Journal of Scottish Thought

Volume 8

If Scotland...
Conjecturing 2014

Editors: Scott Hames and Adrian Hunter

Contents

Introduction:

If Scotland… Conjecturing 2014

Scott Hames and Adrian Hunter

> *What sweeter way to spend a lifetime than drinking to the memory of a glorious future that never happened.*
>
> David Greig, 24 September 2014[1]

This number of the *Journal of Scottish Thought* collects papers presented at the 'If Scotland: Posting 2014' conference held at the University of Stirling a few weeks prior to the referendum on Scottish independence (23–24 August 2014).

The aim of the conference was straightforward enough: to explore how the 'historic' debates of 2014 might be recollected and understood a few decades later. It was, admittedly, an exercise in clairvoyance in what was already a season of conjecture. But our hope was that by thrusting the what-iffery of 2014 into an artificially solid historical frame – imagining ourselves looking back from either a new independent state or a refashioned UK – we might better grasp the uniquely contingent moment we were living through. How would the future historicise us? How would it regard the arguments we had chosen to make and our reasons for making them? Once the apparent fluidity of events and possibilities had re-condensed, would our doubts and hopes seem risible or right-minded?

Recalling how the event was advertised, our aims sound both open-ended and over-thought – a puzzling combination not unlike the debate itself:

*

> *What will be the history of now?*
>
> [published on *Bella Caledonia* blog, 17 August 2014]

After years of looking forward, we grow weary of possible tomorrows. With history about to pick a side – and as both sides try to make history – fevered minds turn to the politics of the past-in-prospect. Meaning:

---

[1] David Greig, 'Back to Work', front-step.co.uk, 24 September 2014, http://www.front-step.co.uk/2014/09/24/back-to-work/, accessed 1 October 2014.

the result on September 19 will profoundly colour the meaning and
memory of everything leading up to it. On the cusp of that verdict, our
current moment seems emptied of its own 'live' significance, awaiting
the roar of impending retrospect. In the words of a James Kelman
story, 'not too long from now tonight will be that last time' – a time we
inhabit but cannot know.

History as a living and made reality is at its most liquid, but in a few
weeks the facts will freeze textbook solid. Explanation will quickly
usurp speculation. And so the indyref imaginary begins to pivot,
worrying forward to dream back. See Martin Kettle's wistful invita-
tion to 'Remember 2014, the last golden summer of the old Britain',
projecting us into a surreal and scrappy post-Yes reality, then puzzling
out the complexity (and ultimate nullity) of post-British wrangling from
a jaded 2024.[2]

Alongside musings of the future-past, consider the empirical mania
of what Andrew Tickell (playing hipster correspondent for *The Drouth*)
fittingly deems 'archival fever', whereby no indyref campaigning expe-
rience 'is adequately authenticated without having been documented',
curated, catalogued.[3]

What of this impulse to collect and record everything? Simply a nod
to what is self-evidently historic about what's unfolding – whatever it
might soon mean – with the occasional dash of I-was-there self-regard?
As with the rash of DIY polls (confirmation-bias bonanza), there is a
powerful thirst to make your own evidence – owing much to a bristling
mistrust of those taking the measurements and writing the first draft of
this history. So capture ALL the facts (and spin) for later scrutiny: some
clear-eyed scholar of the future will be equipped to see and evaluate
everything, finally coming to vindicate our own view here and now.
There is something lively and brittle in the public memory this weather,
beginning to wonder seriously how this – and we – might eventually
come to look.

So go on, take a speculative selfie. Imagine that we're looking back
on the hectic present from a few decades into the future. How do we

---

[2] Martin Kettle, 'Remember 2014, the last golden summer of the old Britain', 31
July 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jul/30/scottish-
independence-2014-last-golden-summer-old-britain, accessed 1 October 2014.

[3] Andrew Tickell, 'In the Hipster's Den: The Playful Politics of Indyref', *The Drouth*
47 (Winter 2013/14): 5-9.

look here in 2014 – prescient? Foolish? Admirably sober? Het up about nothing?

On August 23–24 the *If Scotland: Posting 2014* conference will explore just this premise, asking how the indyref will be remembered, historicised and understood a few decades from now – whatever the result. What will our children find puzzling, appalling, banal about what we're gripped by today? Who and what will future historians be chortling at?

*

As this prompt suggests, a degree of humour and whimsy seemed both appropriate and inevitable, and was positively encouraged by the conference organisers. We were delighted by the creativity and imagination shown by contributors to this issue, several of whom stepped well beyond their scholarly comfort-zones (and whose essays should be read accordingly). In addition to papers and presentations, of which only a selection is captured here, the conference included set-piece debates on post-Yes and post-No futures, featuring a panel comprising journalist David Torrance, novelist Kirstin Innes and constitutional scholar Aileen McHarg. Lesley Riddoch spoke at the 'post-Yes' session, pondering 2014 from a new state two decades old, where New Town avenues have been re-branded to suit the new dispensation (goodbye Charlotte Square, hello Margo's Mercat). On the 'post-No' day, novelist Ken MacLeod looked back on the flukish electoral pathway to 2014, and cherished the 'New Improvement' of an enriched and recharged Union following the decisive rejection of independence. In addition to plenary lectures from Catriona M. M. Macdonald, Michael Keating and Cairns Craig, a series of literary roundtables featured Jenni Calder, Meaghan Delahunt, Kerry Hudson, Hannah McGill, Ewan Morrison, Allan Wilson and Nicola White. Creative responses were especially memorable. In addition to Robert Crawford's deathless performance of himself as a mildly dyspeptic octogenarian – complete with vigorous mis-pronunciations of 'Foucault' – Kirsty Strang mounted a small museum exhibition of artefacts and curios from 2014. A short piece of youth theatre was specially commissioned for the event, and was superbly performed by members of BBC Scotland's 'Generation 2014' (a group of 16–18 year olds casting their first votes that September).

One evident advantage of what-iffery is its power to release thinking from the limits set by the particular political occasion (in this case, Yes v No). It is an advantage fiction has often exercised in Scottish history. As Ian Duncan argues

in his majestic study of literary Edinburgh in the early nineteenth century, *Scott's Shadow*, the novels of Sir Walter Scott *as* novels – 'inauthentic fictional statements' – were able to 'float above partisan alignments and…invoke a national public' in ways that other, documentary registers were not. The premise of *If Scotland…*, though more modest, likewise compelled speakers to fictionalise their arguments by means of address to unknown, future national publics.

Catriona M. M. Macdonald's paper, which opened the conference, explores the challenges presented by the referendum to the practicing historian. As an event without precedent in the British Isles, there is little to be learned from looking back. Instead, Macdonald proposes a form of 'conjectural history' – an exercise not lacking in Enlightenment pedigree – to examine a different set of hypotheses: not what Scotland's future will be, 'but how a future Scotland might impact on the way we write history – our historiography'. How, for example, will future histories of the twentieth century view the Welfare State, in the event of a clear Yes or No? As the symptom of an excessive British state centralisation that was always bound to fail, or as a key element in the post-war social contract that ultimately saved the Union? And what of Thatcherism? The death-blow to the Unionist project, or closer to what, in 2014, a majority of Scots actually believed?

Robert Crawford's playful contribution relishes the freedoms of the future-past, presenting the text of an 'oration' delivered at Stirling in 2044 by a noted but fading poet-scholar. In halting voice, the 85-year-old Professor Crawford can just recall the campus view 'before the demolition of the Wallace Monument' and 'the installation of those five celebrated and imposing equestrian statues of that most notable among modern-day Secretaries of State for Scotland, the blessed Theresa May'. His musings on post-2014 Scotland and its perverse literary fashions are interspersed with poems from his long-forgotten collection *Testament*, including verses rumoured to have been recited by 'Professor Cairns Crag' on the morning of his execution during the Year of Boris. The rest defies summary.

For the Gaelic community, Pàdraig MacAoidh suggests, the referendum was a welcome chance to argue over something other than the language itself, and this is reflected in the distinctive but oblique contribution Gaelic poetry made to the wider debate. When Gaelic poets did write about the vote, he recalls from 2034, 'they tended to evoke an alternative present that wasn't actually happening'. With a characteristic conjoining of the political and the pastoral, writers such as Aonghas MacNeacail, Marcas Mac an Tuairneir, and

Liam Crouse placed 'state of the nation' questions against the state of the planet, with climate change, environmental degradation, and global economic influences in the forefront of their work. Not that language politics entirely vanished from view. As MacAoidh explains, the absence from Gaelic of the symbol 'X' meant that Gaelic speakers were effectively unable to vote in their own language – an irony not lost on the poet Daibhidh Eyre and the grassroots 'S Dòcha / Dòchas ['Maybe / Hope'] movement.

Cairns Craig's paper, which closed the conference, looks back from 2034 on a period of dramatic political and technological change following the 'great collapse' of 2022. As Scotland prepares for a second referendum on independence after the dead heat of 2014, Craig traces the key influence of the 'fantasy physics' of Kelvin and Clerk Maxwell in scientific and philosophical innovations of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. (The latter includes the abolition of physical ageing.) From the distance of twenty years, competing theories of energy serve as a guide to the 2014 debate, the No and Yes campaigns being characterised by 'the difference between a physics of the dissipation of energy and a physics of its re-accumulation'. By 2034, Scotland stands revealed as the Maxwellian 'demon' in the capitalist world system bequeathed and justified by its Enlightenment, 'the pathfinder for a new kind of nationalism that has reshaped the world's political geography and liberated its peoples from the clutches of a global system that was driving us to economic and ecological ruin'.

The imaginative premise of the conference – that we are looking back on the indyref from the distance of several decades – is maintained in this opening trio of papers by Crawford, MacAoidh and Craig. (Recall that these essays were written prior to the vote and without knowledge of its outcome.) The final quartet of essays from Thomson, Wirth, Gibson and Introna are located within our own historical horizons, and examine the referendum in the light of confirmed experience, often employing a comparative or negative lens to question its immanent mythologies (and their analogues in cultural history).

In a searching essay in literary historiography, Alex Thomson queries the pro-independence consensus in a contemporary Scottish culture 'alleged to be newly at ease with itself'. Unravelling this trope, Thomson questions the narrative of continuity linking the referendum moment with earlier phases of recuperated 'cultural confidence' in the 1980s and 1930s. For Thomson, 'the redefinition of the art of the Renaissance not just as an episode in the prehistory of the contemporary, but as its very origin, risks cancelling out

its critical distance from society'. In seeking to restore this critical distance – partly through close counter-readings of a wide range of key twentieth-century novels – a very different trajectory of Scottish literary and critical history since 1918 begins to emerge, one guided by Thomson's insistence that 'the aesthetic critique of modernity depends on the differentiation between art and culture – between the normative standards and conventions of society and works which challenge and repudiate them'.

'One notable feature' of the indyref, according to Thomson, 'was the concern of both campaigns not to appeal to history'. Robert Wirth's essay pursues this theme in depth, tracing the story of a very present absence. He notes that 'both official campaigns applied a utopian and future-oriented rhetoric, while accusing each other of instrumentalising sentimental attachments to the past'. Though grappling on markedly conservative terrain – which constitutional option will best secure what remains of the welfare state – both sides showed a strong aversion to openly 'restorative' nostalgia, and largely eschewed the 'antimodern myth-making' typical of nationality politics. Logically and emotionally beholden to the goodness of the past, but hyper-sensitive to charges of atavism, both campaigns 'hoped to profit from voters' historical awareness without overtly appealing to it, or being seen to manipulate it'.

Corey Gibson looks half a century backward to probe the appeal and limits of artistic commitment in 2014. For Gibson, the pro-independence National Collective project 'inhabits a clear tension between the cultural activism of a self-appointed vanguard' and the Gramscian 'national-popular'. In this regard it reproduces several unresolved and unresolvable facets of the 1964 'folksong flyting' between Hugh MacDiarmid and Hamish Henderson. In proposing a 'National Flyting Festival' to replace the party conference season, National Collective aim for a crowd-sourced, dogma-busting forum for popular engagement, but seem to misread key aspects of the Scottish tradition it seeks to re-fashion. The resulting tangle speaks to a direct contradiction between quasi-Nordic democratic models and the mannered rhetorical extravagance of flyting. The impossibility of combining 'measured and dispassionate debate' with 'an exultant kind of vituperative theatre' illuminates wider tensions within the cultural campaign.

The question of who 'we' are dominates Arianna Introna's incisive study of the so-called Missing Scotland – a phrase coined by Gerry Hassan to denote a segment of population (for the most part young, poor, and living in social housing) who are disconnected from politics. Introna probes the contradictions

in the progressive Yes movement's co-option of this constituency, which it treated both as a symbol of its supposed inclusiveness and compassion, and as the embodiment of a fabled 'miserablism' from which a future independent Scotland would and should be delivered.

But we begin as we began with the opening plenary address from Catriona M. M. Macdonald, located firmly in the slippery and undecided temporality of our theme, a Scottish historian pondering 'what if?' some 26 days before the vote.

Dr Scott Hames
Dr Adrian Hunter
University of Stirling, February 2016

'The fierce urgency of now': conjecture and the limits of Scottish history

Catriona M. M. Macdonald

A month ago, I took a break from work in the archives and wandered for a while around Limerick. On the Sarsfield bridge over the Shannon River there is a statue commemorating the dead of 1916. Ireland is movingly depicted as a maid, released from her bondage by the heroes of the civil war. Had you visited the site during 1916, however, you would have noticed that the same spot then supported a statue to John Viscount FitzGibbon who had been killed at Balaclava in 1854. John FitzGibbon's grandfather had been 'Black Jack' FitzGibbon, the Lord Chancellor at the time of the 1798 rebellion.[1] Indeed, the statue to the young FitzGibbon was originally intended to adorn a site in the town's crescent, but political and religious sensitivities at the end of the nineteenth century meant that particular spot was given over to a statue of the Liberator, Daniel O'Connell, so FitzGibbon began his short residence on the bridge before the statue was ultimately blown up by the IRA in June 1930.

Needless to say, this got me thinking, 'if'.

If FitzGibbon had not been killed, or if his grandfather had not been who *he* was, would John's life have been worthy of commemoration? *If* Ireland had remained part of the United Kingdom, would Limerick's Tom Clarke and others have merited more than a footnote in the annals of their country, and would the hero of Balaclava still be reflected in the waters of the Shannon? *If* Irish independence had been secured without the bloodshed, would a more tolerant attitude to the past have allowed FitzGibbon to maintain his occupation of the bridge site, no matter his role in the British empire, or his grandfather's opposition to Catholic relief?

'If': a word that invariably invokes the future is clearly very much in thrall to the past.

We'll come back to Ireland later, but for the moment, perhaps it's not surprising that as a historian, it's the temporal aspect of the 'if' question that has both challenged and bemused me as I prepared for today. The habits of a

---

[1] Ann Kavanaugh, 'FitzGibbon, John, first earl of Clare (1748–1802)', ODNB (Oxford, 2004).

lifetime, however, meant that – instead of reaching for a crystal ball – my first recourse was to seek direction in the works of others, and so I turned to the first professor of Scottish history, Peter Hume Brown (1849–1918), whose approach to politics in a period of crisis gave me cause for confidence. Hume Brown's good friend, Viscount Haldane, a former secretary of state for war, noted in 1919 how,

> In public affairs [Brown] took a deep if detached interest. About the outcome of the Great War he never had the slightest doubt. 'We historians', he used to say to me, 'can judge consequences better than politicians who look at events from too near'.[2]

Before you start planning a trip to the local Ladbrokes after this paper, however, I would suggest that in the current context Brown was wrong. The old patrician order has passed, and with only weeks to go before the referendum, we are *all* encouraged to get 'too near'.

Somewhat discouraged, I sought direction instead in the work of a more recent popular historian, with the hope that therein lay the insights of someone with a finger on the public pulse. The results were less inspiring than Haldane's assessment, though perhaps more entertaining. If only to prove that there's 'nothing new under the sun', I discovered that the late Nigel Tranter (1909–2000) had addressed the 'ifs' in Scottish history long before us. So, we have the following: *if* Alexander, Duke of Albany had not been killed by a splintered lance at a French tournament in 1485, Tranter claimed we would have had no James IV, no Flodden, no James V, no Mary Queen of Scots, no James VI, no Union of the Crowns and hence, no parliamentary Union. So, yet another depressing story of poor foreign workmanship letting down the Scottish public.

Let's try another. Tranter's gaze moves forward into the sixteenth century, and this time, it's a plumbing job that holds the fate of the nation in the balance. Tranter claimed that if the mother of James Stewart, second Earl of Moray, hadn't installed a new fangled drainage scheme at Donibristle Castle which fed the fire in 1592 that was ignited by Huntly's troops, her son could have sat out the siege in safety and thus, presumably, Scottish folk artists would have had to find another track to fill the spaces currently occupied by countless versions of the ballad named after the 'Bonnie Earl'. Tranter was

---

[2] Viscount Haldane, 'Preface', in P. Hume Brown, *Surveys of Scottish History* (Glasgow, 1919), ix.

also not averse to loading these conjectures with political weight. Had Charles Edward won the '45, but failed to hold England, Tranter paints the picture of a very different Scotland:

> A resident monarchy in Scotland, with all that implies, no Union parliament at Westminster, so no need for self-government agitation, Scotland a potent force in Europe almost certainly... There would have been no Highland Clearances, for the clan chiefs would not have lost their lands, and so the North would have probably remained more populous, no legacy of Victoria and of absentee lairdship. A Scottish parliament, typically would be quite the most squabblesome in existence, with the monarch presiding in person, as required. And there would be no Scottish National Party![3]

Clearly, there is great scope in this approach for imagining a Scotland that might have been – one that perhaps suits one's own preferences more than the reality of 'now'. Tranter was a life-long devolutionist and a Liberal whose sympathies for an alliance with the SNP were repeatedly thwarted. That might just explain the last line. But where would this approach get us?

The focus of this conference rests on a very particular 'what if': what if a majority of Scots vote 'yes' or 'no' to independence in September. It's a very different conundrum: we are not blessed with hindsight to distinguish between the most likely outcomes, to rank the possibilities, or trace the future with the confidence of having lived through it. We cannot necessarily say what is likely or what is mere fancy. Before going any further, then, it pays to be a little pedantic and to elicit just what history can legitimately bring to the debate.

Like the most desperate undergraduate, I start by probing definitions. What do 'yes' and 'no' actually mean? It's not as silly as it might at first sound, because the question in this instance is pregnant with contextual and environmental challenges. What if the global political environment makes defence more important in the debate than it has been to date? What if George Osborne miraculously finds that the money he stored under the bed since the banking crisis might be best spent in Scotland? What if it rains on 18 September? Certainly, the vote will be recorded in the bland format of a digital spreadsheet, presenting turnout and the proportionate share of the vote for each response and the number of spoilt papers. I can just see the revolving pie charts and

---

[3] Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Acc 13160/12.

multi-hued bar graphs on the BBC evolving as the night of 18 September becomes the morning of the 19th. But the statistical result does not answer the question of *meaning,* nor does it necessarily suggest the most likely conse-quences arising from a particular outcome at either a regional or national level. What will matter is how the result will be interpreted – not what yes and no mean for the individual voter, but how the meaning of the aggregated statistics will be judged, and thence how that might or might not inform policy going forward.

Let's make an imaginative leap. If an almost unanimous vote for independence is taken to mean a vote for a very different Scotland, ought we really to expect a brave new Nordic Scotia,[4] or might it be more likely that the inevitable compromise will be made between parties established in the pre-independence years, resulting in a less radical alternative? If a convincing yes vote is recorded, will the interpretation of politicians and the public coincide? Will Cameron and Salmond's interpretations of the Edinburgh Agreement in the end prove compatible? Will a convincing majority be taken as evidence of a uniformity of will on policy issues about which voters perhaps scarcely thought when they entered the polling booth? After all, we know that voters are recording a spectrum of motives when they are asked to tick just one box, and a yes vote is hardly a clear affirmation of the white paper, far less anything else. Similarly, will a no vote be taken simply as the endorsement of the Union, or acclaim for the status quo, or support for a devolutionary process that already promises to add new powers to the parliament? Alternatively, one can envisage how – if rather awkwardly – a 'no' vote might be spinned as reflecting a desire for 'devo max', thus touching on the question that *wasn't* asked back in September 2014. In sum, it's hardly news to point out that what you want when you tick 'yes' or 'no' might not be what you get.

Equally, as a historian, one can envisage events in the future being blamed – legitimately or otherwise – on a 'yes' or 'no' vote, even though (in truth) the vote has limited predictive capacity at this remove when it comes to events that happen *after* 18 September. So, one can imagine a scenario in which, in the case of a yes vote, Ed Miliband's failure to secure victory at the next UK general election in 2015 may be blamed less on years of rather lacklustre leadership than on the 'betrayal' of Scottish Labour stalwarts the year before. And in the event of a 'no' vote, one can imagine that in the year 2065, following fifty years of unbroken rule by UKIP, some English Tories might just blame the

---

4   See Lesley Riddoch, *Blossom: what Scotland needs to flourish* (Edinburgh, 2013).

Scots for not teaching Farage a lesson in September 2014 and thus failing to secure for them the traditional bolt hole in the north from high London house prices, the commercialisation of public services, and the expense of care for the elderly. Jersey will be able to sustain only so many well-heeled refugees. In much the same way, we can identify some things that will happen in the future *regardless* of a yes or no vote that will be influential factors in what will unfold for Scots. North Sea oil, for example, is a finite resource, and its exploitation will continue to shape our future, no matter who gets the tax revenue.

So, having offered these caveats, what *can* history contribute, if anything at all, to the question of 'if'?

Two options are usually available to the historian when asked about the likelihood of a certain outcome: we are permitted to call on precedent, or – with less certainty – we can offer a hypothesis based on what has gone before. In this instance, we can discount the first quite quickly, there simply is no convincing precedent for what happens after September either in the history of the British Isles or elsewhere. If for no other reason, the time gap between now and the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922 makes that comparator problematic; the creation of the new eastern European states following a period of bloodshed and ethnic tension at the end of the twentieth century was so strongly influenced by World War and Cold War consequences as to make comparison there quite ridiculous; and we do our Commonwealth partners (and potential partners) a disservice by comparing the liberation of former colonies from British rule to internal power brokerage within the former imperial state. For me at least, what we are left with is speculation, deduction, inference, conjecture. For those of you who like your history served neat – single malt empiricism – be prepared to be disappointed.

Conjecture is the hidden thread in most historical scholarship. Having gutted one archive, we speculate on where to go next; having identified competing perspectives on the past, we deduce which is most convincing; having read one half of a correspondence we often infer the rest; and it's conjecture that allows us to build up chains of cause and effect which are essential to historical narrative. By necessity, historians in sketching what *has* happened must also consider why other alternatives didn't. So, asking why the SNP won a majority at Holyrood in 2011 inevitably means answering why Labour failed to do so. We might not always think in these terms, but historians always hold in their heads a past that didn't happen and the prospect of alternative futures. Edinburgh without trams; a Scotland with the best health record in Europe: some versions of 'now' are easier to imagine than others.

