living language, and is the subject of increasing academic study and discussion. A group of university staff and others concerned with both Scots and Gaelic have recently put forward a proposal for a centre for the languages of Scotland.

\textsuperscript{18} COMEX, The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: Application of the Charter in the UK, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Monitoring cycle, paragraph 80.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., paragraph 50.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., paragraph 55, paragraph 164.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 81, recommendation six.
This could provide a framework for the extensive data held on the languages by various bodies, including the *Scottish National Dictionary*, supported by SAC [the Scottish Arts Council], and the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, supported by the universities. A feasibility study is planned.\textsuperscript{22}

In the second, again Labour-dominated Executive’s draft of *A Strategy for Scotland’s Languages*, the following, larger statement was made about Scots:

The Scots language is an important part of Scotland’s cultural heritage. It is a living language and is still widely spoken across Scotland today in a variety of forms such as Scots, Doric and Lallans. Unlike Gaelic, Scots is not an endangered language and has considerable overlap with Scottish Standard English. However, it is important that we recognise, respect and celebrate the Scots language as an integral part of our cultural heritage. We must also ensure a familiarity with the language so that we continue to understand not only our literature and our historical record but also our contemporary arts as well. We are aware that there are many people in Scotland who do not regard Scots as a separate language. Scots, however, was once recognised as a language of government, business, academia and everyday life in Scotland. Scots, like English, German, Dutch, Norwegian and Danish, is a Germanic language. It is important for the confidence of Scots speakers that we recognise and respect it as a distinct language. We should not assume that speaking Scots is an indication of poor competence in English. Instead, we should celebrate the contribution that Scots has made to the modern English vocabulary as well as the influence that Scots speakers have had on the modern world—in disciplines such as science, literature, economics, politics, philosophy and the arts. People in Scotland who are not from Scots-speaking families or communities should also be encouraged to celebrate Scots as an important part of our diverse cultural heritage. Familiarity with Scots allows us to enjoy not only the great literature of the past but contemporary arts and culture as well. The *Executive’s National Guidelines on English Language 5–14* advocate the inclusion of Scots in the school curriculum where

appropriate. The Guidelines advocate the inclusion of Scots literature in the curriculum, and Learning and Teaching Scotland produces teaching materials in support of this inclusive policy. This allows pupils to be confident and creative in language and to develop notions of language diversity, within which they can appreciate the range of accents, dialects and forms of expression they encounter. This helps children value the Scots they may use at home or with their peers. In addition, there are a range of groups supporting and promoting Scots, including the Scots Language Society, the Scots Language Resource Centre, Scottish Language Dictionaries, Dictionary of the Scottish Tongue and the Association for Scottish Literary Studies. These groups have made important contributions towards raising the profile of Scots and thus enriching Scotland’s cultural life.23

This statement reads like a descriptive encyclopaedic entry; it is neither a statement of policy nor an agenda; it is allegedly a fact sheet drawn up by the then Conservative Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, c. 1995. Whereas there are some exhortative maxims, there is no indication of how those goals might be achieved. The first part of the document favours the first person plural pronoun ‘we’, but who exactly are those ‘we’ being referred to? (There appear to be several referents.) Is it an attempt to include the Scottish population in a sense of collective identity for which the population is so complicit that there is neither reason nor need for the government to act separately? The strategy document comes with a rationale for ‘celebrating cultural diversity’, ‘promoting respect and confidence’, ‘encouraging mobility and communication’, ‘facilitating access and inclusion’, ‘increasing economic opportunity’ and ‘enriching education’, but at no point in the strategy does it show how Scots will achieve those rather weaselly-worded goals.24 Whatever this document is, it certainly is not a strategy. It fails to address any matter of policy let alone strategy.25 By contrast, the Northern Ireland, Executive has

---


24 Ibid.

created a Charter Implementation Group, which has produced ‘Guidance’ on the implementation of the charter and measures for ‘Equality Testing’ with regard to the charter’s implementation. In addition, the Executive has published for public consultation proposals for an Ulster-Scots Academy, which has corpus planning or standardisation as one of its central goals. In so far as there may be utter disbelief in the status of Ulster-Scots as an autonomous language, the Executive is taking steps towards strategic maintenance.

V Policy Issues

The present situation regarding policy for Scots and Ulster-Scots in Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively raises all sorts of issues. For what is descriptively one bound-up linguistic unity, government is proceeding on the basis of two names, for what is taken to be two separate autonomous languages, with two separate policies in operation. In Scotland, a Dewar-led Executive did nothing because the view prevailed that everyone knew what Scots was, and that there was no need for any action by the government. Lobbying was generally un-orchestrated and unfocussed as there was much disagreement about goals and tactics among activists, as Robert McColl Millar has shown, but some credit must go to the Scots Language Society for securing the original inclusion of Scots in the ECRML. By contrast, in Northern Ireland, nobody in government knew about Ulster-Scots as it had been thrust upon them. As activist lobbying was vocal and sustained, it was that view which came to prevail in government and be reflected in policy—in the separate recognition of Ulster-Scots as a language in the charter, in the official use of the hyphen to designate its separate status and, above all, in the use of activists as consultants and advisers, often wearing multiple hats—a classic case of poachers turning gamekeepers. Direct resolute action by activists led over time to the desired

actions—it led to clear visibility and to the remarkable raising of public consciousness that there was a linguistic entity of some sort worth reckoning with which was neither English nor Irish. One difference between the two jurisdictions was that, in Northern Ireland, there were politicians willing to take up the cause of Ulster-Scots, leading to its conspicuous presence alongside Irish in the *Belfast Agreement* of 1998, although at that stage yet to be undignified by the qualifier ‘language’.

Returning to Spolsky’s model of language policy, for there to be a policy at all, each part of the model must be invoked and in equilibrium. In Northern Ireland, the three parts are clearly not in harmony or unison. Whereas the Northern Ireland Executive and Ulster-Scots activism are united in their ideological, at times evangelical, belief that Ulster-Scots is a separate language from Scotland Scots, there is disbelief and disaffection among ‘Braid Scotch’ speakers who regard their ‘Braid Scotch’ as simply their ‘way of talking’, but with the implication of speaking a variety which is apperceptionally judged by some as ‘English’ without an awareness that what they are speaking is actually a form of Scots. Although such apperceptional views in Northern Ireland are held with genuine conviction, such non-recognition may veil wider issues of ethnic or class prejudice only now becoming unleashed through Ulster-Scots activism.

However, in support of their beliefs, the Executive is showing willingness to respond to the ECRML and ‘to implement’ and ‘to take resolute action’ by initiating management through guidelines and proposals by way of policy provision. In terms of practice, however, there is failed corpus planning; communicative failure; and, worst of all, disbelieving, disaffected and disenchanted speakers. There is a huge chasm between management and practice. Invoke Spolsky’s conditioning factors and a Northern Ireland policy towards standardisation is doomed from the start if it is not based on the forms and idioms of the speech community, or has native speaker support.

In Scotland, by comparison, there has been a stand-off between the Executive on the one hand and academia and activism on the other on the grounds of ‘everyone knows’ and opposing ideological beliefs. The fact is, however, that nobody knows because no information about Scots has been systematically gathered by the Executive either by Census returns or as a nation-wide sociolinguistic survey. There is a further stand-off between the COMEX and the Executive, which has spectacularly failed to implement any of the

---

29 For a copy of the *Belfast Agreement* see http://www.nio.gov.uk/agreement.pdf [Accessed 7 July 2008].
policy measures urged by the COMEX in both 2004 and 2007. Statements by the Executive in the form of strategy tend to describe the work by education or cultural organisations, or by universities or lexicographic research units, many of them receiving only the most token and insecure of funding streams from central government, thereby simply side-stepping the issues of policy, strategy and adequacy of funding.

When Scotland is considered in terms of Spolsky’s model, the Executive and activism are disunited in ideology, with the Executive also in denial or deferral mode. Beliefs about Scots are also mixed between speakers and activism and within activism. With the Scottish parliament’s Cross-Party Group on the Scots Language, there were huge disagreements about the form of the Scots which appeared as the text in the group’s pamphlet entitled *Scots: A Statement of Principles* (2003) with rich idiomatic Scots giving way to Scottified English. Many steeped in the literary tradition find the Scots of the popular *Itchy Coo* publications very inauthentic, more recognisable as translated English than idiomatic Scots. As far as management is concerned, there is no policy provision whatsoever; but if the view is that there is nothing to manage, then there is little surprise that the Executive is keen to leave it to others. At the level of practice, by the most positive assessments, as many as 2.75 million Scots speak some form of Scots every day, regardless of what they call it; but there is no corpus planning, and between the two are disaffected and disenchanted speakers of various kinds. Despite this lack of policy, Scotland already has two advantages in terms of Spolsky’s conditioning factors. The first is that written Scots is invariably based on the Scots speech with which writers are most familiar and, notwithstanding the literary tradition, this offers probably the most plausible model for standardisation as such written idiomatic Scots is regarded as authentic for that particular speech community. Secondly, Scots in itself has an emblematic quality which symbolically as well as unifyingly expresses Scottishness.

Taken together, it is noticeable that the two jurisdictions share the lack of policies—either jointly or territorially separately. Both areas suffer from the ideology of ‘everyone knows’/‘nobody knows’, to which Executives as well as activists subscribe. The ECRML is proving both a help and a hindrance. In Scotland, its implementation is ignored; in Northern Ireland, the Executive creates language-management tools in what is clearly a situation of disbelief that the product which those tools are intended to maintain is either necessary or desired. In Scotland, the ECRML is the policy framework which is resisted; in Northern Ireland, it is the framework around which management tools are
being built. Those Northern Ireland tools are based on the invented Ullans of the activists and followers; in Scotland, the denial of a written Scots Sachprosa is so complete that there is no communication between the Executive and those who might be sufficiently skilled at experimenting with Civil Service prose in Scots.

Some of the issues which contrast Scotland and Northern Ireland arise from terminology and its implications. Structurally, as it has been shown, Scots in Scotland and Northern Ireland are as one; Ulster Scots might as well be called Hiberno-Scots for the ways in which it relates to Scots (or mainly Hiberno-West-Mid-Scots if the Scottish National Dictionary definition is accepted) are no different from those through which Hiberno-English is related to English. Apperceptually, however, there are real differences about status: In Scotland, for many, Scots, unquestionably, is a language. If they think about it further, Scots, unquestionably, is a language, of which Ulster Scots is a part. In Northern Ireland, for some, Ulster Scots is a language quite separate from Scots; for others, Ulster Scots is a local form of English, a form of Hiberno-English; for others, they will see the relationship with Scotland but be unsure about its classification or relationship. A coach and horses has now been driven through those views by the ECRML, invoked as unequivocal support for the separate languageness of Scots in Northern Ireland. If the ECRML has bias, it is towards the will and aspirations of speakers rather than governments. The ECRML reciprocates that will in Scotland which falls on a deaf Executive; in Northern Ireland the ECRML finds a willing manager in the Executive which has ended up forging an ever-growing chasm between, on the one hand, the activists who have, through skilful politics with the COMEX at the outset, engineered the descriptively unverifiable status of Ulster-Scots as a language and are now embarked on dubious corpus planning and, on the other, the native speakers who have not recovered from the shock of discovering their living linguistic birthright mangled into a deadening counter-intuitive idiom.

There are other issues. One is the conflation of definitions used for identifying language. Description is challenged by apperception and now policy—in so far as it is based on the ECRML—reinforces apperception. Apperceptual views are treated as real by the Northern Ireland Executive and with disbelief by the Scottish Executive, as if each had descriptive legitimacy. In this context, the use of Heinz Kloss’ criteria of Abstand and Ausbau and related notions of Mindestabstand (‘minimum divergence’), Dialekt and Spielart (‘national dialect’) helpfully clarifies and provides (admittedly impressionistic) categories to articulate the nature of, and difference between, Scots
in Scotland and Scots in Northern Ireland (and indeed between Scots and English).³⁰

Another issue is that what is at stake here is not a question of languages _per se_ but of discourses. After 400 years, descendants of the original Scottish settlers are no longer Scots but Ulstermen. They wish to sound Ulster; they wish to reflect their Ulsterness in written form, in a way that is prevented by metropolitan standard English. These Ulstermen are not Irish by any measurement, so that the Irish language is not for them either. Just as the professional jargon of the lawyer, the medic, the engineer and the schoolteacher differentiate themselves conspicuously in any company, so it is the discourse style of the Ulsterman which differentiates him from both his Scottish and Irish neighbours. Behind the style lie all the makings of a new ethnicity, with shared history, mythology, homeland, customary practices as well as language. Add to that humour or _craic_ of the Ulster variety and the ethnicity of Ulster-Scot is complete.

A further issue is the genrification of Scots or reduction of domain functions. Scots has become reduced to narrative, comedy and _sangs_, which are all popular with children and, later, nostalgia for childhood; it is not—and, despite experimentation, it has not become—the language of _Sachprosa_ or public or civil service prose.³¹ Scots limits the speaker and writer—but to break out beyond those domain and genre limitations, Scots will need fresh regeneration, development within certain _ausbau_-ed or elaborated registers, and the renewal of tradition.

VI The Future

The final issue is the way forward. In May 2007, a nationalist government was elected in Scotland. In its manifesto, the Scottish National Party claimed that:

---


³¹ Although Corbett and Douglas, ‘Scots in the Public Sphere’ report on some recent examples.
We will promote an increased awareness of Scots and its literature. This will include introducing a question on Scots in the Census and making sure that European obligations to develop the language are honoured. We will actively encourage the use of Scots in education, broadcasting and the arts.\(^{32}\)

Since an oral version of this paper was presented in September 2007, the government (as it now calls itself) has commissioned an audit for Scots-language provision. There is good reason to believe that, at last, the government is for the first time waking up to its obligations under the ECRML and beginning to act responsively as well as responsibly. It is likely that, following the audit, further policy research will be commissioned with a view to providing the government with not only the policy for Scots it so badly needs but the right policy. Meanwhile, such language policy as there was at management level in Northern Ireland has come tumbling down like the house of cards it was, through the cancellation of plans for an Ulster-Scots Academy, the result of political expediency in the context of withdrawn funds for Irish-language projects and a refusal to proceed with an *Irish Language Act*. Whatever it was, the ECRML was never intended as a bartering mechanism between languages. May Scots be spared that its future policies ever be directly conditional upon those of Gaelic, a very different language which has a different relationship with the current language of state. Now, in May 2008, in Scotland, there is unprecedented optimism for future policy provision for Scots. For this, the Spolsky model may prove instructive by its stressing the need for equilibrium between beliefs, practices and language management, and in harmony with the three conditioning factors of comprehensive languageness, speech community vibrancy, and symbolic values and worth. With some confidence, the policies under the ECRML expected by the COMEX most recently in 2007 may at last begin to emerge, in time for the United Kingdom government’s next periodic report, most especially for Scots in Scotland. Watch this space!

*Queen’s University, Belfast*

In this paper, I shall argue that the historic colonial relationship between Ireland and England has left a legacy of unionist hostility to the Irish language. During the 1980s, United Kingdom government policy in respect of the Irish language in the north of Ireland was at odds with the groundswell of community support for and interest in the language. In the last two decades, the United Kingdom government, which has the power, opportunity and indeed the responsibility to raise the issue of Irish-language rights out of the party political arena, has not done so. Instead, in the period following the Good Friday Agreement, it has continued to place the responsibility for changing negative unionist attitudes on Irish speakers themselves. The United Kingdom’s ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in respect of Irish shows a lack of strategic co-ordination or drive and a disparity in the treatment of Irish compared with Welsh in Wales and Gaelic in Scotland. Finally, the actions of the United Kingdom government during 2006–07, following its St Andrews’ Agreement commitment to enact Irish-language legislation in the north, has reinforced the politicisation of the Irish language and increased unionist perceptions that the United Kingdom government will yield Irish-language rights when subjected to pressure.

I United Kingdom Policy in Respect of the Irish Language

Following the conquest of Ireland in the twelfth century, successive English governments sought to suppress the Irish language. Numerous commentators have documented the legislative, political and social mechanisms by which this has been attempted.¹ Tomás Mac Siomón notes that the English invasion and

subjection of Ireland depended upon ‘the systematic destruction throughout
the island of the legal, administrative, economic and cultural foundations of
the Gaelic world’.2

Tony Crowley points out, however, that in the fourteenth century, in spite
of these attempts, outside the English Pale, the eastern coastal strip of Ireland
under effective colonial domination, the Irish language remained the com-
mon language of the country. He argues that English rule was insecure, and
sought to embed itself through its settler population. Repressive legislation
such as the Statute of Kilkenny of 1366 was ‘intended to govern the English
in Ireland, to ensure that they remained English, to prevent them from going
native; that is to say, from being Gaelicised’.3 Antipathy to the Irish language,
and indeed, the Irish, was fostered in order to serve English colonial ambitions
in Ireland.

In spite of the systematic historical juxtaposition of the interests of the
indigenous population of Ireland against those of the English colonial settler
and Planter population, some level of involvement and interest of these lat-
ter in the Irish language persisted through to the Partition of Ireland. James
Loughlin points out that prior to 1920 unionists generally perceived them-
selves to be ‘Irish’. He argues that the fact that the United Kingdom still
controlled the whole of Ireland meant that ‘Irishness’ could be subsumed
within a United Kingdom identity. The partition of Ireland, however, created
an ‘otherness’ in the religious, cultural, linguistic and political appearance of
the twenty-six counties of the Irish Free State.4 From this point on, all things
Irish would be viewed by unionism as a threat.

Joseph Ruane describes the historical processes involved in the creation of
the north of Ireland as ‘a system of relationships’ formed through the forced
integration of Ireland into the British state.5 He identifies three elements
as integral to this system: first, the ‘overlapping and ideological oppositions
within Ireland’ based on religion, ethnic origins and cultural stereotyping; sec-
ond, ‘a structure of dominance, dependence and inequality’ through which
the British state controlled Ireland using a Protestant minority ‘whose loyalty

3 Tony Crowley, War of Words: The Politics of Language in Ireland 1537–2004 (Oxford,
2005), 5.
4 James Loughlin Ulster Unionism and British National Identity Since 1885 (London, 1995),
70.
in Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd (eds.), After the Good Friday Agreement: Analysing
Political Change in Northern Ireland (Dublin, 1999), 148.
was assured as long as the British government underwrote their dominance over Catholics; and, third, community polarisation resulting from the tensions around religion, culture and ethnicity. Ruane concludes that the effect of this system was ‘to constitute the British state as the major power-holder in Ireland and Irish Catholics and Protestants as culturally distinct communities with sharply opposed interests and identities. Once in place, the system showed remarkable resilience.’

Eugene McKendry has shown that since its inception, the northern state has regarded the Irish language with suspicion. L. S. Andrews quotes an internal memo from the Northern Irish Minister for Education dated 1928 in which the Minister stated ‘we should avoid carefully any impression that we desire to encourage the teaching of the language.’ The same year saw protests by the Loyalty League that any official sanction for Irish offered succour to ‘an anti-British and disloyal faction’. The League continues, ‘The language is of no practical utility, but may be of much value to incipient traitors.’

Whilst relatively few official policy statements were made on the Irish language during the 1970s and 1980s, those that have been made public appear to place overwhelming importance on the viewpoint of Protestants in respect of the language. By the 1980s, the Irish language was being incorporated into the policy area entitled ‘Community Relations’ which imposed, at least initially, a compulsory (and demographically rather challenging) cross-community element upon language projects if they were to be eligible for funding. More significant in the long term was the tendency of the community relations context to charge Irish speakers themselves with the responsibility of proving that the Irish language was a resource for all, without adequate funding, without the support of positive government strategies and, as we shall see, in the face of ongoing ambivalence towards the language revival.

In this context, it is perhaps predictable that some twenty years after the inception of community relations policy, the 2001 Census indicated no significant increase in acquisition of Irish among Protestants. Diarmait Mac Giolla Chriost notes,

---

6 Ibid.
9 PRONI CAB 9D/44/1, 1928.
There are very powerful structural reasons for the low incidence of Irish-speakers amongst Protestants. The absence of the language from the curriculum of the state (almost wholly Protestant) educational system in the region and the very low status afforded to the language by the unionist-dominated government of Northern Ireland seated at Stormont are probably the two main factors for the small numbers of Irish-speakers recorded among Protestants.¹⁰

Camille O’Reilly’s study on the different discourses on the Irish language existing in the north of Ireland during the past two decades supports the view that government policy, whilst ostensibly geared towards encouraging the use of Irish among a broader section of the population, has contributed to the perception among nationalists that it was in fact directed at slowing the growth of the Irish-speaking community in nationalist areas.¹¹ O’Reilly believes that many of the community actions taken to promote the Irish language in the north have a political basis. In her examination of the different discourses around the Irish language, she concludes that over thirty years, for nationalists, it has become an important tool for political organisation in Northern Ireland. She attributes this to the ‘abnormal’ political situation in the North and the legacy of inequality. Significantly, she also identifies the failures of political structures in the North to allow participation or access to power for the majority of both nationalist and unionist working class people. In addition, she points out that, ‘the dominant British ethos of the state continues to stifle political and cultural expressions of Irishness, even within the limited progress made in recent years as a result of new policies intended to nurture the “two traditions” and rhetoric about “parity of esteem”’.¹²

Robert Dunbar notes a central problem in the 2003 blueprint for community relations, *A Shared Future*, published by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.¹³ He points out the tension between the stated desire to create a ‘pluralist society’ based upon the specific policy aim of promoting respect and tolerance of cultural diversity and in which people are free to assert their identity, and the proposition in the same document that it

---

¹² Ibid.
is cultural identity in itself that is the cause of division.\textsuperscript{14} He notes, “Thus, the paper is in the curious position of arguing that the desire to maintain cultural diversity is one of the causes of a set of problems which will be cured, in part, through “respect and tolerance of cultural diversity.”\textsuperscript{15}

II Overview of Current Protections for Irish

The Good Friday Agreement has significant references to the importance of language diversity. It also makes a series of specific commitments in relation to the facilitation of the public use of the Irish language. None the less, the only domestic legal protection for Irish in the north of Ireland is in one clause of the Education Order (NI) 1998. To date, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, signed by the United Kingdom government in 2000 and ratified in 2001, has been the only other source of legal protection for Irish in the north of Ireland. The United Kingdom ratification instrument originally designated that the general protections of Part II of the Charter should to be applied to Welsh in Wales, to Gaelic and Scots in Scotland and to Irish\textsuperscript{16} and Ulster Scots\textsuperscript{17} in the north, with Cornish and Manx being later additions. As well as the Part II provisions, Welsh in Wales, Gaelic in Scotland and Irish in the north were all also afforded protection under the more detailed and specific provisions of Part III of the Charter. However, the Charter itself has not been enacted into British domestic legislation, and therefore, its provisions are not enforceable in the courts of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. Whilst this failure also affects the Charter’s effectiveness in respect of Welsh in Wales and Gaelic in Scotland, both of these languages are subject to comprehensive domestic legal protections in addition to their Part III Charter status. Within the United

\textsuperscript{14} OFMDFM 2003, parag 1.7; OFMDFM, 2003, parag 1.4.
\textsuperscript{15} Dunbar in POBAL 2003
\textsuperscript{16} The 2001 Census shows that of 167,460 people in the north with knowledge of Irish, Catholics are more likely to have knowledge of Irish (22.2%) than Protestants (1.2%). Those most likely to have knowledge of Irish are found in the younger age groups, (12 – 15 years, 23.8%; 16 – 24 yrs, 16%)
\textsuperscript{17} There are no Census figures regarding people with knowledge of Ulster Scots. However, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has used the Life and Times Survey (1999) as a small sample indicator. 2200 people were questioned. Results indicated that of these 2% indicated knowledge of Ulster Scots. Of this percentage, Protestants were more likely (2%) to speak Ulster Scots than Catholics (1%). People over sixty-five were most likely to have knowledge of Ulster Scots.
Kingdom jurisdiction therefore, it is only in the north of Ireland that there is no such protection for the primary indigenous language, a point made clearly by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) POBAL\(^1\) in their submissions on the Charter implementation.\(^1\) In addition to this fundamental issue, the United Kingdom ratification in respect of Irish is based upon a minimal number of paragraphs under Part III and the selection of the most limited options within them. POBAL has characterised the Charter’s application in the north as ‘lacklustre’ and lacking central strategic co-ordination.\(^2\)

### III The Application of the Charter in Respect of Irish

Whilst the overall findings of the Council of Europe during the two monitoring cycles to date have noted some general progress on a United Kingdom-wide basis, the more detailed comments of the Committee of Experts (COMEX) on the Charter implementation for Irish have signalled some key failings. In its first report in 2004, the COMEX find that there are important differences in the approach adopted by the United Kingdom government towards Welsh in Wales, Gaelic in Scotland, Irish in the north. The COMEX note, ‘In contrast to Wales, both Scotland and Northern Ireland still have basic needs as regards the development of language policy’.\(^2\) In addition, the COMEX raise concerns on strategic policy co-ordination\(^2\) at all levels and regarding provision and practice in every Article of the Part III ratification instrument for Irish.\(^3\) In spite of the Council of Ministers’

---

\(^1\) The author is Chief Executive of POBAL.


\(^3\) Ibid., 57 point B.

\(^2\) COMEX, The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: Application of the Charter in the UK, Strasbourg, 1\(^{\text{st}}\) Monitoring Cycle, Strasbourg, 24\(^{\text{th}}\) March 2004. See pg 57, point B.

\(^3\) Ibid, for comments on Article 8, Education, see 46, paragraph 304, 305; 47, paragraph 312; 57, point G; 48, paragraph 318; comments on Article 9, Courts, see 58, point 1; for comments on Article 10, Administration Authorities, see 50, paragraph 335; Article 11 The Media, see 53, paragraph 361.
recommendation\textsuperscript{24} in 2004 that immediate action be taken to improve Irish-language television broadcasting, the United Kingdom government resisted consistent appeals and pressure during public consultation processes for better public service broadcasting through Irish, and in legislation in 2003\textsuperscript{25} and 2005\textsuperscript{26}, omitted any provision for Irish whilst including key references to broadcasting in Welsh in Wales and Gaelic in Scotland.

In the COMEX’s report of 2007 on the second monitoring cycle, the Experts find evidence of poor performance in the same areas that gave cause for concern in the previous cycle.\textsuperscript{27} In respect of Article 8 provisions on education, the COMEX raise fundamental questions on policy and practice, resourcing and support.\textsuperscript{28} In relation to Article 9, on the Administration of Justice, the Experts highlight an unresolved contradiction between the commitments in the Good Friday Agreement and the continuing failure to repeal the 1737 Administration of Justice (Ireland) Act which places a ban on the use of languages other than English in the courts.\textsuperscript{29} The Experts say that the measures taken by local authorities to accept correspondence in Irish ‘is in need of improvement’\textsuperscript{30} and they note the failure to provide an appropriate alternative to the much-criticised voicemail system for verbal contact.\textsuperscript{31} In addition, they request further information on signage\textsuperscript{32} and call for ‘more direction from the authorities’.\textsuperscript{33}

The 2007 COMEX report also notes the inappropriate implementation of the Charter in respect of Part II, which applies to Ulster-Scots and Irish, and Part III which, as noted, in the north of Ireland, applies to Irish alone. The report comments,

\begin{quote}

in a number of instances, the request for action appropriate to the Irish
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{24} RecChL(2004)1, 24\textsuperscript{th} March 2004, at the 877 meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies, The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: Application of the Charter in the UK, Strasbourg

\textsuperscript{25} UK Communications Act 2003

\textsuperscript{26} UK Review of the BBC Royal Charter 2005

\textsuperscript{27} COMEX, The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: Application of the Charter in the UK, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Monitoring cycle, Strasbourg, 14 March 2007.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 48, paragraph 420, 422, 425; 49, paragraph 428, 430, 433; 50, paragraph 436, 437, 438, 439, 440; 51, paragraph 447.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 17, paragraph 148.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 63, point H.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 52, paragraph g 451, 452, 468.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 53, paragraph 465.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 52, paragraph 460.
language (therefore) led to the result that no measures were taken, since it was not practically possible to apply identical measures to Ulster Scots. The Committee of Experts wishes to underline that each regional or minority language should be protected and promoted according to its own situation.³⁴

The Council of Ministers’ recommend provision of adequate support to the Irish-language print media, and the development of a comprehensive policy in relation to the Irish language.

IV Working Towards an Irish Language Act

Concurrent with its monitoring work on the Charter, POBAL spearheaded a two-year process of community education, information and consultation on the issue of Irish-language legislation. In February 2006, the NGO launched its document, *Acht na Gaeilge TÉ/The Irish Language Act NI*, based upon the views and findings of the Irish-speaking community in relation to protection for the language. The proposals were drafted with advice and support from Robert Dunbar (University of Aberdeen), from Wilson McLeod (University of Edinburgh), Fernand de Varennes (Murdock University, Australia) and Colin Williams (University of Cardiff).

The document proposes that a rights-based Act should be introduced at Westminster. Many of the participants in the consultation process organised by POBAL had expressed the view that it would be politically very difficult to achieve legislation in a devolved Assembly because of anticipated unionist opposition. Further reasons for the enactment of legislation at Westminster included the need to supply appropriate provision on matters ‘reserved’ by the British government, including broadcasting, the duties of Crown bodies operating on a United Kingdom-wide basis and many elements of the justice system, including the repeal of 1737 Administration of Justice (Ireland) Act.

*Acht na Gaeilge TÉ/The Irish Language Act NI* proposes that Irish be made an official language in the north and that a significant range of guaranteed rights should be created in the political institutions, in the courts, in the media, in education, in public services and in the workplace. To oversee the implementa-

³⁴ Ibid., 7, paragraph 32.
tion and enforcement of the Act, the document proposes the establishment of two new bodies, the Office of the Irish Language Commissioner, Coimisinéir na Gaeilge TÉ, and Bord Um Chearta agus Pleanáil na Gaeilge. Further, it is proposed that a schedule would be attached to the Act in which the government and public bodies with greatest responsibility for the provision of services through the medium of Irish would be listed. Other bodies would work with the Bord Um Chearta agus Pleanáil na Gaeilge to prepare clearly defined language plans or schemes to outline what services they would provide and when.

The former Ombudsman and head of the Northern Irish Civil Service, Maurice Hayes, wrote a Foreword and launched the document for POBAL in February 2006, and there followed an intense period of lobbying by Irish-language and human-rights organisations, brought together by POBAL under one Co-ordinating Group.

V The St Andrews’ Agreement and Proposed Irish-Language Legislation

During 2002–7, when the Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended, the electoral mandates of both unionist and nationalist political parties altered significantly. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) was overtaken at the polls by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the Social Democratic and

35 Unionism is the term applied to support for a full constitutional and institutional relationship between Ireland and Great Britain, based on the Act of Union 1800, which sought to merge both countries into the United Kingdom. Following Partition, in 1920, only the six north-eastern counties of Ireland (“Northern Ireland”) remain under United Kingdom jurisdiction. Unionists tend generally to be Protestant and regard themselves as British. They are the majority section of the population in Northern Ireland.

36 The term ‘nationalist’ in the context of the north’s political parties implies support for an all-Ireland political framework. Nationalists tend to be Catholic and regard themselves as Irish. They are a significant minority of the population of Northern Ireland.

37 The Ulster Unionist Party is led by Reg Empey. It supports the maintenance of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. The party supported the Good Friday Agreement. For sixty years, it was the largest unionist party. In the last ten years, it has lost support to the more ‘hardline’ DUP. In the 2007 Assembly elections, the UUP took 14.94% of the vote, giving it eighteen seats, a decrease of nine seats from the 2003 elections.

38 The Democratic Unionist Party, formerly led by Ian Paisley and from 2008 by Peter
Labour Party (SDLP)\textsuperscript{39} was overtaken by Sinn Féin.\textsuperscript{40} This shift appeared to reveal even more starkly the polarised nature of politics in the north.

Over five years, difficult and fruitless talks took place in an attempt to mould the situation to the point at which the British government would re-institute the devolved institutions. Finally, in October 2006, the United Kingdom and Irish governments jointly published the St Andrews Agreement which includes the following commitment by the United Kingdom, ‘The government will introduce an Irish Language Act reflecting on the experience of Wales and Ireland and work with the incoming Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish Language’.\textsuperscript{41}

Reaction to the publication of the Agreement highlighted the sectarian divisions of northern society. Unionists, both from the UUP and the DUP, reacted with outrage.\textsuperscript{42} In contrast, Irish-language organisations and human rights groups identified the commitment as a long-overdue measure. On 13 December, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in the north published a consultation document on the proposed legislation for Irish. The foreword contained a commitment that the United Kingdom government would quickly take forward legislation based upon the results of consultation.

However, for Westminster legislation to be brought forward before the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[39] The SDLP, led by Mark Durkan, support the reunification of Ireland. The party supported the Good Friday Agreement. The largest nationalist party in Northern Ireland for thirty years, they have now been overtaken by Sinn Féin. In the 2007 Assembly elections, the SDLP received 15.22\% of the vote and took sixteen seats, a decrease in two seats since the 2003 elections.
\item[40] Sinn Féin, led by Gerry Adams, support the reunification of Ireland. The party supported the Good Friday Agreement. In the 2007 Assembly elections the party took twenty-eight seats, an increase of four from the previous election, receiving 26.16\% of the vote.
\item[41] The St Andrews’ Agreement, United Kingdom and Irish Governments, 13 October 2006.
\end{footnotes}
deadline set by the British and Irish governments for the re-establishment of devolution, British Direct Rule Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Maria Eagle stated that it must be introduced by 19 March. Irish-language organisations challenged this view in face-to-face meetings with the Minister (6 December 2006), in correspondence (POBAL, 1 November 2006) and, as I shall note later, in submissions from all key Irish-language organisations during the first consultation process (POBAL, Comhairle na Gaelscoileachta, Conradh na Gaeilge, Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge, Glór na nGael, Gael Linn, Iontaobhas Ultach and Comhaltas Uladh). None the less, Peter Hain, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, reinforced the British government’s position at Northern Ireland Question Time at Westminster, when he told DUP MP Peter Robinson that should the devolved Assembly be re-established before Irish-language legislation was passed at Westminster, the responsibility for any such legislation would pass to the Assembly. In effect, this statement was a public guarantee that the British government would not intervene if unionists chose to veto the progress of protection for the Irish language in the event of the re-establishment of the devolved institutions.

VI The DCAL Consultation Document, 13 December 2006

Following a twelve-week consultation ending on 2 March 2007, DCAL announced that it had received 668 substantive replies to the document, 1,376 postcards and a petition with 2,500 signatures supporting the legislation based on the proposals put forward by POBAL. In addition, the Department received copies of a newspaper advertisement placed by the umbrella group, with 800 signatures also calling for the implementation of the umbrella group’s proposals.

DCAL comments,

Astu siúd a chuir fhreagra isteach, bhí tromlach thar na bearta (93%) ar son reachtaíocht Ghaeilge a thabhairt isteach; agus bhí mionlach beag daoine nár aontaigh leis an mholadh ar chor ar bith. Luaigh na daoine a bhí ina éadan (7%) cúrsaí costais agus d’aithín siad go mbeadh

43 Secretary of State Peter Hain in response to question from DUP MP, Peter Robinson, Hansard 100588, Column 531, 22 November 2006, under the heading Sewel Convention.
reachtaíocht ina hábhar deighilte go polaitiúil.\textsuperscript{44}

In addition to the written submissions of all kinds, on 24 February 2007 thousands of people joined the POBAL co-ordinating group’s first march of Irish speakers to Belfast city centre to support the enactment of a rights-based Irish-language Act.\textsuperscript{45}

As noted earlier, the United Kingdom government’s designation of language as a devolved issue is one that produced responses in a number of submissions, including from the umbrella organisation, POBAL, who note,

\begin{quote}
Is léir go bhféadann rialtas na Breataine reachtaíocht ar an teanga Ghaeilge a achtú ag Westminster am ar bith. Agus, creidimid nach bhfuil aon bhunús leis an dearbhú a rinneadh i gcáipéis RCEF gur rud cineachta e beartas teanga. Tá teanga lárnaichi ngach gné den rialúcháin. Ní feiniméan teoranta ná scoite í a dtíg deileáil léi scartha ó limistéir eile reachtaíochta nó bheartais. Ná ní hí an t-aon limistéar sa saol poiblí í a chíonn ‘eur chuiige smaointe naschta’ idir rialtas na Breataine agus an Tionól cineachta.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{44} RCEF/DCAL Consultation paper, 13 March 2007, 6. ‘This reflects a significant level of interest in the issues raised in the paper. Of those who responded, the overwhelming majority (93%) favoured the adoption of Irish-language legislation; while a small minority of respondents strongly disagreed with the proposal. Those in favour preferred a rights-based approach. Those against (7%) cited cost issues and the perception that legislation would be politically divisive.’ Official DCAL English-language version. NB: The two language versions differ, with the English-language version containing two phrases not in the Irish-language version. These sentences are: ‘This reflects a significant level of interest in the issues raised in the paper’ and ‘Those in favour preferred a rights-based approach.’


\textsuperscript{46} POBAL, \textit{Aighneacht ar Pháipéar Comhaitrliúcháin RCEF ar Reachtaíocht Ghaeilge atá á Béartú do TÉ/Submisssion on DCAL Consultation Paper on Proposed Irish Language legislation for Northern Ireland, February 2007} (Belfast, 2007): ‘It is clear that the British government may enact legislation at Westminster on the Irish language at any time. Furthermore, we believe that there is no basis for the assertion made in the DCAL document that language policy is a devolved matter. Language is central to all aspects of government. It is not a limited or isolated phenomenon that can be treated separately from other legislative or policy areas. Nor is it the only area of public life which does not require a “joined-up thinking approach” between the British government and the devolved Assembly.’ POBAL’s English-language version of submission.
They also received a response from the statutory Irish-language organisation, Iontaobhas Ultach, which states that it was crucial that the British government fulfil its commitment to pass the legislation at Westminster so it could include ‘reserved matters’, and because of concerns that the Assembly would prove a difficult legislative environment for Irish. Iontaobhas Ultach say that the north, ‘is currently in an unstable political state and a new Assembly, on the past records of such Assemblies, will be taken up more with shadow boxing and posturing than with developing new legislation.’

A Summary of Responses to the 19th January EQIA notes that the Equality Commission pointed out to DCAL that the Department had juxtaposed the rights of Irish speakers with the ‘sensitivities’ of unionists in spite of the fact that the DCAL document had not provided ‘any quantitative or qualitative evidence to support the idea put forward . . . that the unionist community had concerns that its British identity may be undermined by Irish-language legislation’. The Summary of Responses document notes furthermore that the Equality Commission’s own submission contains the following, which DCAL states that it endorses, ‘The notion that providing equality or protection for one group limits their availability for another is both unfounded in itself and acts to the detriment of all who seek to live in a society that is fair and equitable and should be avoided in the drafting of public policy.’

The United Kingdom government did not proceed with the introduction of the promised legislation. Instead, it opted for a second consultation period of twelve weeks, thus ensuring that the deadline for agreement on the return of the power-sharing Assembly would pass before the end of the consultation. In April 2007, Secretary of State, Peter Hain told the leaders of the DUP and Sinn Féin that if they did not accept the 26 March deadline for the re-establishment of the Assembly, that, ‘The Assembly will close down, the salaries will stop, the allowances will stop. Water bills are being processed over the next week and these will kick in. The end of academic selection will kick in. The Irish-language legislation will be taken forward at Westminster’.

These developments provoked predictable anger and disappointment amongst supporters of the proposed legislation. POBAL accused Downing

47 Iontaobhas Ultach, Submission to the DCAL Consultation Paper on Proposed Irish Language Legislation for Northern Ireland (Belfast 2007)


49 Ibid., 3, paragraph 1.5.

50 Press release from Peter Hain, Secretary of State, 20 April 2007.
Street of acting in ‘extreme bad faith’\textsuperscript{51}, whilst \textit{Irish News} columnist, Robert McMillen commented that in spite of the overwhelming support for the proposed legislation, ‘. . . forty-six submissions decided that Irish speakers shouldn’t have rights and so the diligent work by the many was scuppered by the few.’\textsuperscript{52} The SDLP accused the British government of ‘pandering’ to the ‘virulent anti-Irish lobby in the DUP’ and called on Downing Street to ‘stand by its commitment, abandon further consultation and begin the process of enacting legislation.’\textsuperscript{53} Sinn Féin, meanwhile, called for street protest in support of the legislation.\textsuperscript{54}

None the less, both nationalist and unionist parties continued to engage in bargaining negotiations in relation to the restoration of the devolved institutions. When agreement was finally reached between Sinn Féin and the DUP to enter into power sharing together by 8 May 2007, Ian Paisley, newly-nominated as DUP First Minister said, ‘The claim that an Irish Language Act will be forced upon us is now gone forever. . . . No Assembly the DUP lead will pass such an Act.’\textsuperscript{55}

\section*{VII The Second DCAL Consultation Document}

The second DCAL consultation document\textsuperscript{56} notes the high level of interest in the first consultation process on the proposed legislation and the 93\% of substantive responses in favour of the model of rights-based legislation proposed by POBAL. However, it then departs from the evidence of the first consultation and goes on to state, ‘Aithnimid, ag an am chéanna, áfach, go bhfuil éagsúlacht shuntasach leathan tuairimí ann laistigh de Thuaisceart Éireann aithint le ról na Gaeilge sa saol poiblí.’\textsuperscript{57}

The document, which contains no proposals in respect of education, broadcasting, the use of Irish in the political institutions or the status of the Irish

\textsuperscript{51} POBAL, \textit{BBC News 24}, 15\textsuperscript{th} March 2007
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{The Irish News}, 4\textsuperscript{th} March 2007, ‘Minister Strangles Irish Language Act’
\textsuperscript{53} Dominic Bradley, \textit{News Letter}, 14\textsuperscript{th} March 2007
\textsuperscript{54} Adams, \textit{Lá Nua}, 15\textsuperscript{th} March 2007
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., ‘At the same time, however, we recognise that there is a pronounced divergence of views within in Northern Ireland with respect to the role of the Irish language in public life’. Official DCAL English-language version.
language purports to represent a ‘middle-ground’ approach to the issue and to draw heavily on the experience of Wales and the Republic of Ireland.58 Both of these assertions would be rejected by all of the key Irish-language organisations and the two nationalist parties, Sinn Féin and the SDLP. As POBAL’s submission states, there are a number of clauses in the draft document that are not based upon this experience, and which put forward an approach that weakens the draft legislative proposals and is disadvantageous to the Irish language. As examples of this, the organisation cites commentary on the Irish Language Commissioner59; matters relating to Crown Authorities60; and the use of Irish in the courts and tribunals.61

VIII ‘The Task of Political Leadership’

Perhaps one of the most noticeable features of the submissions made to the DCAL consultation processes is the pragmatic and open approach adopted, particularly in the first round, of a number of public bodies. Significant among these is the document submitted by the Community Relations Council, which notes,

The task of political leadership in divided societies is to turn issues previously understood as the property of one side into opportunities to establish new links, partnerships and new appreciations for the entire community. The quid pro quo of rights in this area is that our languages are understood as the possession of the whole community, without violence and aggression or particular political connotation, and that steps to embed rights should be accompanied by active efforts to ensure real opportunities to participate in language activities for all.62

The period prior to the re-establishment of the devolved institutions, however, appears to indicate that in the case of the Irish language, the political leadership of the United Kingdom not only failed in this task, but acted in a

58 Ibid., 6, paragraph 3.
59 Ibid., 9, clause 2.
60 Ibid., 15, section 2(4); 2007: 15, section 3(3); 2007: 19, section 9; 2–7: 20, section 10
61 Ibid., 21, section 12(2)(b).
manner that gives cause to doubt its public stance on civil democracy and on language and human rights in the north. In turn, this has led to a deepening of division and bitterness in the public exchanges on the question of language between the north’s main political parties. The increasing level of disillusionment in the ability of the political processes to advance the circumstances of the language is reflected by columnist Patrick Murphy, who writes, ‘Irish is not a political principle or a linguistic bone to be fought over by two sectarian dogs. It is an ancient tongue of dignity and distinction, an Official Language of the European Community, a cultural treasure and an educational opportunity.’

The damage being done to the Irish language, and the threat to its further development caused by its increasing politicisation was evident to the nationalist parties. However, in April 2007, when the devolved Assembly’s new Ministerial portfolios were allocated under D’Hondt according to the electoral strength of each of the political parties, neither the SDLP nor Sinn Féin selected the Ministry with core responsibility for language issues, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Sinn Féin bypassed this department at each of three separate allocation rounds. The SDLP, with one opportunity to select a Ministry also failed to nominate it. DCAL was therefore the last Ministry to be selected and was taken by the DUP.

On 16 October 2007, the DUP Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Edwin Poots published the results of the second consultation process on the proposed legislation. These showed that of 11,629 responses received, 7,500 (68%) supported Irish-language legislation. The document also notes that of those responses in favour of legislation, the majority of Irish-language organisations preferred a rights-based approach. It further states that government and public sector bodies tended to emphasise a language schemes approach, a point which clearly indicates that none of these bodies opposed the proposed legislation in principle.

The DCAL Summary presents the following figures in relation to each of the two consultations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of first consultation responses (Dec 2006–March 2007)</th>
<th>Number of second consultation responses (March–June 2007)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

63 Patrick Murphy, *The Irish News*, 3 April, 2007
64 DCAL, *Summary of Responses to the 2nd Consultation on Proposed Irish Language Legislation for Northern Ireland*, 13 March 2007, 5, point 2.
65 Ibid., 7, point 14.
The Effect of UK Policy on the Irish Language in the North of Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total no. of responses</th>
<th>668</th>
<th>Total no of responses</th>
<th>11,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Petitions, postcards and advertisement</td>
<td>4,566</td>
<td>Petitions</td>
<td>629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revised total</td>
<td>5,234</td>
<td>Revised total</td>
<td>11,629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For legislation</td>
<td>5,187</td>
<td>For legislation</td>
<td>7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against legislation</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Against legislation</td>
<td>4,129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DCAL Summary of Responses to 2nd Consultation October 2007

Therefore, if the results of the consultations are put together, the results are as follows,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall total number of responses (1st and second consultation)</th>
<th>16,863</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In favour of legislation</td>
<td>12,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against legislation</td>
<td>4,176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DCAL Summary of Responses to 2nd Consultation October 2007

In spite of statements by the Minister that he would present his findings to the Assembly Sub-Committee on Culture, Arts and Leisure prior to making a decision, the Minister declared himself ‘un-persuaded that there is a compelling case for bringing forward Irish-language legislation.’

**IX Conclusions**

British policy towards the Irish language moved over a period of several hundred years from one of active suppression and destruction of the language, to one of neglect and shifting of responsibility in the period after the Partition of Ireland in 1920.

Although the provisions of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement facilitated some change between 1998 and 2006 in respect of the treatment of the Irish language and its community in the north of Ireland, the British government has failed to put into place co-ordinated strategies to take resolute action to promote the Irish language. It is apparent that in 2006–7, it used its own formal commitment to enact Irish-language legislation in a cynical and

---

opportunist manner to help draw the rejectionist DUP into a power-sharing Executive which the party had opposed since 2000. Whilst nationalist parties campaigned on a platform of support for the legislation, the issue appears to have had inadequate significance in their overall approach. The restored institutions will clearly require time if they are to become embedded and it is apparent that the Irish language legislation will feature in ongoing manoeuvring between the main parties. Whether or not this will prove to be beneficial to the language in the longer term remains to be seen. Certainly, it has become increasingly clear during the period since the St Andrews’ Agreement that United Kingdom policy in respect of the Irish language is no more benevolent now than in the past. Irish-language organisations will no doubt continue to work to highlight the need for comprehensive rights-based legislation as well as strong provision within a Bill of Rights for the north which would theoretically prevent further politically motivated abuse of basic principles of Irish-language promotion in public life. In the meantime, should the political parties in the devolved institutions fail to resolve the impasse over the legislation, the obligation remains on the United Kingdom government to enact the Irish Language Act at Westminster. Wherever the legislation is enacted, the nationalist political parties must ensure that the legislation has sufficient clarity, scope and robustness to redress the damage that the United Kingdom government has itself inflicted on the Irish language, not just in the distant past, but during the period leading to and following the restoration of devolution in the north of Ireland.
Unions—political unions—have not got a good track record when it comes to respecting language rights and linguistic diversity. When one people overrun another and set about ruling them they need to justify and rationalise their behaviour. One way of approaching the issue is to say that the language and culture of the dominant group are superior to those of the conquered peoples.

We have many examples from history. The Roman Empire immediately springs to mind. Those who did not submit to Rome and speak Latin were described as being barbarians and savages—inferior in every way to the Romans. The Greeks thought along the same lines. European powers that built up colonial empires—the Spaniards, the English and the French etc.—invariably imposed their language on the conquered peoples. In its final years as a colonial power, Portugal tried to create the myth that its colonies were in fact not colonies at all but overseas provinces of Portugal. And the criterion for according members of the local population civil and political rights was their ability to speak Portuguese. Those who could were classified as assimilados.

There were practical as well as ideological reasons also for imposing monolingualism—reasons of administrative efficiency and security. Sir John Davies, writing in 1612 of the Irish, provides us with an excellent example of this: ‘We may conceive and hope that the next generation will in tongue and heart, and every way else, become English; so that there will be no difference or distinction but the Irish Sea betwixt us’.1 The connection between tongue and heart is revealing.

It would be naïve to think that such attitudes belong to the past. It is instructive to have a look a the web-site of U.S. English, an organisation, claiming a membership of no less that 1.8 million, which is dedicated to promoting English as the sole official language in the United States.2 Its founder, the late

---

1. Extracts from Sir John Davies, *A Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland was never Entirely Subdued*, 1612, reprinted in Constantia Maxwell, *Irish History from Contemporary Sources* (London, 1923), 351.

2. On its website US English declares ‘Declaring English the official language means that
Senator S. I. Hayakawa, once observed:

The United States, a land of immigrants from every corner of the world, has been strengthened and unified because its newcomers have historically chosen ultimately to forgo their native language for the English language.\(^3\)

Gaels from Scotland and Ireland will know of another famous person quoted on the U.S. English website—Margaret Thatcher: ‘Why in the world anyone in America is allowing another language (other than English) to be his first. . . I don’t know’.\(^4\)

I can think of only two imperial powers that were reasonably tolerant from a linguistic perspective—the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. There was such linguistic diversity within these empires that it must have been evident that a monolingual policy just could not work. It is only fit to observe that they were very intolerant on other respects.

I The Irish Experience

Ireland has experience of two political unions—the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (or Northern Ireland as it now is) and the European Union. The earliest precursor of today’s European Union was the European Coal and Steel Community, established in 1951. It had six member-states: France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The Community was the brainchild of Robert Schumann and Jean Monet who were convinced that the best way of avoiding another disastrous European war was to forge a community of interests between the main protagonists—France and Germany. And they believed that as coal and steel were highly important components in the economies of both, the most important countries, this was the basis on which to start. Six years later, two more communities were established with the Treaty of Rome—EURATOM, which dealt with nuclear energy, and the European Economic Community, the most important of all.

\(^{3}\) Ibid.

\(^{4}\) Ibid.
It is intriguing to note that linguistic and cultural issues did not form any part of the early vision. In fact, it appears that the intention back in 1951 was that the European Coal and Steel Community would have only one working language—French. Opposition to this proposal came, not from Germany, as might be expected, but from Flanders. Linguistic issues were high on the Belgian political agenda in the 1950s and the idea that French should become a privileged language in a Community whose headquarters were to be in bilingual Brussels was anathema to the Flemings. Dutch would have to be given equal status. The outcome was that the Community acquired four official and working languages: French, German, Dutch and Italian.

It is worth noting that there is nothing in either of the major European treaties—the Treaty Establishing the European Communities (which is the consolidated treaty drawing together the separate treaties for the Coal and Steel Community, Economic Community and EURATOM treaties and the Treaty establishing the European Union)—which mentions official and working languages. The final article of the European Community Treaty, Article 314, and the final article of the European Union Treaty, Article 53, simply list the languages in which there are official and authentic versions of the treaties. The issue of official and working languages is dealt with in Council Regulation No. 1/1958.

II Ireland joins the European Communities

This situation continued until the early 1970s when the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway and Ireland applied for membership. As it happened, the Norwegian people rejected European Community membership in two different referenda so Norwegian never became an official or working language. The United Kingdom, Denmark and Ireland joined the European Communities in 1973 and English and Danish became official and working languages of the Communities. But what about Irish? Why was it not included? The simple, shameful answer is that Irish was excluded at the express request of the Irish government.