Now, this is hardly rocket science, and nor is it news. The Scottish enlightenment scholar Dugald Stewart (1753–1828) identified conjectural history as a method of legitimate social scientific analysis in his attempts to explain important political and sociological phenomena.[5] Indeed, by this means Stewart distinguished between 'instinctive' and 'rational' patriotisms which map relatively easily on to the dichotomy of 'ethnic' and 'civic' nationalisms of which we have heard much of late. Interestingly, Stewart considered acquiring a good knowledge of history as being essential for the cultivation of the latter, but let's leave that to one side for the moment. In similar fashion, John Galt (1779-1839) – the Greenock-born novelist – claimed that his novels were likewise forms of conjectural history: stories that were to all intents and purposes as legitimate expressions of the history of his times as any chronicle. Yet, here we hit on two dilemmas. When does conjecture become fancy? If we have to open history's door to the imagination to deliver these necessary deductive leaps and create a narrative, how do we defend against claims of invention and, perhaps worse, impartiality? Secondly, how do such models take account of the unexpected? The philosophical and fictional worlds of Stewart and Galt presumed a stability that historians cannot afford to take for granted: Stewart's Scots existed in the abstract, while Galt's could be controlled by the pen of their creator.

The significance of this in the context of the current debate is easily illustrated by the fate of the 1913 Home Rule Scotland Bill: no amount of conjecture could have anticipated the global conflict on which that legislation ran aground a year later. Similarly, we might point to other events that impacted upon the governance of Scotland in an earlier age: the death of the Maid of Norway in 1290, for example, or the death of Francis II (the first husband of Mary Queen of Scots) in 1560. The basic fact I'm trying to make here is that you cannot use deductive reasoning on something that is yet to happen without denying the power of the unexpected and thus without compromising the limits of history itself. My conclusion, as the first speaker at this conference, therefore, is a bleak one: history can offer very little in answer to 'if' *and still claim to be history.*

The only route forward is, then, to stand the premise of this weekend's conference on its head and ask not what history suggests a future Scotland might be like, but how a future Scotland might impact on the way we write history – our historiography. Will a certain vote next month make us justified

---

[5] Catriona M.M. Macdonald, 'History and the Heritage Aesthetic', in *NationLive* (Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 2013), 11–16.

Catriona M. M. Macdonald

in seeing our past in one way more than another? It's at this point that we return to Ireland.

This is not the place to get in to the debate about revisionism in Irish history: I boast neither the knowledge nor the diplomatic skills requisite for that task, save to lay out some of its characteristics that may give us clues to what could/might/should happen to our past in the future.[6] With the Irish model in mind, then, what implications might a 'yes' vote in September have for our history?

In Ireland, the national project after 1922 involved the state-sponsored endorsement of a certain vision of an authentic Ireland which sought to reaffirm wholeness and distinctiveness. This was to be met in 1938 by the foundation of the journal *Irish Historical Studies* by T. W. Moody and R. D. Edwards in an attempt to energise historical studies as a more scientific enterprise, with an emphasis on primary source scholarship and robust methodologies very much in line with contemporary British models. As it turned out, however, many have suggested that what was *actually* effected by such endeavours was the institutionalisation of conservative historical tendencies in Ireland that held at one remove more radical approaches evident elsewhere in Europe. What happened was the silencing of alternative voices in Ireland's past that did not fit the revisionist project which itself shared British scholarship's obsession with constitutional – one might say 'elite' – histories. Not surprisingly, then, the next generation of historians would turn the spotlight on the very institutions such conservatism appeared to sustain, in particular the Catholic Church and the Irish state itself (which, encouraged by the Moody/Edwards generation, had sponsored a multi-volume New History of Ireland intended to offer a synthesis of the best work in the discipline).

So, what of it? It's quite simple: if the end of the pantomime of the British state changes, we have to review the plot and the characters. If there is to be no happily *together* ever after, Scotia will have to be seen to be sufficiently 'gallus' to go it alone without the prince, without the wedding, and without the catchy panto sing-a-long. If independence is to be the end of our nation's story for my generation of historians, a 'yes' vote will make more likely histories that will usurp or at least reset many conventional turning points, some chains of cause and consequence, and a periodisation that has been established in the Union years.

---

[6] For insightful comment on Irish revisionism, see C. Brady (ed.), *Interpreting Irish History: the debate on historical revisionism* (Dublin, 2006).

The Scottish History Society was established in 1886 – a year after the Scottish Office – and for some time had at its head the Liberal, Lord Rosebery – one of the earliest architects of administrative devolution within the Union state. Similarly, the *Scottish Historical Review* emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century – the high point of Empire – and at much the same time as the first chair in Scottish history was founded at Edinburgh University. It's hardly surprising, then, that these historical institutions (given that they rely on the support of individuals in state-funded higher education) still bear the marks of their origins in a confident unionist Scotland. Equally, it's hardly controversial to suggest that in an independent Scotland the profession may wish to revise some of its conventions.

The new histories that may emerge, however, will not necessarily be more 'true' than those that have gone before – that, in a sense, was the illusion of Moody and Edwards – but they will be different, and they will not all point in the same direction – that has been the lesson in Ireland since the 1960s. In what ways different remains to be seen, but there is scope to infer where the pressure points may be.

A 'yes' vote *might* make it more likely that our historic relationship with England will be seen in terms of oppression – the deliberate curtailing of a legitimate and distinctive voice. Alternatively, we might simply try harder to identify evidence of how that voice was maintained over the years, and see our history in more empowering (but no less distorting) terms. A 'yes' vote may, in part, neutralise research which has brought to the fore the contested ethnic roots of Scotland. Alternatively, it might empower such scholars who might come to see in our past the origins of a multi-ethnic present. A 'yes' vote may also encourage more historians to view the period between 1707 and 2014 as an unfortunate aberration, resting on the dynastic accident of 1603. This would be a position that would, perhaps, become more likely if Scotland ultimately becomes a republic, but less likely if we remain beguiled by the House of Windsor.

More perverse consequences are also possible: will we no longer see the welfare state as the twentieth century's greatest achievement, but as yet another example of UK state centralisation – an attack on native traditions? Will nationalisation after 1945 be seen as a curb on Scottish entrepreneurship rather than as an attempt to save heavy industry? I could go on.

Finally, we might start to re-people our narratives with alternative heroes. Liberal values and public health reforms have already destroyed a lineage of imperial 'Boys Own' figures who once appeared on cigarette cards; but

independence may entice us to write new biographies more in keeping with a story that ends in 'yes'. We might also think about changing our statues too.

Some statues are perhaps already at the top of the demolition list: the statue to the Duke of Sutherland atop Ben Bhraggie near Golspie, for example. But others are not so easy to distinguish. Do we keep the Scott monument to celebrate our literary heritage; do we take down this confection that celebrates a Unionist wordsmith; or do we simply undertake a little cosmetic surgery to make the wizard of Abbotsford look more like Hugh MacDiarmid? Alternatively, should a Conservative resurgence result in a Tory majority in an independent Scottish parliament, will we at last commission a statue to Scottish Tory Prime Minister Arthur Balfour (1848–1930), who currently boasts no likeness in his native Scotland, although he *is* remembered in Whitehall. Maybe Donald Dewar – architect of what will then be seen as the discredited devolution debacle – could make way for him on Buchanan Street?

Clearly, a yes vote might influence our history in both radicalising and conservative ways, some of them more unsettling than others. But, what of a 'no' vote?

Will James VI be seen as a man ahead of his time – a man with special insights of the future in much the same way as the witches that were executed during his reign? Will Victorian perspectives that emphasised the disinterested statesmanship of the Scottish commissioners in 1707 become once more *de rigeur*? Will a 'no' vote make historians more likely to view the SNP once more in the guise of Wendy Wood than John Swinney? Will we come to see 2014 as the year that the SNP members over-reached themselves and reverted to type: dwellers in a Celtic twilight where few could be enticed to join them? Will the Thatcher years be recast as an unfortunate 'blip' in the otherwise smooth working of the Union, reaffirmed by the majority of 2014? Will we be more inclined to credit the Scottish Conservatives with being more in touch with the public than we have to date, and perhaps reluctantly (if more honestly) identify *other* aspects of this apparent popular connection in policy areas such as immigration controls and public spending cuts? Or will the result simply reaffirm the 'Scottish crisis of confidence' touted by our middle classes, and take its place after the Darien Disaster, Culloden and the 1978 world cup as evidence of the nation's historic vanquished status and its current under-performance? And what, then, of our statues?

Despite his rather uninspiring physique, the case for a statue to Balfour would still remain – he, like many others, was a Scot whose fame in a British

context leaves his claim to commemoration unaffected by the vote. We tend to admire successful London Scots even if we don't like them. But should we rob Dewar of his towering presence over Glasgow's Buchanan Street? Certainly, Dewar might be lauded in the future as the man who saved the Union by offering sufficient concessions when it mattered. Alternatively, he might also be charged with having given away too much, thus preparing the way for the folly of 2014, although even at that, I doubt his pedestal will ever support a statue to Alastair Darling or Ruth Davidson.

From this distance, a 'no' vote does not promise to have the same transformative effect on our historiography as a 'yes' vote. The Scottish princess will remain in her marriage of convenience, and – while we might forget this year's panto song, as we usually do after leaving the theatre – we will still have the national anthem to remind us that very little has changed.

Conclusion

I said in my introduction that it has been the temporal aspect of the 'if' question that has exercised me in recent weeks: past/future, now/ then. With the vote only 26 days away, however, I'm struck by how indulgent this may seem. As many of you will have guessed, I took my title for this paper from Martin Luther King's Lincoln Memorial speech in 1963,(and that may seem indulgent too). In it he noted:

> We have ...come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy...It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment... Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning.[7]

The speech, of course, is more famous for the lines, each starting, 'I have a dream'. In contrast to my title, *those* lines are aspirational and as such they are timeless, and perhaps that's why they are better remembered. But the

---

[7] Atlanta, GA (USA), The King Center, 'I have a dream', a speech by Dr Martin Luther King Jr. at the historic 'March on Washington', Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963, 1–2, http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/i-have-dream-1, accessed 29 March 2015.

contemporary emphasis, the 'now', the urgency of the lines I have just read is more relevant here.

Over the last year, when asked how I intended to vote, my most honest answer, although the one I never gave, was that I wished there was a third box that said 'not yet'. (I wouldn't read too much into that: it points in many ways!) Instead, I said – just as truthfully – that I didn't know. But now the urgency of the question and the urgency of the times coincide and offer us all a powerful and potent prospect that can no longer be postponed. At this distance, time – the temporal – remains important, but it's the now and *only* the now that matters, making this conference more than simply timely.

The Impossible Panopticon

Robert Crawford

EDITORIAL NOTE

The under-editor and under-editor's assistant wish to apologise for the delay in the publication of Professor Crawford's scrappy and pathetically self-promoting paper, and for its severely redacted nature. We would like to make it clear that Professor Crawford is to blame throughout for these unusual features of the essay. Even to call it an 'essay' is misleading: what follows is merely a bowdlerized version of his so-called lecture at the University of Stirling, which was, in truth, by and large a reading of poems from his new book, Testament. *Professor Crawford has refused permission for several of these poems to be reprinted here without excessive copyright permissions fees being paid to him and his publisher by Aberdeen University Press. 'If people want to read the poems, let them buy the book, which is published by Jonathan Cape', he has said (through his lawyers, Barrage, Ming and McCutcheon plc). Responding through their own lawyers (Oil, Alford and O'Doric), Aberdeen University Press has stated simply, 'We will not pay one penny for this mendacious trash.'*

Throughout his dealings with both the editorial team and the Press, Professor Crawford has been sly, curmudgeonly, and scrupulously offensive. We note his hypocritical refusal to pay any permissions fees for the inclusion of further copyrighted illustrative material from the oeuvres of several photographers; after extensive scrutiny our own legal team has deemed much of this work 'sensitive and semi-pornographic'. We would not have published such pictures anyhow. Furthermore, though Professor Crawford has assured us that some of the characters mentioned in his piece 'bear hardly any relation at all' to real people, we wonder about this, and are seeking further advice with a view to impending prosecutions.

As a result of a prolonged series of legal meetings (laughably called 'a process of dispute resolution') which have taken up much editorial time, not to mention the time of several officers of the Press, their PAs and dog-handlers, Professor Crawford (who is, by the way, a wilfully slipshod proof-reader, and has made not the slightest attempt to follow the Aberdeen University Press style-sheet) has reluctantly agreed to make available in lieu of the full texts of several poems from Testament *a long — and, in our opinion, thoroughly shoddy — ramble. This so called 'Shakespikedian Mashup' first appeared as*

part of the Oxford University Press (New York) blog just before the Scottish Independence Referendum. The entire editorial team at the present journal regard this piece as an absurd attempt to hijack the American wing of a British university press for blatantly political propaganda. Professor Crawford (through Barrage, Ming and McCutcheon plc) has said it was simply an attempt to 'seize the means of production.' We print this piece (under some duress, but with obsequiously grateful acknowledgement to Oxford University Press) as an appendix. Libraries and individual subscribers may wish to protect themselves from any further potential legal action by burning this issue of the Journal of Scottish Thought.

Text of oration delivered at the University of Stirling, c. 2044

Thank you for your introduction. It always saddens me to come to Stirling. I feel particularly miserable today on the campus, because I remember clearly what the view was like before the demolition of the Wallace Monument; before the Ochil Hills were quarried out and filled with silos for post-Trident nuclear deterrents; and before the post-Referendum erasure of Kathleen Jamie's poem from the rotunda at Bannockburn. Though my memory is beginning to fail (especially with names), and, though, particularly when listening to academic papers, I experience episodes of intense confusion, nonetheless I still recall this campus as it was before the erection of the Lord McConnell Library, let alone before the installation of those five celebrated and imposing equestrian statues of that most notable among modern-day Secretaries of State for Scotland, the blessed Theresa May.

I'm sad, too, because I've been asked to offer some memories of what is for me, in retrospect, a particularly unhappy summer: a long ago summer which began in melancholy with my own failure to qualify for the Scottish weightlifting team for the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Not long after I had received that unexpected and distressing news, I was invited by my friend Professor (now Baron) Pittock to attend the First World Conglomeration of Scottish Cultures at my *alma mater*, the Universitas Glasguensis. When I agreed to go there to give a reading from what was then my new collection of poems, *Testament*, I was unaware that Baron Pittock had also invited Jean McGillivray to read.

Today, of course, MacGillivray needs no introduction. In the west, at least, that period which I am recalling is often called the Age of McGillivray. One has only to quote from the start of her novel, *The Impossible Panopticon*, those opening syllables – '6, 15, 87, 243, 17' – for people to smile with warm approval. Before McGillivray, no novel had started with a 70-page chapter comprised entirely of numbers. Nowadays we are familiar with the critical

writings of Lord Hames who has demonstrated so eloquently how those opening numbers fuse the world of the working-class bingo caller with the elite white-collar digital environments of coders and gamers; now, we are used to reading remotely, happy, in the wake of the late Franco Moretti, to have our computers digest texts for us, rather than wasting our own valuable time in unmediated reading. But then, back in 2014, I was hardly alone in being bemused by that most famous of passages, beginning '6, 15, 87, 243, 17', and, though I am ashamed to confess it now (and indeed my opinion led to a period of internment), I thought that McGillivray was something of a charlatan.

I came to Glasgow and read first of all my poem, 'Daveheart'. Perhaps you might indulge me in listening to it, for it made almost no impression at the time, and my collection, *Testament*, sold so very badly that I still have copies of the first edition (published as what we called, in the old days, 'a book') here to offer you today at the 2014 cover price of £10 in the currency that was known as 'Sterling'.

DAVEHEART

> St George o' Osborne tae his richt
> And SamCam by his side,
> Daveheart has ridden thro' the nicht
> Tae flatter Scotland's pride.
>
> He sings the joys o' Union lang
> And loud through shitty weather.
> His een are bricht. His voice is strang,
> 'We're better aff thegither!'

(The rest of this poem appears on pages 17–18 of *Testament* (Cape, 2014))

Well, though it may surprise you to hear it, some people were mildly amused by this in that long-vanished summer of 2014, and I am even told that a few years later, to cheer himself up in his cell on the morning of his execution during the Year of Boris, this very poem was recited by Professor Cairns Crag. Anyhow, any pleasure I got from a few titters in the Glaswegian audience at the Conglomeration was very short-lived; because I soon became aware that what everyone was talking about was not *Testament* but McGillivray's *The Impossible Panopticon*.

Though it was not published until 2016, chapters of *The Impossible Panopticon* were circulating throughout those summer months. I had met its author for the first time when she heckled me at a reading in the Caddies' Hut on the Old Course at St Andrews. That Hut was one of the larger venues visited by the Bus Party, a pro-independence group organized by Neal Ascherson-Ascherson, Will Storrar-Storrar, and James Justice Robertson, remembered today as the first three intellectual martyrs lobotomized in the Year of Ukipation that marked Britain's Great Withdrawal from the European Union. Anyhow, I had just begun to read in the Caddies' Hut when Jean McGillivray stood up to berate me and to invoke that French historian and cultural theorist whose name, with disconcerting results, she insisted on pronouncing repeatedly as 'Fucko'. Had I not read Fucko's 'What is an Author?' Had I not read Fucko's *Discipline and Punish* or his *Archaeology of Knowledge?* As I tried to read some of the biblical paraphrases which conclude *Testament*, all I could hear was a repeated chanting of 'Fucko! Fucko! Fucko!'

Attempting to conceal my indignation when this happened not only in St Andrews but also at other events organized by the National Collective (an enthusiastic group of minstrels I recall as inspired by Milton's *Areopagitica*) and even at the Bannockburn celebrations where I read my poems to mollify long queues for tickets and toilets, I persisted in reading over the loud cries of 'Fucko! Fucko! Fucko!' as many poems as I could possibly cram in.

Perhaps it is simply because they persist in using words rather than numbers and code that these poems seem today so passé. Now that it is recognized as the classic novel of the Scottish Independence Referendum, we can understand that *The Impossible Panopticon* draws on McGillivray's background in computer science: she had written her doctoral thesis on data visualization in the modelling of biological warfare. *The Impossible Panopticon* relies too on her readiness to hybridize Foucauldian ideas of surveillance with Glasgow University Rector Edward Snowden's mass release of NSA and GCHQ data. For while I was earnestly colloguing with Baron Pittock's colleagues at the vast Conglomeration, Jean McGillivray had absented herself from the academic proceedings in order to spend time, and indeed to make intellectual hay, with Rector Snowden, who was then visiting the university in his official capacity, though without the cognizance of the British or American authorities.

Rector Snowden, with whom I enjoyed a delicious private dinner in Professors' Square, was an unusual man, not least in his generosity. For unlike Julian Assange, to whom he is sometimes compared (and who is said to have attempted to nibble the ear of Andrea O'Pagan, his semi-crypto-biographer),

Rector Snowden showed towards Jean McGillivray only the most remarkable intellectual generosity. In fact, he became with her almost the co-author of some of her novel's most startling passages. His making available of the unredacted speeches of the then Lord Robertson (now His Cryogenic Majesty Emperor Robertson) as eavesdropped upon by the NSA allowed McGillivray to incorporate into *The Impossible Panopticon* some of its most rhetorically outré and politically admired passages. Was it not Boris de Balliol himself, shortly after he became Prime Minister of the ReUnited Kingdom, who quoted extensively from those sections of McGillivray's *magnum opus*? I remember reading those passages with some distaste, though it is now unwise to question their sentiments.

But where was I? Ah, yes, while I tucked into some of Glasgow's finest vegetarian haggis with Rector Snowden, little did I realise that Jean McGillivray was herself not only recording Snowden's *bon mots* and his encryption advice, but she was also cloning his phone. Surely it is the material gained from that rather questionable process that gives *The Impossible Panopticon* some of its peculiar *frisson*. Where Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* incorporates, famously, an index of plagiarisms, McGillivray's novel became the first to incorporate an email address book, long lists of favourite telephone numbers, and the entire contents of the computers at GCHQ. For some – and particularly for aficionados of remote reading – this has made it hard to put down; and for others, not least human readers, it has made *The Impossible Panopticon* hard to lift up, let alone to finish. No work before McGillivray's had been read by so many of the world's computers. It is, unlike my own *Testament*, a milestone in the digital humanities, in the history of espionage, and in the global literary canon. Even Baron Pittock has discerned in it the template of our digital era, though I part company with him when he also regards it as ironically tinged with Jacobite iconography.

Lady Penelope Fielding, that distinguished textual editor of Stevenson and McGillivray, contends that the first-edition of *The Impossible Panopticon* – which sold recently in Shanghai for 14 million Sino-US dollars – was underpriced. In her memoirs, Lady Penelope has used the opposite word of my own *Testament*, which, as I may have mentioned, still retails at ten pounds Sterling. But such questions of value continue to dog literary criticism, even in this present age when most texts are read, written, debugged and rewritten only by botnets. My most cherished literary opinions have been coloured, perhaps, by my meetings not just with Rector Snowden, Sir Drummond Byron, and other bright stars of yesteryear's Glaswegian firmament, but also by my lunches in 2014 with

that notorious quisling, Alasdair Gray. Not for a moment as I ate with him that summer and imbibed some of his mannerisms, not least his taste in lambswool pullovers which is now my own also, did I suspect that Gray was in fact an agent provocateur for the Better Together campaign.

Nowadays, thanks to researchers at this very university, we know that Gray was by no means the figure biographed so misleadingly by the artful Rodger Glass, but was in fact an Old Etonian flâneur whose retrospective Riddrification was surely the most cunning Scottish literary hoax since Ossian. I confess that, like so many others, I too was taken in, and accepted at face value Gray's support for Scottish co-operative independence. It was only later, when he was pardoned by Emperor Boris at the ASLS Show Trials, that I realised that Gray, like McGillivray, and like his own Bohu, had been writing all along a master narrative of British Unionism. In the summer of 2014 I saw none of this; indeed, I bought him a large pistachio-flavoured ice cream which he ate with his characteristic slittery gusto.

Such was my ideological naivety that while McGillivray was already securing the serialization deal of a lifetime with several of Rupert Mugdock's most squeaky-clean e-publishing henchmen, I persisted in reading to whoever would listen my poem from *Testament*, 'The Scottish Constitution'.

THE SCOTTISH CONSTITUTION

It must contain silver sands. It must hold water
In the shape of lochans, hydro dams, and firths.

It must be just, in the sense both of perjink
And even-handed, shaking hands with all.

(The rest of this poem appears on page 27 of *Testament* (Cape, 2014))

Sadly, I still believe in those sentiments, and even in that poem; but I recognize that it will cut little ice here in front of an audience of McGillivrayists. So all I can do is hope that you will understand my present melancholy as I recall, not for the first time, that long, arduous summer of 2014 when, everywhere I went, I seemed to be greeted by loud and none too friendly academically-tinged novelistic chanting of that single, impossibly panoptical word, 'Fucko!'

[This is the end of the talk – make sure to add lots of footnotes. – Under-Ed.]

*   *   *

APPENDICES, GATHERED BY THE UNDER-EDITOR'S ASSISTANT
(These reproduce the two blogs written by Professor Crawford for the blog of
Oxford University Press in New York, and published on the Press's website
in September 2014 in the run-up to the Scottish Independence Referendum.
The first, earnest in tone, is thought to be one of the publications that led to
Professor Crawford's sacking; the second, flippant and derivative, precipitated
the subsequent loss of his pension).

BLOG ON THE SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE DEBATE
I want an independent Scotland that is true to the ideals of egalitarianism
articulated in some of the best poetry of Robert Burns. I want a pluralist,
cosmopolitan Scotland accountable to its own parliament and allied to the
European Union. My vote goes to *Borgen*, not to *Braveheart*. I want change.

Britain belongs to a past that is sometimes magnificent, but is a relic of
empire. Scotland played its sometimes bloody part in that, but should now get
out, and have the courage of its own distinctive convictions. It is ready to face
up to being a small nation, and to get over its nostalgia for being part of some
supposed 'world power'. No better, no worse than many other nations, it is
regaining its self-respect.