In the course of negotiations for membership, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Patrick Hillery TD, wrote a letter to the President of the European Communities on 23 July 1971 in which he said:

Irish is the first official language of Ireland, this being provided for
in our Constitution. My government consider it to be a matter of the greatest importance that the primary position accorded in our Constitution to the Irish language should be reflected in a suitable and specific recognition to be incorporated in the agreed provisions for the languages of the enlarged Communities. Indeed, I can say that, having regard to the unique position of the Irish language in our national culture, both our parliament and people would expect that such recognition be given.

The government consider that this could most suitably be done by having Irish designated as an official language of the enlarged Communities. We fully realise that the official translation into Irish of all Community acts could give rise to serious difficulties of a practical nature. We would, therefore, propose that, while provision would be made of Irish as an official language, there should also be provision to limit the extent to which Irish translations of Community texts would have to be prepared.

What we have in mind here is that there should be an authentic text of the accession treaty in the Irish language and that official texts in the Irish language of the existing treaties should also be prepared.

I consider that if arrangements on the lines which I have outlined were agreed, the position of the Irish language could be protected, national wishes and sensitivities would be respected and the creation of serious practical difficulties for the Community in the translation work would be avoided.5

III In the Wilderness

What the Irish government of the day seemingly did not understand that the European Community make no distinction between ‘official languages’ and ‘working languages’. So, notwithstanding what the Irish government claimed in public, Irish for thirty-four years was neither an official nor a working language of the Communities. The term—a non-legal term it should be understood—used to describe it was ‘treaty language’. Why did the Irish government take such a stance? One can only speculate. Plans were being made in 1973 to end the requirement that a knowledge of Irish be an essential prerequisite

for entering the civil or public service. (This happened in 1975.) Irish becoming a working language in the European Community could have stymied this. Some say that certain senior civil servants had their eyes set on positions in the European Community institutions. More than once, I heard a report of an internal civil service memo saying that ‘Gaeilgeoirí types’ (Irish-speaking types) would get all the top positions in the European Commission if Irish were a working language. A year ago, one of my post-graduate students was doing her thesis on Irish in the European Union. When she sought the relevant civil service files from that period under the Freedom of Information Act she was informed that the files regarding Irish had been misplaced and were not available.

IV The European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages

I would now like to digress from the issue of the Irish language to the broader area of linguistic diversity and support for regional or minority languages. In the late 1970s a number of motions for resolution were tabled in the European Parliament concerning these languages and indeed the right of minorities in general. One of them was successful in attracting support—one on lesser-used languages, tabled by John Hume and supported by a Socialist MEP from each member-state. I had written a number of articles on the issue and it was suggested to me that I contact John Hume and Gaetano Arfé, who was charged with preparing a report for parliament. This I did and I can only say that this meeting was to change my life. I actively canvassed for support for the Arfé Resolution which was adopted by a comfortable majority in October 1981. The following year the European Community started a small budget line for minority languages and at a colloquy organised by Arfé and the Socialist group, the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages was established. I was elected its first President and two years later I was appointed Secretary General. The objective of the Bureau was to conserve and promote the autochthonous lesser-used languages of the European Communities together with their attendant cultures.

I do not wish to dwell on the history or work of the Bureau. Suffice it to say that we established committees in every member-state, lobbied for support for our languages on every occasion, had a number of additional resolutions on lesser-used languages passed by the European Parliament, persuaded the parliament to vote an increased budget line each year, set up programmes
(including a study-visit programme), published a newsletter, produced copious publications and videos, organised conferences, workshops, youth gatherings, public meetings etc., and cooperated with the Council of Europe in the preparation and adoption of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and with the OSCE High Commissioner in the preparation and adoption of the Oslo Recommendations Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities. It is only fair to say that successive Irish governments gave the Bureau financial and political support. We had Presidents and Directors from different language communities. One I fondly remember was Reverend Jack Macarthur, a Gàidhlig speaker, who served as Bureau President from 1987 until 1989.

I must say that there was a broad body of support in the European Community institutions for linguistic diversity and for our work. Opposition normally came, not from within, but from certain member-state governments, notably the Greek one.

The saga of the Bureau does not have a happy ending, I am sorry to say. The Directors of the Bureau moved the Secretariat General from Dublin to Brussels in 1998, closed the Dublin Office completely in 2001 and declared my Dublin-based colleagues and me redundant. Within eighteen months the organisation was in crisis. It now has no permanent office or staff and exists more in name than in reality.

V European Union Attitudes towards Linguistic Diversity

It must be said, however, that Bureau thinking seems to have left a lasting mark on European thinking and programmes. The European Union has now adopted, what was the Bureau’s motto, ‘Unity in Diversity’. Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, adopted by European Union leaders in 2000, says that the Union shall respect linguistic diversity, and Article 21 prohibits discrimination based on a number of grounds, including language. Together with respect for the individual, openness towards other cultures, tolerance and acceptance of others, respect for linguistic diversity is a core value of the European Union. Its language programmes are now open to all languages, not just to the official and working ones as hitherto. There is now a Commissioner for Multilingualism, Leonard Orban, a Romanian. The Union has twenty-three official and working languages, more than any other international institution that I know of. The UNO has only six and NATO two.
VI Status for Irish

In 2003 I was invited to give a paper on ‘Linguistic and Cultural Rights in the New Europe’ at a summer folk-school in the small Gaeltacht area of An Rinn. What I said aroused more interest than I had anticipated and I was invited to a meeting of interested people during the Oireachtas festival two months later to see if anything could be done to gain official and working status for Irish in the European Union. The European Union was about to extend membership to ten new member-states and recognise nine new official and working languages. Two of them, Estonian and Maltese had smaller pools of speakers than Irish. It was at this meeting in Tralee that Stádas was established, a small but representative pressure group whose sole objective was to obtain official European Union status for Irish. We elected as Chairperson Dr Pádraig Ó Laighin, an Irish speaker who had left a highly successful academic career in Canada to return to Ireland. Pádraig was an inspired choice—analytical, articulate, energetic and totally committed.

VII The Campaign

We prepared our mission statement and set out our arguments. Our first approach was to the National Forum of Europe, a broadly representative body established by the Irish government to allow interested persons and groups to learn about and discuss European matters. Our arguments were very well received and the Chairperson of the Forum, a former Northern Ireland Ombudsman, Michael Hayes, declared himself in favour of Irish being afforded official European Union status.

We then sought the support of local authorities, cultural and sporting organisations and finally the political parties. Fianna Fáil, the main government party, was and is generally considered by the public to be more favourably disposed towards Irish than the main opposition party, Fine Gael. But the government’s negative attitude was the stumbling block. We decided to focus on the opposition parties and get them onside. This we did with surprising ease. The main opposition parties, especially Labour, came on board. Motions were tabled in both the Seanad (Upper House) and the Dáil (Lower House). Meanwhile a young Finnish academic who had learned Irish, Panu Petteri Höglund, organised a signature campaign on the Internet. Over 80,000 signatures were collected. Street demonstrations took place, many of them led by students.
I confess that when I was invited to join Stádas I did so believing that we would probably not succeed but also believing that we should give it our best shot. I feared that in the era of the Celtic Tiger many people would regard the campaign as being an irrelevancy or unrealistic. I was wrong, completely wrong. Those who took to the streets, who collected signatures and packed the visitors gallery in the Dáil during the debate were not old war-horses like me: they were from the young, optimistic, self-confident young generation—the cubs of the Celtic Tiger.

A reluctant and, one felt, somewhat confused government finally capitulated to rising public opinion and agreed to act. We learned that a delegation was sent to Brussels to see if there was some way in which the status of Irish could be improved short of according the language official and working status. The legal services of the Commission clarified that there was not. The government then finally asked that Irish be made an official and working language of the European Union.

VIII A New Dawn

The Council of Ministers acceded to the Irish request and on 1 January 2007 Irish became the twenty-first official and working language of the Union. (Bulgarian and Romanian were later to join it.) It is the only Celtic language to gain this status. A derogation was granted under which only Regulations adopted jointly by the European Parliament and the Council need be translated into Irish. This derogation will be reviewed in four years time. I am happy to say that the European Union institutions have already translated other documents (e.g. websites, information materials) that they are not obliged to translate. Translators and interpreters are being recruited. Irish is now covered by IATE (Inter Active Translation for Europe), an online database of terminology found in official European Union documents.

IX The European Union and Respect for Diversity

One could level criticism against the European Union for its approach to language. Three languages—French, English and German—are used extensively for internal communication. Is the Union guilty of spreading linguistic imperialism? Before rushing to criticism one might ask if our languages would be
better off if the European Communities and Union had never come into existence. If the Union did not exist its role in promoting trade and creating an extended market would almost certainly have been assumed by a series of bilateral or multilateral trade agreements. And any such agreement would require the use of a language (or a small number of languages) for international communication. I have found no evidence that would lead me to believe that Irish would be better off or stronger under such circumstances. Perhaps many of the European Union’s linguistic shortcomings will come be more effectively addressed if we focus on developing a global paradigm to accommodate linguistic diversity—one which ensures the use of all languages in their respective domains.

For me, as an Irish speaker, I feel we have come a long way from one union to another. My ancestors, as late as the final decades in the nineteenth century, were punished at school for speaking Irish. Last year my elder daughter, a lawyer in the European Court of Justice, took her pledge of loyalty to the Union in Irish. Irish is no longer the language of demoralised peasants: it is the language of a sovereign (and dare I say, prosperous) people in a united Europe. For me, as an Irish speaker, the European Union gets a good pass-mark and leaves me feeling enthusiastic about the new Europe and optimistic for the future of my language in it.
Over the centuries, political unions have forged, been maintained and/or, with time, disintegrated.¹ Unions may also be redefined without necessarily collapsing. To persist, however, they require successful mechanisms that enable the political system to function without suffering a legitimacy crisis. What might constitute such a crisis will depend, at any given time, on the wider historical context, the level of socio-economic development, the nature of the political system itself and the expectations of society. The relationship between society and state is thus crucial in a union’s endurance. This paper illustrates one example of a union’s collapse in a state socialist system at the end of the twentieth century and examines the dynamics that brought it about.

I The Soviet Case Study

The disintegration of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), like the disintegration of the Tsarist state, was a complex protracted process, spread over several years. One variable alone cannot account for the union’s collapse. The process was multi-variate and one in which sequence and timing mattered. Certain key developments in the system’s final months of implosion could not have come about without other prior, and crucial, developments. There were necessary pre-requisites for disintegration, ongoing and interrelated social and political processes of change integral to it, build-ups of tensions, vital accelerators that speeded the disintegration and catalysts for fundamental transformations.

The prior context of this erosion and collapse of the one-party state was an anachronistic economic system suffering from negative growth rates

¹ I have used the Library of Congress transliteration system here with exceptions for names or words customarily known in the West differently. Thus El’tsin, Iakovlev, Ianaev and Iazov are here rendered Yeltsin, Yakovlev, Yanaev and Yazov and soft signs have been dropped from the ends of words that would otherwise correctly be glasnost’ and oblast’.
and a cynicism among the intelligentsia and wider public about politics and party privilege. In the early 1980s, the stalled and embarrassing gerontocracies in quick succession of Leonid Brezhnev, Iurii Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko vividly illustrated the need for rejuvenation and redefinition.

Integral to the processes of change from 1985 to 1991 were the following enabling factors: first, an instigator of reform in a socio-economic context that required reform; second, an officially approved policy of perestroika (restructuring or reconstruction); third, the encouragement ‘from above’ of new groups and movements to form, independent of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), in order to encourage support for perestroika; fourth, changes to the electoral system; fifth, pressing demands arising from the nationalities question; and sixth, a failed coup as catalyst. Without the first, the other key factors for disintegration would either have been missing or, in the case of the nationalities question, would have lacked the legality to express itself and demand further change. Ultimately, a war of laws between different administrative levels, namely between the union’s centre in Moscow and the newly elected parliaments in the republics, illustrated the grave legitimacy crisis that the Union confronted due to reforms adopted by it. Political chaos, ungovernability and fragmentation were among the consequences. The paradox for its instigator, Mikhail Gorbachev, was that when his de jure power was at its strongest in 1990 and 1991, after he assumed the title of President of the USSR, his authority at home was at its weakest, even if his prestige abroad was high. Power without authority means weak de facto power. By 1991, the components of the USSR that had held the union together, the very logic of the system, had been undermined, just as in 1917 the props that had held up Tsarism were no longer in place. Moreover, the instigator was losing his closest supporters, becoming increasingly politically isolated, trapped between radicals and conservatives, neither of whom he wanted fully to join. Final attempts after the failed coup of August 1991 to maintain some sort of union without the Baltic states failed and disagreements among remaining republics over attempts to coordinate economic and social policy finally undermined the viability of any cohesive political union.

i) The Instigator
When Gorbachev’s colleagues on the Politburo selected him in March 1985 to become the new General Secretary after the death of Chernenko, no-one suspected quite how much of a reformer he was. Had the rest of the Politburo realised this in advance, they would probably not have picked him. The
The historical lesson that reform from above in one-party authoritarian systems is potentially dangerous since it can lead to demands for further change than what is on offer from leaders had already been learnt from Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Gorbachev, as a reformer, did not call for a new system. He merely wanted to modify the existing one, within its own socialist parameters. He called for a perfection of socialism in the tradition of Lenin. Gorbachev hoped, as a consequence, to see a more efficient economy, a higher standard of living, a more democratic socialism, an activation of the ‘human factor’ as he put it and a ‘new political thinking’ in foreign policy. Economic stagnation and crisis, as pointed out by economists Abel Aganbegian and Tat’iana Zaslavskaya as characterising the years 1979–82, made the need for change and initiative in the workplace and in society compelling. Gorbachev supported khozraschet (cost-accounting) and samofinansirovanie (self-financing), as introduced in the 1987 Law on State Enterprise. He wanted a more committed workforce (with an end to the reality of ‘they pretend to pay us and we pretend to work’) and fewer bureaucratic orders sent down to factory directors. The stifling role of ministries and widespread corruption needed to be tackled. The economic changes that Gorbachev attempted were geared to his goal of an ‘intensification’ of economic growth. ‘Intensifikatsiia’ became a buzz word along with ‘efficiency’ and ‘acceleration of the scientific-technological revolution.’ Gorbachev wanted to replace old machinery with new in order to boost productivity, which called for both the import of Western technology and the production of new and more sophisticated Soviet forms. He also advocated stricter labour discipline, initially continuing Iuri Andropov’s anti-alcohol campaign, until 1989 when he relaxed it due to opposition and failure. All these aspects of economic reform were subsumed under Gorbachev’s perestroika which he defined as a revolutionary process of interrelated changes in economy, polity and society.

ii) The Policy of Perestroika

Officially, perestroika was launched at the 27th Party Congress in 1986, an event convenient in its timing, just one year after Gorbachev became General

---


Secretary. It presented him with the opportunity for defining his desired direction quickly and also for triggering some turnover in the membership of the Central Committee. Whereas 87% of the full membership of the Central Committee had been re-elected under Brezhnev in 1981, only 59% enjoyed re-election in 1986, with Gorbachev benefiting from greater shake out. In fact, in his first year in office, Gorbachev got off to a quick start by dismissing thirty-nine out of 101 ministers with seats on the Council of Ministers and also fourteen out of twenty-three heads of Central Committee party departments.

The precise meaning of perestroika changed over time, as did the permitted limits to the use of glasnost, or openness. These two concepts were linked since problems that perestroika had to solve could not be tackled until they had been named, aired, shamed, tackled and solved. Hence the necessity for ‘publicity’ about them which glasnost provided. After 1987 a range of social problems were refreshingly admitted to exist, such as prostitution, drug addiction, suicide and crime, although they were blamed mainly on the stagnation of the Brezhnev era which became an ideological target. But early on glasnost had its limits. Gorbachev did not wish to question Leninism, to attack the KGB, to expose violence in the army or to discuss the Molotov-Ribentrop Pact of 1938. Nor did he wish to see discussion of the compulsory two years of military service or to see opinion polls which showed Andrei Sakharov and Jesus Christ as more popular than himself. Certainly, with time, he got them all as the truth can become addictive and also corrosive of established norms and values.

The crucial point on economic reform was that Gorbachev wanted a more flexible system, based on planning and central control. He attempted to get more market elements into a system of socialist planning. A reduction in the number of state orders from the ministries was essential to his vision, as were cooperative businesses. The latter were legalised in 1986 and 1987 in laws on individual enterprise and in 1988 on cooperatives. In brief, these early economic reforms failed because the success of cost accounting required price reforms that did not occur and the ministries and Gosplan failed to reduce the number of administrative orders sent down to factories, leaving many directors with no space for initiative. Gorbachev also hesitated to adopt the Shatalin plan of economic reform after having first been keen to see it drawn

---

up. His fear of offending conservatives was a key factor here. Gorbachev’s call for ‘more initiative’ from below was tepid because the space for taking it was limited and many citizens were afraid to pursue this path in case they made errors and were subsequently punished, especially if Gorbachev’s tenure was short as some feared early on during his battle with hard-liners.

Failed economic reforms were crucial to the process of disintegration since Gorbachev came to believe that economic reform needed political reform in order to be successful. Political reform, he hoped, would shake up the old controlling practices of the ministries and make them more accountable. The ensuing political reforms, taken together, were vital for leading to disintegration which Gorbachev neither wanted, nor envisaged at their outset.

### iii) New Groups and Movements

Beginning in 1987, as glasnost was taking off, Gorbachev encouraged new groups and movements to form, independent of the CPSU. Under Stalin any group independent of the party would have been dubbed ‘anti-Soviet’ as an ‘enemy of the people’ and under Brezhnev they would have been labelled ‘dissident.’ This development was absolutely key to the political momentum and pace of change that followed. Why did he permit them, given the risks involved?

First, Gorbachev badly wanted new movements to support his reforms and to help in his arguments and battles with conservative communists who opposed his ideas. Initially, indeed, these movements did support him. In the Baltic states, for example, popular fronts for perestroika wanted economic reforms. Socialist groups who desired genuine socialism and human rights also formed, as did a wide range of other democratic groups such as the tiny Democratic Union and the larger umbrella movement Democratic Russia (which included quite diverse groups such as the Democratic Party of Russia, the Christian Democratic Movement and the Car Lovers’ Party). Secondly, this process was part of what Gorbachev called democratising socialism.

The key point for this discussion is that as momentum built, and as other changes occurred, the popular fronts and other groups, including a Democratic Platform within the CPSU, began to call for more change than Gorbachev himself wanted. For instance, Democratic Russia hoped for the election of democrats to the soviets, the election of Boris Yeltsin to the presidency of

---

Russia, an end to Article 6 of the Constitution which enshrined the ‘leading and guiding role of the CPSU’ and effectively an abolition of the command-administrative system of the USSR and the advent of the multi-party system. And out of the popular fronts in the Baltic states came nationalist movements, such as Sajudis in Lithuania. Sajudis wanted economic autonomy, then sovereignty, followed by political independence.

In short, groups and movements that Gorbachev initially needed in his political battles, ultimately were crucial in sealing his political fate and in challenging the very fabric of the union. The embryonic civil society that he enabled eventually betrayed him. Without it, nationalist pressures could not have been so easily expressed.  

iv) Changes to the Electoral System

The political opportunities and levers for the array of social, political and nationalist groups to express themselves fully, and also to act with some legitimacy, came through changes to the electoral process. In democratising the soviets and in ushering in candidate choice, Gorbachev began to unpick and redefine the established relationship between strong party and weak soviets. In 1989, Soviet citizens voted for the Congress of People’s Deputies which was an all-union parliament with 2,250 deputies from across the Union. This body then selected its own smaller Supreme Soviet of 542.

Instigating this change had been extremely difficult and Gorbachev showed himself an immensely adept politician in so doing. He had briefly mentioned electoral reform at the 27th Party Congress, but no-one else did. The topic was returned to at a Central Committee plenum in January 1987 where Gorbachev advocated electoral choice. The plenum officially endorsed the idea in a resolution. Legal journals then began to debate how best to go about this and a tiny experiment in 1% of constituencies took place in June (with one ‘automatic’ deputy of sixteen years shocked not to be elected, another upset to the point of heart attack and chairpersons of commissions finding it hard to read out results when a party boss was not returned).

Rather than wait until the next Party Congress for the opportunity to widen political reform, Gorbachev convened a special party conference at which he called for more radical reform of what he described as a deformed

---


7 See White, Gorbachev, 28–75.
and ossified political system. The conference was stormy with Soviet citizens glued to their television screens to watch resolutions passed for more democracy. At the 19th Party Conference in June 1988, Gorbachev rammed this policy of electoral reform through, amid debate, anger and an unprecedented political liveliness. Central Committee meetings in July and September followed the suggestions of the Conference, out of which came an electoral law, passed in December 1988 by the Supreme Soviet. Gorbachev revived Lenin’s slogan ‘all power to the soviets’, not yet anticipating what they would do to him and to the system. In his speeches Gorbachev likened political reform to oxygen.

The upshot was success for Gorbachev in attaining approval for electoral reform, possibly because many did not realise quite how radical it could be. Three sets of voting were to take place: 750 deputies to be elected in local constituencies; another 750 to be selected from larger units to ensure representation by nationality; and a final 750 to come from social organisations. These last group of seats were effectively ‘saved’ ones with 100 reserved for the CPSU, seventy-five for the Komsomol and so on. They came in for huge criticism from democrats, but arguably Gorbachev had to include them in his political package to win over his conservative critics. When it convened, the more radical deputies who had been elected to the Congress of People’s Deputies set up the Inter-regional group of deputies. This linked advocates of change across the fifteen republics who wanted more change than Gorbachev and faster. Boris Yeltsin was one of its members.

The momentum of electoral reform did not stop with the new All-Union Congress of People’s Deputies. As a system of many administrative levels, the logic of the USSR required elections at lower levels too. The fast pace of change accelerated in late 1989 and in 1990 due to elections to parliaments in the republics. These were arguably fundamental to the unravelling of the system which could not have logically occurred without them. Lively debates took place about what ‘learning democracy’ for parliamentarians meant in a system unfamiliar with it. Bad behaviour and scuffles on the floor of debating chambers were part of the process.

v) The Nationalities Question
A strong case can be made that it was insensitivity to nationalist demands in this wider context of political reform that ultimately caused the break-up of

---

the USSR. If we contrast the USSR with Spain, we can see that in the latter, statutes of pre-autonomy showed respect for the historic nationalities enabling the state to continue without fragmenting. This did not occur in the USSR. Indeed, Gorbachev was ‘nationality blind’ until too late. At the 27th Party Congress, he reiterated the old party line that the nationalities question had been solved and also short-sightedly referred to the Russians as the elder brother of the others, just as Stalin and others before him had done.

Gorbachev did not instigate electoral reform to aid nationalism, but that was one of its consequences. Electoral reform gave nationalism a mouthpiece, a legitimate political outlet and a power base. Nationalism had previously been aided by the encouragement ‘from above’ of independent social movements which had allowed movements to begin to mobilise and to articulate their thoughts and policies. In December 1989, the Lithuanian communist party declared its independence from the CPSU. The newly elected Lithuanian parliament was the first to declare independence from Moscow. By the end of 1990, all Soviet republics, including Russia, had declared their sovereignty. This meant that they were rejecting the historic right of the All-Union level in Moscow to override their own legislation. Gorbachev could protest that much of this was unconstitutional, such as the seizure by Russia of control over the Russian KGB and of the mines on its territory, but in reality there was little he could do. To underscore the point that he needed to defend Russian interests first and foremost and to be independent of the CPSU, Yeltsin publicly and unexpectedly resigned from the party at the 28th Party Congress in 1990 and stunned Gorbachev by walking out. As elected Chairman of the Russian Congress of People’s Deputies in 1990 and as its elected President in June 1991, Yeltsin declared that the laws of his parliament could override the laws of the All-Union Congress of People’s Deputies. In the ensuing ‘war of laws’ between fifteen republics and the All-Union level, or union centre, contradictory laws were passed and the republics assumed new powers, control over budgets, land, the militia and so on. Political chaos was one of the results. The words crisis (krizis), collapse (krakh), disintegration (razval) and despair (otchaianie) became part of intellectual, journalistic and daily discourse.

This process of disintegration was also spurred on by the euphoria at witnessing successful revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989, where Gorbachev had also encouraged perestroika. As the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe collapsed, nationalists inside the USSR felt emboldened by a ripple effect which topped up the confidence that was developing internally anyway.
vi) The Failed Coup as Catalyst

The significance of the failed coup of August 1991 was that it accelerated political change at a previously unimagined pace. The irony here is that the coup’s instigators wanted to maintain the old system but speedily achieved the opposite.9

Since 1989, there had been numerous rumours about impending civil war and a right-wing coup. Finding himself caught between opponents of perestroika on one side and radical reformers on the other who wanted more change than he did, Gorbachev endured an uneasy middle position, sometimes seeming to lean one way, then veering to the other. When, in 1990, Gorbachev assumed more powers through an executive presidency as membership of the CPSU was falling and its credibility dissolving with exposés of privileges and corruption, not only did radical reformers accuse him of authoritarianism, but also former supporters such as Eduard Shevardnadze. 1990 was a crucial year, with Gorbachev losing some of his erstwhile crucial backers, meaning an erosion of his political credibility, authority and strength. He also tried to reign in glasnost. In that year he appointed Leonid Kravchenko to head Gosteleradio and immediately lively programmes were stopped and transformed into dull ones. Yet now emboldened by changes, journalists and Gorbachev’s critics fought back. No longer wary, cautious, cowed or afraid, as some had been in 1987 and 1988, they felt confident to demand genuine glasnost since the new political context of lively parliamentary debates and fresh legislation gave them legitimacy to demand that the new widened parameters of discussion remain.

This context was unacceptable to conservative communists, made worse for them in 1991 by two developments. First, in Russia, Yeltsin in a decree of July 1991 had declared that all party cells in the workplace had to close. To take the party out of the workplace was to kill the party’s historical entry-point. Traditional party members were exceedingly unhappy at this. Second, ongoing calls for sovereignty had resulted in discussions and debates which were to culminate on 20 August 1991 in a signing of a new union treaty. Coup leaders wanted to stop this treaty since it meant dismemberment of the USSR as they knew it and wanted it.

An Emergency Committee of eight men formed, including Vice-President Yanaev, Head of the KGB Kriuchkov, Defence Minister Yazov, Boris Pugo the Minister of the Interior and Prime Minister Pavlov, and other leaders of

---

industry and agriculture. They declared that chaos and ungovernability had prompted them to act. They banned all meetings, demonstrations and strikes and argued that the economy was in crisis and that famine was possible. With Gorbachev on holiday in the Crimea and effectively under house arrest, tanks rolled into Moscow.

Several factors, however, meant that the coup would fail. First, the security forces were divided. The Russian KGB, no longer part of the all-Union KGB, tipped Yeltsin off about what was happening which allowed him to begin the resistance immediately. The Russian KGB was loyal to Yeltsin and this was vital. Secondly, Yeltsin’s role as popularly elected president of Russia meant that he enjoyed the people’s mandate through the ballot box. Similarly, coup leaders had no mandate to rule, but the Russian parliament had. Thirdly, the coup leaders were disorganised and Yanaev and Pavlov were apparently drunk. Fourthly, and crucially, sections of the armed forces were ready to disobey orders and to refuse to attack the Russian parliament—its building increasingly a symbol of democracy. Fifthly, many citizens in Moscow, but admittedly a minority since most stayed home, tried to persuade the soldiers in tanks that they were wrong to be there. Some hauled soldiers out of tanks and started to argue with them about what they were doing. In this context, the coup crumbled. Pugo committed suicide and the others were arrested.

II The Union’s Final Demise

Brought back to Moscow from isolation, at first Gorbachev did not grasp how fast and how far politics had moved on. During a painful speech to the Russian parliament (i.e. not the All-Union parliament but the one in which Yeltsin held the presidency) Gorbachev failed, at first, to appreciate the political mood, or to see why at his call for ‘more perestroika’ deputies openly laughed at him. Very slowly he caught on. With hugely boosted authority, Yeltsin then humiliated Gorbachev inside the Russian parliament by publicly insisting that he resign as General Secretary of the CPSU, and ask the Central Committee to dissolve itself, as well as to ban the Russian communist party on 23 August. The Soviet era was now effectively over, but the Union had not yet gone entirely. The coup alone did not mean an end to the USSR, although the Baltic states demanded independence and were given it immediately.
Gorbachev wanted to maintain some sort of union right up to the very end. The All-Union Congress of People’s Deputies met to declare change and to formalise independence for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. On 1 September, the Congress approved new central institutions which effectively made itself powerless. Executive power from September to late December 1991 lay in the State Council. Its members were Gorbachev and the top office holders of the republics, thereby reflecting a power shift to the republican level. These office holders could be presidents, prime-ministers or chairs of Supreme Soviets where presidential elections had not yet taken place. The purpose of the State Council was to find coordinated solutions to problems of domestic and foreign policy. Thus policy making became an attempt, above all, to coordinate among political units, not to issue orders from the union centre at the top down to all. In essence, the Union’s ‘top’ or ‘centre’ was much eroded.

The Supreme Soviet was retained, after much debate. The Council of Nationalities was transformed into a Council of Republics in which each union republic had one vote. The Council of Republics could now veto legislation coming from the Supreme Soviet’s other chamber, the Council of the Union. This, again, reflected the power shift to the republics. So did the right of the Council of Republics to suspend USSR laws on the territory of the republics, if the laws contravened the republican constitution. Thus, the republics enjoyed more power than the centre.\textsuperscript{10} The Congress approved a change of name from USSR to Union of Sovereign States. This name applied until October when it became the Union of Free Sovereign States. That name lasted until the end of December only.

Gorbachev remained president. The important point is that institutions at the centre were now designed to link and coordinate the new states, not to decide policy for them. They were there to try to hold the parts together. The most important coordinating committee was the inter-republican economic committee headed by Ivan Silaev, meant to coordinate economic and social policy.

On 9 October, a new draft Union Treaty declared a Union of Free Sovereign Republics. It made no reference to a federation. The idea of exclusive powers for the Union was absent. On 8 October, the Russian Supreme Soviet had adopted a resolution that all deputies representing Russia in the USSR Supreme Soviet had to be guided now by Russia’s laws, not the laws\textsuperscript{10} A political Consultative Council also formed but this was just a loose advisory body. On it sat the mayors of Moscow and Leningrad, Gavriil Popov and Anatolii Sobchak, KGB chief Vadim Bakatin, Eduard Shevardnadze, Aleksandr Yakovlev and others.
of the Union. This would affect voting in the new Council of the Republics where each republic had one vote. Then on 11 October, Russia approved a resolution on a Draft Treaty of Economic Community. After much argument on 18 October, eight republics signed a treaty establishing a new economic community, which included many contradictory clauses.

For the inter-republican committee to be successful, its leaders had to agree to work together. This was the political dilemma. The grand goal was to coordinate economic and social policy. From September to November, this looked very doubtful. Tension between Ukraine and other states complicated matters. At first, Ukrainian leaders objected to a coordination of economic policy since they believed that coordination really meant being dictated to by Russia. But then Ukraine was needed by Russia for a viable committee. So Russia put pressure on a recalcitrant Ukraine. Russia restricted Ukraine’s supplies of oil, wood, medicines and banknotes. This was done deliberately to show Ukraine that it needed Russia. Not until 6 November did Ukraine initial the economic treaty that it had refused to sign the previous month. Ukrainian nationalists hoped that the document would not be ratified in the parliament. All the time the Ukrainian leader, Leonid Kravchuk, made clear that Ukraine’s participation in economic coordination depended upon results of the referendum on independence on 1 December. In the meantime, Kravchuk often neglected to attend meetings on the economic future.

Also in the meantime, Yeltsin became very impatient. He wanted a market economy now. So, although inconsistent with the economic treaty he had signed in October, he now declared that Russia would launch a crash programme to establish a market economy. He then took the post of prime minister of Russia, on top of his presidency, and thereby shouldered political responsibility for the crash programme himself. He also appointed Yegor Gaidar as deputy prime minister, responsible for economic policy. Aleksandr Shokhin was appointed deputy prime minister in charge of social policy. They were both known for their commitment to ‘Russia first.’ Russia was not ready to wait for the others.

Further change was prompted as a result of the overwhelming popular support shown on 1 December in Ukraine’s referendum on independence. Just over 90% voted in favour of independence and, with that, the vestiges of the old union crumbled. On 8 December 1991, the secret meeting of the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, the big Slavic three of Yeltsin, Kravchuk and Stanislav Shushkevich, crucially without Gorbachev, established the beginning of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), thereby denying
Gorbachev and the Soviet centre any role at all. Gorbachev and the Union were redundant.

In sum, Gorbachev suffered a creeping loss of *de facto* power, which then accelerated when the republics seized more from him and from the All-Union level.\(^\text{11}\) The failed coup was the final catalyst for a further speed-up of the destruction of the CPSU and for the construction of new political arrangements which, in turn, failed due to disagreements over economic policy and demands for independence within the Slavic camp from Russian domination. Gorbachev felt left out of the deal to form the CIS; indeed, he was politically superfluous to it.\(^\text{12}\) He opposed it when he heard the news and was humiliated to have been excluded.

### III Conclusion

When Nikita Khrushchev decided in 1934 to mark the 300th anniversary of Ukraine’s reunification with Russia with a gift of Crimea from Russia to Ukraine, Otto Kuusinen allegedly declared ‘Only in our country is it possible for such a great people as the Russian people without any hesitation magnanimously to hand over one of their richest oblasts to another fraternal people.’\(^\text{13}\) Dmitri Volkogonov observed that since the ‘Union’ was really ‘a single political entity’ Khrushchev could see nothing offensive to the Russian people by this act.\(^\text{14}\)

That the Union was not really a single political entity was graphically clear by 1989 and 1990. The sequence of events mattered hugely in its unravelling. Certain key developments, such as the Lithuanian nationalist deputies in the Congress of People’s Deputies walking out in 1989 rather than agree that All-Union laws could override republican ones or the Lithuanian communists declaring that they were leaving the CPSU in 1990, could not have occurred without a series of prior events triggered by Gorbachev himself. Furthermore, these acts emboldened Lithuanian nationalists to demand more.

\(^\text{11}\) For more detailed elaboration of this argument see Mary Buckley, ‘Russian Interpretations of Crisis’, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 17 (2001), 1–31.


\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., 198.
If we briefly compare the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics with that of the Tsarist state, there are certain similarities and differences. First, in both cases, it was a process spread over several years, not an instant happening. Second, also in both cases, different groups of people became dissatisfied with the system, although for very different reasons from each other.\textsuperscript{15} This growing dissatisfaction built up into legitimacy crises which meant that not only did old critics of Tsarism and the USSR become more critical but that, most importantly, those who had previously defended and propped up the systems ceased to do so. In the Soviet case, they made demands on the union centre that it was unwilling to meet. Therefore they reached the conclusion that the union had to cease and politics and economics had to be radically redefined and reshaped.

\textit{Hughes Hall, Cambridge}

‘An Unbreakable Union of Free Republics’

Ronald J. Hill

The title of this contribution is taken from opening words of the Soviet national anthem, originally adopted in 1944. The first verse of the 1977 translation—somewhat less reticent than the 1944 translation in identifying Russia’s role—went as follows:

Unbreakable Union of freeborn Republics,
Great Russia has welded forever to stand.
Created in struggle by will of the people,
United and mighty, our Soviet land!

The words of this anthem well reflect the main purpose of the Soviet Union, which is to be distinguished from the Soviet system. That system was established by the Bolshevik party in and after the revolution of October 1917, and had as its purpose the elimination of capitalism, first in Russia—formerly the Russian Empire—and then throughout the world. To that end, it set up a régime based on Soviets—elected councils—under the ‘guidance’ of the party itself acting in the name of the proletariat. This self-styled ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ came to be thought of by many as a dictatorship of the party. The system also entailed an elaborate mechanism of economic planning—effectively

---

1 This translation is somewhat contrived, mainly because it was intended to be sung in English to the rousing tune by Aleksandr V. Aleksandrov. The history of the Soviet national anthem is well chronicled on internet sites, notably http://zavtra.ru/cgi/veil/data/zavtra/98/227/71_all.html [accessed 12 August 2007], where Sergei Mikhalkov, one of the two authors of the original Russian words, discusses the devising of the anthem, in a chapter taken from his book Ot i do (Moscow, 1998). There was also a 1943 translation and recording by the American singer Paul Robeson, available on numerous internet sites, including http://www.allthelyrics.com/song/756496 [accessed 26 February 2008]; the original words were revised in 1977 to remove reference to Stalin—allowing what had become a ‘Song Without Words’ to be sung again. For a comment on the non-singing of the Soviet anthem for two decades after Stalin’s death see Timothy Garton Ash ‘There are great national anthems—now we need an international one’, The Guardian, 17 January 2008, available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jan/17/kosovo.serbia, [accessed 26 February 2008].
a command economy—which from 1928 through a succession of five-year plans (and under Khrushchev one seven-year plan) transformed the economic and social structure of the country. It was educated, modernised, industrialised and urbanised; a relatively simple society of peasants and a tiny industrial class, with a privileged class above them, was replaced by a complex society characterised by diversity, by opportunities for social mobility, and by a level of wealth that previous generations could not even have dreamt of. (It never, of course, reached the levels attained by capitalism once this established system recovered from the profound depression of the 1930s and the Second World War.)

These developments brought about by Soviet power, enforced by the crude imposition of a culture of harsh discipline, enabled the country to play a crucial role in defeating Nazism in the Second World War and in the 1960s become the world’s second superpower. As such, it vied with the United States for leadership in the space race, projected its military might around the globe and supported anti-colonial movements in the Third World. It also created the prototype of the welfare state, which was emulated to some extent in West European countries that had been its allies during the war, whose populations were seeking something different from what their own experiences of pre-Second World War capitalism had been. The rejection of war hero Winston Churchill in favour of Clement Atlee’s Labour Party in the British general election of 1945, which ushered in the nationalisation of much of British industry and the establishment of the national health service in 1948, is a prominent example of this shift to the left; in the post-war period Communist parties in France and Italy, in particular, enjoyed phenomenal electoral success, even when the truth about Stalin’s Soviet Union became known after 1956. Bound together through the Communist Information Bureau, they broadly accepted the Soviet way of doing things, and they fomented strikes and other actions in their support. Only after the Prague Spring of 1968 showed the possibility of a form of socialist rule different from the Soviet model did the West European left develop a serious alternative, known as Eurocommunism: this failed to challenge the Soviet system as ‘authentic’ socialism, however, as new the concepts of ‘developed socialism’ and ‘mature socialism’ were coined in order to place the Soviet Union back at the helm of the movement in the era of the ‘scientific and technical revolution’.2

The Soviet system was respected and feared around the world as a viable alternative to capitalism. The policy of ‘peaceful coexistence’ between states with different socio-economic systems enunciated by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956, and détente between capitalism and socialism from the early 1970s under Leonid Brezhnev, won some support for the Soviet system, whose rapid economic growth allowed it to present itself to undeveloped countries as a shortcut to rapid development, and won it supporters in Africa, Asia and elsewhere.

As early as the 1930s, some Western commentators were taken in by the Soviet achievements, most notoriously, perhaps, the British socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb, who presented Soviet reality under Stalin as ‘a new civilisation’. Even when the negative features of ‘communism’ as a form of rule became acknowledged with Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin in 1956 and the subsequent anti-Stalin campaign, the economic might of a system based on a command economy rather than capitalism was acknowledged by Western governments. The emphasis on military power, including the space race, was taken particularly seriously by the United States. The Soviet system’s capacity to effect economic and social development to a level that challenged the supremacy of the ideological alternative led commentators to acknowledge what appeared to be strengths. By the end of the 1960s, notions of peaceful coexistence and even of ‘convergence’ of the two socio-economic systems were gaining currency among political leaders and in intellectual circles.

However, all of this could have been achieved without the creation of a Soviet Union. The words of the Soviet national anthem reflected the point that the Soviet Union was designed to accommodate and manage the complex

---

3 Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation? (London, 1935); a reviewer observed that by the end of the second volume they identified it as indeed a new civilisation. See George Catlin, review in Political Science Quarterly, 52 (1937), 421; subsequent editions dropped the question mark at the end of the subtitle.

ethnic diversity of the territory inherited from the Russian Empire. That was a crucial element of compromise with the analysis and predictions of Marx and Engels that Lenin and the revolutionary generation of Soviet leaders felt they had to make.

I The Purpose of the Soviet Union

For the founding fathers of Marxism, the fundamental division in human society was socio-economic class, defined in terms of an individual’s or group’s relationship to the means of production. Their prediction was that eventually the working class (proletariat) would rise up and overthrow the ruling bourgeoisie, institute a dictatorship, expropriate the former ruling class and reorganise production along ‘socialist’ lines. This would transform class relationships. Moreover, since the state was identified as the instrument of bourgeois class rule, in the absence of a ruling class there would be no need for a state which would, in the famous words of Friedrich Engels, ‘wither away’. In this analysis, ‘nationality’ was a bogus notion invented by the ruling classes to seduce the workers and peasants into submitting to the interests of those ruling classes, and to divide and thereby continue to rule the international working class.5

Such an analysis may have come to be seen as incorrect in the decades since Marx’s death—indeed, the jingoism that greeted the outbreak of the First World War was a serious challenge to the assumptions of European socialists. Lenin’s call to turn the imperialist war into a European civil war fell on deaf ears. None the less, just as Marx supported Irish nationalism against Britain, Lenin recognised that Russia’s ethnic minorities were a force that could be used to overthrow the Tsarist régime.6 The Russian Empire had been identified as ‘a prison-house of nations’.7 Literally scores of national and ethnic

5 On Marx’s views, and those of his followers, on these matters see the monumental study by Walker Connor, The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory (Princeton, NJ, 1984); these views are critically examined in Robert Conquest, The Nation Killers (London, 1972), Chapter 8.

6 This point was picked up by the Webbs. See Sydney Webb and Beatrice Webb, Soviet Communism (3rd edition; London, 1944), 107–8. Alexander J. Motyl sees the Marxist legacy in this area as comprising ‘the strategic primacy of class struggle, the tactical utility of nationalism and ethnocentrism’. See Alexander J. Motyl, Sovietology, Rationality, Nationality: Coming to Grips with Nationalism in the USSR (New York, 1990), 73.

7 The origins of this phrase are obscure, but it is widely attributed to both Lenin and Marx, and even more widely depicted as reflecting the general nineteenth-century
groups had been incorporated as the Russian Empire expanded eastwards and southwards from the European heartland of the Slavs. Thousands of internal troops, led by Cossacks, were engaged in repressive duties in the last decades of the Empire. Russian systems of education, administration and law were imposed on groups with diverse traditions and cultures, as Russification policies were pursued. This partly explains the late Soviet tendency to depict contact with the Russian nation as a progressive step in the histories of the subject nations. But, while the grievances of ethnic minorities could be used to benefit the Bolsheviks in attacking the imperial system, the problem of ethnic diversity did not disappear with the success of the revolution. Indeed, it became urgent, and its complexity defied a simple solution. The creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which was adopted on 30 December 1922, was an attempt to come to terms with this, in a practice that Ronald Suny has seen as ‘a compromise with maximal ideological desiderata’, in consequence of which, ‘[r]ather than a melting pot, the Soviet Union became the incubator of new nations’.

While Lenin had certainly appreciated the importance of the ‘nationalities question’ in Russia, it was Stalin who devised the structure of the Union. As a member of the Georgian nation, he was given responsibility for the nationalities’ affairs as People’s Commissar of Nationalities, and he appears to have taken this role seriously as a Marxist theoretician, having written a treatise on the question as early as 1913. Indeed, his four-point definition of a nation


8 For a succinct account of the position of the national minorities in late Tsarist Russia, see ibid., 69–83; the issue was explored in Hugh Seton-Watson, The Decline of Imperial Russia 1855–1914 (London, 1952), passim; and in Richard Pipes, The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923 (revised edition; New York, 1974; originally Cambridge, MA, 1954).

9 Explained in terms of a supposed policy of ‘friendly cooperation that existed between the Russian and other peoples, despite the imperialistic aspirations of the former ruling class or of the Tsarist régime’. Anatole G. Mazour, The Writing of History in the Soviet Union (Stanford, CA, 1971), 104.


11 This was his Marxism and the National Question, first published in Prosveshcheniye, 1913, Nos 3–5 (March–May); an English-language version is to be found at http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03.htm [accessed 11 March 2008]. Stalin’s claims as an ideologist are stressed in Robert Service, Stalin: A Biography (Basingstoke, 2004), chapter 9.
has been widely cited. He, too, recognised the significance of the peripheral nations’ antipathy towards the imperial system for the success of the Bolshevik cause.

It was also clear that the Bolshevik régime had to treat national and ethnic minorities rather differently from the way the Tsars treated them, and Stalin’s ‘solution’ was that of a ‘union’—nominally a federal system based on ethnic identity, which linked regional federations and two individual Soviet states—Belarus and Ukraine—into a new entity, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, for which the first constitution was adopted in 1924; subsequent constitutions were adopted in 1936 and 1977.

This was later identified as the ‘Leninist nationalities policy’, which was asserted to have ‘solved’ the nationalities question. By the mid-1930s, the Webbs felt confident to write of ‘The Solution of the Problem’, on the basis of what they perceived as ‘the whole-hearted adoption of [the] policy of cultural autonomy, and even more... its accompaniment of leaving the local administration to be carried on mainly by “natives”.’

The original constituent federations underwent structural changes, but the principles of the state and territorial structure remained intact until the collapse of the system in 1992. Union republics, each named after a major ethnic group (usually that of the majority); autonomous republics within some of the union republics—again named after a significant ethnic group in the territory, although not always the majority or even the largest group; autonomous provinces and national areas: these were the ethnic units that formed the Union. And, as is typical of federal states, certain powers were granted to the various units, principally in the realm of cultural rights: the language of instruction in educational establishments could vary; books and


13 See Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, also Davis, *Toward a Marxist Theory of Nationalism*, 89. The Webbs, too, noted Lenin’s recognition of the significance of national antipathy to the imperial system.

14 Webb and Webb, *Soviet Communism*, 118. These naïve perceptions were, of course, shown to be false in subsequent assaults on some of the minorities, notably during and after the Second World War. See, in particular, Conquest, *The Nation Killers*. 
newspapers were published in local languages, and there were radio and television stations that broadcast in the language of the community that they served; local languages were used in public places such as street signs; the age of marriage might differ from one republic to another; and each union republic was given the appurtenances of statehood (see below). In this way, the existence of different ethnic and national groups was recognised formally in the structures of the state.

However, the reality of the Soviet Union is that for most purposes the country was governed as a unitary state. The hierarchical structure was ruled by the ‘Leninist’ principle of democratic centralism, in which the centralist principle dominated. Federal decisions, whether by All-Union ministries or the central organs of the communist party, the trade union organisation, the women’s council and most other bodies, were binding upon those of the union and autonomous republics, the autonomous provinces and the national territories. Administration might be devolved, but decision making was centralised. Moreover, since the federal capital, Moscow, was also the capital of the largest republic, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, it was hard in practice to distinguish Soviet policy from policy that came from Russia for those on the receiving end of central policies. In such circumstances, it was perhaps a reflection of political realities that the national anthem declared that Russia had put together this union, and that it would last forever. Russia dominated in many ways—economically, politically and culturally—and policies on such features as language, publication, education and defence could certainly be interpreted as constituting ‘Russification’. For many purposes, ‘Soviet’ was indistinguishable from ‘Russian’ (although I have argued that Soviet nationalities policy and the issues surrounding it were not simply a matter of handling relations between the Russian majority and the non-Russian minorities: this was an exceedingly complex area of political, social and economic life, that presented many dilemmas for any government responsible for that particular territory). What is undeniable is that official attitudes and policies towards ethnic diversity in this ‘union’ were somewhat ambiguous, and, in my view, the results have been contradictory.

---

II The Impact of Soviet Federalism

We need to bear in mind that the Soviet Union was created on the basis of a territory inhabited by scores of groups, some of them manifesting features of traditional society, with illiteracy, customary law, an unsettled existence and other pre-modern characteristics. The Soviet policy imposed modern ideas of statehood and nationhood on those groups and their territories—in some cases, such as Central Asia, perhaps as a deliberate means of dividing and ruling the Islamic *umma* or world community. In establishing republics that were formally ‘autonomous’, Soviet power introduced modern notions to such communities for the first time. The idea of the territorial state, with its symbols of flag, coat-of-arms, national anthem and capital city, was a novelty, particularly in the non-European parts of the country; even in Europe, the trappings of statehood were given to created territories such as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (which later became the Republic of Moldova) and units within the Russian Federative Republic, such as the Tatar, Buryat and Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics. When during the Second World War the three Baltic States lost their interwar independence through incorporation into the Soviet Union and establishment as union republics, they acquired new flags, anthems, coats-of-arms and other state symbols that reflected the imposed Soviet identity.

Across the Union, each republican capital city became an economic, cultural, administrative, political and educational centre. Republican capitals acquired their grand state buildings (usually in Soviet ‘classical’ style), their radio and television station, their university, academy of sciences, opera and ballet theatre, folk music and dance companies, ‘national’ newspapers and publishing houses (which published in Russian and the local language). Towns that had been peripheral in the Russian Empire or in an external state (for example, Chișinău/Kishinev, capital of Moldova, on the north-east fringes of Romania) had their status and whole identity changed by decree and through the policies that flowed from that. An apparatus of government (‘conventional state machinery’, as one observer called it\(^\text{16}\)), including a Council of Ministers run by politicians, who headed ministries and state committees, was established in each republic. It accompanied representative bodies (latterly known as ‘Soviets of People’s Deputies’), headed by a quasi-parliamentary ‘Supreme Soviet’ that was constitutionally the highest

---

law-making body within its territory. At lower levels in the hierarchy, city, provincial, rural district and village soviets embraced large numbers of citizens, approved by the political authorities of the Communist Party and endorsed by the electorate, who supposedly exercised ‘people’s power’—and certainly performed useful functions in mediating between the citizens and the holders of real power.17

It was through these institutions and policies that successive generations of Ukrainians, Belarusians, Udmurts, Chuvash, Yakuts, Tajiks, Kazakhs and others became socialised into modern notions of statehood and the political processes of administration in modern societies.18 Moreover, although boundaries between territorial units were changed over time and sometimes displayed scant rationality except as means of ensuring Moscow’s dominance—the situating of Armenian Nagorny Karabakh within Muslim Azerbaijan is the example that has become best known in the past two decades because of the tensions that led to war in 1988—those very boundaries became associated with the units that became independent following the collapse of the Union in 1992. Thus, the Baltic republics incorporated into the Soviet Union as a result of the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact of 1939 possessed different boundaries from those of the Baltic States that enjoyed an independent existence between the two world wars; this was particularly true of Lithuania.19

However, despite the trappings of national statehood or quasi-statehood, attempts to expand or reinforce the ethnic identity of particular units were treated as hostile to the interests of the Soviet Union and condemned as ‘bourgeois nationalism’, and their perpetrators punished. In the early 1970s, Petr Shelest, the communist party leader in Ukraine, was removed from office for apparent leniency towards nationalism.20 Loyalty to the Soviet Union,

17 This point may be regarded as contentious; but see Ronald J. Hill, Soviet Politics, Political Science and Reform (London, 1980), chapters 3 and 4, for evidence that suggests these bodies were taken seriously.

18 In this context, Suny refers to ‘the formative influence of the Soviet experience in the making of nations’. See Suny, The Revenge of the Past, 140; see also Motyl, Sovietology, Rationality, Nationality, 167.

19 For example, the capital of Soviet (and post-Soviet) Lithuania—Vilnius—was located within Poland during the inter-war period, and was known as Wilno; the ‘temporary capital’ of independent Lithuania was Kaunas; other territories that had historically been regarded as part of Lithuania were incorporated into the Belorussian Soviet republic and have remained within post-Soviet Belarus.