Yet the grip of the past is strong. Almost absurdly emblematic of the
complicated state of 2014 Scottish politics is Bannockburn: seven hundred
years ago Bannockburn, near Stirling in central Scotland, was the site of the
greatest medieval Scottish victory against an English army; today Bannockburn
is part of a local government zone controlled by a Labour-Conservative
political alliance eager to defeat any aspirations for Scottish independence. In
the summer of 2014 Bannockburn will be the site of a civilian celebration of
that 1314 Scottish victory, and of a large-scale contemporary British military
rally. The way the Labour and Conservative parties in Scotland are allied,
sometimes uneasily, in the 'Better Together' or 'No' campaign to preserve the
British Union makes Scotland a very different political arena from England
where Labour is the opposition party fighting a Conservative Westminster
government. England has no parliament of its own. As a result, the so-called
'British' Parliament, awash with its Lords, with its cabinet of privately educated
millionaires, and with all its braying of privilege, spends much of its time on
matters that relate to England, not Britain. This is a manifest abuse of power.
The Scottish Parliament at Holyrood looks – and is – very different.

Like many contemporary Scottish writers and artists, I am nourished by traditions, yet I like the idea of change and dislike the *status quo*, especially the political *status quo*. National identity is dynamic, not fixed. Democracy is about vigorous debate, about rocking the boat. Operating in an atmosphere of productive uncertainty is often good for artistic work. Writers enjoy rocking the boat, and can see that as a way of achieving a more egalitarian society. That's why most writers and artists who have spoken out are on the 'Yes' side. If there is a Yes vote in the Scottish independence referendum on 18 September 2014, it will be a clear vote for change. If there is a 'No' vote, it will be because of a strong innate conservatism in Scottish society – a sense of wanting to play it safe and not rock the boat. Whether Scotland's Labour voters remain conservative in their allegiances and vote 'No', or can be swayed to vote 'Yes' because they see the possibility of a more egalitarian future -- is a key question.

SCOTS WHA PLAY: AN ENGLISH SHAKESPIKEDIAN
SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM MASHUP

THE DATE: 18 September 2014, Fateful Day of Scotland's Independence Referendum

THE PLACE: A Sceptred Isle
DRAMATIS PERSONAE:
Alexander the Great, First Minister of Scotland
Daveheart, Prime Minister of the Britons
Assorted Other Ministers, Attendant Lords, Lordlings, Politicos and Camp Followers
Three Witches
A Botnet of Midges
The Internet (A Sprite)
A Helicopter
Dame Scotia
St George of Osborne
Boris de Balliol, Mayor of Londres
UKIP (An Acronym)
Chorus

ACT I: *A Blasted Heath.*

Enter THREE WITCHES –

When shall we three meet again,
In thunder, lightning or in rain?

When the referendum's done,
When the battle's lost and won.

That will be when Salmond's gone.

Where the place?

Hampstead Heath.

Better Together unto death!

Is that your phone?

Daveheart calls: anon! –
Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the plebs and filthy air.

[WITCHES *vanish.*

ACT II: *The Scottish Camp (Voters at Dawn)*

Enter a SMALL FOLKS' CHORUS, Botnet Midges,
Who flap their wings, and then commence this chant:

See here assembled in the Scottish Camp
The Thane of Yes, Lord Naw-Naw, Doctor Spin.
Old folk forget; yet all shall be forgot,
But we'll remember, with advantages,
This Referendum Day. Then shall that name
And date, familiar as our household words –
Alex the Great, the eighteenth of September –

And many, many here who cast their votes,
A true sorority, a band of brothers,
Long be remembered – long as 'Auld Lang Syne' –
For she or he who votes along with me
Shall be my sibling; be they curt or harsh
This day shall gentle their condition:
Scots students down in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed, they were not here,
Casting their votes in this our referendum.

ACT III: *On Arthur's Seat, a Mount Olympus*
Near the Scots' Parliament at Holyrood

Proud Edward Milibrand, Daveheart, Nicholas Clegg,
And Anthony à Blair perch on the crags
With English Exiles. Now Lord Devomax speaks:

Stands England where it did? Alas, poor country,
Almost afraid to know itself, a stateless
Nation, post-imperial, undevolved;
Still sadly lacking its own Parliament,
It commandeers to deal with its affairs
The British Parliament, whose time it wastes
With talk of what pertains to England only,
And so abuses that quaint institution
As if it were its own, not for these islands
Set in a silver sea from Sark to Shetland.

(*Exit, pursued by A. Blair*)

ACT IV: *The Archipelago (High Noon)*

Enter THE INTERNET, A Sprite, who sings:

Full fathom five Westminster lies;
Democracy begins to fade;
Stout, undevolved, John Bull still eyes

Imperial power so long mislaid;
England must suffer a sea-change
Into something small and strange,
MPs hourly clang Big Ben:

DING-DONG!

Come, John Bull, and toll Big Ben.

ACT V: *South London: top floor of the Shard*

Boris de Balliol, St George of Osborne,
Attendant Lords, and Chorus Bankerorum,
Et Nympharum Tamesis et Parliamentorum

Sheet lightnings flash offstage while clashing cymbals
Crescendo in a thunderous night's farrage.

ST GEORGE: Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!
            Ye exit polls and hurricanoes spout!
            Come, Boris, here's the place. Stand still.
                                How fearful
            And dizzy 'tis, to cast one's eyes so low!
            The crows and choughs, that wing the midway air
            Seem gross as bankers' apps: here from this Shard
            See floors of smug short-sellers, dreadful traders
            Inside a giant gherkin, and the City
            Fraternity of *inegalité*
            Spread out around us while its denizens
            Appear like lice.

ATTENDANT LORDS: Scotia and Boris, hail!

BORIS: O Bella, Bella Caledonia,
          Hic Boris Maior, Londinii Imperator,
          Ego –

Fanfare of hautboys, bagpipes, and a tucket.

ST GEORGE: A tucket!

BORIS: Tempus fugit.

CHORUS: Fuckaduckit!
              Pipers, desist! Your music from this height
              Has calmed the storm, and, blithely, while we wait
              For the result to come from Holyrood,
              So charms the ear that, clad in English tartans –
              The Hunting Cholmondesley, the Royal Agincourt,
              And chic crisscrosses of the National Trust –
              Our city here, ravished by this fair sound
              Of tweeted pibroch, YouTubed from the Shard
              To Wapping, Westminster and Heathrow's tarmac,
              While gazing up from bingo and Big Macs,
              Brooding upon our disunited kingdom,
              Stands all agog to hear Dame Scotia speak.

Scotia descends, ex machina helecopteris

HELICOPTER: Bzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz.

SCOTIA: O England, England, your tight cabinet's
              Sly Oxbridge public-schoolboy millionaires
              Fight while your country sinks beneath their yoke;
              It weeps, it bleeds; and each new day a gash
              Is added to those wounds: new Europhiles
              Repulsed, the world repelled; England whose riots
              Failed to stop students' fees for your own folk
              Or to contain their escalating cost.
              Sad, catastrophic, calculating drones
              Miscalculating loans, kicking the arts,
              England betrayed by Scoto-Anglish Blair
              Into wrong wars and then to Gordon Brown,
              Jowled lord of loss and light-touch regulation.
              O England, England! Rise and be a nation

United under your own Parliament!
Methinks I am a prophet now inspired
And thus, inspiring, do foretell of you:
Your Europhobia must not endure,
For violent fires must soon burn out themselves;
Small showers last long, but sudden storms are short.
Learn from the Scots: plant windfarms, make yourself
A Saudi Arabia of tidal power,
Though not of gender; learn, too, from the French,
There is no need to stay a sceptred isle,
Scuffed other Eden, demi-paradise;
No fortress, built by UKIP for themselves,
Against infection in their Brussels wars;
Be happy as a nation on an island
That's not England's alone, a little world,
This precious stone set in a silver sea,
Which serves to link it now with all the globe,
Or as the front door to a happy home,
Be, still, the envy of less happier lands,
And set up soon an English Parliament,
Maybe in London, Britain's other eye,
Maybe in Yorkshire, so you may become
A better friend to Scotland whose folk love
This blessed plot, this earth, and independence.

She zooms northwards

'S Dòcha / Dòchas – Maybe / Hope:
A 2034 look at Gaelic poetry of the '14

Pàdraig MacAoidh

Looking back with the hindsight of 20 years at Gaelic culture in the run up to the 2014 referendum, it is clear this was the period of the most fervent political activity and discussion in the language for (perhaps) hundreds of years. On radio and on television, there was broad-ranging, informed, analytical and heated debate about the pros and cons of the arguments of the Yes campaign and Better Together, to an extent not normally political seen in the Gaelic media, not least because of the difficulties of finding high-level spokespeople for each of the political parties in Scotland (something that was not an issue during the referendum campaign, given the divisions within the Gaelic-speaking community). The maturity and level of debate also came in spite – or perhaps in part because – of the fact that Gaelic itself was not part of the argument: during the referendum campaign both Gaelic and Scots were largely depoliticised, and issues relating to the languages tended to be set aside, as when policy announcements about funding for Gaelic broadcasting during the campaigning period were warmly greeted by both sides, but not claimed exclusively by either. This may be because neither side wanted to appear 'un-Scottish' and so opposed to these markers of identity; equally, however, it was clear that many language activists who favoured the Yes campaign toned down the importance of what might be considered narrow or excessively traditional markers of Scottish identity, for fear of 'scaring the cuddies'.[1] Certainly, there was no single 'Gaelic' voice with regards to the referendum; instead, during the referendum campaign there was clear evidence that Gaelic had not sunk to the status of a meta-language, only capable of discussing – at a political or social level – Gaelic itself, but that it could be used successfully and powerfully to sway, shape and stymie currents of political opinion.

However, if the referendum campaign showed the maturity and reach of the Gaelic media, then it also showed that any Gaelic poetic response to

---

[1] My introduction builds on arguments made as part of the papers and discussions at the 'If Scotland' conference; I owe thanks to those who participated in the discussions, but any errors or infelicities in the argument are my own.

the referendum was tentative even about being ambiguous. There was little Gaelic poetry explicitly directed towards the referendum, and when poets did write about the vote, they tended to evoke 'an alternative present that wasn't actually happening' (to adapt Catriona MacDonald's description of historical speculation as exploring an 'alternative past that never happened'): 'Scotland as nation' was approached obliquely, if approached at all. This could be considered as an outcome of the de-political status of Gaelic mentioned above, or indeed of as a condition of poetry itself: the truths poetry tells are, after all, 'slant', and not a response to yesterday's or today's headlines. However, there was some poetry written about or – perhaps more accurately – in the context of the referendum. In the months running up to September 2014 I contacted various Gaelic poets – some established, some new – to ask if they had published (or even written) any poems addressing the vote and the campaigns. Four poets provided me with poems: all of these poets were male, with a – perhaps significant – ratio of three learners of the language to one native speaker (this is not a large or representative enough sample to draw any reliable overarching conclusions about the state of Gaelic poetry in 2014, but that isn't going to stop me).

Looking back on these poems, what they share is a sense that the referendum campaign – and local and national politics in general – must be set aside larger, global concerns. Gaelic political poetry is often also a pastoral poetry, tied up with the landscape, and the changing fortunes of the landscape (as in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Clearance poetry that focused on the effects of the clearances on the landscape – the presence of sheep in the Highlands, for example – rather than on the political undercurrents and machinations that had led to these changes). This is true of the poetry of the referendum also; in particular, images of the 'state of the nation' are placed in the context of climate change, environmental disaster or global forces outside anyone's control, for poets who were sympathetic to both sides of the referendum campaign.

In Aonghas MacNeacail's 'alba, air adhart' [scotland, forward], for example, Scotland is addressed from 'the edge of space', a viewpoint which highlights the country's precariousness:

> air chlàr mór an t-saoghail
> na d' àrainn bheag shuarach
> de chreag shneachdach paisgt
> ann am fillidhean d' éilidh feòir

is an gluasad mu do chòrsa
mar gun robh thu air bhog
ann an amar braoin beirme

[on the great chart of the world, | in your paltry small domain | of snowy rock wrapped | in the pleats of your grassy kilt | and the motion around your coast | as if you were afloat | in a basin of fermenting foam][2]

The 'kilt' is, as later sections of the poem make clear, an identity that has been imported and woven with other features to form part of the 'tale' of Scotland. Here, it is imbricated into the land of Scotland itself, a land that is not only 'beag shuarach', but awash in a 'braoin beirme' [fermenting foam] that threatens to swamp it. The poet feels that he himself could bring about the end of anything of value in this country:

air d' fhaicinn as iomall fànais
shaoilinn nan laighinn mo bhròg ort
gum prannainn na bha mùirneach
ann a' seanchas do chuislean

[observing you from the edge of space | i feel that should my boot fall on you | i might crush what was beloved | in the narrative of your veins]

'Seanchas' has a historical dimension absent from the English 'narrative'; it can also cover folklore, storytelling or a saga. What is at stake here, in other words, is the continued 'story' of Scotland: the story Scotland tells itself, and through which it creates itself in the process of that telling. But if there is optimism about the possibilities of Scotland in this poem, then it is tentative, based on awareness of the 'aimhreit' ['discord'] that has characterized much of that story. The task of the poet at the end of the poem is to find a resolution for what is irreconcilable, 'réite eadar aon is neoni' [the concord between one and zero]; the poem's final suggestion is that this will come from past experiences of difficulty, the hard won knowledge of 'tuisleadh' ['stumbling'] and 'spàirn' ['struggle']:

---

[2] Thanks are due to Aonghas MacNeacail for permission to publish part of the poem alongside his own translation.

suidh aig do sgrìon ri solus coinnle
rannsachadh réite eadar aon is neoni

an sgleò bhriathran doillearach
eadar an sgoil-callaid agus
callaid na sgoile glainne

tha tuigse agad air tuisleadh
tha tuigse agad air spàirn

[sit at your screen by candlelight | researching the concord between one
and zero | | the cloud of darkened words | between the hedge-school
and | the glass school's hedge || you have a knowledge of stumbling |
you have a knowledge of struggle]

On one hand, MacNeacail's politics appear clear (and MacNeacail has elsewhere
spoken out passionately in support of Scottish independence): there is a future
for Scotland in which its story encompasses the various strands of its own
past, but in which England does not feature other than as part of that 'braoin
beirme' [fermenting foam] around Scotland's coasts (the imagery of the poem
almost suggests Scotland is an island). This is balanced, however, by the open-
endedness of the poem, and the sense of fragility, difficulty and multiplicity
that is – for the poem – necessarily contained in any notion of 'Scotland'.

For Marcas Mac an Tuairneir, meanwhile, a sense of fragility or
precariousness comes from a fear that Scotland's past could 'poison' the
present. In 'Staoim' ['Tin'], Mac an Tuairneir reimagines the ship of state as a
rusting hulk:

Long
Rongach
Teas Mheadhan locha,
Cuairticht' le cnoic,
Gun dòrnaidh na mara.
Ri siùdan nan tuinn,
Le acair staoin' thruime.
Adhlaicte gu domhainn;
Teadhrachadh dhan bhonn.

[A ship | Decrepit, | Far out in a loch, | Surrounded by hillocks, | Without sight of the sea. | To the roll of the waves, | With a heavy tin anchor. | Buried below; | A tether to the deep.][3]

This is a ship of state that is self-delusional and static: in front of the boat is 'faire na teachdail' [the future's horizon], on which each star represents 'dèidh do-ruigheachd' [an unattainable whim]; the crew themselves are made of tin:

   Cionarra uile, is gagach gach fear.
   A' togail aon luaidh, le ràcadh an ranndan;
   Seòladairean cumhang, gun comas air ceapag.

[Identical all, and stuttering each one. | Singing the same song, repeating their verses; | Stenotic sailors, unable to improvise.]

And it is the anchor, the symbolic rootedness in the past, which has brought about the 'stenosis', the narrowing of the heart. The anchor is

   Àrsachd aillseach
   A nimhich a sgioba
   A chuir na thosd
   Òran binn staoin'.

[A cancerous archaism | That poisoned her crew | That silenced, forever, | The sweet song of tin.]

This poem could be read as a critique of nationalism and the narrowing that comes with static, repetitive versions of national identity (especially if you relate this image to the ship of state as I have been doing). However, its scope is also broader than this: it can be seen to question any narrow, atavistic form of identity – national or otherwise – that serves to restrict individuality, difference and creative freedom.

   Similarly, Mac an Tuairneir's 'Ola' [Oil] is explicit in its opposition to walls and lines that divide people – 'Loidhnichean nach tig am bàrr | Air làraich na

---

[3] Thanks to Marcas Mac an Tuairneir for permission to publish extracts from his original poems and his own translations.

tìre | Ach air mapaichean ùr on chlò' [Lines that don't appear | On the scars of the land | But on maps, hot off the press] – but its logic can also be extended beyond this, with its suggestion that no-one should really expect to 'own' oil, since it doesn't spell 'ar n-ainmean | Air suail na fairge' [our names | On the swell of the tide]. Although one could put a political agenda onto 'Ola', it is more flighty, shiftier than you would find in poetic propaganda; indeed, what Mac an Tuairneir's poems remind us is that there are questions beyond the confines of the referendum debate that should be attended to. If you attempt to build a fairer, more equitable future on lessons learnt from the past do you not risk being narrowed or poisoned by that past, in ways you may well not even notice? And in the rush to evaluate just how much oil there is in the North Sea, and thereby to calculate the (im)possibilities of independence, should we not first seriously ask whether that oil is actually 'ours' to extract in the first place?

Images of environmental poisoning are used more lightly (and party-politically) in Liam Crouse's 'Gun dàinig mise on Choille Ghruamaich' [I have come from the gloomy wood], a reworking of a famous song by Iain MacLean (Bàrd Tighearna Cholla) on his first impressions after having emigrated to North America. A native of Rhode Island, Crouse has made the opposite journey to MacLean, and the 'gloominess' of the wood he encounters in the Scotland is more the result of emigration policy than the harsh environmental conditions:

> Fhios gun robh còir 'am a bhith a' snòtadh
> An robh droch bholadh fleòdradh mun cuairt;
> Cò leis an coire, an deamhain Tòraidh
> An òinid ghòrach 's a chòmhlan nan truaill.
> Ma choilean an rùn, 's a gheibh an dùrachd,
> Gun reach an dùthaich na mhùthadh truagh,
> Ach tha mi 'n dùil gum faigh e cùl-thaobh
> Dar gheibh sibh iùl-dùthch' san ùine uaibh.

> [I know I should have been sniffing | to see if a bad smell was floating around; | who was responsible but the Tory devil | the stupid idiot and his polluting gang. | If their desire's fulfilled and they get their wishes | the country will be sorely altered, | but I hope that he'll be turned back | soon, when your country takes a new tack.][4]

---

[4] Thanks to Liam Crouse for the original poem; the translation is my own.

The 'pollution' in Crouse's poem is political, and so too is the solution: a new direction for the country, and with it the possibility – in an independent Scotland – for a more generous immigration policy.

If Crouse's poem bespeaks displacement, Daibhidh Eyre's concrete poem 'X' expresses the linguistic 'disenfranchisement' of Gaelic speakers, who weren't able to vote in their own language, and instead had to use a symbol that doesn't even appear in their language. The two lines of the poem could be translated as 'we will use X under protest' and 'although there's no X in Gaelic':

This is a convoluted 'X', and not just because the reader has to choose which way to read the poem. The 'X' of the poem is not just that of the ballot box, but also the abstract mathematical 'x' of uncertainty, and the 'X' of anonymous action, affirmation and negation; the political act that it suggests is then a complicated and conditional one – it is to some extent a sign that critiques its own imprinting, an act of radical uncertainty.

II

This idea of both giving and retaining political consent at one and the same time, in the same act, gained traction among Gaelic speakers in the run-up to the referendum and in its aftermath. In particular it influenced the grassroots 'S Dòcha / Dòchas movement, believed to have originated in a then-illegal cannabis farm in Argyll (*'S Dòcha* is the Gaelic for 'Maybe'; with some juggling it becomes *Dòchas* – 'Hope'). This movement – in its first incarnation – encouraged people to express themselves on the ballot paper for the referendum not with

an 'X' – since there isn't one in Gaelic – but with the non-committal ''S Dòcha' [Maybe]. In 2014 and the subsequent referenda – the period of *la referendum siempre* – these votes became more important, as the totals grew ever closer, and the counts came to depend upon such 'hanging chad' papers. A minor academic discipline developed in interpreting these ballots. The following example was generally understood to represent someone who had made the 'journey' from 'No' to 'Yes', but was still not 100% (but was to be counted as a 'yes'):

Whereas this next example was understood to represent someone whose 'journey' was still not complete and whose vote was discounted (their use of a home-made ballot paper considered balanced by their more accurate use of grammatical accents):

After the jubilation / despondency [delete as appropriate] following the final, official result, the 'S Dòcha movement developed an artistic life beyond the voting booth. Early concrete poems based on 'S Dòcha tended to explore the

way the radical uncertainty of 'S Dòcha could metamorphose into Dòchas (the Gaelic for 'hope'), and vice versa. In the late 2020s it was common to see variations of this metamorphosis published in magazines and then, laterally, painted in public spaces around the country. These are from Taynuilt and Benbecula in 2021, and the side of the Wallace Monument the following year:

```
                                    XXXX'S DÒCHAXXXXXXX
        'S DÒCHA                    XXXXXXÒCHXXXXXXXX
          ÒCH                       XXXXXXSÒCH'DAXXXXX
        SÒCH'DA                     XXXXXXÒCHXXXXXXXX
          ÒCH                       XXXXXD'ÒCHSAXXXXXX
        D'ÒCHSA                     XXXXXXÒCHXXXXXXXX
          ÒCH                       XXXXXXSÒCHA'DXXXXX
        SÒCHA'D                     XXXXXXÒCHXXXXXXXX
          ÒCH                       XXXXXXÒCHXXXXXXXX
          ÒCH                       XXXXXXXX'XXXXXXXXXX
           '                        XXXXXXÒCHXXXXXXXX
          ÒCH                       XXXXXXÒCHXXXXXXXX
          ÒCH                       XXXXXDÒCHASXXXXXX
        DÒCHAS
```


With the shift from paper to site-specific renderings of the 'poem', the 'S Dòcha artworks moved from being 'concrete poems' to 'concrete' explorations of the landscape, in a way that tapped into the environmental concerns expressed in other Gaelic poetry of the period, and also served to critique any notions of

the 'inscription' of the landscape reflecting, in any easy way, a Heideggerian sense of belonging. These explorations built upon the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay; indeed, one of the early examples of 'S Dòcha concretism literally built on, and 'repurposed' Hamilton Finlay's work, in – apparently – a deliberately crude and anti-aesthetic fashion:

As with the printed concrete poems, whether this work suggests a journey from hope to uncertainty or vice versa depends entirely on your direction of travel.

If the vandalism of Hamilton Finlay's work rightly brought widespread and almost universal condemnation, then 'S Dòcha's greatest success – both critical and commercial – came with their next act of 'repurposing', the reshaping of an iconic Sutherland monument into an installation entitled 'Can you hear this in Hell, Patrick Sellar?':

This piece was controversial enough, and showed enough multi-disciplinary collaborative potential, to attract the financial support of both Creative

Scotland and a newly incorporated stakeholder, Hope Conglomerates. With their support, the next – and final – 'S Dòcha installation was fully publically funded, with the private company bearing the costs for clearing the debris from the site at Roineabhal on Harris:

This symbol of the frailty, durability and marketability of hope is now, outside of a few archived little magazines, all that remains of a remarkable period in Gaelic literature. If nothing else – and indeed it suggests little else – the 'S Dòcha movement serves as a reminder that – as always – you have to be careful what you hope for.