20 It was during his period in office that Ivan Dzyuba’s Internationalism or Russification? A Study of the Soviet Nationalities Problem (London, 1968), highly critical of Soviet integrationist policies towards Ukraine, was published. See also Borys Lewytzkyj, Politics and Society in Soviet Ukraine, 1953–1980 (Edmonton, 1984), especially chapter 4.
rather than to Ukraine, Moldova, Kirgizia or Birobijan (a ‘Jewish autonomous province’ in the east) was fostered, and inter-republican migration, inter-ethnic marriage and other integrative policies were pursued, with some success.\(^{21}\) By 1979, some 14.9% of all families were ethnically mixed, including 18.1% of urban families;\(^{22}\) Russians were long recognised as ‘active’ participants in mixed marriages.\(^{23}\) The incidence of inter-ethnic marriage among females entering marriage rose during the 1980s in all but four republics (Lithuania, Estonia, Turkmenia and Azerbaijan).\(^{24}\) By the late 1980s, some 25 million Russians were living outside the Russian republic, and millions of citizens of other Soviet republics resided in Russia and other territories that were based on an ethnic identity other than their own.\(^{25}\)

This ethnic inter-mingling of the Soviet population was intended to foster a new ‘Soviet’ identity and was facilitated among young males by integrated military service, which served to reinforce socialisation encountered in the schools and through youth organisations, and ensured a mastery of the Russian language as the national medium of communication. In 1972 the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev declared that ‘a new historical community has been created—the Soviet people’, an assertion that subsequently became a dogma in official rhetoric.\(^{26}\) So, when the national anthem cried:

\begin{center}
Be glorious, our free Fatherland—
The reliable bulwark of friendship of the peoples!
\end{center}

it was perfectly clear that the Fatherland in question was the Union. This was reinforced by explicit references to Soviet identity in the anthems of the Soviet republics. The anthem of Ukraine, for example, opened with the declaration:

\begin{center}
\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Suny, \textit{The Revenge of the Past}, 109, refers to ‘enviable success’; this accords with my own observation, as recorded in \textit{Hill, ‘The Dissolution of the Soviet Union’}, 200.
\item \textit{Sto natsii i narodnostei: Etnograficheskoe razvitie SSSR} (Moscow, 1985), 81, Table 1.
\item Ibid., 82.
\item \textit{Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1989g.: Statisticheskii yezhgodnik} (Moscow, 1990), 35–6.
\item According to one source, a fifth of the total Soviet population—more than 60 million persons—lived outside their ‘own’ area. See Leon Gudkov, ‘The Disintegration of the USSR and Russians in the Republics’, \textit{The Journal of Communist Studies}, 9 (1993), 75.
\item Leonid Brezhnev, \textit{Pravda}, 22 December 1972 (speech on the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the USSR). Alfred B. Evans has pointed out that the term ‘Soviet people’ (\textit{sovetskii narod}) was in use from the 1930s; he also dates the term ‘new historical community’ to Khrushchev’s speech to the 22\textsuperscript{nd} Communist Party Congress (1961). See Alfred B. Evans, \textit{Soviet Marxism-Leninism: The Decline of an Ideology} (Westport, C, 1993), 42 and 86.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
\end{center}
Live, Ukraine, beautiful and mighty
In the Soviet Union you have found happiness

while that of Latvia exhorted ‘Soviet Latvia’ to live forever, ‘Let it shine bright in the Soviet crown’. The Moldavian SSR anthem was even more explicit:

Soviet Moldova our land in blossom
Together with other sister republics
Steps with great Russia,
Towards the Union’s serene future.

The Union was seen as—and was in reality—greater than the sum of its parts. The union republics and autonomous republics were severely circumscribed in their power and authority. Specifically, decisions on economic development were the prerogative of the central authorities, and the planning system removed the capacity of local and regional authorities to take significant decisions. The 1977 Constitution, Article 16, observed that the Soviet Union constituted ‘an integral economic complex comprising all the elements of social production, distribution and exchange on its territory’, and one purpose—or at least an effect—of the planning mechanism was to tie together the various regions and republics in a web of supply and distribution networks so that the various regions became integrated and dependent on one another.

Foreign trade was a monopoly of the appropriate federal
ministry. And, although each union republic had a ministry of foreign affairs, it was the Soviet Union as an entity that had diplomatic representation abroad and pursued foreign policy.29

The emphasis on the pre-eminence of the Union in relation to the rights and identity of the national units that composed it implied that the arrangements set up in the early 1920s were to be temporary. Ideological pronouncements in subsequent decades bore this out. While policy had to be presented as permitting all nations to flourish as they never could in Tsarist Russia— the rastsvet of ethnic groups, living together happily in a ‘fraternal family of nations’ 30—the long-term trend was supposedly for the rapprochement (sblizhenie) and ultimate merging (sliyanie) of nations, a theme that was revived in the 1950s by Khrushchev, anxious to show progress towards communism.31 This raised intriguing—and perturbing—questions about whether the whole basis of Soviet federalism would be undermined; Khrushchev was ambivalent on the matter, but the logic was clear.32 This never happened, however: ethnic tensions never disappeared, the ‘merging’ could at most be seen as embryonic, and other events gave revived nationalist sentiment an opportunity to assert itself.

III The Collapse of the Union

When the Soviet Union began to collapse in the late 1980s, with a failed economy and renewed competitive pressure from the West, it was ethnic demands and the existence of ethnic territorial units that structured the break-up.33 On top of the hostility between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the status of Nagorny Karabakh, other territorial and boundary disputes arose. Moreover,
the existence of ethnic minorities within minorities provoked tensions and demands for autonomy and independence: what Raymond Taras has referred to as ‘matrioshka nationalism’ multiplied the complexity of regulating the ethnic question and managing the dissolution of the Soviet state. With internal migration and ethnically mixed marriages compounding the traditional complexities of inter-ethnic relations stemming from differences in population size, economic and cultural distinctions, and the ‘nested’ geographical distribution of groups (not to mention traditional rivalries and animosities, which were not simply directed against Russians), it is perhaps no wonder that the relaxation of the political leadership under Gorbachev gave rise to multiple expressions of dissatisfaction against neighbours that had not been overcome by seven decades of assertions and assurances. Indeed, in 1991, one source identified seventy-six separate border disputes across the Soviet Union, and 180 a year later.

In the disintegration of the Union at the end of 1991, the existing ethno-territorial units came to form the structure of the post-Soviet space. The Baltic republics demanded independence on the basis of their existing boundaries; Moldova—which had never existed as an independent state—sought its independence (as an alternative to reincorporation into Romania); likewise Belarus, Kazakhstan, Georgia and other union republics and, within Russia itself, the various autonomous republics, including Chechnya, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan (formerly Bashkiria), Yakutia (which adopted the name Sakha) and all the rest. The union republics all gained their independence, followed by formal diplomatic recognition and membership of international bodies including the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the OSCE. They adapted their Soviet constitutions to new needs, sometimes replacing them entirely or (as in the case of Latvia) reverting to a pre-Soviet fundamental law. They rejected Soviet symbolism in favour of ethnically-based anthems, flags, statues and so forth (including, in Moldova, the erection of a statue of the legendary she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome—making an unsubtle point that the majority of inhabitants of modern Moldova are not Slavs but descendants of the Roman Empire).

---

34 The ‘matrioshka’ is the traditional Russian nest of dolls that became a new art form when the Soviet Union relaxed its control over individual craft activities; for reference to this concept applied to Soviet national relations, see Ray Taras, ‘From Matrioshka Nationalism to National Interests’ in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds.), *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations* (Cambridge, 1997), 685–703.

IV Post-Soviet Russia

The Union that had been welded ‘forever’ fell apart, and what some saw as an attempt to hold it together in the Commonwealth of Independent States became instead a way of managing the disintegration.\(^\text{36}\) Across the former Union, symbols of the Communist régime were removed from public display: many statues of Lenin and other Communist heroes were demolished, in some cases collected in theme parks; the hammer and sickle emblem and the five-pointed star were removed from buildings, interior walls and, famously, the embroidered stage curtain of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow.

Post-Soviet Russia remains the largest state in the world—now one-eighth rather than one-sixth of the land surface of the planet—but it no longer leads the mighty Soviet Union. Yet it retains some of the features of the former USSR. It, too, has a federal constitution, but it is a federation of a peculiar kind, with very different sets of relationships between the centre and different constituent elements, including those that are nominally of equal status. The republics within the Russian Federation bear an ethnic title, and some of them possess considerable autonomy in practice: Tatarstan, in particular, functions under President Shaimiev with scant regard for the norms of democracy embodied in the Russian Constitution of 1993; and Chechnya, most obviously, has refused to accept its position as a constituent ‘subject’ of the Russian Federation.\(^\text{37}\) But in practice, it appears, the centralising tendency is as powerful as it was in the Soviet era. Certainly, the state symbols of the USSR have disappeared: the hammer and sickle have been replaced by the double-headed eagle; the red flag and the five-pointed star have given way to the white, blue and red tricolour invented, according to a long-standing myth, by Peter the Great who, when put on the spot in Holland in 1699, simply rearranged the stripes of the Dutch flag.\(^\text{38}\)

But the national anthem? After an interlude during which a tune by Glinka was used, the familiar Soviet tune by Aleksandrov came back in 2000, with new words by Mikhailov, the author of the Soviet words of 1944. And again


\(^{37}\) On the political variety within the Russian federation, see, for example, Cameron Ross (ed.), *Regional Politics in Russia* (Manchester, 2002); idem., *Russian Federalism and Democratisation in Russia* (Manchester, 2004), stresses constitutional and political ‘asymmetry’.

\(^{38}\) On this myth, see http://www.russianstory.com/flag.html [accessed 12 March 2008].
we hear familiar words ‘Be glorious, our free Fatherland,’ followed by a variation on the bulwark of the peoples’ friendship ‘Ancient union of brotherly peoples’. We also witness what many interpret as a return to authoritarianism under a president who spent the formative part of his career in the KGB—an institution that apparently saw itself as the guardian of the values of the Soviet Union. The nostalgia for the mighty Soviet Union has clearly not gone away, any more than the problem of managing conflicting ethnicities has. Post-Soviet Russia still contains more than 100 nations, nationalities and ethnic groups, and the complexity of managing relations among them has been further compounded by the creation of separate states: what was essentially an internal matter for the Soviet Union now has an inter-state dimension. The disintegration of the Soviet Union is proving to be more protracted and complicated than many imagined. Ukraine still hovers between a westerly orientation and the continuation of a close relationship with Russia. Moldova appears to have embraced a closer relationship with the European Union—yet the rebel territory of Pridnestrovie (also known as Transnistria) maintains an identity that bears many hallmarks of its Soviet origins, with the manifest support of post-Soviet Russia. In the Caucasus, too, conflicts between Georgia and the breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia still fester more than a decade and a half after the Union’s break-up, with Russia apparently not relinquishing its traditional influence. Nagorny Karabakh is still a bone of contention between Azerbaijan and Armenia, not resolved by a declaration of independence in 1991 and a referendum held in December 2006. And inside Russia, two bloody wars have still not entirely settled the relationship between the Chechens and the Russians, which the Soviet Union suppressed but failed to resolve.

A reconstituted Soviet Union is inconceivable, but a Russia aware of the power that can be wielded by virtue of its vast energy supplies can treat some of its former allies with a robustness that many find disturbing. A new cold war between Russia and the West has been identified, in which, among other things, Russia is attempting to reassert its influence over former Soviet

---

39 Convincing survey evidence of positive attitudes towards the Soviet past is presented in Stephen White, ‘Communist Nostalgia and its Consequences in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine’ in David Lane (ed.), The Transformation of State Socialism: System Change, Capitalism or Something Else? (Basingstoke, 2007), 35–56. As the demise of the Union approached, there was strong support for the notion of a renewed union, and later for close co-operation among the newly independent states; however, some nostalgia for the ‘Union’ was directed at the system that offered employment, order, security and stable prices, apart from stable inter-ethnic relations.
republics. It is tempting to see a reversion to Soviet standards, particularly in view of President Vladimir Putin’s well-known KGB associations and his promotion of old associates to positions of power in the first eight years of the new century. Such thinking was reinforced in 2005, when President Putin identified the collapse of the Soviet Union as ‘the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the [twentieth] century’.

But it is just as likely that Russia’s traditional great power aspirations are coming into play. Before the Soviet Union was created, Russia was a land empire with interests and goals, a particular endowment of resources and peoples, with the prospects and opportunities that these offered. As creator and leader of the Soviet Union, Russia moved a long way in realising ancient dreams of acceptance and respect from the Great Powers that had already reached pre-eminence in world affairs. The alliance with the United States and Britain during the Second World War, and subsequent prowess in space, in the sports arena and in projecting power and military muscle around the world, all led many Russians to a pride in achievement that their downtrodden predecessors of previous centuries could not dream of. It may take some time to reach reconciliation with the loss of the Soviet ‘empire’, much as Britain, France and other former imperial powers have had difficulties in coming to terms with their own similar loss.

The question is whether the values embraced by the Soviet Union—values of liberty, equality, democracy, community and other ‘progressive’ ideas—lodged in the nation’s consciousness or were completely overwhelmed by the cruelty of the system of rule. How far did they echo the contradictions of the Tsarist

---


42 Indeed, Figes notes that Russia became an empire before it became a nation, and it must be held together at whatever cost: see *A People’s Tragedy*, 70; such thinking may well influence Russian attitudes towards minorities today, and is reflected in the term Rossiiskii narod, ‘a Russian civil-political nation’ seen by the Russian ethnographer Emil Pain as the only ultimate solution to managing the ethnic complexity of Russian society, although it is not possible in present circumstances. See ‘Russia: RFE/RL Speaks With Ethnographer Emil Pain’, 15 October 2005, available at http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/10/b543d3da-1542-4d26-952d-0bbda79d0edd.html [accessed 12 March 2008].
system that the Union replaced? These are major historical questions, and it is far too early to attempt an assessment. Was the Soviet Union largely a reversion to Russian norms after the excitement of the early post-revolutionary years? Did it preserve Russian values that might have been overcome had the first 1917 revolution been allowed to play itself out? Was the Soviet Union mainly a doomed attempt to manage the modernisation of a complex but backward society? The experience changed Russia, as it changed the other now independent constituent parts. But the more Russia continues to change, the more it seems to resemble its past, whether that is the last century of its history or earlier experiences. The debate will continue.

Trinity College, Dublin
Regional Identity in the United States:  
The Southern Question  

Quincy R. Lehr

Despite all the hullabaloo about ‘globalisation’ and despite economic and legal differences between the South and the rest of the United States being smaller than, say, fifty years ago, Southern regional identity continues to exert a pull on the region and nation, but in a peculiar way. Namely, even though the South (or at least a lot of the ‘white folk’ within it) made a bid to become a nation-state, it did so on distinctively and consciously American terms, drawing on the legacy of the Revolutionary War in its rhetoric. Indeed, a former president of the United States, John Tyler, served in the Confederate Congress.¹

Ulrich Phillips once claimed of the Ohio River that ‘[t]he northern shore is American without question; the southern is American with a difference’.² I am not going to use this essay proving that Southerners still have a distinct regional identity, but rather want to look at how some of the key cornerstones of that identity—the legacy of the Civil War, segregation and so forth—have been and continue to be, in many quarters, written out of the main story of ‘Southern heritage’. Yet, these issues, acknowledged or not, continue even now to define the region.

There is a central contradiction: while Southern identity remains thoroughly interwoven with a more general American nationality, it is none the less premised on a society that, whether through slavery, Ku Klux Klan violence or Jim Crow segregation, denied equality to black Americans. And while anti-black racism was hardly an exclusively Southern phenomenon, the legacy of slavery, and indeed the fomenting of a Civil War to preserve it, have connected the region, both in fact and in the perception of many Southerners, to the legacy of racism.³ While the ‘Fugitives’ (who included

³ The historiography of race and racism both within the South and outside of it is vast, and has indeed been something of a growth industry in recent decades. Indeed, the concept of ‘whiteness’, deployed in books such as David Roediger, Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class (London, 1991) and Noel Ignatiev,
such literary luminaries as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and Robert Penn
Warren) argued in the classic *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian
Tradition* (1930) that the enemy of the South was, in fact, industrialisation,
their vision of an agrarian South (and indeed America) was very much an
antebellum image.4

The pageantry of the white Southern identity, frequently on proud
display in the South and beyond (I used to see a moped with a Dixie flag
motif painted on its side parked on O'Connell Street in Dublin on a fairly
routine basis), could reasonably be viewed as a celebration of treachery. The
Confederate government’s officials and its military leadership were, as a rule,
not only United States citizens but frequently had formerly held high offices
within the United States’ state apparatus. So how is it that one can not only
take pride in a regional identification, but embrace the symbols of a pro-
slavery rebellion?

The easiest way is to reinterpret the history. Ann Coulter—not a
Southerner—opined a few years ago that, ‘It is pride in the South—having noth-
ing to do with race—and its honourable military history that the Confederate
battle flag represents’. The Confederate battle flag, Coulter argued, was simply
an exaltation of Southern pride in the region’s military prowess. ‘Pride in being
good fighters,’ said Coulter, ‘is not an endorsement of slavery’.5 Even if we
grant Coulter the last point—which we should not—that the flag in question
was flown by troops who killed and maimed American soldiers in the hun-
dreds of thousands seems not to matter one whit.

Coulter is not important because she is a particularly sensitive reader
of the Southern experience. Rather, she is worth mentioning because her
apology for—and indeed vociferous defence of—the Confederate flag
is a particularly crude version of a myth of the Southern experience that

---

*How the Irish Became White* (New York and London, 1995) has become a significant,
if problematic theme in American history—and neither of these books, nor many
of those like them, has a particularly Southern focus. Decades ago, moreover, Leon
Litwack, *North of Slavery* (Chicago, 1961) showed conclusively that Jim Crow-style
segregation was the norm in the North before the Civil War. However, all of these
works still recognise the centrality of slavery, which, by the 1800s, was a more or less
Southern phenomenon.

4 ‘Twelve Southerners’ (Donald Davidson, John Gould Fletcher, Henry Blue Kline, Lyle
H. Lanier, Andrew Nelson Lytle, Herman Clarence Nixon, Frank Lawrence Owsley,
John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, John Donald Wade, Robert Penn Warren, Stark
Young), *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York, 1930),
*passim.*

continues to resonate among many white Southerners. David Brion Davis summarises this view as follows: ‘Though the South lost the battles, for more than a century it attained its goal: that the role of slavery in America’s history be thoroughly diminished, even somehow removed as a cause of the war’. The Civil War became redefined as a valiant struggle over a series of secondary and tertiary issues, with Reconstruction generally portrayed as a tragic mistake by both Democrats and Republicans in both the North and the South. Indeed, Southern Republicans could, at times, prove even more eager than their Democratic counterparts to assert their loyalty to white supremacy. Fairly typically, in 1922, Oklahoma Republican gubernatorial candidate John Fields declared, ‘No Democrat stands stiffer than I for white supremacy’—which did not stop the Democrats from continuing to race-bait the Republicans.

In many ways, the crucial racial dimension to white Southern identity was far more explicitly acknowledged in the days of Jim Crow than it often is now. In an influential 1928 article entitled ‘The Central Theme of Southern History’, Ulrich B. Phillips, at the time considered the pre-eminent historian of American slavery, declared that ‘by Southern hypothesis, exalted into a creed, negroes in their mass were incompetent for any good political purpose and by reason of their inexperience and racial unwisdom were likely to prove subversive’. This assumption was, as Phillips saw it, key to the Southern experience and the root of the region’s distinctiveness, the struggle to keep the South a ‘white man’s country’. Though Phillips’ own racism led him to endorse this particular political programme, his view none the less gets to a truth that Coulter’s wish to sanitise Southern history does not.

And, indeed, when the history of the South comes up in the political arena, the region’s fraught racial history is rarely far behind it. Take the case of Strom Thurmond and Trent Lott. In 2003, United States Senator Strom Thurmond, whose forty-eight years of service in that body were the longest any single man has ever had, died at age 100. Thurmond’s funeral was well-attended, with some 3,000 congregants, and with eulogies from the likes of Vice President Richard Cheney, and others holding high office in Washington’s political establishment. This was, of course, the Strom Thurmond, the man who had famously declared the Brown vs. Board decision that opened up the

---

7 Quincy Lehr, Terror, Reform and Repression: Oklahoma Politics in the Early 1920s, Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University, 2006), 226.
process of ending *de jure* segregation in American public schools to be a ‘clear abuse of judicial power’, and whose campaign for the presidency in 1948 on the States’ Rights Democrat, or ‘Dixiecrat’, platform, had been premised on the defence of segregation.\(^9\)

The tone of the eulogies in discussing Thurmond’s career was subdued, doubtless because the various politicos in office remembered what had happened to Mississippi Senator Trent Lott not all that long before. In December 2002, Lott—then Senate Majority leader—had, at Thurmond’s hundredth birthday party, waxed nostalgic for what Thurmond had stood for in those days. ‘I want to say this about my state’, declared Lott, ‘When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We’re proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn’t have had all these problems over all these years, either’. Despite repeated public apologies, Lott failed to convince his critics that his remarks were nothing more than kind words for an old man. From his time as a student at the University of Mississippi, when he was active in opposing the integration of his fraternity, Lott had numerous links to segregationist politics and politicians. And indeed, when Lott first reached Washington in 1968, he worked under Mississippi Congressman William L. Colmer, a staunch segregationist. Though Lott claimed to have left his segregationist past ‘way back there,’ the brouhaha served as a reminder that the Southern wing of the Republican Party is largely descended from the old segregationist wing of the Democratic Party.\(^10\)

This was not merely a case of the past coming to haunt the present, but reflected a continuing oddness surrounding white Southern identity within the American polity. It is a tension that one can find reflected across the region, where one can frequently see the old Confederate battle flag flying beside the Stars and Stripes. Indeed, Lott’s home state of Mississippi still features the Confederate Battle flag in its design. The debate over the distinct history of the South—and in particular the racist aspects that feature so prominently within it—have continued to be live political issues, as the reaction to Lott’s comments emphasises.

There is certainly more to Southern history than plantations and Jim Crow and white supremacist politics, but the case of Thurmond and Lott illustrates the degree to which the dominant narrative of Southern history lionises the racist political tradition in the South. Even if we grant Lott’s denials that he intended his comments to in any way suggest an endorsement of

---


segregation—which is difficult given that the preservation of segregation was Thurmond’s main plank in 1948—the very need to distance himself from this stance when eulogising a senior politician from the region indicates the nature of the problem. There has been, in fact, a fair degree of continuity between the old segregationists and much of the current Southern political leadership. As George Lewis notes in his recent book *Massive Resistance*, the blatant segregationists did not always make the transition to post-civil rights movement politics, but those who did managed ‘to encode any overtly racist appeals in such a way as to make them palatable to a broader, non-sectional audience, to continue their work and merge almost imperceptibly into a steadily evolving national climate of conservatism’. Lott’s problem, in a sense, was that his remarks connected too many dots.

Thinking on the topic of (white) Southern identity has long run in contradictory directions. In a 1958 essay, ‘The Search for Southern Identity’, the great Southern historian C. Vann Woodward wrote that there were ‘several American legends in which the South can participate only vicariously or in part’. Not least of these, in 1958, was the myth that the United States had never lost a war. The South, Woodward noted, had not only lost the Civil War, but been mired in levels of poverty and relative economic backwardness that stood in stark contrast to those in the North. This, said Woodward, meant that Southerners had ‘no basis for the delusion that there is nothing whatever that is beyond their power to accomplish’.

Even now, the South continues to lag behind the North in many regards, with the average wage in all Southern states except for Virginia falling below the national average—in Mississippi’s case by just over $10,000 in 2002. Of the five states with the lowest percentage of union members in the workforce in 2005, four were in the South (the fifth being Utah). Yet, having said that, the days of cotton monoculture are long past; as of 2005, thirty-one states, most of them outside the South, had a similar combination of low rates of unionisation and relatively low wages. Nor are the gaps what they used to be. Likewise, the system of *de jure* racial segregation has long since passed away. Even Woodward himself, revisiting the theme many years later, opined that the reverses of the Civil War and the following decades had not made

Southerners more savvy than their Northern countrymen, and he concluded
that, ‘Perhaps it was unrealistic for Southerners to be any the wiser for their
historical experience’.\(^{15}\)

Indeed, the mythologised legacy of the Confederacy has long been chal-
genred by black Southerners. In Charleston, South Carolina, in many ways
the Confederacy’s birthplace, black residents used to throw stones at the
statue of pro-slavery politician John C. Calhoun at the turn of the twentieth
century.\(^{16}\) There was also a tradition of white dissent as well. Take the case
of Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, the daughter of a Confederate veteran and
Klansman, and the daughter and younger sister of propagandists for the
‘Lost Cause’ myth that portrayed the Civil War as a doomed but noble strug-
gle against Northern tyranny. Lumpkin, after a stint at Columbia University,
returned South under the auspices of the Young Women’s Christian
Association to try to forge a racially-integrated student movement in the
South. Although she completed a doctorate at the University of Wisconsin,
she was always on the fringes of academia due to her gender, but her studies
of the South, which focused on issues such as work and the family, sought
to present an accurate portrayal of Southerners as neither dispossessed aris-
tocrats nor truculent bigots.\(^{17}\)

The debate over the meaning of Southern history has been played out
in popular culture, too, most notably in music, where the outstanding song
is Lynyrd Skynyrd’s ‘Sweet Home Alabama’. Skynyrd, a band from northern
Florida, recorded the song in response to Canadian singer-songwriter Neil
Young’s songs, ‘Alabama’ and ‘Southern Man’, the latter of which included
the lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I saw cotton} \\
\text{And I saw black} \\
\text{Tall white mansions} \\
\text{And little shacks.} \\
\text{Southern man} \\
\text{When will you} \\
\text{Pay them back?}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{16}\) Joan Marie Johnson, “‘Drill into us . . . the Rebel Tradition’: The Contest over
Southern Identity in Black and White Women’s Clubs, South Carolina, 1898–1930”,
\(^{17}\) Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, ‘Open Secrets: Memory, Imagination and the Refashioning of
I heard screamin’
And bullwhips cracking
How long? How long?²⁸

And at times, ‘Sweet Home Alabama’ does sound like a knee-jerk defence of the Southern status quo:

In Birmingham they love the governor.
Now we all did what we could do.
Now Watergate does not bother me.
Does your conscience bother you?
Tell the truth.²⁹

But the point was not primarily to defend Alabama governor George Wallace and the segregationist politics for which he was known, but rather to celebrate the state and to fight what the band considered to be an unfair attack. None the less, the song did bleed over into implicit apologetics for Southern conservatism.