Scotland and the Re-invention of the Modern World

Cairns Craig

It is a real pleasure to be able to reconvene here in 2034 and to see you all looking barely changed from when we met in August 2014 in order to imagine what it might be like when we reached this day in 2034. From our perspective, of course, the world of 2014, with all its individually driven cars, its need for wires and chargers for all its mobile devices, its love affair with social media and huge television sets, seems now positively antique. But what has changed our lives out of all recognition – or rather, has changed our lives by making them unchangingly recognisable – is the Maxwell Dorian Demon. We never imagined in 2014 that within a decade the physical appearances of ageing would be a thing of the past and that the generation that has been born in the last decade and half will always look as they do when they reach maturity. We whose ageing was only suspended a decade ago now look almost grotesque, and in a few years, if we survive (I am now 85), will be gargoyle-like amongst a population who enjoy the appearance of eternal youth. The Celtic myth of the country of those who are ever young has, in our age, as with so many of our ancient myths, become the very substance of our reality.

That the MDD was a Scottish invention, and proof of Scotland's continuing contribution to the understanding of the universe and the improvement of the human condition, has been a source not only of great pride to us all but one of the drivers of our politics of independence. The inventor of the MDD, Sorley Crichton MacCaig, not only, as you all know, won the Nobel Prize for his discovery but has been a driving force in the independence movement ever since. His decision to gift the proceeds of the MDD to the Scottish nation as long as the proceeds were invested in a sovereign wealth fund for the country's future benefit has been a cornerstone of the regeneration and transformation of Scotland in the past ten years. This stunning new lecture hall in which we sit in the rebuilt Stirling campus is just one sign of the transformation brought about by MacCaig's benevolence, but is also a token of the overthrow of that neo-liberalism which dominated economic thought in the West from the 1980s till the 2020s. MacCaig was one of the fiercest critics of the ungoverned

marketplaces and the private quasi-monopolies which almost bankrupted the US and the UK in 2008 and then effectively did bankrupt them in the 'great collapse' of 2022. That the MDD was launched at the height of the ravages of the 'great collapse' made Scotland a beacon for new technologies and for a new politics that has brought us to where we are today – on the verge of an independence referendum which is being queried only by those who think it entirely unnecessary, since no one has thought it worthwhile to mount an equivalent of 2014's 'Better Together' campaign. Effectively, Scotland has been independent now for nearly a decade; the vote this week will simply be the legal formality by which that independence is internationally recognised so that Scotland can join those other parts of Europe which followed Scotland's original example in 2014 but gained their formal independence before us.

This is a narrative you have all lived through but you will probably have forgotten my own minor role in it, since I was responsible for the naming of MacCaig's invention, and, indeed, indirectly responsible for pointing him to the path that led to it. This goes back to 2015 when I was still Director of the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish studies at the University of Aberdeen: I invited a group of scientists to join with a group of cultural historians to examine what we then called the 'fantasy physics' of scientific theories that never came to fruition. Among them was a book entitled *The Unseen Universe* (1875), written by Balfour Stewart, a Scottish geophysicist, and Peter Guthrie Tait, professor of natural philosophy at the University of Edinburgh and previously co-author with William Thomson, Lord Kelvin, of their *Treatise on Natural Philosophy*, published in 1867, which sought to replace the physics of force, as conceived by Newton, with a physics of energy. The *Treatise on Natural Philosophy* brought together and synthesised the work of a generation of Scottish physicists who worked on the theoretical issues around the workings of steam engines. Their radical proposition, as put by Macquorn Rankine in 1856, was that

> all forms of physical energy, whether visible motion, heat, light, magnetism, electricity, chemical action, or other forms not yet understood, are mutually convertible; that the total amount of physical energy in the universe is unchangeable, and varies merely in its condition and locality, by conversion from one form to another, or by transference from one portion of matter to another.[1]

---

[1] Macquorn Rankine, 'On the Concentration of the Mechanical Energy of the Universe', paper read before the British Association on September 2, 1852, and

The stuff of the world is simply the form taken by energy in one of its metamorphoses. The immense and unifying effect of this theory on our understanding of the physical universe carried with it, however, a dark shadow, for in all transformations of matter some of the energy stored therein is dissipated into the environment – no steam engine, for instance, could harness all the energy that generated its activity – and over a long period, it was believed, the energy of the universe would be so dissipated that the universe would consist of no more than an undifferentiated and very thin soup of atoms in which no further activity would be possible. This was a prospect that had a terrifying impact on Scottish intellectuals such as David Masson who, in his book on *Recent British Philosophy* in 1865 explained

> how it is the collapse or winding-down of the whole solar system that recent Science, conjecturing onwards through time, has been prognosticating as inevitable in the distance. By a process which has been named the Equilibration of Forces, and which is slowly going on, it seems to be foreseen that a period will come when all the energy locked up in the solar system, and sustaining whatever of motion or life there is in it, will be exhausted … and all its parts through all their present variousness will be stiffened or resolved, as regards each other, in a defunct and featureless community of rest and death … [Farther, Science] yet sees no other end but that all the immeasurable entanglement of all the starry systems shall also run itself together at last in an indistinguishable equilibrium of ruin.[2]

Such a conclusion did not worry Lord Kelvin, with whose Presbyterian view of a fallen universe it accorded only too well, but it provoked his younger Scottish colleague, James Clerk Maxwell, to a thought experiment which so disrupted Kelvin's view of the universe that he named it 'Maxwell's demon' – a figure who was later to play a curious role in many branches of modern science, from physics to informatics. Maxwell's demon is a small creature about the size of an atom who guards a gateway between two vats containing gases, one hotter than the other. Under the laws of energy physics these ought to be cooling as the energy of the atoms in motion gradually dissipates. The demon, however, directs the faster atoms from the cooler chamber through

published in the Philosophical Magazine for November, 1852.

[2] David Masson, *Recent British Philosophy: A review with criticisms, including some comments on Mr. Mill's answer to Sir William Hamilton.* (London, 1867, second edn, 151–2).

the gateway into the hotter chamber and the slower atoms from the hotter chamber into the cooler chamber, with the effect that the hotter chamber gets warmer: what the experiment suggests is that the dissipation of energy is only a statistical outcome which, in particular parts of chaotic systems, may be reversed, thus concentrating rather than dissipating the energy available to produce change.

In the *Unseen Universe*, Stewart and Tait used 'Maxwell's Demon' as a mechanism for envisaging how the energy expended by human beings could somehow be accumulating in a parallel universe invisible to us, one from which all energy originally stemmed and to which it returns as it is dissipated. 'The law of gravitation', they insist,

> assures us that any displacement which takes place in the very heart of the earth will be felt throughout the universe, and we may even imagine that the same thing will hold true of those molecular motions … which accompany thought. For every thought we think is accompanied by a displacement and motion of the particles of the brain, and we may imagine that somehow these motions are propagated throughout the universe'.[3]

That thought energy, however, is not simply endlessly discharged but is re-collected in the unseen universe parallel to our own, which is 'connected by bonds of energy with the visible universe' but is 'also capable of transforming the energy so received'; the 'speculation' which they offer is that it is 'less likely that by far the larger portion of the high-class energy of the present universe is travelling outwards into space with an immense velocity, than that it is being gradually transferred into an invisible order of things.'[4]

The energy that each of us expends is being stored up in the unseen universe so that we can be re-united with ourselves when all the energy of the universe is finally dissipated. Stewart and Tait's 'phantasy physics' helped intensify MacCaig's search for the individual signature in the energy that we expend in our daily tasks, which he famously discovered to be as recognisable and analysable as the DNA which informs the structure of every cell in our bodies. Energy, too, was, essentially, information, information which could be collected and recycled, thereby defeating that dissipation at a cellular level

---

[3] Stewart Balfour and P. G. Tait, *The Unseen Universe: Physical Speculations on a Future State* (London, 1875), 198.

[4] *The Unseen Universe*, 199.

which is the main cause of ageing. MacCaig had found the means of refreshing our cellular structure with our own expended energy. When he first outlined this to us as he searched for a mechanism that could turn it into a practical device, I suggested to him that what he had envisaged had already been prefigured in Oscar Wilde's 1890 story, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in which the portrait of Dorian ages while Dorian himself remains unchangeably young. I suggested, too, that *Dorian Gray* was an aesthetic version of *The Unseen Universe* and that his invention, therefore, in acknowledgment of the long interchange between Irish and Scottish cultures – Oscar Wilde was, of course, named after the son of Ossian in the poem by James Macpherson that was so admired by Lady Wilde – could be called the Maxwell Dorian Demon. And so, some years later, it was, and we were endowed with the unique autonomosphere in which we now live.

Looking back across these twenty years to the First Referendum debate, the difference between a physics of the dissipation of energy and a physics of its re-accumulation seems to characterise the difference between the 'No' and 'Yes' campaigns. The 'No' campaign was founded on the fear of dissipation – the oil would run out, the economy would grind to a halt as large companies left for London, the money would cease to flow from Westminster to Holyrood, Scots would be deprived of access to careers in London. The universe that the 'No' campaign inhabited was like Kelvin's universe, one necessarily running down but which would run down more slowly if Scotland remained within the UK. That is why 'No' was unable to articulate a positive vision for the Union: it was firmly camped on the territory which much of British politics had inhabited since the 1950s – the management of decline. The 'Yes' campaign was characterised, on the other hand, by a sense of energy recaptured, of vitality renewed, of a common purpose full of creative – if ill-defined – potential. The development of the campaign was like the effect of Maxwell's demon: the more the 'No' campaign tried to cool nationalist fervour the more its energy was diverted towards the 'Yes' side, as though a demon was capturing and transferring to the other side its warmest atoms – those Labour voters who began to see independence as the only road to a more equal society. At the same time, however, the 'Yes' campaign had a similar effect to the MDD – the energy it generated was recycled not to create something new but in order to ensure that things would remain recognisably the same: the same currency, the same monarchy, the same favourite programmes from the BBC. Except in the case of Trident nuclear weaponry, the paradox of the 'Yes' campaign was that its energy was directed at staying in the same

place and refusing the route to the future that had been devised by the heirs of Mrs Thatcher, while the 'No' campaign insisted the only way of staying in the same place was precisely to stay in a United Kingdom still locked into Thatcher's vision of what might make it 'great' again.

Because of the MDD, we now take for granted the continuity of our personal identities while, at the same time, joyfully accepting the radical transformations which characterise our social environment, but the many books written to explain the hinterland to the Referendum in the years leading up to 2014 – Iain MacWhirter's *Road to Referendum*, David Torrance's *Battle for Britain*, Gerry Hassan's *Caledonia Dreaming*, Alan Riach and Sandy Moffat's *The Arts of Independence*, Gordon Brown's *My Scotland, Our Britain* and the reissue of Andrew Marr's *The Battle for Scotland* – offer a very different notion of the relationship between past and present selves and their environments. The overriding sense in re-reading these books now is of people trying and failing to find any connection between the childhood they experienced, the person they expected to become and what has actually happened to them. The gulf between a childhood in the 1950s, 60s or 70s and the environment of the 2010s is so great that there seems to be no possible explanation of how the earlier period could have been the foundation for the later. It is as though a Maxwellian demon has somehow disrupted the causal laws of history and produced an outcome which can no longer be traced back to its origin. Gerry Hassan, for instance, prefaces his narrative of how modern Scotland has – or has not – developed with a note about his personal circumstances:

> My childhood was spent in the council estate of Ardler, built in the north-west corner of the city [Dundee], where the city authorities had acquired the land of Downfield Golf Course, and built six tower blocks in an environment filled with green spaces, trees, and play areas. It was in many respects the perfect environment for a child, being defined by safety, trust and a sense of community, and against the backdrop of rising working-class living standards and increasing prosperity.[5]

That sense of security was to be radically disrupted when Hassan's father lost his job at National Cash Register, one of the international companies with a substantial plant in Dundee, an event which presaged vast changes in the global economy but which led locally to the break-up of his parents' marriage.

---

[5] Gerry Hassan. *Caledonian Dreaming: The Quest for a Different Scotland* (Luath Press Ltd. Kindle Edition, 2014, Kindle Locations 753–56.

Hassan's book may be subtitled 'the quest for a different Scotland' and end with a list of things Scotland should do to be *different* in the future, but what drives its quest are the fundamental differences between the Scotland of his childhood and the Scotland of the 2010s:

> Throughout my childhood my parents had a fairly positive outlook on life, society and what opportunities they thought would be available to their son. My parents believed in Britain, the future, and the idea of the labour movement as a means of bringing about social change … These were the three pillars of post-war Scotland and indeed post-war Britain, the powerful, potent account of 'Labour Britain' which had been given such foundation and form in the post-war Attlee Government.[6]

The Britain of 2014, however, was not the 'Labour Britain' to which Hassan's parents had looked forward and which made them vote against a Scottish parliament in 1979:

> Slowly the central state has become what can only be called a neo-liberal state: one which as its main purpose promotes the ideas of marketising, outsourcing, privatising and working in favour of corporate capitalist logic. The dynamism and mindset of the core centre in Downing Street and senior departments, which once were defined for decades by civil service impartiality, has now become over the period of Thatcherism and New Labour (and remains so under Cameron) one where the new class of neo-liberal agents and actors are embedded in the core with the consultant class having been granted permanent access and influence. This has become so entrenched as the way of doing things that the British political elite no longer see the values and priorities of this worldview and class as an ideology. Instead it is seen as incontrovertible fact. This political and economic determinism has become regarded as how the world is mixing globalisation, the power of finance capital, hyper-competition and individualism, along with the weakening and dilution of the once powerful 'social contract'. George Osborne's ambition, revealed in his 2013 Autumn Statement of taking public spending back to 1948 levels in terms of health, education and infrastructure spending

---

[6] *Caledonian Dreaming: The Quest for a Different Scotland*; Kindle Locations 734–35.

(excluding individual transfers such as pensions), is the logical endpoint of this base, anti-social, elite-focused mindset.[7]

History has turned back on itself: instead of continuing the 'progress' initiated by the 1945 Labour government, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government of 2010 set out to shrink the state to the size it was pre-1948. While the Labour victory of 1997 looked as though it would restore 'Labour Britain' as the horizon and ambition of modern Britain, it had, in fact, helped embed that alternative history. 'Labour Britain', no matter what the name of the party that governed Britain from 1997 till 2010, was the lost dream of Hassan's parents' generation, the lost context of his childhood identity, the lost continuity of his adult experience.

That same sense of measuring the personal against the public pervades Iain MacWhirter's *Road to Referendum*, with its series of cameos of his journey from being a youthful socialist upbraiding his mother for her CND-inspired nationalism (when the politics of class was clearly the only important issue) to his discovery that, in the aftermath of the 1979 vote on a Scottish parliament, he 'was more sympathetic to devolution than I'd realised. I'd intended to abstain on the grounds that devolution was a crushing irrelevance, but the dismal conduct of the campaign made me think again'.[8] MacWhirter, too, sees his narrative as the story of the loss of the Britain into which he had been born after the Second World War:

> During the war Scots had fought with English soldiers across North Africa and Europe in a great project to save Western civilisation. They had been fighting, not in the interest of a British Empire or a ruling class, but for the people of a country, Great Britain, which had stood alone against tyranny and had led the world in a just war against fascism. Like the citizens of Clydebank during the blitz, they felt part of something that transcended domestic politics and national boundaries. This was a new popular Unionism, not based on tartan romanticism or imperial chauvinism. It was a Labour rather than a Tory Unionism.[9]

What this post-war 'Labour Unionism' produced was 'a truly national NHS' which 'provided security for all citizens of Britain on an equal basis', an

---

[7] *Caledonian Dreaming*, Kindle Locations 964–73.
[8] Iain MacWhirter, *Road to Referendum*, 198.
[9] Ibid., 149–50.

outcome that was 'the legacy of the collective spirit generated across Britain by the war effort'.[10] It is the loss of that 'collective spirit' and collective security which has undermined the sense of the inter-relatedness of the individual and the society to which s/he belongs. And the same holds true of Gordon Brown's *My Scotland, Our Britain*, which provided the large-scale version of the public speeches which are generally thought to have had a significant impact on the outcome of the 2014 Referendum. What drives Brown's commitment to the Union is the 'pooling and sharing' of resources made possible by Britain's major historical innovation – the welfare state:[11] 'the pooling and sharing we engage in is thus more than a set of values we share in common: it is the everyday practice of popular institutions like the NHS and pensions system that brings these values to life. Indeed, no other country in the world has managed to persuade four nations to pool and share their resources in the comprehensive and sophisticated way we do'.[12] It is the Britain created by the Labour government of 1945 into which Brown was born that he sought to defend from a nationalism he believed to be driven not by economic or social sanity but by irrational ideology; whereas, of course, for his opponents in the SNP, their nationalism was the only defence against Westminster's destruction of those shared values. As Nicola Sturgeon put it,

> In the thirteen years of devolution, great changes have occurred. We lose sight of them in the pell-mell of politics – but unlike the privatization process south of the border, our health service remains true to Nye Bevan's founding principles; our education system has a new curriculum fit for modern teaching and learning; our universities offer education based on the ability to learn and not the ability to pay; and our older people have more security in the their later years.[13]

It is, ironically, retention of the past that drove both the 'Yes' and the 'No' versions of Scotland's future. The referendum debate was, in effect, a debate between two sides sharing the same nostalgia for the world created by the 1945 Labour government – a world also accepted by the Conservative governments of the 1950s. Fundamentally the debate was about which side could more

---

[10] Ibid., 154.
[11] Gordon Brown, *My Scotland, Our Britain*, 49.
[12] Ibid., 199.
[13] Quoted Torrance, *The Battle for Britain*, 192; http://www.snp.org/media-centre/news/2013/Jul/yes-independence-only-vote-more-powers

effectively maintain the virtues of that earlier world. The defining difference between them, of course, was Trident, the dark shadow which had lain across that secure world of post-war 'Labour Unionism' and which, to 'No', symbolised the continuing security of the Union and, to 'Yes', the insecurity that Westminster imposed on Scotland for the greater safety of the south of England. 'Yes' captured much of the anti-Trident vote ('SNP=CND', as some put it at the time) but the SNP's policy of remaining within NATO meant that 'Yes' hardly amounted to a commitment to a non-nuclear unilateralism.

The referendum appeared on the surface to be between two extremes – independence or continued commitment to the Union – with the nation polarised between them, giving rise to much commentary in the aftermath about how divided the country was. The eventual outcome, with almost exactly 50% for each side, despite many recounts, suggested a nation incapable of resolving its differences. What became evident subsequently, however, in the work of analysts such as Michael Keating of the University of Aberdeen, was that much of the population was a hesitant 60:40 'for' or a reluctant 60:40 'against' independence: the outcome pointed not to a divided and polarised society but to one in which almost everyone was on the same journey, except that different parts of the population had travelled different distances towards accepting independence. Carol Craig probably spoke for many when she wrote:

> Lest you think I have found deciding to vote No easy, I haven't. I'm feeling uncomfortable about it. When I hear many Yes folk speak they are talking my language: extremely critical of the Westminster regime and the politics currently on offer. My values chime with theirs. What's more there's a tremendous creativity in their campaign. They seem to have all the best tunes. Of course, I'd rather be on the same side as radicals like Andy Wightman, young activists like Zara Kitson and cultural figures like Janice Galloway and David Greig whose work I admire hugely. Instead I'm on the same side as the bowling clubs, old footballers and the British Legion. Though it is also true to say that the majority of women of my age I know – including lots of former left-wing activists and feminists – are also voting No, so I'm definitely not alone.[14]

---

[14] Carol Craig, 'Why this optimist is voting No', *Scottish Review*, 9 September 2014; http://www.scottishreview.net/CarolCraig172.shtml, accessed 20 March 2015.

Of course, those over 60 by-and-large voted 'No', but the situation was one in which many people wanted to be asked the question about independence and to say 'yes' … but not yet. The direction of travel, as Michael Keating told us at our conference in 2014, was clear, and if the aftermath of the referendum did not produce the 'something close to federalism' that Gordon Brown had claimed could be delivered, it produced a quasi-autonomy that came to be regarded as a quasi-independence in the eyes of most Scots, and in the eyes of most of the world, till we reached the point where the inevitability of independence was accepted on all sides.

What remained unresolved, however, was what was driving this issue – why should one of the most highly developed countries in the world, which had been part of one of the most successful empires known to history, decide suddenly that it needed to escape from the Union by which its history had been so profoundly shaped. There was, in the eyes of historians and commentators, no sufficient cause for the upsurge of nationalist politics in Scotland: it was not religiously different from the rest of the UK as Ireland had been before 1922; it was not significantly different in social attitudes or in wealth from most of the rest of the UK (as sociologists such as David McCrone never tired of pointing out); it was not 'colonised' by England, no matter how much resentment there might be about English people taking top jobs in certain sectors of Scottish culture; what Tom Nairn, in *The Break-up of Britain* (1977) described as 'neo-nationalism' in Scotland, seemed, like Maxwell's Demon, to defy the logic of political and economic history. Since the first emergence of the new nationalist politics in the 1960s, Scotland's political past had been pored over and written about as never before, but the more history that was written the more mysterious modern Scotland became. After having studied the many histories published before 2014, Iain MacWhirter was still able to declare, 'Here's the mystery. How did Scotland go from being a willing and enthusiastic partner in the Union with England to the referendum on independence within the pace of little more than a generation?'[15] That 'mystery' remains unresolved at the end of MacWhirter's narrative: 'The theme of this book has been the rise, as if from nowhere, of Scottish Nationalism'.[16] As *if* from nowhere. *If* this has actually happened in *Scotland*, how uncertain and chaotic is the world we now inhabit? Gordon Brown was almost breathless with shock: 'The speed with which Scottish political nationalism has moved from the fringes to the mainstream, then to an electoral majority in the Scottish Parliament

---

[15] MacWhirter, *Road to Referendum*, 13.

[16] Ibid., 375.

and now to threaten the very existence of Britain is extraordinary'.[17] Brown's astonishment reflects the fact that such a nationalism was a new and unknown force, defying the 'logic of history' or the realities of modernity: as David Torrance put it, 'in 2011–14 all the talk was of Unionists and Nationalists advocating, respectively, "the Union" and "independence", when in reality the meaning of both those constitutional options had changed almost beyond recognition'.[18] The disruptive energy of the 'mystery' of Scotland's nationalism was what drove Gordon Brown's defence of the Union, because the rise of nationalism threatens the whole direction and purpose of Scottish history:

> I do not ask those questions rhetorically but to try to understand why the trajectory of Scottish nationalism is so unlike the other forms it claims to parallel. Can we explain why there was no significant Scottish-led rebellion in 1832 or 1848, when Britain was convulsed by riots over political reform; and why no significant Scottish nationalist uprising in 1919, when there was a huge sense of injustice as British promises of 'Homes fit for Heroes' were swept aside and workers left to the mercy of a post-war depression? If repression is the trigger for an assertion of national identity, why not in the period from 1746 when Highlanders were brutally suppressed in the aftermath of Culloden? If religious differences are a potential starting pistol for a secessionist movement, why not in 1712 when the British Parliament usurped the authority of the Scottish Church? If resentment against unfair treatment is a likely cause, then why not in the 19990s when, at the time of Mrs Thatcher's government, the sense of grievance at an inequitable relationship was probably at its height?[19]

The failure of nationalism in the past, when it might have been appropriate, is the reason why it makes no sense in the present:

> So for me the central Scottish mystery of modern history is not that people feel they want to assert their Scottishness (we have *always* felt Scottish), not that there is a demand for Scottish institutions to express that identity (our institutions have *always* done so), but that while for

[17] Gordon Brown, *My Scotland, Our Britain*, 15.

[18] David Torrance, *The Battle for Britain: Scotland and the Independence Referendum* (London, 2013), 328.

[19] Brown, *My Scotland, Our Britain*, 19.

> 300 years we have expressed our identity, run our own institutions and latterly shared political power as part of Britain, now many want to do so without being part of Britain.[20]

Since no cause in the past was sufficient to produce a nationalist reaction against the Union, no cause could be sufficient to explain why Scots in this era, under these circumstances, should have decided so decisively to try to change their relationship to the Union. The whole nature of modern Scottish history is, therefore, without cause and cannot be anything but an insoluble 'mystery'.

The writing of Scottish history itself, however, had been provoked from somnolence by the rise of the Scottish National Party in the 1960s. Not having its own political structures after 1707, the kinds of narratives of political change that were written about the United Kingdom (i.e. about England) were impossible in Scotland. What *could* be narrated, nonetheless, were the country's economic developments, and the consequent social changes, particularly since there had been such a dramatic transformation in its economic infrastructure with the growth of Glasgow and the development of industries – like jute in Dundee – that depended on the Empire. Scotland's history became the subject matter of a generation of historians whose ambition was to use Scotland to show the power and purpose of a new kind history that had developed in the 1960s, a history focused not on the political elite but on the economic development society and its social consequences for the mass of the people. Scotland became a kind of test-bed for how a country could manage the process of industrialisation in the wake of England's rapid progress in the eighteenth century, something which every developing economy would have to go through in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was the burden of Tom Nairn's analysis of Scotland's 'missing' nationalism in the nineteenth century: Scotland was unique among European nations because there 'was to be only one example of a land which – so to speak – "made it" before the new age of nationalism':

> Only one society was in fact able to advance, more or less according to its precepts, from feudal and theological squalor to the stage of bourgeois civil society, polite culture and so on. Only one land crossed the great divide *before* the whole condition of European politics and

---

[20] Brown, *My Scotland, Our Britain*, 20.

culture was decisively and permanently altered by the great awakening of nationalist consciousness.[21]

Scotland's unique priority in historical development led directly to its being uniquely 'belated' in the development of nationalism. T. M. Devine makes essentially the same case but transfers to the Scotland of the 1760s the fundamental experiences of modernisation which had traditionally been accorded to England:

> The traditional pattern, of basic continuity marked by some changes at the margins, abruptly came to an end in the 1760s. That decade seems to have been a defining watershed, because from then on Scotland began to experience a social and economic transformation unparalleled among European societies of the time in its speed, scale and intensity. The currently favoured view of English modernization as a process characterised by cumulative, protracted and evolutionary development does not fit the Scottish experience. North of the Border there truly was an Industrial and Agricultural Revolution.[22]

Those defining elements of the 'cause' of English history, the Agricultural and the Industrial Revolutions, are relocated to Scotland – they are not only the 'cause' of modern Scotland but also the justification for writing the history of Scotland, since it can now be presented as a – indeed, as *the* – paradigm case of economic modernisation in the Western world.

It was a theme which developed with increasing intensity around the notion of the 'Scottish Enlightenment' – that apparently dramatic efflorescence of Scottish thought in the mid-eighteenth century, and a period which came to be seen as the philosophical 'foundation' of the modern world in works such as Arthur Herman's *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Scots' Invention of the Modern World* (2002):

> This is the story of how the Scottish Enlightenment created the basic idea of modernity. Obviously, the Scots did not do everything by themselves: other nations – Germans, French, Italians, Russians, even the English – have their place in the making of the modern world. But it is the Scots more than anyone else who have created the lens

---

[21] Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London, 1977; 1981), 108.
[22] T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire 1600–1815* (London, 2003), 322.

through which we now see the final product. When we gaze out on a contemporary world shaped by technology, capitalism and modern democracy, and struggle to find our place as individuals in it, we are in effect viewing the world as the Scots did.[23]

Here, a story which had originally been developed in some obscurity about the origins of the social sciences in the United States by scholars such as W. C. Lehmann and Gladys Bryson in the 1930s and 40s, is expanded into an account of the origins and justification of the United States itself: the world of modernity, of capitalism, of democracy, of America's global influence, is possible only because of eighteenth-century Scotland. Scotland is the first cause in the sequence which produces that modernity, the single and singular cause without which it would not have occurred: 'It marks a crucial turning point in America, in the development of the British Empire, and of Europe – not to mention the United Kingdom'.[24] The nation which had defied the logic of history and which, apparently, had no cause to continue to exist, is transformed into the nation which is the fundamental cause of the whole world of modern capitalism in which we now live.

The economic consequences of the Scottish Enlightenment were clear to those who, like the directors of the Adam Smith Institute, became advisers to Margaret Thatcher, a prime minister who never understood why Scots did not respond positively to her economic policies since they derived, in her view, from a great Scotsman, Adam Smith, of whom Scots should be proud both for his contemporary influence in the work of economists such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, and for providing the foundation of the great achievements of nineteenth century industrial Scotland. Hugo Young records her as having said that 'the Scots invented Thatcherism, long before I was thought of', and declaring, 'Tory values are in tune with everything that is finest in the Scottish character. Scottish values are Tory values – and vice versa'.[25] Scotland as the *homeland* of free-market capitalism was the fundamental basis of the neo-liberalism of the 'Chicago School' which Hayek led and from which Mrs Thatcher's governments derived many of their policies. Alternative readings of Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, such as those of Andrew Skinner of Glasgow University, which underlined Smith's

---

[23] Arthur Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Scots' Invention of the Modern World* (London, 2002), vii.

[24] Ibid., vii.

[25] Hugo Young, *One of Us* (London, 1989) 528.

emphasis on the role of 'sympathy' as well as 'self-interest' in the operations of an economy, were ignored in an environment where the Liberty Press of Indianapolis was producing new editions of the works of the major thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment dedicated to revealing how they provided the intellectual justification for contemporary US free-market policies. The Scottish Enlightenment was, in reality, nothing to do with Scotland: it was an origin myth for the United States, but one which gave Scotland a key role in the world of global capitalism.

The Enlightenment was also, of course, a Unionist myth: Scotland's importance in the events of the world was a direct outcome of the Union, and without Union Scotland would simply have remained the barbaric backwater from which the Union rescued it; indeed, for many, that rescue was merely a temporary escape hatch from a backwardness to which Scotland returned with the onset of Romanticism and the sentimental evasions of the reality of Scottish life that characterised Scottish culture from Burns and Scott to Stevenson and Barrie. As Hugh Trevor-Roper (who has some claim to being the first to promote the notion of a Scottish 'Enlightenment'[26]) argued, the Enlightenment in Scotland was the nation's very brief foray into rationality: Scottish culture was, in its essence, perhaps in its genes, a *mythopoeic* culture, fundamentally resistant to rationality, one in which 'one myth surrenders only to another'.[27] Scotland's Enlightenment could not, therefore, prevent the return of mythopoeic falsehood, this time in the form of James Macpherson's Ossianic poetry:

> if Scottish belief in the authenticity of Ossian weakened in the course of the nineteenth century, that was not because the Scots, however belatedly, yielded to reason. Like Boece's kings and Buchanan's ancient constitution, Ossian's poems lost their authenticity, not when they were disproved, but when changing circumstances made them no longer necessary – and when another myth was available to supersede them.[28]

---

[26] The notion that there had been a specifically Scottish Enlightenment was, it seems, first publicly proposed by Hugh Trevor-Roper at the second International Conference on the Enlightenment at St Andrews in 1966. John Robertson relates that Trevor-Roper and Duncan Forbes both laid claim to the creation of the concept, Forbes because of a course he ran at Cambridge on 'Hume, Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment'; see http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/4408/1/The_Scottish_Contribution_to_the_Enlightenment_by_John_Robertson___Institute_of_Historical_Research.pdf; accessed 21 July 2014.

[27] Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History* (New Haven, 2008), 72.

[28] Ibid., 188.

The myth which displaced Ossian was the equally fabulous vision of Scotland's tartan past as conjured up by the 'Wizard of the North', Walter Scott. Scotland founded the modern world only to retreat from it into its ancestral backwardness, just as its industrial domination in the nineteenth century, when it was the 'workshop of the world', was but a prologue to decline into a dependent economy of unrelieved industrial failure, from the Hillman Imp to Silicon Glen.

To the economic and social historians who used their new analytical tools to chart the past, the world of 'culture' was no more than an epiphenomenon of the real drivers of change – technological improvement, trade and profit. If Scotland had inspired the building of the modern world, it had expired into irrelevance with its industrial decline in the aftermath of the First World War, and a culture which had turned its back on the universal truths of the Enlightenment in the nineteenth century would, in the twentieth century, and despite the efforts of Hugh MacDiarmid's Scottish Renaissance movement, decline into parochial redundancy: Scotland's cultural identity was a reflection of its misshapen and ineffective economy. As Tom Nairn summarised it in 1978, Scotland was: 'cramped, stagnant, backward-looking, parochial . . . the one thing which the Scots can never be said to have lacked is an identity'.[29] Such a culture could never be a cause of political change: there was nothing there for a nationalist movement to gather around and celebrate, and the Scottish National Party resolutely accepted the judgment of the historians and focused its campaigning on the need for economic change in Scotland, and, subsequently, on the need for social justice. Its slogan in the era of its initial impact was not 'Make Scottish Culture Anew' but 'It's Scotland's Oil'. The SNP was not a party of cultural nationalism but a party of economic nationalism, complaining about the failure of successive Westminster governments to effect any major change in the Scottish economy – even in a period like the 1980s when oil from the Scottish North Sea was bailing out the faltering British economy. It is easy, now, after 27 years of continuous SNP government in Scotland to forget just how feeble this strategy had proved through the twentieth century: in the 1997 general election which was to lead to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, the SNP won only 3 seats; in the first Scottish parliamentary election, where it could benefit from the system of proportional representation, it could manage only 35 seats which, while the same as the Conservative and the Liberal Democrats combined, did not

---

[29] Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain*, 131.

come anywhere near displacing the Labour party, which had 56 seats. Gaining twenty-eight percent of the votes cast did not suggest that the SNP were about to transform Scottish politics, since those declaring for independence had remained consistently at about thirty percent in the polls from the 1980s till the 2010s, driving expectations in 2014 that there would be a 70:30 vote in favour of 'No'.

What the energy of the 'Yes' campaign in the run-up to the Referendum revealed, however, was that support for Scottish independence and for Scottish nationalism was much broader than support for the SNP as a party, even if the two were to become much more aligned in its aftermath. Where had that energy come from? It had come, I suggest, from precisely the epiphenomenon which economic historians regarded as having no causal efficacy, from culture, and from the transformation of Scotland's self-perception in the period after the failure of the first devolution referendum in 1979. That failure revealed to many how feeble was the grasp of most Scots on their own past, on its values and achievements, and how, lacking such a conception of their national heritage, they had no basis for supporting a specifically Scottish politics or resisting their steady incorporation into an English-dominated, or globally organised, cultural environment. Cultural activists in Scotland in the 1980s went in search of their possible predecessors: the folk song revivalists of the 1950s; Hugh MacDiarmid, whose work from the 1920s and 30s had begun to attract revived interest in the 1960s; the working-class playwrights of the 1920s and 30s whose drama was revived by the 7:84 company in the 1980s; the women writers of the inter-war period who feature prominently in the first round of the Canongate Classics series in the 1980s. These acts of recuperation were accompanied by an explosion of creativity that, if an origin is required, can be traced to the publication of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* in 1981, which is itself structured like Maxwell's thought experiment since its protagonist moves back and forwards between alternative worlds each of which is running down as its energy dissipates. Across all of the arts, it was as though the political energy dammed (and damned) by the referendum result flowed into the creative invention of alternative Scotlands: in poetry (Hamilton Finlay, Morgan, Lochhead, Dunn, Paterson, Kay), in the novel (Gray, Kelman, Galloway, Kennedy, Banks, Welsh), in drama (Lochhead, Byrne, Hannan, Greig, Burke), in art (Campbell, Colvin, Mach, Watt), in film (Forsyth, Douglas, MacDonald, Ramsay), in music both classical and popular (James Macmillan, Runrig, Proclaimers, Deacon Blue etc.). That explosion in creativity was matched by a sudden efflorescence of works designed to

recuperate and reinterpret the Scottish past: the four-volume *History of Scottish Literature* produced by Aberdeen University Press in 1987–8, Duncan MacMillan's groundbreaking account of Scotland's artistic traditions, *Scottish Art 1460–1990* (1990), Alexander Broadie's challenging interpretation of *The Tradition of Scottish Philosophy* (1990), John Purser's revelatory *Scotland's Music* (1992), Charles Jones's *Edinburgh History of the Scots Language* (1997) and Bill Findlay's recuperation of what had been supposed not to exist in Scotland in his *A History of Scottish Theatre* (1998). By the millennium Scotland was a country culturally transformed, endowed with rich independent cultural traditions that had been invisible in the 1960s and 1970s. The existence of the Scottish parliament made it possible for Scottish voters to vote for the SNP without fear of undermining Labour's chances of winning Westminster elections, but what made that commitment possible was a rising tide of cultural nationalism on which the political ambition of the SNP was a small floating barque.

It is the continuation and expansion of that cultural nationalism which has underpinned the development of modern Scotland: we have recuperated the eighteenth-century from its free-market and Unionist mythologies; we have connected it again to the development of nineteenth-century Scottish culture and revealed that in the energy physics of Kelvin, Tait and Clerk Maxwell are the real foundations of the modern world, *our* modern world; we have returned to the vision of a just and equal society as envisaged by Keir Hardie and other Scottish leaders of the labour movement; we have redrawn the map of Scotland's twentieth-century cultural achievement, in part by foregrounding the work of neglected women writers and artists and in part by reconnecting art in Scotland to its local intellectual environment; we have recovered Scotland's contributions to ecology from the predecessors of John Muir to those subsequently inspired by the ideas of Patrick Geddes; we have rediscovered the worldwide influence of the philosophical and psychological traditions of twentieth-century Scotland, stemming from the philosophy of John Macmurray and the anti-psychology of R. D. Laing; we have recast Scotland's cultural development in the light of its relationship with its xenitean migrant communities[30] and made Scottish culture once again central to the curriculum of the Scottish universities. We are now producing

---

[30] 'Xenitea' is an alternative Greek word for 'diaspora': while 'diaspora' implies a people forced to emigrate and nostalgic for their homeland, xeniteans set out to recreate their homeland elsewhere, with no intention of returning. Scotland as a country with a xenitean empire was the burden of my contribution to John M. MacKenzie and T. M. Devine (eds), *Scotland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2011), 84–118.

Scottish science as well as Scottish philosophy, Scottish theology, Scottish history, Scottish literature, each of them developing out of Scottish traditions and their international interconnections – renouncing the blandishments of a globalisation that once assumed you could only be *inter*national by ceasing to be national.

The Scotland we now inhabit will join, this week, the many small nations that have re-emerged from those large colonising nationalities forged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and will, in its renewed and reaffirmed independence, celebrate the diversity that we now recognise as essential to humanity's creative potential. Global uniformity, after the great collapse, is a thing of the past: we are now in a new ecosystem of nations, nations like ourselves made young again by MacCaig's invention and by the Scottish government's decision to share MDD technology with the poorest countries in the world, giving each of them the opportunity to live in their own autonomospheres. Scotland, it turned out, was the 'demon' in the world system, the pathfinder for a new kind of nationalism that has reshaped the world's political geography and liberated its peoples from the clutches of a global system that was driving us to economic and ecological ruin. The Americans who sought in the Scottish Enlightenment the origins and justification of their free-market domination of the world could hardly have suspected that the Scotland they saw as origin and justification of their world-wide power would turn out to be the source of resistance to that global empire and the model for its overthrow. We may now be belated entrants into the post-US, post-China era of newly independent national cultural formations, but our belatedness does not diminish the impetus we gave to that process in 2014.

                                                        Cairns Craig
                                                University of Aberdeen,
                                                    September 2034

From 'Renaissance' to Referendum?
Literature and Critique in Scotland, 1918–2014

Alex Thomson

The 2014 referendum campaign in Scotland emphasised many national divisions. One that struck contemporary observers with particular force was the disproportionate prevalence of support for independence within what had once been known as 'the arts', but which contemporary technocratic jargon preferred to call the creative and cultural industries. Writers, artists, musicians, filmmakers: with a few notable exceptions — a fistful of avowed Unionists, honourable refuseniks, some elements of the left — those who spoke up in public urged Scotland to vote Yes. Nor was this simply a question of the pro-independence camp's success in seeking celebrity endorsements, and in exploiting the weightless political opinion mill provided by social media. Commentators also noted a striking crossover between some of the grassroots campaigning that sprung up under the umbrella of the Yes campaign and the rank-and-file artistic community: the most high-profile being National Collective, whose tagline 'Artists and Creatives for Independence', with its awkward collision of political and managerial registers, has the authentic smack of the period. Based on the evidence of their public statements, interviews and even cultural manifestoes, it seemed that the artistic elites were considerably more favourable to the prospect of independence than the population as a whole.

The appearance of a disjunction between the cultural sector and society at large bulwarked a longstanding nationalist claim that the arts had not only served to preserve a distinctive Scottish cultural identity since the Union of 1707, but had been an active vehicle for political identity-formation in Scotland since at least the Renaissance movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Whereas between 1979 and 1997, common opposition to Thatcherism had served to unite artists and writers with a broad spectrum of Scottish civil society, this new alignment of artists with the Scottish government against majority opinion was more troubling. It threatened to confirm the vanguardist ambitions of a nationalist project that had been characterised by its political moderation, at least since the parting of the ways between Hugh MacDiarmid

and John McCormick in the 1930s. This torsion is neatly exposed in an unguarded comment by the novelist Alan Warner:

> A no vote will create a savage and profound division between the voters of Scotland and its literature; a new convulsion. It will be the death knell for the whole Scottish literature "project" — a crushing denial of an identity that writers have been meticulously accumulating.[1]

Warner's comments bring to mind Brecht's suggestion in his poem 'The Solution': if the people fail to live up to the expectations of the writers, they will have to be dissolved and another created. Here perhaps was the hidden truth of the critical commonplace that Scotland's artists had been its unacknowledged legislators: a self-appointed elite who knew the country better than the people themselves.

However tendentious, Warner's comments reflected a widespread interpretation of Scottish cultural history at the time of the referendum, in which late twentieth-century artistic revival, belatedly fulfilling the hopes of the 1920s and 1930s Renaissance movement, not only preceded but shaped the political trajectory to devolution and beyond. The academic cultural historian Cairns Craig made the case explicitly in an essay published a matter of weeks before the referendum:

> the overwhelming vote in favour of devolution in 1997 was not produced by the political parties — they were small boats floating on a rising tide of cultural nationalism that went from the rediscovery of the art of the Glasgow boys and the Scottish colourists to the music of the Proclaimers and Runrig, from the writings of Nan Shepherd to Ian Rankin's Rebus.[2]

This account inverted the pathological interpretation of Scotland as a nation in long-term decline that had been common in the earlier period, and had been revived in the aftermath of the 1979 referendum. It also echoes the rhetoric of the Yes campaign: now that the writers and artists had restored the nation's faith in its own capabilities, a vote for independence would not

---

[1] 'Scottish Writers on the Referendum: Independence Day?', *The Guardian*, Saturday 19 July 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jul/19/scottish-referendum-independence-uk-how-writers-vote.

[2] 'The Case for Culture', *Scottish Review of Books*, 10:3 (2014), 20.

only inaugurate a new future but redeem the failures of history, enacting a typological fulfillment of the past in the plenitude of present possibility.

But at this point the historian has to demur: the continuity claimed at the time was an illusion. The potent blend of aesthetics and politics in the rhetoric of the Independence movement was itself the real break with the past, attesting not to the critical power of the arts but to their subsumption by contemporary politics. In this paper I will try to specify some of the distinctive features of this reversal, by offering a counter narrative to the culturalist interpretation. To challenge the assumption of continuity within twentieth century Scottish cultural history, I deploy discontinuity as a heuristic device, distinguishing in broad terms between the 'Renaissance', the 'devolutionary' and the 'referendum' periods. In my conclusion I will offer some further reflections on the political conditions for the emergence of the aesthetic discourse of the Yes campaign, and on its ambiguities.

The twentieth-century Renaissance and its legacies: 1918–1970

Although some cultural critics have claimed a significant awakening of national self-consciousness in the later nineteenth century, the terms of Scottish cultural debate throughout the remainder of the twentieth century were largely set in the 1920s and 1930s. As Richard Finlay has shown, the diagnosis of economic and cultural decline in the period was a commonplace amongst Scottish intellectuals. This in turn reflects a larger tendency, across Europe and the USA, to articulate political and social crisis in cultural terms, giving a new prominence to questions of nation and race. One consequence of this is a renewed interest in the national cultures of the British Isles.[3] Matthew Arnold's influential argument that the strength of English literature sprang from its hybrid racial mix left open discursive space for a hypothetical rebirth of literature through a reassertion of Celtic sources.[4] Following Arnold, Eliot conceives cultural modernization in Britain in terms of a

---

[3] Richard Finlay, 'National Identity in Crisis: Politicians, Intellectuals and the "End of Scotland", 1920–1939', *History*, 79 (1994), 242–59; for the broader picture see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London, 1958; 2nd edition); for the USA, Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism* (Durham, NC, 1995); for England, Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, 2004) and Peter Mandler, *English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, 2006).

[4] c.f. Daniel Williams, *Ethnicity and Cultural Authority: from Arnold to Dubois* (Edinburgh, 2006); Laura O'Connor, *Haunted English: The Celtic Fringe, The British Empire, and de-Anglicization* (Baltimore, 2006).

convergence whose vitality requires continual differentiation of its sources: modernist literary reaction more generally tended to increase rather than diminish national differentiation within Britain.[5] But the combination of the idea of crisis and the idea of the nation are insufficient to define the novelty and specificity of the Scottish literary response, and thus the meaning of the twentieth century Scottish Renaissance movement.

The Renaissance needs to be understood not as an artistic movement professing the revival of vernacular styles and traditions, but as a revolutionary movement whose significance depends on its self-understanding as a variant of the wider aesthetic critique of modernity. What drew so many writers to radical politics was the perception that not just Scottish or British, but Western culture itself was in crisis. This is more than a merely diagnostic gesture; requiring the construction of contemporary history as the site of cultural crisis, and in so doing to actively precipitate a crisis of tradition, as a call for radical questioning and critique. Art plays several roles in this project: to the extent that it is successfully integrated into a decadent culture it needs to be challenged; in new and more radical forms it can serve as a medium for this questioning; and in its relation to the aesthetic ideal of an harmonious, reconciled and autonomous culture, it can help locate the standard against which the present is judged. This leads to a major ambiguity which challenges subsequent reception of the Renaissance. The ultimate goal is not the production of more realistic representations of modern social conditions, nor the liberation of art from the tastes of the bourgeoisie, but the dissolution of art back into life in a fully reconciled future nation. To this end the separation between contemporary national culture and the arts may need to be sharpened in order to heighten the crisis. Radical experiment is licensed as a critical strategy, because the present time is recast not in terms of the peaceful handing over of tradition, but as a transitional state of emergency. The trope of 'revival' is inadequate to capture the exigency of this strategy.