This did not, however, particularly stymie the song’s broader success. Peter Coclanis relates a story a friend of his told him about attending a Skynyrd show in Philadelphia in the 1970s, where the audience, mostly Northern-born Italian- and Jewish-Americans, waved Confederate flags, more an indication of appreciating for the band’s three guitarists than any particular sympathy for, or even strong opinion about, the Confederacy. The sight was to be repeated many places in the United States and beyond.²⁰

‘Sweet Home Alabama’ resurfaced as the title of the 2002 film of the same name, directed by Andy Tennant and starring Reese Witherspoon. In the film, Witherspoon plays socialite fashion designer Melanie Smooter, who is engaged to the son of a prominent liberal politician played by Candice Bergen. When Melanie returns home to divorce her first husband, an archetypal red-neck named Jake, played by Josh Lucas, she slowly falls in love with him—and the state, her Confederate re-enactor father, and everything she thought she had left behind.²¹

¹⁸ Neil Young. ‘Southern Man’ on After the Gold Rush, Reprise RS 6383. ‘Alabama’ appeared on Harvest, Reprise MS 2277.
¹⁹ The song originally appeared on the album Second Helping, MCA MCAD 1686, and has been a staple of compilations since.
²¹ Sweet Home Alabama. DVD, directed by Andy Tennant (2002; Burbank, CA, 2003).
Though the film is, in many ways, a forgettable romantic comedy, it nevertheless deploys many of the central tropes of the construction of Southern identity. While Witherspoon’s character plays the aristocratic Southern belle (presumably more acceptable to her well-connected boyfriend and his politician mother), the film reveals her to have more humble origins, and while this may deflate a certain stereotype generally acknowledged to be such, it reinforces others. Her father’s obsession with things Confederate is presented as a harmless eccentricity—until the villain of the film, the snobbish liberal New York politician played by Bergen, sees him and has conniptions. The bottom line is that the place is basically fine and down home, and only a snobbish Yankee or a self-hating Southern expatriate could fail to see that.

While it might be a bit much to ask a romantic comedy to make a political statement, the film none the less deals in stereotypes that are political in nature. While Northern liberals may claim to be concerned about black Americans, simple hauteur is at the bottom of it, says the film. And while it would be churlish to head back in time and lecture the concert-goers in Philadelphia about what the Confederate flag means while they rock out to a song, these things have political implications.

Perhaps a more nuanced artistic response to Southern history and identity can be found on the *Southern Rock Opera* double album by the Drive-By Truckers, in which many of the songs explore the legacy of both Lynyrd Skynyrd and Alabama’s fraught racial history. On the album, band leader, Patterson Hood chooses the Devil to narrate the political career of pro-segregationist Alabama governor and unsuccessful presidential candidate, George Wallace, who he sees as dominated by opportunism rather than a sort of regional determinism by which white Southerners are inherently racist. The South on the album, though not dominated by its racist legacy, is none the less haunted by it.22

But what about Woodward’s point that the history of the South, having known defeat and poverty to a greater extent than the nation as a whole, could provide a constructive contribution in the nation’s politics, culture, and self-image? Potentially. Certainly some, whether historians or musicians or activists, have managed to derive something from Southern history (and that of white Southerners in particular) that neither recapitulates a romanticised and sanitised version of ‘Southern heritage’ nor writes off white Southerners en masse as a bunch of ignorant, bigoted yokels.

---

22 Drive-By Truckers, *Southern Rock Opera*, Lost Highway Records [B000068FUS].
But the Drive-by Truckers are on an independent label, while Skynyrd was on MCA. And while there have always been activists and scholars like Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, their voices are often drowned out on a large scale by those echoing Lott and Thurmond. And high-profile apologists for the Confederate legacy like Coulter, who seek to disaggregate Southern history from the racism that pervades it have a distinct advantage over historical articles that appear in small peer-reviewed academic journals. The myths remain and overlay the lived experience of actual Southerners.

The result of this is that perceptions of the South—and white Southerners’ perceptions of themselves—in many cases remain what they were, albeit somewhat sanitised to conform to the post-Jim Crow era. Aside from telling those who will listen, there is relatively little that the historical profession can do about it. And indeed, if the Civil War was about slavery; if that institution and subsequent segregation are key questions in the history of the region, and indeed the nation; if these things are not the teething of a young republic but are structurally imbedded in the history of the region, and thus the nation, the results of a reconsideration of the Southern past could be explosive. Indeed, what white Southerners think about their heritage is far from being the most important thing likely to change: in fact, America’s self-understanding is at stake.

National University of Ireland, Galway
In 1867 Walter Bagehot published *The English Constitution*, in which he extolled the virtues of the British system of government, a system that had evolved over centuries of political development, producing a series of stable and distinctive institutions. In the same year the Westminster parliament passed the British North America (BNA) Act thereby inaugurating the Canadian Confederation. While not explicit in either ‘constitution’, both Britain and Canada were also ‘unions’, multinational states which had been formed through the incorporation of nationalities. By the end of the nineteenth century, nationalists in Scotland and Québec questioned the degree to which these constitutions adequately accommodated their respective nations. This has been a recurrent theme ever since.

This essay contends that the specific character of the political unions of Canada and Britain can tell us much about the ebb and flow of sub-state political nationalism in these states, most especially in Scotland and Québec. In particular, the quality of the ‘federalism’ employed by these unions is identified as key to explaining the relative success of these states. The form that federalism takes is found to be particularly determinative of the demands made by political nationalists. Crude, Scotland has enjoyed an informal federalism arising from a cultural recognition of its national status; in contrast a formal, constitutional federalism has given Québec significant political voice within the Canadian Confederation, yet recognition of its cultural distinctiveness has been fraught. The paper has four parts: the first reviews the concept of federalism, the middle sections provide an overview of its practice in the cases of Canada and Britain, identifying its relationship to the rise and fall of political nationalism; some reflections on the architecture of these unions are offered by way of conclusion.

---

1 It is worth noting that 1867 also witnessed the formation of another union: the ‘Dual Monarchy’ of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
I Federalisms

Nineteenth-century liberal theory gave federalism a ringing endorsement. John Stuart Mill ascribed positive qualities to federalism; he praised federal systems for their pacifism and for their ability to harmonise trade (which would itself mitigate against war): ‘it of course puts an end to war and diplomatic quarrels, and usually also to restrictions on commerce between the states composing the union’.\(^2\) They were disposed to pacifism since ‘a federal government has not a sufficiently concentrated authority, to conduct with much efficiency any war but one of self-defence’.\(^3\) Above all federalism was a way of managing difference when people are unable to live under the same internal government. While difference could take many forms, Mill identified race, language, religion and diverging political institutions as being particularly important.\(^4\)

But how does federalism operate in practice? Considerable conceptual confusion surrounds this question. Preston King’s distinction between ‘federalism’ and ‘federation’ is a good starting point.\(^5\) While federalism relates to an ideology or an ethos, federation refers simply to a type of political institution. The preponderance of literature on federalism has equated it with this latter sense. William H. Riker’s 1964 classic study of ‘federalism’ exemplifies this. The definition of federalism is seen there as unproblematic since it is a ‘precisely definable and easily recognisable constitutional artefact’ demarcated by specific institutions: ‘a government of the federation and a set of governments of the member units, in which both kinds of governments rule over the same territory and people and each kind has the authority to make some decisions independently of the other’.\(^6\) Yet Riker’s classification of liberal Canada and the United States, as well as communist Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union as federal systems based simply on their possession of a set of institutions—overlooking the actual practice of these states—suggests that institutions alone are a poor indicator of the practice of federalism.

William S. Livingstone is critical of this approach, since it is oblivious to the actual operation of institutions: ‘whether a constitutional structure may properly be called federal depends not so much on the arrangement of the institutions within it as it does on the manner in which these institutions are

---

\(^3\) Ibid., 443.
\(^4\) Ibid., 435.
\(^5\) Preston King, Federalism and Federation (London, 1982), 75.
employed’. Therefore Livingstone suggests that federalism can be understood in more sociological terms, as a way of articulating and protecting the federal qualities of a particular society, where diversity is grouped territorially. Thus political systems are judged on how well they govern federal societies. Moreover the institutions-based approach fails to account for a certain fluidity in the life of institutions: a set of institutions may operate in a manner unintended by its originators and the successful operation of institutions may change over time, so that institutions which were successful in one period need not have the same success in another. As we shall see the Union government in Canada in the 1840s and 1850s exemplifies the first, while the increasing strain on the local state in late nineteenth-century Scotland exemplifies the second.

In Livingstone’s view federalism represents a compromise between the competing demands for autonomy and integration. The resulting constitution, therefore, will reflect their relative strengths: ‘the federal system is thus an institutionalisation of the compromise between these two demands’. Thus federalism emerges as a relative, and not an absolute concept, a matter of degree and not of kind. The tools that federal systems employ to manage diversity likewise vary and are in part a reflection of the degree to which societies are segmented. Thus there is no ‘a priori list of the characteristics of a federal system’.

In deeply divided plural societies practices and conventions may take the form of a consociation, identified in Arend Lijphart’s description of power-sharing arrangements practiced in the Netherlands. Consociations are marked primarily through the existence of élite co-operation. This is a feature of the four key components which consociations are held to possess: government by a grand coalition is the most important, all groups are represented in a cabinet, a council/committee or among top office-holders; proportionality in political representation, the division of government employment and

---

9 Ibid., 84, 87.
10 These tools include not only particular institutions but also the manner in which they are operated. Ibid., 91.
11 Ibid., 88–91.
spending; a high degree of internal autonomy of groups; and with each group possessing a mutual veto over legislation which threatens its well-being.\textsuperscript{13} Canada as both a unitary province and as a federation has possessed elements of each of these components allowing Lijphart to describe it as a ‘semi-consociational democracy’.\textsuperscript{14} Indeed the possession of a federation is thought to be particularly conducive to the success of consociations, where the political boundaries of federal structures mirror the territorial concentration of distinct groups.\textsuperscript{15}

Clearly the federalisms that Livingstone and Riker depict are quite different. Riker’s definition is based exclusively on institutions; his focus is on federation rather than the practice of federalism. In contrast Livingstone’s focus is on political practices, which may or may not be expressed through a formal federation. Livingstone’s view is not without controversy. Indeed, it is a view that many political scientists reject, believing that the term should be retained exclusively for an institutions-driven account. However the advantage of Livingstone’s approach is to focus attention on how societies are actually governed rather than on how formal constitutions suggest that they are. This has particular implications for the cases of Scotland and Québec.

Britain is often thought to be the very hallmark of a unitary state, yet, as we will see, that state’s relationship to Scotland took a form that was decidedly federal. John Stuart Mill gives authority to this conception of federalism, by citing the example of the Union between Scotland and England to demonstrate that a state need not proclaim itself as federal in order to exhibit federal qualities: ‘a people may have the desire, and the capacity, for a closer union than one merely federal, while yet their local peculiarities and antecedents render considerable diversities desirable in the details of their government’. By avoiding the ‘mania for uniformity’ prevalent on continental Europe, Mill suggested that ‘a totally different system of law, and very different administrative institutions, may exist in two portions of a country without being any obstacle to legislative union’; on the continent the assumption was that a distinctive legal system would require a distinctive government.\textsuperscript{16}

Canada exemplified federal tendencies, yet its federalism was expressed differently: the practices of the pre-1867 Province of Canada were federal, despite its unitary character, and these practices continued following the

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 120–9.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 42–3.
\textsuperscript{16} Mill, ‘Considerations on Representative Government’, 444–5.
constitution of Canada as a federation in 1867.\textsuperscript{17} The cases of Canada and Britain suggest a distinction between a formal institutional federalism and an informal federalism, comprising a series of practices that recognise the federal nature of society. In the latter case a continuum exists between the simple recognition of a group through to the development of explicit consociational practices of power-sharing.\textsuperscript{18}

Yet it is worth bearing in mind Robert Dahl’s caution that on purely theoretical grounds no political unit is ‘inherently more democratic or otherwise more desirable than others’.\textsuperscript{19} What matters ultimately is whether political institutions and political practices are able successfully to meet the demands of governing multinational states. There are two issues in play here: does the formal provision of ‘voice’ within a political system engender ‘loyalty’ and thereby mitigate against ‘exit’?\textsuperscript{20} Michael Hechter argues that the institution of indirect rule through the form of a federation itself militates against political nationalism.\textsuperscript{21} Alternatively is it necessary formally to institute federalism so long as there are political practices in place which recognise a group’s cultural ‘worth’ and thereby avoid its misrecognition or non-recognition?\textsuperscript{22} The next two sections seek to explore these issues in the context of Canada and Britain.

II Canada

1867 is a critical juncture in the political development of Canada. It is from that date that the present Canadian constitution was established. However before examining Canadian Confederation it is also instructive to examine the system of government which preceded it, especially as it related to Québec. The French cession of New France to the British in 1763 brought a significant

\textsuperscript{17} Mill suggested that federalism could be used to describe Canada’s mid-nineteenth century relationship with Britain: it constituted the ‘slightest kind of federal union’, although not an equal federation, since while it possessed full power over its own affairs, it had little or no say in foreign policy. Ibid., 449.


\textsuperscript{21} Michael Hechter, Containing Nationalism (Oxford, 2000).

linguistic and religious minority into the British Empire. While recognition of this minority was not immediately forthcoming, two subsequent acts (the Québec Act of 1774 and the Constitution Act of 1791) sought to safeguard the French language, Roman Catholicism, as well as the French civil law, and crucially allowed Catholics to vote and stand for office, something not available to British Catholics until 1829. The latter Act also created the separate legislatures of predominantly English-speaking Upper and French-speaking Lower Canada. The structure of the colonial administration in Lower Canada mirrored the social cleavages in the colony: French Canadian liberal professionals dominated the elected Legislative Assembly whilst Anglophones and ‘reliable’ elements composed the appointed executive and legislative councils, where effective power was centred. Disaffection with this situation led to the Patriote rebellions of 1837–8, led by Louis-Joseph Papineau.

The defeat of the rebellions led to the creation of the Province of Canada, a political structure designed to resolve the problems caused by ‘two nations warring within the bosom of a single state’ within Lower Canada, which the Durham Report of 1839 had blamed for the Patriote rebellions. While the Act of Union of 1840 sought to promote political assimilation by uniting Upper and Lower Canada (now Canada West and East respectively) under a single parliament, in practice the new political system was marked by negotiation and accommodation between British and French Canadians. It met all four of the characteristics associated with contemporary consociationalism, which Lijphart identifies above.

George-Etienne Cartier embodied the political mood of French Canadians through the mid-nineteenth century. Having participated in the 1837 rebellions, he went on to jointly head the government of the Province of Canada with John A Macdonald (1857–62), before becoming the most prominent French Canadian supporter of the Canadian Confederation of 1867 (which brought about the union of the British North American colonies of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Canada to form the Dominion of Canada). Cartier believed that Confederation would allow French Canadians to assert their influence outside Québec, particularly in the westward expansion of the Confederation, and he was closely associated with the formation of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Canada’s first transcontinental railroad and the engine of the drive westwards.

The sociological conditions were certainly favourable to the institution of a federal constitution. The relative peace of North America (the United

---

States’ civil war exempted) meant that a decentralised system of government could be permitted. This stood in marked contrast to the state rivalries which characterised continental Europe and promoted highly centralised states. Federation also had the advantage of allowing the effective governance of a geographically dispersed population and, perhaps most crucially from a French Canadian perspective, allowed for the preservation of francophone Québec’s ‘distinct society’. By the late nineteenth century, however, French Canadian political élites had become increasingly concerned about the position of French Canadians within Confederation. In 1867 one province in four had been French-speaking, however as Confederation expanded and admitted additional provinces the ratio was reduced to one province in seven by 1910. This prompted competing interpretations of Confederation itself. Among English-speaking Canadians Confederation was interpreted as a political compact of provinces, while French-speakers increasingly viewed it as a compact of peoples:

The Fathers of Confederation set themselves a two-fold purpose. First, they wanted to rid the Central Government of such business that could better be adjusted by the local authorities. Second, they wanted the two main elements of the Canadian people – French and English – to enjoy equal rights under the constitution.

It was in this context that a small group of influential Nationalistes inspired by Henri Bourassa argued for a bi-national Canada. While Bourassa had come to prominence asserting Canadian sovereignty in response to British imperial demands, the Nationalistes’ domestic vision of Canada was just as important. Their concerns were existential in character. Schooling crises outside Québec curbed the use of French as a language of instruction. Most notable were the schooling crises in Manitoba in the 1890s and in Ontario following the imposition of Regulation 17 by the Ontario Provincial government in 1912, which infamously sought to restrict both the use of French as a language instruction and as a subject of study, a move which was aimed directly at Ontario’s fast-growing francophone population. In part these controversies were a response to significant demographic changes taking place in these provinces; the result of an unprecedented influx of non-francophone immigrants who had little

---


interest in the ‘historic’ rights of French Canadians. Against this background the Nationalistes campaigned for a bi-national settlement in which French and British Canadians would be politically equal, through an arrangement that approximates contemporary consociationalism. In doing so they sought the resurrection of arrangements which had proven successful during the period of the Province of Canada. In their campaigns the Nationalistes promoted a French-speaking nation wider than the confines of Québec, which incorporated French-speaking populations to the east and west in New Brunswick, Ontario and Manitoba. Unable to attract significant support among English-speaking Canadians, this vision of pan-Canadian nationalism ultimately failed. The Conscription Crisis of 1917 in which conscription was imposed on Québec despite its strong opposition, underlined the rift between English and French-speaking Canada.26

The failure of the federal state to respond adequately to these concerns directly led to the rise of the conservative and Québec-centred nationalism of the priest-historian, Lionel Groulx. This was an ideology which glorified Catholic rural Québec against modernist materialism; it was promoted in the interwar period by journals such as l’Action française, later l’Action nationale, and influenced Maurice Duplessis and his Union Nationale (UN), which dominated Québec’s provincial politics from 1944 to 1960. The UN had been returned to power in a wave of nationalism generated by a second Conscription Crisis in 1944. During the 1950s Duplessis resisted federal government social programmes in the name of provincial autonomy and continued to defer to the Catholic Church in the realm of social policy. At the same time he oversaw the business-friendly industrialisation of Québec. These policies mobilised both liberals and progressive neo-nationalists in their shared opposition.27

The election of Jean Lesage’s provincial Liberal party in 1960 ushered in a period of reform, known as the ‘Quiet Revolution’, in which the government sought to catch-up with the rest of the developed world socially, economically and politically. Crucially it was the provincial Québec state which took the lead role in each of these areas. To some, notably René Lévesque, a prominent journalist and energy minister under Lesage, the progress achieved suggested that Québec could accomplish still more as an independent state. In 1968 Lévesque founded the Parti Québécois (PQ) with its platform of

---

26 James Kennedy “‘A Switzerland of the North?’ The Nationalistes and a Bi-national Canada’, Nations and Nationalism, 10 (2004), 499–518.
27 Michael Derek Behiels, Prelude to Quebec’s Quiet Revolution (Montreal, 1985).
‘sovereignty-association’, in which Québec would be politically independent but would remain economically integrated with the rest of Canada. The PQ came to power within eight years of its formation. During its first term of office it passed significant language legislation and held a referendum on sovereignty in 1980, losing by 40% to 60%. It lost power in 1985, after a second term in office, and went into a period of retrenchment.

However, the failure to ratify the Meech Lake Accord in 1987 revived the PQ’s fortunes. Québec felt alienated since Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau had ‘repatriated’ the Canadian constitution in 1982, despite having failed to secure the approval of the Québec government. Meech Lake was an attempt on the part of new Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Québec Premier Robert Bourassa to bring Québec back within the constitutional fold. The chief means by which this was to be accomplished was the inclusion of a clause recognising Québec as a ‘distinct society’. This proved to be a hugely controversial measure outside Québec, angering both the indigenous First Nations and regionalist sentiment in the Canadian West. The failure of the Meech Lake Accord to gain ratification was deeply felt in Québec; the perception was that this was a rejection of Québec’s national distinctiveness. It had the immediate effect of soaring poll support for both the PQ and its sovereignty platform. Notwithstanding the attempt to broker a new settlement (the Charlottetown Accord in 1992), it was this initial sense of rejection which led ultimately to the election of the PQ in 1994 and the closeness of the referendum on sovereignty the following year: the ‘Yes’ side narrowly lost by 49.9% to 50.1%.

Politics in Québec since the referendum have focused less on constitutional matters. Yet the three main parties all adopt a nationalist stance, claiming to protect Québec and its interests. The Parti Libéral du Québec (PLQ) has been in government since 2002. The breakthrough success of the conservative Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ) in the 2006 provincial election, coming second to the PLQ and relegating the PQ to third place, may partly be explained by its moderate nationalist position (it was a member of the ‘Yes’ campaign in the 1995 referendum on sovereignty), which captures the mood of current Québécois politics. Federal politics has recently had an impact in Québec: the rise of the Conservative party has once again made Québec competitive in federal elections. It is perhaps this that lies behind the Canadian House of Commons’ parliamentary motion in 2007, with the support of the nationalist Bloc Québécois, which took the unprecedented step of declaring that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada. The parliamentary
motion which passed by 266 votes to 16 was largely symbolic since it carried no legal weight and promised Québec no additional powers. However it was precisely the demand for cultural recognition, rather than political voice that this symbolic gesture addressed.

Canada since 1867 has constituted a federation, and as a result Québec has enjoyed significant political voice. Yet political rule has not always taken a ‘federal’ form: schooling and conscription crises in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively and the more recent attempts to re-write the constitution are cases in point. These have provided the ire to provoke first French Canadian then Québécois nationalism. Provincial politics too has played its part, notably in the advent of the Quiet Revolution and the rise of the PQ. This story contrasts with that of Britain where Scotland has only recently acquired significant political voice.

III Britain

Scotland’s formal independence was brought to an end with its Treaty of Union with England in 1707. In exchange for access to imperial markets Scotland’s political élite negotiated a legislative union with England. As a result, in Nairn’s choice phrase it became a ‘decapitated national state’ retaining many of the trappings of formal statehood, namely, a legal system, an education system and a national church (the Presbyterian Church of Scotland). Together with a distinctive system of local government, this ‘holy trinity’ of institutions formed the nucleus of governance through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For all practical purposes the Union left the daily governance of Scotland largely untouched. The institutions that mattered had been left unaffected by union.

However the political structure of the British state began to change in the mid-nineteenth century, first due to the exigencies of war and an expanding empire and, as the century progressed, as a result of the demands for improved housing, health and sanitation created by a growing and increasingly urban population. In both instances the result was the increasing centralisation of power at Westminster. In the 1850s the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights emerged to champion the maintenance of strong local government. In the era between the First and Second Reform

---

Acts, this was an élite movement which mobilised a privileged segment of Scottish society to demand not more but less central government intervention.\(^29\)

But by the late nineteenth century more rather than less government intervention was the order of the day. In the 1880s it was the Scottish Home Rule Association which proposed devolution as the solution to Scotland’s ‘legislative neglect’. ‘Home Rule all Round’, in which Britain would become a formal federal system also gained support. However it is quite wrong to suggest that the demand for Scottish home rule was simply a by-product of Irish agitation for home rule.\(^30\) The Young Scots’ Society took up the mantle of home rule in the first decade of the twentieth century. This was a society which was closely affiliated with the politically dominant Liberal party and which promoted a dual campaign of home rule and radical social reform. The Young Scots were responding to what in contemporary parlance would be referred to as a ‘democratic deficit’: during this period increasingly powerful boards or ‘quangos’ administered social legislation in Scotland largely outside democratic scrutiny. Moreover they claimed that only limited attention was given to Scottish matters at Westminster with the result that progressive legislation was effectively stalled, or inappropriate measures imposed:

> Scotland comes as an afterthought. The proposed legislation is framed by an English minister with the assistance of English lawyers, and it is based on English experience, custom and law. A clause at the end makes it applicable to Scotland, and thus the Scottish people have to make the best they can of a measure that under their different experience, custom and law, is wholly unsuitable and often worse than useless.\(^31\)

Political pressure for home rule had some success, namely to administrative devolution. Yet there is irony in that this success effectively undercut the demand for legislative devolution. The Young Scots argued that the embryonic welfare state should be distinctly Scottish in order to respond effectively to Scotland’s distinct needs. The success of the fight to ensure Scottish control

---


\(^{31}\) Young Scots’ Society, *Manifesto and Appeal to the Scottish People on Scottish Home Rule* (Glasgow, 1912), 2.
over welfare provision had paradoxical implications for the campaign for home rule. Far from paving the way for the imminent recall of the Scottish parliament, administrative control over welfare effectively undermined the urgency of the demand for legislative devolution. The example of National Insurance in 1911 is instructive. Its introduction received this favourable review from a home rule supporting publication:

The striking success of the scheme on this side of the Border is a magnificent tribute to the administrative genius of the Scot... ‘Scotland so far as National Insurance is concerned, is under Home Rule’. As a result, the percentage of persons who are insured is higher in Scotland than in England, Ireland or Wales. The vast organisation which achieved this distinction could never have been worked from an office in London.32

This substantiates Lindsay Paterson’s claim that welfare legislation was not only a response to socialist agitation, but that ‘it was equally a displacement of nationalistic pressure for a separate legislature’.33 This was the pattern that was followed most especially in the immediate post-World War II period: distinctively Scottish institutions administered the growing welfare apparatus in Scotland. The institutions of administrative devolution were various. Core components included the Scottish Office and Scottish Education Department, both established in the 1880s and initially headquartered in London before moving to Edinburgh in 1939. These departments were headed by the Scottish Secretary, who attained full cabinet rank and became Secretary of State for Scotland in 1926. Equally central was the Scottish Grand Committee, formed by Westminster Scottish MPs to consider Scottish legislation, and the Scottish Select Committee which oversaw the workings of the Scottish Office. In James Kellas’ view these elements constituted a ‘Scottish political system’; a view countered by Midwinter, Keating and Mitchell who emphasise the dominance of the British central state during this period.34 In the post-war era this state-led social and economic re-generation enjoyed considerable success. However this political system came under strain

32 *Scottish Nation*, November 1913, 13 (my emphasis).
during the 1960s and 1970s, as successive British governments identified the regions as requiring additional attention. In this regional planning Scotland was identified as a ‘problem’. Thus the way in which Scotland was ‘institutionally defined’ mattered and had implications for political nationalism, giving legitimacy to claims that ‘Britain isn’t working’.35

It was during this period that the Scottish National Party (SNP) enjoyed particular success, the product of rising expectations among a young generation frustrated by Britain’s economic and political stagnation and buoyed up by the discovery of North Sea oil. ‘It’s Scotland’s Oil!’ ran the SNP’s most successful campaign. The general election results of 1974 saw the party secure seven then eleven MPs in the February and October elections respectively. The failure of the home rule referendum in 1979 began a period of demobilisation, however. It was Margaret Thatcher who revived the SNP’s fortunes, and more generally that of the home rule cause, in the late 1980s. The generalised sense that the Conservative administration was a government without popular support in Scotland was given concrete form with the imposition of the Poll Tax in 1988, a local government tax introduced one year ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom. Through the period of Thatcher’s rule a class of state-employed professionals, including local government and NHS employees, had been mobilised to join the home rule movement; in other words, those directly affected by attempts to reform the public sector.36

The 1997 landslide of New Labour in the United Kingdom also heralded a new era for Scottish politics. Within months of taking office the new government issued a white paper and launched what was to be a successful referendum campaign. Two years later Scottish elections were held and the first Scottish parliament for almost three hundred years met. Curiously, in the immediate period following the (re-)establishment of the Scottish parliament a sort of national paralysis set in, in which the devolved institutions failed to meet popular aspirations. In part, this was the result of the decade-long anticipation of devolution which had generated high expectations. This was combined with a particular set of circumstances which affected the devolved administrations: the sudden and tragic death of the first First Minister, Donald Dewar; the perceived dithering of the short-lived administration of his successor, Henry McLeish; and the competent though uninspiring leadership of Jack McConnell. Despite its legislative achievements, there was an impression

that the devolution settlement was merely a more elaborate mechanism of local government, a charge that opponents of devolution had long contended. In other words while Scotland now enjoyed a formal political voice there was a sense that its new political institutions were failing to secure its cultural recognition.