To this end, the writing and criticism of the Renaissance movement deploys two characteristic strategies. The first is critical: an iconoclastic attack on the values of modern Scottish commercial society, interwoven with the repudiation of the recent tradition held to be responsible for the current situation. At

---

[5] Eliot's views are clearly expressed in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* [1948] (London, 1962). For a preliminary sketch of the broader picture, see Alex Thomson, 'The Asymmetry of British Modernism: Hugh MacDiarmid and Wyndham Lewis', Modernist Cultures, 8 (2013), 252–71.

times this amounts to a 'kulturkampf' directed against not just middlebrow taste, but the 'cynicism, blindness, helplessness, / The inner poverty of the vast majority of adult Scots'.[6] The second strategy is both radical and creative: the attempt to invent an art of the future. Since current forms have been contaminated by the commercial culture that has given birth to them, they must be replaced. Images of the past – and especially of an idealised medieval or Gaelic culture in which art and social life are imagined as harmoniously integrated – are to be used to refurnish both political and artistic imagination. At the heart of the Renaissance movement is this combination of reaction and invention, destruction and creation. There is no paradox in this alternation of pessimism and affirmation, once we see that the demand for critical retrieval of deeper sources of value stems from a single conception of modern history as the revelation of a more fundamental failure of tradition. On that basis, all the attributes of sociological modernization can be interpreted as symptoms of degeneration.

It is important to stress the novelty of these arguments in a Scottish context. They exploit a fault-line that can be seen quite clearly for the first time in George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901). Douglas Brown is an heir to Flaubert in depicting a provincial world whose inhabitants are blind to the aesthetic significance of their environment. For Brown's narrator, dawn is characterised in terms of 'an unfamiliar delicacy in the familiar scene, a freshness and purity of aspect – almost an unearthliness – as though you viewed it through a crystal dream'. But the elder Gourlay is 'dead to the fairness of the scene'.[7] Brown generalises this failure of vision into a national stereotype through the contrast between two types of imagination: 'Imagination may consecrate the world to a man, or it may merely be a visualizing faculty which sees that, as already perfect, which is still lying in the raw material'. The latter 'commercial imagination' is what makes the Scot the 'best of colonists'.[8] But he lacks that higher imagination, 'both creative and consecrative', whose nascent presence in young Gourlay constitutes the book's great irony, and which, suitably disciplined by thought 'might create an opulent and vivid mind'.[9] By characterising this lower faculty as *'perfervidum ingenium'*, traditionally associated with the Celts, Brown displaces the Arnoldian

---

[6] These are MacDiarmid's term in his retrospective poem, published in 1947. 'The Kulturkampf', in Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken (eds), *The Collected Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid,* vol. 1 (Harmondsworth, 1978), 694–704, 698.

[7] George Douglas Brown, *The House with the Green Shutters* (Harmondsworth: 1985), 39.

[8] Ibid., 98.

[9] Ibid., 162, 163.

account of the racial sources of literary genius, aligning the artist not with the primitivist return to origins but with the tradition of modern aesthetic philosophy.[10] In doing so he broadens the metropolitan critique of provincial vision – lapped up by Edinburgh critics as an attack on the sentimental and popular fiction of the kailyard – into a challenge to the national stereotypes of the enterprising and entrepreneurial Scot.

This attempt to view Scotland in the light of aesthetic modernity generates two central features of the Renaissance movement, the tensions between which are bequeathed to subsequent Scottish writers and artists. The first is a problematic interpretation of the cultural history of the preceding two centuries; the second is an artistic dynamism that responds to the utopian demand for artists to be both social and aesthetic visionaries. For Brown, provincial taste proves inadequate measured against the powers of the imagination heralded in the idealist philosophy and the classical models he had learned at the Universities of Glasgow and Oxford, and national tradition feels inadequate measured against the strengths of modern European literature. Later writers would extend this critique to Scotland as a whole, linking it to commerce and capitalism, rejecting the art and thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries out of hand, and diagnosing the failure of artistic imagination as a historical fall from grace. Edwin Muir's 'Scotland, 1941' is the most succinct artistic recollection of this view, tracing the dissolution of pre-Reformation rural community, and specifically identifying Protestantism with capitalism: 'We watch our cities burning in the pit, / To salve our souls grinding dull lucre out'.[11] In his depiction of pre-lapsarian idyll, Muir incorporates reference to Thomas the Rhymer to suggest the harmonious integration of poetry and imagination into the sphere of social existence – the 'green road winding up the ferny brae' being the path to fairyland, signalling the desirable co-existence and integration of the spiritual and mundane worlds. Critics have tended to find Muir's poem too categorical, but I suggest we take it seriously as a reminder that for the Renaissance, absent conditions of total social reconciliation, the achievement of adequate aesthetic form is at most a compensatory achievement. Muir's point about Burns and Scott is that art in unredeemed society can only be 'a sham', and absent a hubris that the severity of his style rejects, this would have to include his own work. Modern art is always an art of failure, and a national art is always the art of our own particular cultural disaster.

---

[10] Ibid., 98, emphasis in original.
[11] Edwin Muir, *Collected Poems* (London, 1984), 97–8, 97.

The uneven blending of cultural and historical criticism with artistic activism on which the idea of literary Renaissance is predicated can also be seen clearly in Christopher Grieve's work. On the one hand, Grieve is committed to demonstrating the possibility of a distinctively national art: by differentiating Scottish from English literature, forging styles with deeper connection to popular life than would be possible following bourgeois standards, and thereby vindicating the ideal of national aesthetic culture. This is the basis for his relationship to Burns – however degraded by the cult around the poet, there remains a genuine popular appreciation of the national poet which presages a potential regeneration. But on the other hand, Grieve's own more radical projects call for new forms and styles against which much of the work associated with the Renaissance itself remains hopelessly backward. This is true in both politics and poetics, as he has to distance himself from both the verse of the vernacular revival and the cause of home rule.

This tension can lead to apparent contradictions. For example, the *Northern Numbers* anthologies contain plenty of Georgian verse alongside more imagist or symbolist writing. Donald Mackenzie's poem 'Edinburgh', contributed to the second volume (1921), deploys the tropes of romantic cultural criticism and the clichés of a neoclassical poetic diction to complain that 'Commerce is placed o'er art; the harp is dumb, / The pen unhonoured: wealth doth learning shun'.[12] When in *Scottish Scene* (1934) Grieve's alter ego Hugh MacDiarmid complains that 'a similar vague diffused spirit of evil, emasculating the whole life of the nation and rendering any creative spirit, any real activity, impossible, has the whole of Scotland in its toils, and Edinburgh is its headquarters', he is merely refashioning the earlier sentiment.[13] MacDiarmid's 'spirit of evil' is explained in context as a gloss of the Boyg from Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, but only a step in another direction lie the sentiments of Mackenzie's poem: 'Wouldst thou become, / O Modern Athens, Modern Babylon?'. As in much of his less successful occasional verse, the tone of MacDiarmid's 'kulturkampf' can often border on kitsch, and his critical bluster might be taken as a sign of his awareness of the need to commit to using a rhetoric he recognises as hackneyed. There are lessons here for less cautious scribblers of the contemporary Yes movement, whether panegyrists or polemicists.

The same tensions between destructive historical criticism and artistic vision are more successfully reconciled in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, although

---

[12] *Northern Numbers*, 2 (1921), 90.

[13] 'Edinburgh', in Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene: or, The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (Edinburgh: 1934), 68–81, 70.

their presence in combination is a sign of a high risk strategy. MacDiarmid's great work is an epic of imagination, pitting the Dionysiac intoxication of the artist against the thistle, standing in by synecdoche for the entire conventional image-stock of national culture. The underlying impulse is Nietzschean, and it is the exemplary significance of the artist himself which accounts for much of the discomfort with which MacDiarmid's project has been received. As Christoph Menke explains, for Nietzsche, 'aesthetically autonomous art gains ethical-political import only through the figure of the artist – more precisely through our *learning from the artist*'. The artist's capacity for intoxication, a state of 'increased force and plenitude' is emblematic of the purposeless praxis which would characterise an achieved aesthetic political condition.[14]

The structure of MacDiarmid's poem bears this out. The poet-figure, physically passive before the thistle, overcomes it through the power of imaginative vision. The poem begins in a violent confrontation with the same manifestation of kitsch in national life that Renaissance criticism sought to drive out, before transcending this towards an experience of the infinite, necessary prelude to any earthly political reconstruction:

> He canna Scotland see wha yet
> Canna see the Infinite,
> And Scotland in true scale to it.[15] (ll.2527-9)

The emphasis on spiritual vision is entwined with an overcoming of self; not merely a renunciation, but an active cruelty and contempt directed towards both self and social world. Moreover, it remains an open question whether Scotland itself can live up to the ideal embodied by the artist:

> Is Scotland big enough to be
> A symbol o' that force in me,
>
> In wha's divine inebriety
> A sicht abune contempt I'll see?[16] (ll. 2009-12)

I have stressed the inextricability of creation and destruction in the

---

[14] Christoph Menke, *Force: A Fundamental Concept of Aesthetic Anthropology*, trans. Gerrit Jackson (New York, 2013), 83 (emphasis in original), 85.

[15] *Collected Poems* vol. 1, 83–167, 162.

[16] Ibid., 145.

Renaissance project both to signal its utopianism and to highlight the tension between the aesthetic-political project of critique and more conventional political strategies. The embrace of radical politics by the artists of the Renaissance leads to a series of confrontations with more moderate standard-bearers of nationalist sentiment. Nationalist groups in twentieth-century Scotland have more often been vehicles for establishment renegotiation of administrative devolution and control than they have been advocates for radical social renewal, which suggests we might view the political role of the artistic fringe as closer to that of a ginger group. It is also true that many writers were skeptical of both artistic and social projects for renewal, a debate sometimes obscured by the elision of the tension between the Renaissance, narrowly defined, and other significant work of the period.

This difference is clearly dramatized in Nan Shepherd's *The Weatherhouse* (1930). Garry Forbes, University-educated engineer, returns to Fetter-Rothnie as emblem of modernization and social progress: he preaches what the novel describes ambiguously as the 'gospel of a rejuvenated world', reflecting the intertwining of myth and religion in the social doctrines of Renaissance writers.[17] Forbes echoes the role of Ekdal in Ibsen's *Wild Duck*: he will unmask the lies by which the community lives in order to ready it for the cold blast of progress. But instead he learns lessons that might equally be directed at the author of *The House with the Green Shutters*. The Scottish rural world is not a parochial backwater, but nor is it the benign object of aesthetic vision. Its moral life has its own drama and complexity, and the landscape's power is elemental and disturbing. So while the novel records and explores what it describes as 'the change in temper of a generation, the altered point of balance of the world's knowledge, the press of passions other than individual and domestic', Garry's social enthusiasm founders: 'How could one proclaim an ideal future when men and women persisted in being so stubbornly themselves?'.[18] Shepherd's vision is stubbornly anti-Pelagian, stressing moral complexity and ambivalence, suggesting both the persistence of older traditions of thought in twentieth century Scotland, but also the presence of a distinctively literary resistance to the idealism underpinning the work of the Renaissance writers.

The terms within which Scotland's modernist writers understood their role dated rapidly in the period of retrenchment following the second world war. These attitudes aligned with a more general loss of faith in the transformative power of the intoxicated and iconoclastic artist. Post-war literary activity – for

---

[17] Nan Shepherd, *The Weatherhouse* (Edinburgh, 1988), 162.
[18] Ibid., 11, 178.

example the *Poetry Scotland* series published by William Mclennan – consolidated the new vernacular poetry of the interwar years. But Muir's post-war verse sets the dominant tone, to be succeeded by the ironic classicism of Norman McCaig. What Douglas Gifford has identified as a 'mood of disillusion' characterizes the Scottish novels of the 1950s and 60s, which suggests that it is the attitude of Shepherd rather than that of MacDiarmid which predominates.[19] This is symptomatic of wider disenchantment with the aesthetic-political projects of the 1930s, perceived to be contaminated with totalitarian impulses. It may also be in part the result of transferral of social hope to the state, entailing in its turn increased administration of the arts, alongside closer scrutiny of their relationship to broadcasting and education. Although a British phenomenon, these trends may be more marked in Scotland. Richard Finlay suggests that the establishment of the welfare state had a greater cultural impact in Scotland than elsewhere; it was also accompanied by a renewal of the Scottish establishment's commitment to devolved administration, already evident in the 1930s, that drew the teeth of the nationalist movement.[20]

Devolution and the transformation of critique: 1970–2000

It has become a commonplace to suggest that Scottish literature undergoes a further renaissance in the 1980s. This implies a further resurgence of the same impulse, but in fact there are significant differences. These are caused in part by external changes in the relationship between art and culture. In the 1920s and 1930s it had been common to see art as a sphere set apart from the cultural, and hence as a space within which cultural change might be explored, mapped, anticipated or even stimulated. But by the last decades of the twentieth century, the autonomy of the artistic sphere from the social can no longer be taken for granted. This has a political consequence insofar as artists and writers are increasingly reluctant to see themselves as possessing a privileged point of view; it also has significance for artistic production. The writers of the twentieth-

---

[19] 'Re-mapping Renaissance', in Gerard Carruthers, David Goldie and Alasdair Renfrew (eds), *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth Century Scottish Literature* (Amsterdam, 2004), 17–27, 26; the relationship of this mood to the work of the Renaissance itself is qualified by Roderick Watson, 'The Modern Scottish Literary Renaissance', in Ian Brown and Alan Riach (eds), *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh, 2009), 75–87, 76–7.

[20] For Richard Finlay, 'the mood of optimism' had 'a deeper resonance [in Scotland] simply because there was more for the state to do in terms of economic and social regeneration', *A Partnership For Good: Scottish Politics and the Union since 1880,* (Edinburgh, 1997), 134.

century Renaissance had specifically sought to combine the revitalisation of national culture with its forceful aesthetic critique. In contrast, over the course of the devolutionary period a division of artistic labour emerges between the production of national culture and its avant-garde critique.

This difference between the two eras – and its political valence – can be clearly seen by contrasting attitudes to tradition. Neil Gunn writes in 1940: 'Only inside his own tradition can a man realise his greatest potentiality; just as, quite literally, he can find words for his profoundest emotion only in his native speech or language. This admits of no doubt, and literature, which is accepted as man's deepest expression of himself, is there to prove it'.[21] Gunn's confidence is as striking as the high value attributed to literature, and his emphasis on the innate emotional connection between language, literature and cultural tradition. A more typical view from the later period not only contests the importance of tradition, but aligns writing precisely with doubt and uncertainty: 'I am a woman. I am heterosexual, I am more Scottish than anything else and I write. But I don't know how these things interrelate. […] I have been asked for a personal perspective on my writing, Scottishness in literature and Scottishness in my work, but my whole understanding of writing and my method for making it does not stem from literary or national forms and traditions'.[22] A. L. Kennedy's wariness here may suggest a retreat from the attempt to forge a national literature, and hence from politics. But what the writing of devolutionary Scotland loses in terms of providing co-ordinating points of cultural identification and recognition, it gains back in terms of critical force.

The new writing that emerges from Scotland in the 1980s is varied. But in its deflationary conception of the place of art in society, its suspicions of the designs that history has on the individual, its concern to reinscribe class and gender as interruptions of social consensus but not as the pivotal engine of history, it reconstitutes the realm of aesthetics as a place of restless critical questioning, but rarely of national affirmation. In the process, literature redefines its traditional claim to 'truth', now being more concerned with marking its distance not from the kitsch falsification of tradition, but from the journalistic falsification of reality and the pressure to contribute directly to

---

[21] 'On Tradition', in Alistair McCleery (ed.), *Landscape and Light* (Aberdeen, 1987), 203–6, 205.

[22] A. L. Kennedy, 'On Not Changing the World', in Ian A. Bell (ed.), *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction*, (Cardiff, 1995), 100–2, 100.

the production and reproduction of social life. This aligns the novelists more closely with the poets than with the historians. Frank Kuppner:

> Now, I am fascinated by such, as it were, pauses in life,
> As being closer to what life normally is
> Than the supreme events which documents tend to fill with,
> As if only spectacular oceans are deep.[23]

In these developments, Scottish literature comes into line with international trends, in the process acquiring the external recognition on which the claim to have successfully renewed cultural tradition depends, while also marketing 'Scotland the brand' to support the tourist industries. The result is both a turn away from questions of identity and a suspicion of the box of 'literary tradition' into which writers had been forced.

For the writing of the 1920s and 1930s, politics was to be thought in terms of history, placing a premium on tradition. For the later period, politics is understood primarily through autonomy. This puts a greater stress on the tensions between the individual and collectivity in general. It brings Scottish writing closer to the scepticism of Shepherd about the possibility of individual fulfilment within community, than to MacDiarmid's idealist future poetry. Where mid-century writers had looked for spaces of lyrical freedom within the individual self, later writing is more strongly marked by the suggestion that in non-reconciled social conditions, there can be no complete or whole self for the individual and that the aesthetic experience of freedom is at best solipsism, at worst irresponsibility. Towards the end of Jessie Kesson's *The White Bird Passes* (1958), Janie experiences an epiphany which the novel describes as 'true freedom. Out here beyond beeswax'. Associated throughout the novel with folksong and the traces of an older oral culture, but also with the vivid impulse of Biblical language acting on the imagination, these moments of lyric interiority promise a temporary point of connection between Janie and the environment, both natural and cultural, that sustains her: 'She shut her eyes to feel the sun groping warmly over her and hotly finding her. You could know an invisible world if you were blind. You could feel its being trembling. Smell its nearness. Hear the thin murmur of its voice'.[24] But in Kennedy's novels, the desire for independence is revealed as narcissism, the attempt to

---

[23] 'Passing Through Doorways', in Douglas Dunn (ed.), *Twentieth Century Scottish Poetry* (London, 1992), 377–85, 379.

[24] Jessie Kesson, *The White Bird Passes* (Edinburgh, 2003), xxx.

protect the self from the risk entailed by admitting our dependence on others: as Savinien puts it in *So I Am Glad* 'an independent life' is: 'That impossible thing. Free from false complications'.[25] Negotiating this tension, her work alternates detailed maps of alienated social existence with tentative, fragile and fungible experiences of possible fulfilment.

This reversal of perspective is in part the consequence of the cultural nationalist tradition itself becoming a force to be rejected. In 1993 the poet Kathleen Jamie recalled that

> I was being told in this loud but subliminal way "You must read MacDiarmid and take those ideas on and espouse his ideas", I was told there was this poem that I had to read, it was called A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle. Drunk? Men? Thistle? What? This was what we'd been striving to get away from for umpteen years. This is the smoky darkness of those pubs that you weren't allowed into because you were a woman. Yes? No. No, not for me.[26]

MacDiarmid's avant-gardism had undoubtedly been an inspiration for younger writers such as Edwin Morgan and Ian Hamilton Finlay, but the literature of the early Scottish revival could itself be perceived as a prescriptive straitjacket. The folk revival of the 1960s had also contributed a neo-romantic and volkisch strand that identified language with people, abolishing the tension between the aesthetic and the vernacular that had nourished the experimental language of the modernists.

The strongest influence on the later period is the sense of disenfranchisement arising from the political upheaval of the 1970s. The true inheritors of the modernist social impulse in Scotland had not been the artists but the planners, who in the postwar decades had undertaken the transformation both of the Highlands and of Scotland's cities. It is the failure of these infrastructural changes to effect substantive social transformation that marks the literature of urban decay, from Morgan's 'Glasgow Sonnets' (1972) to Janice Galloway's *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* (1989). 'It's not the 1930s now,' wrote Edwin Morgan in the former*,*

> Hugh MacDiarmid forgot
> in 'Glasgow 1960' that the feast

---

[25] A.L Kennedy, *So I Am Glad* (London, 1996), 181.
[26] quoted by Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books* (London, 2007), 553.

of reason and the flow of soul have ceased
to matter to the long unfinished plot
of heating frozen hands.[27]

Just as the coming of the welfare state had held a disproportionate promise in Scotland, so the collapse of post-war consensus was felt more strongly. The literary and political magazines of the period show the influx of radical political impulses – drawn from the New Left, from the feminist movement, and from post-Marxist socialist theories – alongside a more nationalist emphasis on the recovery of the national past. Asserting through the form of their work the texture and resilience of the individual voice, writers like Tom Leonard and James Kelman developed a literature that explores the parallels between aesthetic and political autonomy. Artistic achievement is equated with the negation of the demands made upon the writer by the dominant culture: it is at best successful resistance, not transformation. Crucially, these authors' participation in radical political activism attests to their refusal to conflate art and politics – prefiguring their later suspicion of the Yes movement.

The impact of these changing contexts can be illustrated clearly in the problematic situation of William McIlvanney, a novelist who played a vocal political role as an advocate of Scottish independence, but whose work has been marginalized in discussion of the 'second Renaissance' of the 1980s and 1990s. In his 1996 novel *The Kiln* the protagonist Tom Docherty sets out aspirations for his novel which seem to align closely with McIlvanney's: the attempt to memorialize working class folkways, lending dignity and depth to the passing moments of ordinary lives. Docherty connects this with a non-doctrinal, socialist humanism that he identifies with Scottish tradition, but which he sees as vanishing in the changing political and social landscape. By making his protagonist a novelist, McIlvanney seeks to close the gap between artistic experience and social life that founds the specifically aesthetic critique of a work like *The House With The Green Shutters*. But Docherty's exploration of his own self-alienation suggests that this split has merely been internalized in the figure of the artist, as the agonized self-consciousness of the community.

The pioneer in prose fiction of the period is James Kelman, who departs from the more conventional formal qualities of McIlvanney's realism, while sharing the latter's commitment to the dignity of working-class life. Kelman's use of more ambiguous, fractured styles specifically targets our

---

[27] 'Glasgow Sonnets', in *Collected Poems* (Manchester, 1990), 289–92, 290.

desire for the redemptive acknowledgement of social contradiction through its fictional representations. This is a shift from existentialist humanism to a more radical challenge akin to nihilism, in which conventional social forms – family, community, tradition – are revealed to be saturated in power relations, and hence insufficient as a basis to sustain social hope. History, reduced in McIlvanney's work to an incomprehensible fate that can only be endured, becomes in Kelman a destructive nightmare. For Kelman any concession to conventional narrative expectations dissolves the critical role of the artwork, and reduces literature to entertainment. This opens a second fault-line between his project and that of McIlvanney, an early exponent of what had become by 2014 the dominant, and defiantly generic, mode in Scottish fiction: crime writing. The highly conventional characteristics of the detective novel frame and neutralize its social and political content, reinforcing a disenchanted view of the social world as simple common sense.

The work of Alasdair Gray is exemplary of the changing status of the relationship between imagination and politics in the period, and of the distance travelled from the idealism of the Renaissance. Gray sets out to write the epic of the post-war welfare state in *Lanark*, but finds himself anatomizing its failures: corporatist capitalism is revealed as bureaucratic centralism, tied to a system of international states in which feigned democracy masks the rapacious exploitation of the earth by multinational corporations. The alignment of Institute, Council and Creature – roughly speaking, the interlocking systems of modern politics, the arts and sciences, and capitalism – suggests a critical diagnosis of the failure of modernity as thoroughgoing as that of Muir. Despite the persistent ironic demonstration in the realist books that Thaw's desire to pursue his art in peace is not just unrealistic, but selfish and life-denying, when his counterpart Lanark strives to act politically, but finds himself a helpless participant in a process beyond his control, the novel honours his good intentions. The implication is that the romantic linkage of artistic to personal and political freedom assumed by Thaw is itself a modern distortion, parallel to the distortion of political life under the conditions of capitalism and modern democracy. Thaw's complaint that Glasgow is uninhabitable because unimagined by artists has been widely mistaken as a call for a political revival to be led by cultural representation, as if we can only believe in something we have seen depicted by the imagination. In fact Gray's hopes are invested in a return to an earlier ideal – of the renaissance city-state in which neither art nor politics are premised on the false bill of goods sold by capitalism and romanticism alike. This is what distances Gray's patriotism

from the nationalism for which it is often mistaken. His idealization of the city state, seen as epitome of commercial and political patronage of the arts, and of the municipal as the appropriate scale for political improvement, squares with his classicist appreciation of the small and his love of the local.