The minority SNP administration elected in May 2007 appears to have set itself the task of raising the profile of the devolved administration in Scotland to attain a national stature. This is epitomised above all by the symbolic name change of ‘Scottish Executive’ to ‘Scottish Government’. In this sense there is an attempt to acquire a cultural and political recognition. Tellingly this has also been seen in the presentation of Alex Salmond as First Minister: the first meeting between the Scottish First Minister and the British Prime Minister was carefully staged in ‘neutral’ Belfast against the backdrop of the meeting of the British-Irish Council.

Since the late nineteenth century political nationalism in Scotland has largely been devoted to the achievement of a formal political voice, in the form of legislative devolution, and only more recently in substantial, but not majority, support for independence. Administrative devolution initially offset support for legislative devolution. However, the centralising policies of the Conservative government, effectively undercutting local autonomy in Scotland, were the catalyst which resulted in home rule. Since 1999 the failure of successive devolved governments to assume a national mantle allowed the SNP to attain office claiming that it would ‘fight for Scotland’.

IV Conclusion: The ‘architecture of federalism’

The architecture of federalism matters and has implications for the successful accommodation of sub-state nationalism: federalism has been identified in both Britain and Canada. Yet it took a distinctive form in each context.

Since 1867 Canada has possessed a formal constitutional federalism, yet informal federal practices characterised the preceding Province of Canada, and have continued to be practiced since Confederation. In his widely acclaimed essay, ‘The Politics of Recognition’, the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor proposes that what lies behind much ‘identity politics’ is recognition or its absence.\(^\text{37}\) Confederation ensured that Québec had a formal political voice.

\(^{37}\) Taylor, ‘The Politics of Recognition’.
Nationalists have been particularly effective in amassing a range of powers in the Québec state, whereby Québec possesses more powers than any other corresponding sub-state in the developed North yet curiously cultural recognition has been denied. This was most clearly seen in the failure to ratify the Meech Lake Accord, which would have ensured official recognition of Québec as a ‘distinct society’. It remains unclear whether the federal parliamentary motion passed in 2007, acknowledging the Québécois to be a nation, will have any long-term impact in this regard.

In contrast, Scotland until 1999 enjoyed cultural recognition, given substance through a range of informal and formal practices which acknowledged its national status; however, it lacked formal political voice in the institutionalised form of an executive and legislature. The creation of a devolved parliament marked a break with previous governance, captured well by Tom Nairn: ‘a parliament is not in fact just another institution in civil society, devoted to the completion or extension of “low politics” . . . it implies a qualitative shift to the “high politics” of last resort responsibility and extra-local status’. This transition was not straightforward, however, since the acquisition of a political voice alone is not, by itself, sufficient; it also requires an accompanying cultural recognition that the devolved institutions are national institutions.

There is thus a phenomenological distinction between Scottish and Québécois nationalism. In Scotland political nationalism has sought a formal institutional voice within, and more recently outside the British political system. Scotland has historically enjoyed an informal cultural recognition of its national distinctiveness. In Québec it is the demand for the formal cultural recognition of difference that lies at the core of its political nationalism. For the PQ this requires sovereignty, while for others a range of options have been advanced such as bi-nationalism, autonomy and ‘distinct society’ status. These demands are distinct and reflect the contrasting ways in which federalism has been expressed in Britain and Canada.

Federalism has been found to be a relatively malleable set of tools able to provide voice through the formal institution of federations and recognition through the adoption of federal practices. Both elements are necessary in order to meet the aspirations of sub-state nations. This has resonance with the findings of Brendan O’Leary that formal federations with significant national

---

38 The list here includes Scotland but also Catalonia, the Basque Country, Flanders and Waloonia.
minorities need to be accompanied by informal practices, most especially consociationalism.\textsuperscript{41} In other words, both formal and informal federalism are required.

\textit{University of Edinburgh}

\textsuperscript{41} O’Leary, ‘An Iron Law of Federalism’.
Late in 1864, conferences at Charlottetown and Quebec designed an outline union of the British North American provinces. ‘Confederation’, as it was termed, took effect in July 1867 through Westminster legislation: the British North America Act. The original dominion comprised four provinces, of which two, Ontario and Quebec, emerged in 1867 out of the former province of Canada. Upper and Lower Canada had been united by the British in 1840 (the Act came into effect in 1841), but the two sections maintained different codes of civil law and were allocated equal representation in the Assembly. As Upper Canada grew faster than Lower Canada, so it demanded representation by population. By 1861, Upper Canada contained 1.4 million people, Lower Canada 1.1 million, of whom about 900,000 were francophones. Two Maritime [sometimes ‘Lower’] provinces were also founder members: Nova Scotia, with 330,000 people, and New Brunswick, with around 250,000. The small island colonies, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland remained aloof.1

It is a generalisation to talk of a single interlocking explanation among English-Canadian historians, but accounts of the coming of Confederation in older textbooks tend to emphasise the circumstances of 1864. ‘Rep. by pop.’ made it necessary to restructure the Province of Canada. The American Civil War pointed to a political union for defence against the United States. A railway was required linking Quebec to Halifax, and there was pressure to take over the Hudson’s Bay Company Territories and expand westward. Closely examined, these arguments were not always persuasive. Would Maritimers wish to join those quarrelsome Canadians? Defence was a British responsibility. 1864 was hardly a good moment to risk antagonising the Americans. But the interlocking explanation that derived the idea of Confederation from the circumstances of 1864 chimed with English-Canadian nationalist

assumptions. History had decreed that Canada should grow into an east-west union independent of the United States, with Quebec forming part of a pan-Canadian federation.²

However, it is pleasant to cite visionary prophets, and the textbooks acknowledged some earlier proposals for the union of the provinces, tracing a prehistory back to 1784. Two stood out. In 1839, Lord Durham had recommended uniting Upper and Lower Canada, but argued that the union should eventually incorporate the whole of British North America. Ten years later, the short-lived British American League had made a similar call. Both schemes aimed to relegate French Canadians into permanent minority status.³ Historians also found it useful to contrast the successful movement of 1864 with a more recent but stalled initiative undertaken by a Conservative ministry in Canada in 1858. The 1858 episode formed a control experiment that highlighted the unique circumstances of six years later.

My work on Canadian Confederation approached the idea from its imperial dimension, arguing that by about 1850, the British political élite agreed that a union of the provinces was the best way forward. However, two elements in British attitudes may not have appealed across the Atlantic. First, the British saw their North American provinces as a bulwark against the military and ideological challenge of the United States. Colonials could be forgiven if they were less keen on this idea. Second, knowing little about the provinces, the British élite underestimated the problems of internal distance, whereas their inhabitants were very much aware of the difficulties of travel.⁴

While there was undoubtedly far more discussion of the idea in the decade before 1864 than is recognised in ‘the miracle of union’ explanation, there is some danger of exaggerating its intensity.⁵ The arrival of the steam printing press in the mid-1850s caused an explosion of newspaper publishing: by 1865, the province of Canada had twenty-eight daily papers. It was also a golden age for pamphleteering and speech-making. Nova Scotian political oratory had its roots in the declamatory tradition of eighteenth-century America. For example, Joseph Howe’s 1854 speech contained about 16,000 words, including

⁵ Phrase used by Arthur Lower as title of chapter 23 in his textbook, Colony to Nation. See for example the 3rd edition (Toronto, 1964), 313.
the claim that the Nova Scotian militia was twice the size of the English army at the battle of Crécy. Thus it is not surprising that there was discussion of British North American union, and much else. Impact is harder to trace. The handful of politicians—A.T. Galt, Alexander Morris, Thomas D’Arcy McGee—who later vaunted their roles as intellectual pioneers usually rested their claims on very few speeches. It is also difficult to trace linkages spanning provinces or the French-English divide.

Arguments about intercolonial union were not advanced in a void. In Canada, they were closely linked to ‘rep. by pop.’, and another solution to sectional conflict, the ‘double majority’, by which major legislation required majority support from both Upper and Lower Canada. Political union was usually discussed in relation to the practical question of constructing a railway from Canada to the Atlantic seaboard. Nor should we ignore the proximity of events in the United States, most notably the Civil War which undoubtedly explains the paucity of discussion between 1860 and 1864, although not why quasi-federal union schemes erupted again in 1864. Few British Americans favoured annexation, but many recognised that the Americans might some day force the issue upon them.

Several underlying issues had the potential to divide enthusiasts. The most basic was the choice between United States-style federation and a legislative union on United Kingdom lines. It seems that the use of the term ‘Confederation’ helped smudge over the differences, with centralisers accepting that internal devolution would be necessary. Similarly, potential conflict between those who saw union as a step towards independence and those who sought reinforcement of the imperial link was blunted by relegating such developments to the longer term.

Lastly, we should note two chicken-and-egg conundrums underlying the debate. The first related to the intercolonial railway: was a railway from Halifax to Quebec the essential precondition for a political union—or was its construction dependent upon the creation of a central political authority? The second poses Massimo d’Azeglio against Benedict Anderson. After the Risorgimento, d’Azeglio memorably remarked that having created Italy, they must now create Italians. The political scientist Benedict Anderson reverses the relationship: nations, he argues, are fundamentally ‘imagined communities’ that grow out of shared communal mentalities. But a major argument for union in British

7 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*
North America was the need to overcome the lack of contact between the various provinces. With two different language groups, it was difficult to conceptualise common identity in personal terms. Calls for ‘nationality’ represent a major theme, but it is hard to decode their meaning.

But was there a ‘debate’ at all? When the Canadian Assembly discussed the scheme in February 1865, Christopher Dunkin reviewed political controversy since 1859 and commented: ‘we quarrelled and fought about almost everything, but did not waste a thought or a word upon this gigantic question of the confederation of these provinces’.8

I

Certainly the ‘debate’ was sufficiently disjointed to permit an apparently arbitrary decision about periodisation. I choose to start with a speech by J. W. Johnston, premier of Nova Scotia, in 1854. Although his oration had no obvious effect, it is an appropriate starting point because of its links with two previous examples from the prehistory of proposals for a union of the provinces. Johnston had been a Nova Scotia delegate to an abortive conference on the subject convened by Lord Durham at Quebec in 1839. As a Conservative, Johnston also linked his ideas directly to the British American League of ten years later. Conscious that his political career was approaching its close, he saw (in modern terminology) British American union as his ‘legacy issue’.

Johnston combined a conventional ‘union is strength’ case with updated allusion to the circumstances of the 1850s. Railways and telegraphs were overcoming the inherent challenge of internal distance. Canada needed winter ports on the Atlantic seaboard, while Nova Scotia needed a hinterland. United, the provinces could look to an impressive future, to include westward expansion to the Pacific. Johnston feared ‘gradual absorption’ by the United States, arguing that it was better to unite in advance of a continental crisis. In 1854, negotiations were about to start, under British auspices, for a trade treaty with the United States. Johnston argued that a union of the provinces would enable Nova Scotia to defend its inshore fisheries, a resource to which the Americans demanded access, and a bargaining pawn that others might too easily surrender.


8 Christopher Dunkin in Confederation Debates in the Province of Canada, 1865 (Quebec, 1865), 485.
Johnston used two arguments not shared by other enthusiasts. First, he argued that the history of the province of Canada proved that there was no obstacle to political partnership between French- and English-speaking colonists. This ran counter to arguments advanced within Canada itself which were generally based on the need to create an increased measure of federal space between the two language communities. Secondly, he attributed the growth and prosperity of the United States to its federal system, a point that would be flatly denied by another Nova Scotian, P.S. Hamilton. However, as heir to the Tory tradition, Johnston favoured a legislative union, although he also saw the need for ‘a mature and perfect system of Municipal Corporations’, the germ of the compromise that would characterise the Canadian federal solution of 1867. His emphasis upon a strong central government was in line with his hope that ‘[a] wider field would give greater scope to the aspiring, and larger and perhaps more generous influences would be required for success’. A broader and less poisonous political culture would help colonists to transcend the limitations of their status, and rise to ‘at least a quasi nationality’.9

Not to be outdone, the opposition leader Joseph Howe contributed an even larger oration in support of his favourite scheme, the integration of the colonies with Britain through parliamentary representation at Westminster. Although claiming to recognise ‘great advantages arising from a union of these colonies’, he also saw difficulties, such as the choice of a capital city, the cost of Canada’s large debt and the probable resistance of French Canada. He challenged Johnston’s argument that Nova Scotia would be able to defend its interests in continental trade negotiations. ‘It is just probable that the farmers of Western Canada [i.e. modern Ontario] in their anxiety to get their wheat into the United States might throw our fisheries overboard’. While accepting that centralisation would create ‘a strong executive’, he saw a warning in the internal strains in the United Kingdom. ‘What has been the complaint of Ireland for years? That there was no parliament at College Green. Of Scotland at this moment? That there is no parliament at Holyrood’. Howe’s allusion to Scotland was perhaps a muddled recollection of the Disruption a decade earlier: his allusion to Holyrood seems eerily prophetic. Fundamentally, Howe thought the idea of union premature: ‘before we can have this organisation or any other, we must have railroads’. Once the provinces were criss-crossed by railways, union would quickly follow.10

---

'The smallest interest felt in each other by the Colonies would be almost incredible to strangers', Johnston had said. His point was borne out by the apparent total absence of discussion of the Nova Scotian debate in other provinces, where it seems that it was not even reported.

The following year saw the first of a series of pamphlets by the Nova Scotian P.S. Hamilton. In 1864 he would look back on these early days when he was an ‘eccentric theorist’ whose advocacy of intercolonial union was ‘laughed at as the scheme of a visionary’. Unfortunately, the jibe seems to have been well-founded. Hamilton was dogmatic, and inclined to drag irrelevant enthusiasms into his diatribes. Although tireless in circulating his publications among leading figures in both Britain and the provinces, even travelling to Canada to lobby its politicians, he can hardly have persuaded many of them of the soundness of his judgement. He was a memorable phrase-maker, but his command of language suborned him into a hey-presto dismissal of problems. ‘No political movement,’ he said of legislative union, ‘could be more simple’.

In 1855, Hamilton claimed that the idea of union had been ‘extensively discussed by the provincial press and by the people at their own fire-sides’, proof of a ‘craving after nationality’. ‘To be a British American, means nothing in the world’s estimation; to be a Canadian, a New Brunswicker, or a Nova Scotian, is to be just the next thing to nothing’. Union would inspire politicians ‘with a higher and nobler aim,’ and would ensure the completion of the railway connection that Howe saw as a prerequisite.

Almost half of Hamilton’s 1855 pamphlet was taken up with arguing for legislative union against federation, often using arguments that other writers used against any form of union. He argued that a federal division of powers was impracticable, especially since the colonies did not control their own external relations. A weak federal legislature would be irrelevant. Local interests would play off the two levels of government, bringing the system into disrepute. A federation with a strong central authority would quickly reduce the local governments to ‘mere shadows’ and so prove a mere transition stage

---

11 Saunders, Three Premiers, 251.
13 Hamilton’s pamphlets are Observations upon a Union of the Colonies of British North America (Halifax, 1855); A Union of the Colonies of British North America Considered Nationally (Halifax, 1856); Letter to His Grace the duke of Newcastle upon a Union of the Colonies of British North America (Halifax, 1860) and Union of the Colonies of British North America (Montreal, 1864).
14 Hamilton, Observations upon a Union (1855), in Union of the Colonies of British North America (1864), 13–15, 20.
to complete fusion. John A. Macdonald entertained similar views, and even used identical terminology.

Students of the ‘Charter’ culture of post-1982 Canada may take wry note of Hamilton’s dismissal of a Supreme Court as the arbiter of a federation. Such a body could not ‘possess the power to enforce its own decrees’ on the governor-general, or the central or local governments. Worse still, if it could do so, it would be ‘a fourth, independent ruling power over the people of British America; and . . . would make still more complicated the complication of difficulties already existing’.

However, Hamilton, like Johnston, saw the need for administrative devolution. ‘The principle of Municipal Corporations. . . furnishes ample security against any abuses of the centralisation system’. He envisaged ‘a Confederation, not of five Provinces, but of some 140 counties and cities’ in which no one of these Municipalities, however perfectly organised, could ever become dangerous, or even very troublesome, as a rebel against the authority of the general Government, a statement which certainly could not be predicated of any province, under a continuance of its present, political organisation.

Dismissing the American model, Hamilton insisted that the United States was prosperous despite its federal constitution. Three-quarters of a century did not constitute a fair trial.

‘Only two objections have ever been publicly made to a Legislative Union of these Provinces,’ he pronounced, ‘and they are so nearly groundless as scarcely to require any serious answer’. The first was the difficulty of combining English- and French-speaking people in a single polity. Like Johnston, Hamilton appealed to the ‘complete success’ of the Canadian Union, despite being a ‘political union of the two most antagonistic races in British America’. In any case, he added, in an argument that would not appeal to francophones, a major aim of political union was ‘a complete breaking down of all local prejudices, and a fusion of races, throughout the Provinces’.

---

15 The limitation placed upon parliamentary sovereignty by the addition of a Charter of Rights and Freedoms to Canada’s constitution in 1982 has arguably made Canadians more conscious of ‘rights’ and inclined to litigation in their definition and defence.


17 Ibid., 52.

18 Ibid., 53.
argument, internal distance, the far west of Upper Canada was further from the seat of government in Quebec City than Nova Scotia. Railways would annihilate distance, and union would speed up railway construction.

By 1856, there are faint indications that the subject was implanted deep in Canadian political consciousness. In March, the subject was raised in the Legislative Council. James Crooks had lived in Canada since 1794 ‘and had observed great changes’ which led him to conclude that the union of the provinces ‘could not be long delayed’. For a man approaching his seventy-eighth birthday, it was perhaps hazardous to argue that it was ‘necessary to infuse new blood into the province’. A veteran of the battle of Queenston Heights in 1812, he stressed the need for defence. This drew an irritable reply from the premier, Sir Etienne Taché, who called the proposal ‘ill-timed, and uncalled for’. Apparently speaking in *franglais*, Taché said: ‘Constitutions political were not things to be put on and put off like a suit of clothes’. None of the provinces was agitating for a union, while Canada was flourishing. As for improving defence, ‘a union with the other provinces would give us no help even if we were in danger. Before we could reach them, or they us, we must have a railway, and until then to talk of a political alliance was, to say the least, to lose time’. Crooks failed to find a seconder.19 An attempt by the eccentric politician Arthur Rankin to raise the issue in the Assembly was discouraged by John A. Macdonald as ‘premature’.20 Eight years later, Etienne Taché would preside over the coalition ministry that launched the Confederation project.

A revealing indication of the Canadian political sub-conscious surfaced in a leading article in the Toronto-based *Globe*, in April 1856, rejecting a call for annexation made by a New York newspaper:

Should the time come when the present relation of England and her American Provinces would cease to exist, it is not only probable, but morally certain, that instead of seeking annexation to the States and becoming entangled in the distractions and endless controversies which the American constitution has engendered, a confederacy of all the provinces would be cemented, and then a great northern power would be formed, while the anarchical principles that are everywhere rending the state of society in the Union, would be excluded.21

---

20 As recalled by Rankin in *Confederation Debates*, 914–15.
21 *Globe*, 3 April 1856.
The Idea of British North American Union 1854–64

But the subject was not mentioned in other leaders that year in which the _Globe_ campaigned to open up the Hudson’s Bay territories west of the Great Lakes. In August a Toronto debating society discussed British North American union.²² Sometime that year, the Rouge (liberal) politician, A-A. Dorion, suggested a federation of Upper and Lower Canada as a way out of the ‘rep. by pop.’ controversy.²³ Rankin had seen the federalising of the province of Canada as a step towards a wider union, a course that Dorion consistently rejected. From 1856 onwards, the two solutions—Canadian federation and British North American union—sometimes competed and occasionally overlapped.

There are similar traces in 1857 suggesting that British North American union was lurking at the back of the political mind. Canada’s cities were bidding to Queen Victoria to become the provinces’ permanent capital, a process that encouraged a kitchen-sink approach. Quebec City dragged in the union of the provinces, ‘a measure which will ultimately become necessary’, and would make Quebec ‘the most central city of British America’. Ottawa made a similar claim.²⁴

A new arrival in Canada that year was quickly converted to the idea of intercolonial union. D’Arcy McGee was a former Irish rebel who had found the United States uncongenial. He aimed to build a political career by linking Irish-Catholic votes to Montreal business interests. McGee transmuted his Young Irelander faith in Catholic-Protestant partnership into a vision of British North American nationality, contributing an inspirational aspect to Montreal’s ambitions for railways. P.S. Hamilton claimed McGee as a convert.²⁵

Another Nova Scotian influence upon Canadian political debate from 1857 is important but hard to document. That summer, the provinces sent delegations to England to lobby for British-guaranteed loan funding for the Halifax to Quebec railway project. The Nova Scotian premier, J. W. Johnston, tacked the union of the provinces on to the negotiating agenda. The talks were fruitless, but they provided a rare opportunity for contact between politicians from the different provinces. It was probably at this time that the

---

²³ In 1865, Dorion claimed to have originated this proposal. See _Confederation Debates_, 246, and cf. 111. It was not much noticed in 1856.
Canadians, led by John A. Macdonald, became aware of Nova Scotian interest in a possible union.26

The intellectual event of 1857, although hardly noticed at the time, was the series of newspaper articles in support of a British North American federation by Jean-Charles Taché, which appeared in book form early in 1858. Taché was a former Bleu (conservative) politician and a nephew of Etienne Taché. His articles were important in arguing a specifically French-Canadian case. An Ultramontane Catholic who stressed the twin principles of authority and obedience, he rejected both the society and the expansionist threat of the United States. Naturally, he opposed outright legislative union, the project so often designed to suppress francophone identity, and dismissed any thought of closer integration with Great Britain. But while he believed British North American independence to be inevitable, he was happy to postpone the break with Britain for as long as possible. Federation would ease the eventual transition to complete independence. The Maritime provinces were too small to stand alone, while Canada needed a winter outlet on the Atlantic. Although Taché resented the forced union of Upper and Lower Canada, he acknowledged that it had contributed to the prosperity of the province, for instance by creating the investment base capable of completing the St Lawrence canal system. A wider union would bring railways to the sluggish Maritimes. Taché argued for as loose a federation as would be compatible with creating a barrier against the United States. Material interests—such as trade, customs, major public works, post office, militia and criminal justice—would be handled centrally. The moral sphere (such as family and property issues) would be provincial responsibilities.

Although Taché noted Rankin’s abortive resolutions, his own influence is harder to assess: in July 1858, his newspaper commented that it was discouraging to talk to the deaf.28 However, Cartier and other Bleu politicians embraced British American union as a policy option the following month. Both Alexander Morris and A. T. Galt, who publicly argued for the union of the provinces in 1858, were Lower Canada Britishers, and Morris at least was fluent in French.

The Province of Canada passed through hotly contested elections in mid-winter 1857–8. Seven years later, Dunkin recalled that ‘no one at that time spoke of or cared for this magnificent idea of the union of the provinces’.29

---

26 Whitelaw, Maritimes and Canada, 117.
27 J-C. Taché, Des provinces de l’Amérique du Nord et d’une union fédérale (Quebec, 1858).
28 Le Courrier du Canada, 21 July 1858.
29 Confederation Debates, 484.
The elections had resulted in a sectional confrontation between Upper and Lower Canadians, and some politicians sought a way out. Luther Holton, a Montreal politician and businessman, urged George Brown, the Upper Canada Reform leader, that the province could be reshaped into a quasi-federal union. Brown was initially sceptical. ‘A federal union, it seems to me, cannot be entertained for Canada alone but when agitated must include all British America. We will be past caring for politics when that venture is finally achieved’. Brown was certainly reluctant to do anything to advance the prospect. In February, his newspaper, the Toronto Globe, was outraged when the publication of the report of the Nova Scotian delegation to Britain revealed that its mandate had included a reference to ‘a Union of the British North American Provinces! Who authorised Mr Macdonald in the name of, and on behalf of, the people of Canada to proceed on such an embassy?’

In March 1858, Alexander Morris delivered what became celebrated as his Nova Britannia lecture in Montreal. The text was published, and reportedly 3,000 copies were sold in ten days. Morris was a bookish child from an elite Scottish family. ‘At an age when most boys are to be found at the skating rink or in the cricket field, he loved to bury himself in the pages of “Lord Durham’s Report” and to read about the Hudson’s Bay Territories. In 1849, aged twenty-three, he had attended the British American League Convention in Kingston. His friends joked ‘that he had Confederation and the Hudson’s Bay Territories on the brain’.

His lecture was less a specific proposal than a ‘fanciful dream’ of a future transcontinental British North America. Morris began with extensive facts and figures about the provinces, leading to the rhetorical question: ‘Is there not here the germ of a mighty people?’ Although he talked of ‘a great Britannic Confederation’, he seemed to doubt that it was ‘immediately impending’, although public opinion was ‘rapidly maturing’ in its favour. ‘A few years ago, the man who ventured to declare himself in favour of such a combination was deemed a visionary, and was in fact in advance of his times. Now, however, politicians and... the press are ready to adopt the proposal’.