Gray's struggle with the form of the novel – his career is in many ways a series of fascinating but failed experiments – may follow from the difficulty of finding a modern shape for his political beliefs. Nastler's stated aims in *Lanark* are distinctively pre-modern – 'to show a moving model of the world as it is with them inside it' – but this geometrical model of the physical and spiritual universe implies necessity as a cosmological principle, against which the novel must struggle to vindicate its protagonist's freedom.[28] As Gray recognizes, this distorts its worldview. When in Provan, Lanark meets two men, one an optimist, one a pessimist. The former comments:

> 'You pessimists always fall into the disillusion trap. From one distance a thing looks bright. From another it looks dark. You think you've found the truth when you've replaced the cheerful view by the opposite, but true profundity blends all possible views, bright as well as dark.'[29]

If we take this as an admission that *Lanark* may have failed to find a balance between the positive and the negative, we might understand *1982 Janine* as an attempt at a new start. The fatalistic account of human nature drawn by *Lanark* – man is the pie that bakes and eats himself – is reversed into the affirmation of human potential as recognition of the divine potential within. Imagination is in all of us – however pornographic in its current form – and a process of psychic reintegration might ground a renewal. 'I am the eyeball by which the universe sees and knows itself divine': as the silent quotation from Shelley's 'Ode to Apollo' suggests, Gray draws now on the transcendental imagination of the romantics. Imagination is the essence of the divine in all of us: and it is always open to us to accept its power working within us.[30] *1982 Janine* affirms again what *Lanark* has rejected, but at the cost of dissolving the distance between the artist and the engineer: in re-working C.P. Snow's account of the two cultures, Gray places imagination at the basis of both the arts and the sciences. Only recognition of their unity would put technology into the service of ends defined through a larger account of human flourishing,

---

[28] Alasdair Gray, *Lanark* (London, 1991), 494.

[29] ibid., 477.

[30] Alasdair Gray, *1982 Janine* (London: 1984), 70.

reversing the disastrous modern tendency to subordinate the human to the technical. This is not a matter of waiting, but of activity in the here and now: in the much-cited slogan, to work *as if* in the days of a better nation, or to assume that the Renaissance project has already been completed. This risks blurring a distinction between art and politics that only holds for an unredeemed society, accounting perhaps for the fabular quality of Gray's historical political essays, and the essayistic quality of some of his prose fiction.

Gray's analysis makes the arts only an example of a generalized model of production, and displaces them from the privileged place that *Lanark* has explored and rejected, and on which the Renaissance writers had staked their own claim for the transformative power of literature. Despite Gray's status as a figurehead of Scottish artistic engagement in the Referendum period, *1982 Janine* suggests that the imagination of the artist should have no privileged place in the national conversation, except to the extent that it helps us recognize a creative power within us all. If there is a clear precedent set here for the language of creative possibility found in the Yes campaign, and for the identification by many writers of independence with a discourse of responsibility and self-reliance, *1982 Janine* is also an early example of the tendency to see political disagreement as pathological deviation.[31] Jock's Toryism becomes in Gray's hands a psychic disease and not a political position. Ironically, given Gray's apparent republicanism, this leaves little place for the politics of public debate and persuasion, and the novel scorns rhetoric as the pure expression of power.

Referendum and 'cultural confidence': 2000–2014

Every political event entails the possibility of innovation: not just a change of policy, but the discovery that a more profound transformation has already taken place, that we no longer stand where we thought we did. The power of the nation as a political figure is that it provides a temporal frame through which to grasp the shifting balance between loss and invention, and to stabilize our experience of change. This structure must be the site of an intense moral ambivalence, as we inevitably familiarise the strangeness of the past in the course of preserving it in recognizable forms, while we risk cancelling the difference of the future by seeing it as an extrapolation of the present. As social systems become increasingly differentiated, complex and intermeshed through globalization, our need to simplify through figures of identification becomes more powerful, but potentially more treacherous. The referendum

---

[31] See many of the contributions to Scott Hames (ed.), *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence* (Edinburgh, 2012).

campaign can be said to have contributed to a major refurnishing of the symbolic horizon within which debates about art and politics in Scotland are framed, and against which possible futures are measured. If the events of 2014 underlined the distance travelled since the referendum of 1979, they also revealed and accelerated more profound changes.

This change was most clearly registered as a transformation in perceptions of the relationship between cultural criticism and national traditions. In the early 1980s, discussion of the relationship between literature and nation often found itself returning to the debates of the 1930s, in seeking to redress perceived discontinuities and failings in artistic and political tradition: Barbara and Murray Grigor's *Scotch Myths* exhibition (1981) and film (1982) coinciding with the republication of Muir's *Scott and Scotland* by Polygon (1982). Over the course of the following two decades, a self-conscious programme of historiographical recovery comprehensively undermined the empirical basis for that interpretation of history. Rather than asking why Scotland had not produced modern forms in the arts, now cultural historians drew attention to continuing and vital traditions of Scottish literature, philosophy, painting and music. The question became not so much the existence but the distinctiveness or integrity of such traditions, and their historical significance. The period of devolution had seen a major restructuring of the discursive field which, in the wake of the post-war collapse of the Renaissance aspiration that a political revolution should be led by the arts, inscribed a new opposition between national culture and artistic critique. This divide was exacerbated by a revival of Scottish cultural history which relieved writers and artists of the burden of explaining past failures, filling gaps in the historical record, or of representing to itself a nation that – as the argument had once gone – had been let down by historians. This is what was widely described as 'cultural confidence', a frame for the debate to which both sides in the referendum could appeal.

Confidence means cultural self-recognition, a perception of national difference in the mode not of critique but of satisfaction. Both are vulnerable to exceptionalism, but if the weakness of the former is its tendency towards what Cairns Craig has called 'nostophobia', the diagnosis of the products of the national culture as inherently debased, the risk of the latter is an uncritical mythopoeic positivity with disavowed political aims.[32] This could be interpreted as the completion of the Renaissance project – but equally as its abdication. Certainly, evaluation of Scottish tradition no longer rests so centrally on

---

[32] Cairns Craig, 'Nostophobia', in Jonathan Murray, Fidelma Farley and Rod Stoneman (eds.), *Scottish Cinema Now* (Cambridge, 2009), 56–71.

the distinction between art and kitsch that had driven the critical engine of the first Renaissance. There was evidence of this: in 2014 the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum had hosted major retrospectives of the work of both Jack Vettriano, whose nostalgic figurative art had been long ignored by curators, and of Alasdair Gray. Cultural historians too were less concerned with the demand to distinguish between reality and representation, in the light of postmodern doctrines that reality was always in part the product of representations, and the nation always the sum of its own imaginings. Charting the distance between his own work and the 'Scotch myths' exhibition, Murray Pittock concluded: 'we all have our myths, and it turned out that "Scotch myths" are no worse than anybody else's'.[33]

In one sense, this could be described as a manifestation of confidence: recognition of Scottish cultural production as being of no less intrinsic interest than any other. But it might equally be regarded as complacency. The culturalist interpretation of Scottish political history claimed the referendum campaign as the fulfilment of the aspirations of the Renaissance writers. But this in fact expressed the precise reversal of the relationship between art and society that was the foundation of the Renaissance project. Writers of the inter-war Renaissance saw themselves as a cultural vanguard – the challenge was to prove that genuine creation was possible and thereby set an example for the creation of a modern nation: through social revolution and economic revival, through the restoration of tradition, through the destruction of national kitsch and the toppling of false idols. Nearly a century later, participants in the referendum debate could take for granted that Scottish art and culture were possible, because widely acclaimed and acknowledged. But if the cultural nationalist position were true, any claims of art to stand apart from politics and social process, to provide a space for reflection or challenge, had to be set aside: if MacDiarmid could stand alongside Boswell and Scott, as he did in Andrew Marr's BBC television series 'Great Scots' as one of the 'writers that shaped a nation', had he in turn become a sham bard?

This is to some extent borne out by the reception of the Renaissance legacy: the vigour and radicalism of the earlier period proved hard to evaluate for critics in the wake of devolution. Cultural historians of the 1980s and 1990s sought to redress the consequences arising from the scorched-earth Renaissance tendency to scant the achievement of the preceding centuries; they were also concerned that the racial vocabulary in which they were

---

[33] Murray Pittock, *The Road to Independence? Scotland Since the Sixties* (London, 2008), 123.

often expressed exposes the ideals which underpinned the 1920s and 1930s as archaic and essentialising.[34] Conversely, just as the new pluralism allowed writers to move on from the language debates of the 1930s, critics have been tempted to see the Renaissance as a successful precedent. This is to take the art produced by the Renaissance as itself the solution to the social and economic problems that it sought to diagnose. If we reduce social questions to matters of culture, then the production of art that succeeds on its own terms, while falling into line with standards set internationally, might be seen as a form of renewal. But MacDiarmid cautioned against just this interpretation in his draft *Aesthetics in Scotland* (1950): reference to the 'Scottish Renaissance' 'does not imply that that has been achieved, but simply that it is what is being aimed at'.[35] To confuse the creation of successful artworks with the achievement of a society in which art is no longer an insult to the conditions of unfreedom in which many of its inhabitants live is to betray the legacy of the Renaissance. The aesthetic critique of modernity depends on the differentiation between art and culture – between the normative standards and conventions of society and works which challenge and repudiate them. Historians are clear that the Renaissance has little visible impact in its own day: tempting for the cultural historian to celebrate their achievement in retrospect by way of redeeming their struggle.[36]

We are now in a position to assess the first part of Alan Warner's suggestion that there has been a continuous 'project' of nation formation in twentieth-century Scotland, or as he elaborated in an interview of the same period: 'There's a school in Scottish literature that goes back to the 20s when writers and poets felt they were through literature building a nation, a virtual nation, an imagined nation'.[37] This can be seen to be partially correct: imagination was required to conjure alternative possibilities to the moribund nation at hand.

---

[34] For representative examples: Gifford, 'Re-mapping Renaissance'; Sarah Dunnigan, 'The Return of the Repressed' in Carruthers et. al. (eds), *Beyond Scotland*, 111-31; Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh, 1999); Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke, 2004).

[35] *Aesthetics in Scotland* [c.1950], reprinted in Alan Riach (ed.), *Albyn: Shorter Books and Monographs* (Manchester, 1996), 78–129, 85.

[36] See Catriona Macdonald, *Whaur Extremes Meet: Scotland's Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh, 2009); for Ewen A. Cameron, *Impaled Upon A Thistle: Scotland Since 1880* (Edinburgh, 2010), it was 'too remote from the day-to-day concerns of the Scottish people', 173.

[37] Laura Barton, 'Alan Warner: booze, books and why he's backing independence' *The Guardian,* Tuesday 19 August 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/aug/19/alan-warner-booze-books-why-voting-scottish-independence.

However, Warner seems to accept the Renaissance critique of Scottish life – as insufficiently artistic – as a statement of historical fact. This overlooks the fact that the call for new standards of taste and new forms of critique is required precisely to overthrow Burns and Scott, writers who were felt to have been only *too* successful in creating an imagined – read imaginary – nation. Warner's comments also reflect the modern assumption that artistic imagination precedes and contributes to politics, assigning complacently to the art of the 1920s and 1930s a cultural value about which its producers, whether idealists or skeptics, had been more critical. The tension between memory and forgetting is constitutive of the cultural work of history.

Yet the redefinition of the art of the Renaissance not just as an episode in the prehistory of the contemporary, but as its very origin, risks cancelling out its critical distance from society. Scottish culture is alleged to be newly at ease with itself, negating that artistic questioning which is directed not so much to the national culture – since to presume this horizon is already to affirm too much – but of the violence with which any cultural formation addresses the individual. The ambiguity of this restoration settlement can also be traced clearly in the rhetoric of the referendum.

One notable feature was the concern of both campaigns not to appeal to history. This was a political decision to avoid being painted as the reactionary side, but it can also be seen as an echo of the new historiographical stress on the intertwining of varying forms of unionism with national sentiment throughout the period since 1707. Where Linda Colley's influential 1992 work *Britons* had understood Anglo-Scottish relations after Union as a project to build a single British nation around a shared Protestantism, a considerable body of historiography has now argued, on the contrary, that 'the dual existence of Scottish and British national identities [in the nineteenth century] was not regarded as weakness by contemporaries'.[38] This challenges the nationalist tendency to construct history in oppositional terms: indeed, Colin Kidd has argued that historically nationalist sentiment has more commonly been associated with unionist than separatist politics: 'While there is a huge gulf between the most extreme forms of unionism and nationalism, the most influential forms of unionism have been tinged with nationalist considerations,

---

[38] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1830* (New Haven, 1992); Graeme Morton and R. J. Morris, 'Civil Society, Governance and Nation, 1832–1914', in R. A. Houston and W. W. J. Knox (eds.) *The New Penguin History of Scotland: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London, 2001), 355–416.

while the mainstream of nationalism has tended to favour some form of wider association with England'.[39]

These changing perspectives on political history must undermine the view of the Renaissance, persisting into the 1980s, that the cultural achievements of the preceding centuries had been the unnatural products of a history distorted by Union. The new historiography stressed instead the malleability and variation of the idea of nationhood. Just as national symbols had proved themselves amenable to competing political mobilizations through the nineteenth century, so had a distinctive Scottish politics become embedded in civil administration, maintaining not just the 'autonomy' of Scottish national traditions, but a distinct tradition of resistance to the unitary British state.[40] Politically, the evidence of the historical co-existence of a strong sense of Scottish national identity with approval of participation in the British state, and in empire, could be claimed as support for the argument of the 'no' camp that a strong sense of national belonging was perfectly compatible with political and/or cultural support for the United Kingdom. It also de-legitimated the appeal to historical precedent, suggesting that the present situation was another stage in a long-running negotiation of political control between political actors at different levels, complicated by changing understandings of identity. Indeed there was a risk for advocates of independence that greater understanding of Scotland within the period of Union would normalize the differentiation between cultural and political subsystems.

The loss of force of the argument from tradition is partly responsible for the striking degree to which both sides presented themselves as defenders of the status quo – only independence or continuing partnership in the Union would allow Scotland to preserve a political culture that reflected its social consensus. The language of aesthetics met the need of the Yes campaign for an unobjectionable and non-specific vocabulary that left itself open to radical construction and would aid in building a political coalition. It also served a valuable second function in helping strike a balance between radical promise (to keep the energetic grassroots democratic movements on board) and emphasising continuity (to appear to minimise the threat of disruptive change). Creativity and imagination were unobjectionable — safely depoliticised — and yet tra-

---

[39] *Union and Unionism: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500–2000* (Cambridge, 2008), 300.

[40] Graeme Morton, *Unionist Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, 1830–1860* (East Linton, 1999); Lindsay Paterson, *The Autonomy of Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1994); Graeme Morton, 'Identity within the Union State, 1800–1900', in T. M. Devine and Jenny Wormald (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History* (Oxford, 2012), 474–490.

ditionally associated with resistance to capitalism. Indeed the Yes campaign's exploitation of artistic commitment to independence echoes closely the New Labour government of Tony Blair, in its exploitation of culture and celebrity to establish extra-political credentials, and in linking cultural production to soft power, interlocking the administration of culture with economic and political objectives in the arts themselves, but also in education and tourism.[41]

Both sides stressed current confidence – as if the discourse of cultural pathology that had been a familiar characteristic of twentieth century intellectual life in Scotland were finally banished. But the link to creativity and imagination tilted this gesture in favour of the Yes campaign. The idea of the creative nation underscores the idea of Scotland's maturity, both achieved and potential – a creative and modern nation is already ready for a further radical step; a creative nation can be optimistic in relation to the risks entailed by independence because of its human resources and capabilities. If the No side were to stress – as in the event they did – the economic and financial risks of independence, they could be accused of lack of vision. There was of course also another implication, one which the Yes campaign would not have avowed, but which was an inevitable consequence of aligning culture and politics: given the likelihood of defeat, association with the arts would allow the Yes campaign to seize the commanding heights of the cultural economy, to stigmatise their opponents as unimaginative, lacking faith, confidence or belief in country. If Yes was aligned with imagination, any future failure could be blamed on their opponents, and stigmatised as treacherous lack of faith in the radical promise. You can argue about economic policy, currency and projected oil revenues, but you can't argue with a dream.

Étienne Balibar has proposed the term 'fictive ethnicity' to describe the relationship between historical discourse and national identification in the modern period:

> No nation possesses an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized – that is represented in the past and in the future *as if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individuals and social conditions.[42]

---

[41] Robert Hewison, *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain*, (London, 2014), Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy*, (Stanford, 2013).

[42] Étienne Balibar, 'The Nation Form: History and Ideology', in Étienne Balibar and

Both sides in the referendum debates sought to avoid reference to the past, and liberal nationalism in Scotland wears its appeals to cultural diversity as a point of pride, and to ward off the charge of archaism or ethnocentrism. Yet the emphasis of Balibar's argument is not on the obvious truth that nations are inherently political formations which legitimate their claim to authority through the manufacture of history, nor on the postmodern variant which elides the operations of power by rewriting this in terms of the popular imagination of community. His point is that the production of ethnicity is the production of *obviousness*; that the sheer givenness by which an identity, although lacking in any determinate content, presents itself as the horizon against which political negotiation takes place, has a history. In 2001 the sociologist David McCrone had described Scotland taking an 'almost […] cultureless, post-industrial journey into the unknown', observing that dominant

> attitudes and values have been distilled […] so that they become 'as if' Scottish, even though such attitudes are fairly widespread throughout most Western societies […] In other words, there is nothing distinctive about them, but they become useful markers of how a society wishes to present itself.[43]

What McCrone observes is precisely the production of ethnicity – the operation of the 'as if' which naturalizes contingent social facts.

The agreement of both sides in the 2014 Referendum campaign on the strength of Scottish culture – expressed in terms of confidence – suggests that what Craig sees as a 'rising tide of cultural nationalism' might be better described in terms of naturalization of culture as a symbolic horizon for political discussion, bringing with it the attendant risk of substituting cultural for political debate, and of politicizing culture in instrumental ways. To describe this in terms of the production of Scottish ethnicity emphasizes that it is a process by which those horizons of political debate become populated with new myths. A historical view of the 2014 referendum suggests that the new rhetoric of aesthetics in political debate attests to the rising tide of identity thinking, a shift that risks generating new tensions within the model of liberal nationalism espoused by the SNP and, albeit more cautiously, approved by

---

Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities,* trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1991), 86–106, 96.

[43] David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Nation* (London: 2001), 148, 174.

the broader civic society coalition that had sponsored devolution from the Scottish side of the border in the 1980s and 1990s. In this context cultural historians face a dual imperative to recognise rather than disavow their role in this political process, and to find modes which do not sublate the critical questioning of artworks into the production of national culture. If the Yes campaign is to have a lasting influence through a more thoroughgoing debate over the democratization of Scotland, it must contend with the legacy of this powerful identification *not* of Scotland with its historical past, but of politics as such with the expression of identity.

Present and Absent Nostalgia
in the 2014 Referendum

Robert Wirth

2014 was a year positively clogged with significant anniversaries and commemorations, remembrances and tributes.[1] The backward glance was inescapable, but both the Yes and the Better Together campaigns largely avoided the use of nostalgia as a means of influencing the vote. Instead, both official campaigns applied a utopian and future-oriented rhetoric, while accusing each other of instrumentalising sentimental attachments to the past. These charges tended to imply that an unhealthy restorative nostalgia was involved in every appeal to historic belonging, one seeking the comforting certainties of the tribe. Thus, even the most playful forms of reflective nostalgia became taboo by association in the official debate, while flourishing elsewhere. This paper looks back at the several modes of nostalgia present in (and absent from) the independence debate, and considers their political significance.

The debate on Scotland's future, which appears by no means to be concluded, was a passionate but nevertheless very pragmatic one. From a European perspective it is striking to note that, in modern times, violence has not seriously featured in the struggle for Scottish autonomy (or against it). Though the indyref debate became more heated and divisive in its latter stages, chauvinist rhetoric asserting exclusively Scottish or British identity was largely superseded by economic and constitutional matters. As Michael Keating and Malcolm Harvey write, 'visions of the [Scottish] nation have […] been recast, by politicians of all perspectives, away from a romanticised past and towards a more modern, progressive and forward-looking outlook'.[2] Thus, Marcus Banks' and Andre Gingrich's claim that '[t]oday's neo-nationalist groups use, manipulate and instrumentalise *the past* […] for purposes and goals

---

[1] 2014 saw the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn competing with the centenary of the start of the First World War – a year that also witnessed the bicentenary of the publication of Sir Walter Scott's first Waverley novel and Shakespeare's 450th birthday.

[2] Michael Keating and Malcom Harvey, *Small Nations in a Big World: What Scotland Can Learn* (Edinburgh, 2014), 135.

that are rooted in the present'[3], is only partially true in Scotland's case.

Launched just before St Andrew's Day, the independence White Paper *Scotland's Future* focused almost exclusively on economic issues, promising a better time to come rather than settling scores with the past.[4] Alex Massie commented that '[t]he lack of drama – the merciful absence of bagpipes-and-Braveheart-bullshit – at the paper's launch was quite deliberate. This, Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon insisted, is a sober, sensible calculation of the national interest. It's not a romantic romp in the heather or a doomed Jacobite jolly'.[5] And yet there was a restorative dimension to both campaigns: for Yes, resumption not of pre-1707 Scottishness but of post-1945 (British) welfarism. It is not only in name that the White Paper evokes Labour's 1945 manifesto *Let's Face the Future*.[6] Gerry Hassan aptly called the SNP's 'dominant narrative […] a "Back to the Future" outlook grounded on the allure of the supposed "golden age" of Britain 1945–75 and [a] dream of a "New Jerusalem" Scottish vision'.[7] The Yes campaign's appropriation of welfarist values historically identified with Labour helped to fuel the myth of Scotland being the more egalitarian society. The Pro-UK campaign, while regularly stressing common values and a shared history, likewise tried to appear forward-looking and progressive. Speaking to the Confederation of British Industry, George Osborne insisted there is more to Unionism than 'wallowing in nostalgia',[8] and aimed to make a purely rational and economic case for the preservation of Britain. This theme was repeated like a mantra. Ruth Davidson stressed that 'it is to the future

---

[3] Marcus Banks and Andre Gingrich, 'Neo-nationalism in Europe and Beyond', in Marcus Banks and Andre Gingrich (eds), *Neo-nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspectives from Social Anthropology* (New York, 2006), 1–28, 17, italics mine.

[4] Scottish Government, *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland*, n.d., http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00439021.pdf, accessed 25 May 2014.

[5] Alex Massie, 'Scottish Independence Is a Little More Likely Today Than It Was Yesterday', *spectator.co.uk*, 26 November 2013, http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/alex-massie/2013/11/scottish-independence-is-a-little-more-likely-today-than-it-was-yesterday/, accessed 29 November 2014.

[6] Labour Party, 'Let us Face the Future: a Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation', 1945, in *International Labour and Radical History Pamphlet Collection,* http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/ref/collection/radical/id/9811, accessed 15 November 2014.

[7] Gerry Hassan, 'Tom Devine, the Indy Ref and the Myths of Modern Scotland', *gerryhassan.com*, 21 August 2014, http://www.gerryhassan.com/blog/tom-devine-the-indy-ref-and-the-myths-of-modern-scotland/, accessed 25 August 2014.