---

31 Globe, 25 February 1858.
32 Alexander Morris, Nova Britannia; or, Our New Canadian Dominion Foreshadowed (Toronto, 1884 ed.), vi.
33 Ibid., vii.
34 Ibid. 4, 34, 39, 48.
Morris’s assessment seemed borne out in July 1858 when the Independent Reformer Alexander Galt submitted a series of resolutions for debate in the Assembly. Galt’s proposal was a package spanning three contemporary constitutional themes. First, ‘the union of Upper and Lower Canada should be changed from a Legislative to a Federative Union by the subdivision of the province into two or more sections, each governing itself in local and sectional matters, with a general legislative government for subjects of national and common interest’. Second, provision should be made for Canada to take control of the Hudson’s Bay Territories ‘until population and settlement may . . . enable them to be admitted into the Canadian Confederation’. Third, there should be ‘a general Confederation of the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island with Canada and the Western territories’. This would ‘greatly add to their national power and consideration’ while ‘preserving to each province the uncontrolled management of those internal affairs respecting which differences of opinion might arise with other members of the Confederation’.35

Moving his resolutions, Galt criticised politicians for failing to debate the opportunities open to ‘the foremost colony of the foremost empire of the world’. The 700,000 square miles of the Hudson’s Bay Territories could support thirty million people, but, under its existing constitution, the province could not assume the government of those western lands, whereas ‘if a federal government were set up a local government might be given to the people of the Red River or any other locality’, prior to eventual incorporation as a full member. ‘Half a continent is ours if we do not keep on quarrelling about petty matters and lose sight of what interests us most’.36

Although the Globe called the ensuing discussion ‘a most interesting debate’, it was also an anti-climax. No minister spoke. L.T.Drummond, another prominent Lower Canada anglophone, claimed to have advocated a federal union of the provinces ‘for the last twenty years’ (i.e. since the Durham Report) but ‘we must have some political and social intercourse with the Lower Provinces before we could unite with them’. Dorion sweepingly asserted that the federation of all the provinces would be madness for a century to come. The debate lapsed without a vote.37 In 1865, Dunkin claimed

36 Ibid., 80–1.
37 Globe, 7 July 1858; Careless, Brown of the Globe: The Voice of Upper Canada, 257.
that ‘with all his ability . . . he [Galt] could scarcely obtain a hearing’.  
Rather, the significance of Galt’s initiative was magnified by a parochial ministerial crisis immediately afterwards, when Queen Victoria’s choice of Ottawa as the compromise capital triggered the collapse of the Macdonald-Cartier administration. Brown attempted to form an alternative government, accepting the Dorion-Holton formula for federalising the Province of Canada, but was ousted after just two days. Reinforced by Galt, the old guard returned as the Cartier-Macdonald cabinet, tentatively adopting his policy of British North American federation. They planned to communicate with the other provinces ‘inviting them to discuss with us the principles on which a bond of a federal character, uniting the provinces of British North America, may perhaps hereafter be practicable’. The government leader in the upper house, Philip Vankoughnet, was distinctly non-committal about the new policy while, in the lower house, the independent-minded Christopher Dunkin made it clear that he would withdraw his support if the ministry introduced a ‘practical measure’.

The Globe was predictably dismissive, arguing that the union of the provinces was ‘a thing too far distant’, but its criticisms were cogent. The reconstituted ministry’s federation initiative was ‘designed to tickle the ear, and to please the eye, while it appeals not to the sense’, not a policy but a ‘deception’. A ministerial delegation was despatched to England where they had the bad luck to encounter a minority Conservative administration at Westminster which recoiled from this potentially controversial issue. Lord Derby’s government remitted the question to confidential consultation through the governors of the various provinces, who reported cautiously and, above all, slowly. There was probably an element of cynicism behind the Cartier-Macdonald ministry’s sudden endorsement of intercolonial union. It gained them the adhesion of Galt and enabled them to appear to trump the Brown-Dorion bid to create a bi-valved federation confined to the province of Canada. Equally, talking favourably of a union of the provinces, a target widely supported among the British political élite, might unlock imperial funding for the Halifax to Quebec railway. French-Canadian politicians remained determined to make Quebec City the capital and, as the 1857

---

38 Confederation Debates, 485.
40 Whitelaw, Maritimes and Canada, 128.
41 Globe, 10 August 1858; Confederation Debates, 485.
42 Globe, 10 August 1858.
petitions had shown, a move towards the union of the provinces might make it possible to dump the Queen’s inconvenient choice of backwoods Ottawa. But by January 1859, ministers had to admit that no progress had been made, and the *Globe* dismissed the whole episode as ‘half smoke, half air’.43 ‘Can they tell us even now a single feature of their scheme?’, Brown demanded. ‘They have been months in office—and yet not one line of explanation can we extract from them!’44

George Brown’s ambiguity surfaced again during the Great Reform Convention held in November 1859. The first major political gathering in Canada since the British American League ten years earlier, the convention was called to suppress demands for the dissolution of the Canadian union, and to project a show of unity behind a platform vaguely calling for a two-unit federation instead. This specifically rejected a British North American federation because of ‘the delay which must occur in obtaining the sanction of the Lower Provinces’. But one supporter of outright dissolution declared that ‘if the question is placed on the ground of nationality he must go for federation, but a federation of all the British North American colonies’.45

Brown cleverly inverted the argument. ‘I do place the question on ground of nationality. I do hope there is not one Canadian in this assembly who does not look forward with high hopes to the day when these northern countries shall stand out among the nations of the world as one great confederation!’ But, said Brown, it was ‘true wisdom to commence the federated system with our own country, and leave it open to extension hereafter’. A federated province of Canada ‘may at some future day furnish the machinery of a great confederation’.46 There are complex levels of meaning in this vocabulary. Since the Maritimes were tacitly excluded from ‘our own country’, what drove the demand for ‘nationality’? The key to understanding this labyrinth of identities is probably to be found in the fact that George Brown was the identikit ‘Unionist Nationalist’, who saw no contradiction in accepting distinct manifestations of British and Scottish identity, and hence could accommodate a third, British-American level.47

44 Ibid., 285, 293.
46 Ibid.
Throughout the five years after 1859, projects for the union of British North America were quiescent. The failure of the Canadian initiative discouraged any practical project. Some enthusiasts hoped that the first royal tour, by the future Edward VII in the summer of 1860, would strengthen a sense of common identity. Rather, a vicious row over the status of the Orange Order drew attention to internal divisions. Rather, a vicious row over the status of the Orange Order drew attention to internal divisions.48 Later that year, the United States moved towards civil war, further discrediting the political frameworks necessary for wider union. The cause, it seemed, needed an inspiring orator.

That role is sometimes assigned to Thomas D’Arcy McGee, an impression McGee was keen to foster. The collection of his speeches published in 1865, projecting him as a prophet of Confederation, in fact reveal that his support was patchy.49 Although sympathetic to British North American union in 1857, he did not mention it when speaking in the Assembly in March 1859 on the ‘double majority’. He was then in opposition to Macdonald and Cartier, but he seems inconsistent in speaking of his hopes for ‘the speedy growth of this great Province into an incipient nationality’.50 Soon after he visited New Brunswick (a journey few Canadian politicians undertook) and reached the double-negative conclusion that Maritimers were ‘not actively adverse’ to Confederation. In May 1860 he still favoured ‘a bold application of the federal principle’ to the province of Canada, adding that ‘the best and most desirable thing . . . is the Federal Union of all the North American Colonies’. This suggested a more integrated two-stage approach than Brown had envisaged, but even so, McGee thought ‘it would probably be 1864 or 1865 before all the obstacles could be removed, and all the arrangements agreed upon’.

As a spokesman for Montreal business, McGee argued that a political union of the provinces was desirable for economic reasons: ‘a mere Commercial Union’ would not work ‘without the superintendence of some central political power’. He appealed both to the latent notion that colonial status was incomplete (union was ‘a necessary complement of our present colonial system—unless we are to look forward to our annexation to the United States’) and also to ‘the tendencies of our times’, claiming that ‘the obstacles in our

levels of identity.


50 Ibid., 149–53.
way are not greater than those which have been repeatedly overcome by other disunited states and provinces’. This seems to have been a rare allusion to the Risorgimento, an episode that is sometimes thrown into contextual explanations of the coming of Canadian confederation.

McGee’s peroration would tag this oration his ‘Shield of Achilles’ speech. It is the classic example of a national community that was fantasised in terms of landscape and only secondarily imagined as comprising real people. ‘I see in the not remote distance, one great nationality bound, like the shield of Achilles, by the blue rim of ocean—I see it quartered into many communities—each disposing of its internal affairs—but all bound together by free institutions, free intercourse and free commerce’. The shield was surrounded by ‘the peaks of the Western mountains and the crests of the Eastern waves’, and McGee sonorously invoked the names of lakes and rivers. Only then did he make the oratorical transition to living communities, ‘a generation of industrious, contented, moral men, free in name and in fact’, a formulation which glossed over the complication that these worthy inhabitants spoke two different languages and adhered to rival faiths. And, having invoked his grand vision, McGee himself had very little to say about it for the next two years.51

Although the idea was faltering in Canada, it was clinging to life in the Maritimes. In September 1860, the Halifax British Colonist declared that British North America was a project ‘ripening for practical discussion’.52 The British Colonist was the mouthpiece of Charles Tupper, effectively Johnston’s deputy as leader of the Conservatives, who were now in opposition. In November, Tupper delivered a formal address on the subject in Saint John, the chief city of nearby New Brunswick. One motive was a desire to combat ‘the endeavour of little minds to excite a mutual jealousy’ between Saint John and the Nova Scotian capital, Halifax, since both cities hoped to become the seaboard terminal for railways to Canada. Tupper argued that rival tariffs, currencies and postal systems hampered trade within the Maritimes. (Indeed, he delivered a companion lecture focusing on the possibility of uniting the Maritimes into a single province.) It was a sign of a changing international climate that he also emphasised the challenge of defence. He also echoed Johnston and Hamilton in stressing ‘nationality’. Nova Scotians, he complained, were ‘often confounded abroad with the inhabitants of Nova Zembla and similar favoured regions’. Union would make Maritimers and

51 Ibid., 154–76.
Canadians into ‘British Americans’, recognised by the world as inhabitants of a vast and prosperous country.\footnote{C. Tupper, \textit{Recollections of Sixty Years in Canada} (London, 1914), 14–38.}

Tupper did not mobilise a political crusade. In Halifax, the \textit{Novascotian}, mouthpiece of the new Liberal premier, Joseph Howe, repeated his 1854 question: who would pay for go-ahead Canada’s vast public debt?\footnote{Heisler, ‘Halifax Press’, 191.} In Saint John, the \textit{Morning Freeman} published an instant rebuttal. ‘There are only two grounds on which a union of the Colonies can be successfully advocated,’ it pronounced. The first was that long-term preparations should be commenced in order to bear ‘the burden of independence’. The other was that the economic development of the provinces was hampered by their political fragmentation. The \textit{Freeman} ignored the first argument, and dismissed the second: there was no barrier to trade between Canada and the Maritimes. (Nor, indeed, was there much trade.) Tupper had failed ‘to explain how, as a mere appendage of the Crown of England, we could attain a name and nationality and influence abroad peculiarly our own’. Only ‘urgent necessity or the hope of great pecuniary advantage’ would mobilise public opinion for such a major change. ‘The people have no particular anxiety to provide a larger field for aspiring politicians’.\footnote{\textit{Morning Freeman}, 22 November 1860.} Another Liberal newspaper, the Saint John \textit{Morning Chronicle}, dismissed the union of the provinces as ‘one of the Tory whims of the day’, an ‘extravagant notion’ that appealed to few Liberals. ‘In a dozen years, after the Upper and Lower Provinces are connected by railroads, after we have formed some acquaintanceship with each other, it will be time enough to begin to think of a federation’. In August 1861, it declared that a union of the Maritime provinces was ‘of infinitely more importance than a Union with Canada’.\footnote{Whitelaw, \textit{Maritimes and Canada}, 177–8.}

Meanwhile, in April 1861, Premier Howe attempted to out-manoeuvre Tupper, by proposing to contact the other provinces ‘with a view to the enlightened consideration of a question involving the highest interests on which the public mind in all the provinces ought to be set at rest’. The wording indicates that this was a wrecking move, but it was far more than a put-up-or-shut-up ultimatum. Since there was no forum for intercolonial consultations, the Nova Scotian government needed to refer the proposal to London for guidance. Conveniently, they waited for almost a year to do this.\footnote{Saunders, \textit{Three Premiers}, 346; Martin, \textit{Britain and the Origins of Canadian Confederation}, 229–30.}
John A. Macdonald was also proclaiming the union of the provinces as an ideal but unattainable solution to Canada’s conflicts over representation by population and the double majority. Speaking in the Assembly in April 1861, he identified ‘a confederation of all the provinces’ as the ‘only feasible... remedy’ for Canada’s sectional difficulties. He hastily added that he rejected the American federal model, with its ‘fatal error’ of state sovereignty.

The true principle of confederation lies in giving to the general government all the principles and powers of sovereignty, and in the provision that the subordinate or individual states should have no powers but those expressly bestowed upon them. We should thus have a powerful central government, a powerful central legislature, and a powerful decentralised system of minor legislatures for local purposes.58

Unfortunately, there was little prospect that Maritimers, or indeed French Canadians, would accept a union with such a centralised structure. However, on a theoretical plane, Macdonald was evidently moving towards accepting the practical devolution that emerged in 1864. Macdonald made brief allusions to the subject during the 1861 election campaign (but not when Canadians next went to the polls in 1863).59 The most that can be said is that the idea of a united British North America did not vanish entirely in the smoke of Virginia battlefields. In July 1861 a correspondent of the Quebec Chronicle did ‘not expect a very speedy accomplishment of a consolidation’, adding that

until there is a more important trade between Canada and her sister settlements, it would be of little use to consummate a political union... . For the country we desire to see grow must not be one merely in the books and on the maps of the geographers, nor be viewed as a mere interstate partnership by the minds of the people. It must be a nationality.60

As the American Civil War exploded, references to the union of the British provinces became increasingly rare and pro forma. Alexander Morris was now a member of the Assembly. His maiden speech in March 1862 on

60 Whitelaw, Maritimes and Canada, 177.
representation by population made only a tentative allusion to the solution he had trumpeted four years earlier. McGee delivered three major speeches that spring without mentioning it at all. Three years later, he jocularly invoked a Scots phrase: it would have been ‘half-daft’ to propose inter-colonial union in 1862 or 1863.61

However, in London, the Colonial Secretary, the duke of Newcastle, had turned Howe’s 1861 manoeuvre inside out. A supporter of British North American union, Newcastle encouraged a projected intercolonial conference on the Halifax-Quebec railway project to discuss political union as well. A landmark despatch in July 1862 described the idea as ‘a very proper subject for calm discussion’ and authorised ‘leading members of the governments concerned’ to consult informally. Howe then asked each colonial government ‘whether its members are prepared to discuss the question of union’. The Nova Scotian view was ‘the question should be set at rest by such a formal discussion as would promote such a union, if there be any general desire to effect it, and save much time if there were not’.62 Since Cartier and John A. Macdonald had been replaced in office by an insecure Reform ministry, Canada could be relied upon to support the time-saving veto.

The intercolonial conference at Quebec in September 1862 considered ‘political union’ among ‘collateral questions’ but it was regarded, one delegate later recalled, ‘as a matter in the distance’. Howe tactfully explained to Newcastle that the issue was postponed to ‘a more convenient season’, so that public opinion might accept closer relations after the railway had been constructed. But when Leonard Tilley, the premier of New Brunswick, visited Canada in January 1863 to press for action on the Halifax-Quebec line, he found that ‘a portion of the population, of French origin, think the railway will lead to the union of the provinces, and the destruction of their power and political influence’.63

Signs of support for the idea in the Maritimes continued. In March, T. W. Anglin told the New Brunswick Assembly ‘that the British North American Colonies should be joined in one great nation’ and that the union was ‘likely to occur some time’. Anglin had probably written the Morning Freeman editorial

61 Morris, Nova Britannia (1884 edition), 96; Confederation Debates, 126.
62 Martin, Britain and the Origins of Canadian Confederation, 229–30; Saunders, Three Premiers, 346.
attacking Tupper’s lecture in 1860. Even more remarkable was a resolution passed in April by the Assembly of Prince Edward Island, where politics were not simply insular but narcissistically parochial. The Island, it pledged, was ‘prepared attentively to consider any proposition emanating from the neighboring Colonies [. . .] which may have for its object a Union of the British North American Colonies’. The promise did not amount to much, but the fact that it was made at all indicates that the project was being taken seriously in the Atlantic region.

In July, D’Arcy McGee descended on Halifax to call for ‘the Union of all the Colonies’, headed by a royal viceroy. McGee advanced five arguments, although their relevance was not always obvious. The first was a general proposition that union equalled strength. Second, he favoured intercolonial free trade, although he did not explain why this entailed a common political structure. His third argument was an opaque call to increase levels of immigration. McGee called his fourth plank ‘the patriotic argument . . . the absolute necessity of cultivating a high-hearted patriotism amongst us provincialists’, which he linked directly to the challenge of defence. This led to his final argument, ‘political necessity, arising from the state of our neighbours’. McGee was no doubt sincere in supporting a union of the provinces, but he was also using the idea as an oratorical cover for the intercolonial railway. Into this mixture he threw ‘a future, possible, probable, and I hope to live to be able to say positive, British-American Nationality’. The elements of nationality were present—territory, population, civilisation—and, after summoning King Alfred, Shakespeare, Burke and Thomas More, he invoked ‘the fortunate genius of a united British America . . . so that, hand in hand, we and our descendants may advance steadily to the accomplishment of a common destiny’.

McGee was no mean orator, but what was the effect of his speeches? A year later, after the Confederation project had been launched, McGee made another barn-storming tour of the Maritimes. In Fredericton, a local newspaper noted, he was ‘vociferously cheered’. But the reporter insisted that ‘the cheering, however vociferous does not prove that in the minds of the meeting Mr M’Gee had annihilated all objections, and made the way smooth to a Confederation; it was a good natured appreciation of a very eloquent speech’. Some Halifax

67 *Head Quarters*, 24 August 1864.
newspapers supported McGee but, in Saint John, Anglin’s *Morning Freeman* was equivocal. ‘The time will come, perhaps soon, when a union will be practicable and advisable’ but only when the ‘vast wilderness’ separating New Brunswick from Canada had been settled. Although, like McGee, Anglin was an Irish Catholic, he felt no enthusiasm for a ‘new nationality’. Surely it was enough for British Americans to be ‘subjects of the British Empire’? Unlike the Johnston-Howe exchange nine years earlier, McGee’s speech was reported in the Upper Canadian press—although not until McGee himself had returned home, suggesting that he supplied the copy—but there was no widespread discussion of his ideas in Canada. He delivered two further set speeches on the Canadian political situation in October and November 1863, omitting any allusion to the union of the provinces.

Meanwhile, a wave of anger swept the Maritimes after Canada’s Reform ministry dumped its commitment to the railway project. Resentment at Canadian ‘perfidy’ produced a remarkable leading article in the Halifax *Morning Chronicle* in late October. Two months earlier, inspired by McGee, it had urged ‘the formation of the several provinces into a confederation’. Now it claimed that ‘the union of the British North American Colonies, as a group, is no longer a project that men of the present generation can hope to see accomplished’. The ‘next best thing for the Maritime Provinces’ was to unite among themselves.

For the first time, this expression of Nova Scotian pique aroused comment in the Toronto press. The Conservative *Leader* argued a lengthy and conventional case for a union of the provinces. The outspoken Toronto *Globe* was revealing in its comments. ‘It is not Canada which has demanded a union of the provinces’, it flatly told disgruntled fellow colonials. ‘If the maritime provinces desire to hear no more about union with Canada, as they cannot have it just at the moment, and in the exact way they have selected, they will not be bored about it by Canadians. We can live very well without them’. For Canada, British North American union was not a question of gain, but of ‘political prestige and of nationality’. Canadians liked the idea. ‘We look forward to it as our destiny; but it is not a scheme which we feel ourselves compelled to undertake at once by any pressing necessity’. Indeed, a premature initiative ‘would have the effect of retarding the fulfilment of the scheme indefinitely,’ especially if it involved ‘an enormous expenditure on an unproductive railway’.

---

69 For example, *Globe*, 1 August 1863; *Daily News*, 3 August 1863.
70 *Morning Chronicle*, 27 October 1863.
The Nova Scotians ‘must learn to wait. The union of the British American provinces is a great question, not hastily to be settled. Time is needed to bring about a well considered confederation which shall stand the shock of ages’.71 It was hardly a clarion call, but the editorial did suggest cautious endorsement of Confederation.

In March 1864, George Brown, now semi-detached from the faltering Reform ministry, proposed a parliamentary committee to investigate options for constitutional change. Leading politicians sparred over their various nostrums. John A. Macdonald insisted that ‘the only remedy’ was ‘a federation of the provinces’. ‘Nobody supposed that this union could be carried for ten or fifteen years,’ riposted Oliver Mowat.72 Soon afterwards, the Reform ministry resigned and Cartier, McGee and John A. Macdonald joined to form an equally insecure Conservative cabinet under the leadership of Sir Etienne Taché. If the union of the provinces was destiny’s answer to the problems confronting British North America, this government formed in March 1864 was unaware of the fact. Its programme talked vaguely of ‘a closer connection with the sister colonies’, which could mean anything.73

Newly appointed ministers had to fight by-elections. Returned by acclamation in Montreal, McGee delivered an open-air, open-ended political review. ‘I have at all times, in or out of office, zealously advocated the union of the provinces,’ he proclaimed, with some exaggeration. What kind of union—commercial or political, federal or legislative—he was prepared to leave to the collective wisdom. ‘The first step then to any union, league or confederacy, would be the conference of the colonies themselves, subject to the approval of the imperial government. For such a conference the times seem favourable, the necessity urgent, and the several governments well disposed’.74

The plain fact was that the new ministry lacked a big idea to break out of the malaise. Once again, Brown sought to fill the vacuum, in mid-May reviving his proposal for a committee to examine constitutional reform. Again, the prominent players advocated their various solutions. Alexander Morris cherished the hope ‘that the day might come when they should see it to be in the interest of the various provinces of British North America to form such a union as would consolidate the British provinces and British power on this

73 *Montreal Gazette*, 31 March 1864.
74 *Montreal Gazette*, 12 April 1864.
continent’. The American Civil War provided ‘additional reasons . . . to look our actual position in the face’ and adopt a structure ‘which . . . would take us above the petty parish politics in which we were fain to indulge’. McGee argued that it would be easier ‘to form a new act of union that would embrace all British America’ than to re-model the existing Province of Canada. John A. Macdonald reiterated his view that the Civil War proved the need for ‘a stronger form of union and government’ than mere federation.75

A journalist friendly to Macdonald thought that the proposed committee might be worthwhile. If it conducted its discussions ‘in anything like a moderate and patriotic spirit’, it must agree ‘that the only worthy issue out of the present troubles is to bring together all British North America, and making of it a country with powers better adjusted and balanced than is unfortunately now possible in Canada’. Rejecting the idea ‘that any decided movement in favour of a union of the provinces would be premature now’, he argued that ‘an expression of opinion by such a committee would be . . . just what the good cause needs right now’.76 George Brown was duly granted his committee, which reported in mid-June. Its report was cautious enough, recommending ‘changes in the direction of a federative system, applied either to Canada alone, to the whole of British North America’—a step forward, no doubt, but a formula that represented neither consensus nor novelty. Evidently, too, Brown expected no sudden revolution, since he suggested that another committee should meet in 1865. But at that moment, the minority Taché administration fell. Seeing no point in another confrontational general election, Canada’s politicians formed the ‘Great Coalition’ to work for constitutional change. And the rest, to coin a phrase, is Canadian history.77

II

Christopher Dunkin was exaggerating when he claimed that Canada’s politicians had not wasted time on Confederation before 1864—but he did not exaggerate by much. However, enough discussion of the idea of British North American union in the preceding decade can be identified to suggest that Confederation was not simply deduced from the circumstances

75 Montreal Gazette, 21, 24 May 1864.
76 Montreal Gazette, 24 May 1864 (Quebec Correspondent, 19 May).
of 1864. Rather the circumstances of 1864 seemed to provide a favourable, perhaps a unique, moment when the idea made sense as a practical option. Unfortunately, preliminary controversy located several leading figures—Dorion, Anglin, Howe and Dunkin himself—in the opposition camp. This helps to explain why the debates of 1864–7 were often between proponents who talked in visionary generalisations and critics who stressed practical objections.

Insofar as there had been a ‘debate’ throughout the preceding decade, it was sparse on details and lacking consensus about structures. Indeed, had the Confederation initiative failed in the mid-sixties, subsequent historians would probably have cited the fundamental divide between legislative and federal union schemes as a crucially insecure foundation. However, in one important respect, the preliminary pamphleteering and speechmaking indicated that the two opposed forms of union might be conflated, as supporters of complete integration recognised the need for subordinate local governments. Use of the umbrella term ‘Confederation’ may have helped blur the difference. On the other hand, attempts to portray smaller unions, the federation of the two Canadas or the union of the Maritime provinces, as steps towards the wider Confederation proved illusory, and both became rival projects.

There are few indications of any committed inner circle driving the campaign of the kind that worked for Australian federation or the European Union. The quirky P. S. Hamilton was no Jean Monnet. However, Hamilton’s pamphleteering underlines one unhelpful aspect of the pre-1864 story, the apparent prominence of Nova Scotia. When they launched the Confederation project in 1864, Canadian politicians probably took Nova Scotian support for granted. In the event, the province proved hard to win, and remained discontented even after 1867. While much of this may be attributed to the opposition of Joseph Howe, Nova Scotian political oratory provides another explanation—matter-of-fact Canadians were misled by its high degree of meaningless froth.

Above all, we should stress that even the small band of enthusiasts saw Confederation as a long-term development. This helped to elide the clashing ambitions of those who saw it as a step towards independence and those who dreamed of closer integration of the British Empire. Time was speeding up by 1864, and it was almost certainly in the sense of impending crisis that we can identify the key role played the American Civil War. Mowat, who had thought Confederation impossible for a decade, backed the scheme. Dorion, who ruled it out for a century, continued to oppose.
And so we return to the central conundrum: did the idea shape the events or vice-versa? ‘If we have dreamed a dream of union,’ said McGee in 1865, ‘. . . it is at least worth remarking that a dream which has been dreamed by such wise and good men, may. . . have been a sort of vision, a vision foreshadowing forthcoming natural events’.78 Canadian Confederation provides a case study of the relationship between ideas and events. McGee said ‘dream’ not ‘scheme’: maybe both elements are needed to create a successful movement for union.

78 Confederation Debates, 126.