[8] George Osborne, 'Speech by the Chancellor of the Exchequer', 6 September 2012, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/speech-by-the-chancellor-of-the-exchequer-rt-hon-george-osborne-mp-at-scotland-cbi, accessed 16 April 2014.

we must raise our eyes. Scotland in Britain is not an exercise in nostalgia. It is positive and forward-looking – together for good'.[9] George Robertson added: 'This is not about nostalgia: it is about the United Kingdom today. By any standards, this is a significant country, punching far above its weight politically, economically, militarily, culturally and in sport'.[10] Almost in the same breath, however, Robertson went on to list the British Army's various achievements 'from Waterloo to El Alamein and from Goose Green to Helmand' as reasons for staying in the Union.[11] The Yes campaign also rejected the charge of nostalgia. Joyce McMillan called it a 'profound political error […] to think that the current Yes movement in Scotland refers back to Bannockburn or Braveheart', insisting that it was 'the No campaign, by and large, who mention Braveheart – or indeed Bannockburn – as if they mattered'.[12]

Each side accused the other of instrumentalising nostalgic sentiment, though such references were generally rare. Emotional pleas to past (separate or united) accomplishments, glorious victories against each other or achieved together, long-held grudges or long-standing grievances, were quickly dismissed as parochial and consigned to the realm of myth. Yes campaigners were constantly charged with Tartan atavism, but largely concentrated on economic, social and constitutional issues, or what Ben Jackson calls their 'Labourish vision of ameliorist social democracy'.[13] No campaigners were also accused of wistful delusions. Alan Bissett's popular video-poem *Vote Britain* makes a satirical case for staying in the Union, assuming a patronising English voice to give the Scots unsolicited advice on how to vote.[14] This assumed voice urges the 'People of Scotland [to] vote with [their] heart', instead of

---

[9] Ruth Davidson, 'Scottish Conservative Conference Speech', 24 March 2012, http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2012/03/ruth-davidson-speech-scottish-conservative-party-conference/, accessed 5 May 2014.

[10] George Robertson, 'Independence Essay: George Robertson on the Union', *scotsman.com*, 24 June 2014, http://www.scotsman.com/news/independence-essay-george-robertson-on-the-union-1-3455591, accessed 9 July 2014.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Joyce McMillan, 'Independence Is Not About the Past', *scotsman.com*, 26 June 2014, http://www.scotsman.com/news/joyce-mcmillan-independence-is-not-about-the-past-1-3458621?FID=14377&ISC=1&CTP=ARTICLE&DID=3CCD8E8719EFF6BE308AC8180BE80D6127B2A132, accessed 2 August 2014.

[13] Ben Jackson, 'The Political Thought of Scottish Nationalism', *The Political Quarterly* 85.1 (2014), 50-6, 56.

[14] Alan Bissett, 'My Contribution to the Debate on Scottish Independence: Vote Britain', *alanbissett.com*, 13 January 2012, http://alanbissett.com/2012/01/13/my-contribution-to-the-debate-on-scottish-independence/, accessed 23 September 2013. All further references to the video-poem cite this text.

their head. This blatantly emotional appeal exhorts the Scots to remember their honoured place in the imperial project: 'First into battle, loyal and true. The enemy's scared of you. / That's why we send you *over the top* with your och-aye-the-noo'. The past looms large as the Scots are invited to 'Vote Empire', to 'Vote tradition' and to 'Vote for our proud shared history of 'Enslavingothernationsandstealingtheirnaturalresources'. These polemical allusions hint at the tribal mindset often associated with the political use of nostalgia, to which the debate might have given much greater vent. Only a vote for independence, Bissett urges, will put an end to 'strategic references to Braveheart [being deployed] to dismiss you all'; though his own poem makes extensive use of similar chestnuts to illustrate the injustice and humiliation of Scotland's post-1707 history: 'Vote for the Highland Clearances. Baaaaaaaaah'; 'Vote God Save the Queen and that bit about us crushing you all'; and – somewhat paradoxically – 'Vote for the absence of your history in our schools'.

In essence, Bissett accuses the No side of accusing the Yes side of buying into traditional markers and symbols of nostalgic sentiment, and in that accusation he mirrors the actual political debate. Actually weaponising a romanticised past, of which he accuses the No side, was in fact the exception. Trying 'to revive the medieval state of Scotland', as Ken Clarke had accused the SNP of doing, was as unrealistic and exaggerated as some of the notions Bissett set forth to make his subversive case.[15] Both sides seemed to assume in advance that nostalgia is wholly negative and to be condemned, but this is too simplistic.

According to David Cannadine, nostalgia usually follows social upheavals and revolutionary change.[16] The social revolution of Thatcherism led to nostalgia for the protection of the welfare state, and the post-2007 economic crisis can most definitely be seen as a social upheaval. Thus a wish to return to a former, less fraught state or time can be read as both conservative and 'progressive' in the sense described by the Unionist historian Colin Kidd, who writes of 'reluctant Old Labour diehards who see independence – understandably – as a way of rescuing part of the British welfare state from free-marketeering vandals'.[17] A person who is nostalgic is dissatisfied with the

---

[15] Tom Gordon, 'SNP Want to Revive Medieval State of Scotland, Claims Clarke', *heraldscotland.com*, 23 March 2014, http://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/ referendum-news/snp-want-to-revive-medieval-state-of-scotland-claims- clarke.23758849, accessed 25 March 2015.

[16] David Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past: Reflections on Queens, Kings, Knaves, Stately Homes, Sex, Food, and More in Modern Britain* (New York, 1989), 258–9.

[17] Colin Kidd, 'Reflections on the Independence Referendum', *London Review of Books*

present and thus turns back to more stable, homely and safe moments in the past, in order to find reassurance and confirmation of his or her own identity and self-image. This nostalgic turning back involves a certain form of memory by which we retain information and more or less accurately reconstruct past experiences – usually for present purposes. Our experiences and current actions are influenced by our remembered histories. A nostalgic memory, however, differs from personally experienced memory in that the events need not have happened to us, or even within our lifetime. While memory needs real events to connect to, in nostalgic memory the lines between remembering, perceiving and imagining are blurred. This is particularly the case where collective memory is concerned. Nostalgic remembering is often suffused with emotion and closely involved in socially significant practices such as celebrations and commemorations and thus becomes, finally, political.[18] Bannockburn, Flodden and Culloden are not merely historic battlefields; they are reifications of a Scottish collective memory around which nostalgic notions gather.

Svetlana Boym distinguishes between two kinds of nostalgia, which 'characteris[e] [our] relationship to the past, to an imagined community, to [our] home, and to [our] own self-perception, [calling them] restorative and reflective nostalgia'.[19] Restorative nostalgia attempts to restore or reconstruct the object of desire in order to be able to return to it, or at least to temporarily escape to it.[20] There is an emotional attachment to the past which also involves sentimentality. '[O]nly the positive aspects are recalled, amplified and valorised'[21], while the negative dimensions of that previous time are suppressed. 'Restorative nostalgia knows two main narrative plots: the restoration of origins and the conspiracy theory'.[22] While a narrative calling for a return to a medieval, early-modern, or pre-Union situation did not feature in the debate, the Yes side's selective ideological return to and appropriation of post-war Labour policy could indeed be considered restoratively nostalgic. If the restoration of origins was not prominent in the Scottish debate, Boym's second narrative plot certainly was. Boym writes: 'The conspirational world-view reflects […] a simple pre-modern conception of good and evil' and 'is based on a single transhistorical plot, a Manichean battle of good and evil and the inevitable scapegoating of the mythical enemy. […] "Home", imagine

---

36.17 (11 Sep 2014), 13–15.

[18] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, 2001), 42.

[19] Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

[20] Ibid. 41–8.

[21] Jacky Bowring. *A Field Guide to Melancholy* (Harpenden, 2008), 102.

[22] Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 43.

extremist conspiracy adherents, is forever under siege, requiring defence against the plotting enemy'.[23] The simplistic clear-cut dichotomies of us and them, good and evil, Scots and English, independence or subservience, Yes or No, are notions that played a significant role in the public debate. For the Better Together campaign, the *home* was most certainly under threat; for Yes it was to be both secured (from 'alien' Tory or quasi-Tory policy) and remade on terms reflective of Scotland's supposedly social-democratic character: calls for re-nationalisation of the Royal Mail and the prevention of further privatisation of the NHS could indeed be classified as being restoratively nostalgic. Restorative 'nostalgics do not think of themselves as nostalgic', Boym argues: 'they believe that their project is about truth'.[24] Outwith the political discourse, not conforming to either *truth* quickly led to being termed un-Scottish or un-British, a quisling, a traitor or a turncoat, as the reactions to Chris Hoy's and Andy Murray's endorsement of opposing sides exemplify.[25] As restorative nostalgia is closely linked to invented tradition, it 'can also be politically manipulated through newly recreated practices of national commemoration with the aim of re-establishing social cohesion, a sense of security and an obedient relationship to authority'.[26] The choice of date for the referendum itself was often interpreted as a subliminal reminder of the victorious culmination of the medieval wars of independence. While politicians attending the Bannockburn Live and UK Armed Forces Day celebrations of 28 June 2014 insisted on their un-political nature, the covert nostalgic undertone was palpable at both events.[27]

Reflective nostalgia, by contrast, is not concerned with a return to or reconstruction of a lost place or time, but rather it meditates on history and the passing of time, revelling in the feeling of longing itself.[28] Reflective nostalgia

---

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid. 41.

[25] Simon Johnson, 'Chris Hoy Called a Traitor to Scotland by Nationalists', *telegraph. co.uk*, 30 May 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/scotland/10087642/ Nationalists-call-Sir-Chris-Hoy-a-traitor-to-Scotland.html, accessed 24 March 2015; Matthew Norman, 'Insulting "Disloyal" Andy Murray Is Disgusting', *telegraph.co.uk*, 19 September 2014, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/tennis/ andymurray/11109227/Insulting-disloyal-Andy-Murray-is-disgusting.html, accessed 24 March 2015.

[26] Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 42.

[27] James Millar, 'Political Battles as Stirling Celebrates Armed Forces Day'*, sundaypost. com*, 22 June 2014, http://www.sundaypost.com/news-views/politics/political- battles-as-stirling-celebrates-armed-forces-day-1.434954, accessed on 3 July 2014.

[28] Svetlana Boym, 'Nostalgia and Its Discontents', *Hedgehog Review,* 9.2 (2007) 7–18, 13.

can be playfully ironic and humorous, and it certainly shares conceptual traits with melancholy.[29] Harking back to places or times one remembers as being more desirable than the present state of things also has a bittersweet connotation to it, as those days are sadly past; yet, the memory of them continues to evoke pleasure. This melancholic backward-looking is certainly ascertainable in the collective psyche of Scotland and is closely linked to the idea of 'political and cultural miserablism, and […] a sense of powerlessness and fatalism, both collectively and individually'.[30] Melancholy differs from mere sadness in that it is 'culturally inflected'[31]; and as such, unlike in other forms of grieving or mourning, 'the wound is kept open'.[32] This perceived or imagined national wound is ubiquitous in Scottish culture, to the extent that Scottish culture revels in the sense of loss, and paradoxically celebrates its defeats. 'Scottish culture encompasses a profound, deeply embedded sense of loss, and because of this, of melancholy and pessimism'.[33] The long-tailed legacy of the military defeats on the fields of Flodden, Killiecrankie, Glencoe, Glen Shiel and Culloden as well as the economic disaster of the Darien expeditions have historically contributed to this sense of defeatism that is nowadays continued in the 'too small, too poor, too divided' narrative Scots tell themselves, even if the historical complexities are much less clear-cut than retrospective perception suggests.[34] This passive longing and melancholic yearning usually harks back to times or places that are *sadly* past, without a real desire to return to or restore those times and places. It is a rich source for generating national narratives and in Scotland this becomes especially apparent. Traditional as well as relatively contemporary Scottish folk songs in particular manifest this reflective and melancholic tone. The campaign soundtrack itself, to be frequently heard at Yes events, was redolent of sentimental attachment to Caledonia, and its hills and glens. For instance, the purely reflective nostalgic sentiment of Dougie MacLean's Homecoming ballad *Caledonia* was employed as a toned-down rallying call for the troops of the Yes campaign, devoid of accusation, blame and any anti-English sentiment. It merely displays a romantic longing for place, much in the sense of the original conceptual characteristics

---

[29] Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 49.
[30] Gerry Hassan, *Caledonian Dreaming: the Quest for a Different Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2014), 39.
[31] Bowring, *Melancholy*, 32.
[32] Ibid. 79.
[33] Hassan, *Caledonian Dreaming*, 39.
[34] Cf. Ibid. 39–41.

of nostalgia as homesickness[35], and as such, its selection adds weight to the assumption that an open restorative nostalgia was perhaps purposely bypassed. Although still devoid of open anti-English sentiment, the use of Hamish Henderson's song *Freedom Come All Ye* attempted to nostalgically evoke the spirit of the anti-nuclear and anti-war movements of earlier decades; indeed, its internationalist outlook tallied with the Yes side's inclusive civic approach while at the same time criticising Britain's recent involvement in foreign wars and, by extension, the stationing of Trident nuclear weapons on the Clyde. While the instrumentalisation of *Caledonia* and *Freedom Come All Ye* appear to be a rather benign expression of sentiment and love for a nation and a cause, and therefore more reflective, another popular independence rallying song, The Proclaimers' *Cap in Hand*, toys with a restorative nostalgia for a specific time, the heyday of Scottish heavy industry: a time when dignity was supposedly intact without having to 'beg / For a piece of / What's already […] ours'.[36] The attempt by Yes supporters to send *Cap in Hand* to the top of the pop charts – in order to trump a rumoured ban from BBC radio playlists – suggests that a widespread drive existed to evoke sentiment by means of a selective past.[37] At nationalist gatherings, marches and demonstrations renditions of *Flower of Scotland,* with its warlike and anti-English resonances, were perhaps inevitable as well. Scotland's unofficial anthem, reverently sung at Rugby and Football events, embodies both elements of the nostalgia Boym speaks of: the lines 'those days are past now, / And in the past / they must remain' are clearly reflective nostalgic, but are immediately followed by 'But we can still rise now, / And be the nation again' – a restorative notion.[38] While both restorative and reflective nostalgia can be evoked by the same 'memorative signs' and might intersect at certain points, they diverge greatly in their effects.[39] The Better Together campaign was less demonstrative in the musical field: just as the *Flower of Scotland* was at times deemed too provocative, so was *God Save the Queen* due to the infamous verses noted by Alan Bissett. On 13 September, just before the votes were cast, the Last Night of the Proms on Glasgow Green was significant in this regard. Usually known for its abundant flag-waving and jingoistic displays, the event in Scotland significantly 'tactfully eschew[ed] Rule,

---

[35] Jean Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia', *Diogenes* 54 (1966): 81–103, 84.

[36] The Proclaimers, 'Cap in Hand', *Sunshine on Leith*, 1988.

[37] Scott MacNab, 'Scottish independence: Proclaimers song tops chart', *scotsman.com*, 2 September 2014, http://www.scotsman.com/what-s-on/music/scottish-independence-proclaimers-song-tops-chart-1-3527999, accessed 28 March 2015.

[38] Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flower_of_Scotland, accessed 27 March 2015.

[39] Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 12.

Britannia!, Land of Hope and Glory and Jerusalem'.[40] While clear caution was applied in regard to music, symbolism of the various forms of nostalgia was ubiquitous throughout the debate in the form of flags. The respective markers of belonging, the Union Flag and the Saltire, were openly paraded, as they are recognised and established, and are representative of banal nationalism. The Yes campaign had another badge, however, that was more controversial. Andrew Marr points out that: '[t]he historian winces at the popularized use of tartan as a general symbol of Scottish patriotism. But there may be more to this than meets the eye: some young nationalists wear the kilt with a kind of defiant mockery, responding to a century of music-hall and *Punch* caricature'.[41] It is this parodic element that David Torrance failed to recognise when he deplored the September 2013 Calton Hill independence rally as 'ostentatiously ethnic, with a plethora of kilts, face paint, frayed banners and unsavoury characters from fringe European secessionist movements'.[42] The individual reasons for dressing up in this manner are hard to discern, some informed by restorative, others by reflective nostalgia. What is noteworthy in this regard, however, is that the speeches given at the rally were conspicuously devoid of rhetoric that matched the 'ethnic' outfits.

This is also where we recognise a difference between the official and unofficial debates on Scottish independence. In the official discourse, overt reflective nostalgia was not prominent; nor was the more dangerous restorative form, though, competing for the 'progressive' mantle, each side took the other to task for arguments rooted in a superior past. Likewise, apart from very emotional expressions of tribalism, for instance at football matches (international and national), Orange Order marches, or at the clashes on Glasgow's George Square (or Freedom Square as it was briefly known by Yes supporters), the unofficial debate that took place on the internet, in pubs and on the street, was, on the whole, also devoid of unashamed restoratively nostalgic sentiment. Calls to re-erect Hadrian's Wall or to return to or evoke a medieval independent Scotland were the exception.[43] It appears that a certain

---

[40] Charlotte Higgins, 'Britannia Won't Be Ruling the Waves on the Last Night of the Proms in Glasgow', *theguardian.com*, 12 September 2014, http://www.theguardian. com/music/2014/sep/12/last-night-proms-glasgow-britannia-union, accessed 28 March 2015.

[41] Andrew Marr, *The Battle for Scotland* (London, 2013), 31.

[42] David Torrence, 'Curious Case of SNP's Shift from Ethnic Nationalism', *The Glasgow Herald*, 14 April 2014, http://www.heraldscotland.com/comment/columnists/ curious-case-of-snps-shift-from-ethnic-nationalism.23932995, accessed 9 June 2014.

[43] Teresa Rumsey, 'We'll Have to Rebuild Hadrian's Wall to Keep the Scottish

degree of political correctness also prevailed in the popular domain: not least because politicians and campaigners from both sides constantly reminded and cautioned the electorate to keep the debate civil.[44] The official Better Together campaign, for instance, tried to distance itself from a sectarian version of Unionism and repeated calls for restraint were to be heard by both sides in response to online abuse and issued threats.[45] So, while restoratively nostalgic conspiracy theories and one-sided versions of *truth* did feature in the unofficial debate, the type of restorative nostalgia that usually 'characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths' was largely absent in Scotland's debate – in both the political realm and most of the popular debate.[46] And despite the fact that, as Gerry Mooney points out, 'the media, not least the media based in England (and at times in Scotland too), have sought to portray the entire Independence debate and the September Referendum as issues of Scottish national identity'[47], national identity was not at the core of the debate. However, it was not entirely absent. The popular movements both for and against independence, at times displaying traits of restorative nostalgia, have been fostered by a more reflective nostalgia that can also inform national identity. Scottish society has been sensitised to myriad aspects of Scottish history and culture, especially since the 1990s and Devolution. This has been fed by an explosion of academic and popular writing; for instance Arthur Herman's popular books on *How the Scots Invented*

Out', *dailyecho.co.uk*, 10 December 2013, http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/yoursay/letters/10867949.We_ll_have_to_rebuild_Hadrian_s_Wall_to_keep_the_Scottish_out/, accessed 25 November 2014.

44 Ian Macwhirter, 'The Cybernats Are Playing into Labour's Hands', *heraldscotland.com*, 16 December 2014, http://www.heraldscotland.com/comment/columnists/the-cybernats-are-playing-into-labours-hands.114657748, accessed 24 March 2015.

45 Jonathan Brown, 'Scottish Independence: Sectarianism Fears as Orange Order to March in Edinburgh Against Yes Vote', *independent.co.uk*, 11 May 2014, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/scottish-independence-sectarianism-fears-as-orange-order-to-march-in-edinburgh-against-yes-vote-9352562.html, accessed 30 March 2015; Magnus Gardham, 'Yes Campaigners Launch Bid to Silence Cybernats', *heraldscotland.com*, 2 February 2013, http://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/referendum-news/yes-campaigners-launch-bid-to-silence-cybernats.20084686, accessed 30 March 2015.

46 Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

47 Gerry Mooney, 'The 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum – Competing nationalisms?', *open.edu*, 2 March 2015, http://www.open.edu/openlearn/people-politics-law/the-2014-scottish-independence-referendum-competing-nationalisms, accessed 27 March 2015.

the Modern World and *The Scottish Enlightenment*, and Tom Devine's books on *Scotland's Empire* and *The Scottish Nation*, have reached an audience above and beyond a mere limited academic readership. This renaissance and flowering of Scottish themes and issues has been both the result and to some degree the cause of the Scottish debate. This debate has been informed by a plethora of work on Scotland ranging from TV documentaries, autobiographies, popular bestselling novels and political monographs (making a distinct case for either side). Reflective nostalgia has been a catalyst for all kinds of fresh interpretations of the distant and recent past, the striking of new directions in policy and informed reflection on what it means to be Scottish.

It would appear that both official campaigns hoped to profit from voters' historical awareness without overtly appealing to it, or being seen to manipulate it. The question remains why, in such promising conditions, so little overt use was made of powerful nostalgic attachments? One reason, perhaps, was the fear of ferocious scrutiny by media and supporters of both campaigns, particularly online, which would have seized upon any historical, racial or social fallacy. The referendum debate galvanised people from all walks of life into critically assessing the flood of information they were provided with. Both in the traditional media and in innumerable blog postings and Twitterstorms, every claim and assertion was answered with intense partisan scepticism.[48] This widespread public and media vigilance made it very difficult to 'get away' with even the slightest historical allusion or proposed equivalence.[49] Furthermore, there was that fear of ridicule by association with simplistic national icons, tacky 'tartanry' and specious historical comparisons. Godwin's Law, otherwise known as the *reductio ad Hitlerum* applied on a large scale in its very own Scottish guise.[50] Anyone who mentions *Braveheart* or Bannockburn

---

[48] The reactions in the comments section of this article are somewhat representative, I would assert. Cf. Mick Hume, 'The 'Yes' Campaign's Version of History Is Scotch Mist', *spiked-online.com*, 20 August 2014, http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/the-yes-campaigns-version-of-history-is-scotch-mist/15645#.VTIpZmOwSAI, accessed 21 November 2014.

[49] Mark Aitken, 'Ecklaration of Arbroath: Alex Salmond Invokes Spirit of Robert the Bruce as He Unveils His Own Declaration in Independence Push', *dailyrecord.co.uk*, 17 August 2014, http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/ecklaration-arbroath-alex-salmond-invokes-4063547, accessed 25 November 2014.

[50] Katie Wiles, for instance, likened children at a pro-independence rally to the Hitler Youth and subsequent to the outrage withdrew her candidacy for the Angus constituency. Cf. Scott Macnab, 'Labour Candidate Resigns over Hitler Youth Tweet', *scotsman.com*, 2 July 2014, http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/top-stories/labour-candidate-resigns-over-hitler-youth-tweet-1-3462378, accessed 25 October 2014. David Starkey famously called Alex Salmond a 'Caledonian Hitler'. Cf. Simon

in an online discussion is immediately disqualified.[51] There was also a fear of being accused of fascism by association with ethnic nationalisms that openly instrumentalise restorative nostalgia (for instance those of Serbia, Ukraine, and Nazi Germany). The Yes campaign's repeated emphasis on its non-ethnic and inclusive civic nationalism, and the No campaign's recurring emphasis on multinational and multicultural unity, attest to that. As already securely established nations, Scotland and the UK can draw from their respective Scottish or British forms of banal nationalism. A 'continual "flagging", or reminding, of nationhood' has long been in place and thus there was no need to openly instrumentalise those 'ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced'.[52] Moreover, there was an unwillingness to refer to a glorious military past in a world disillusioned with military solutions, particularly when thinking of Britain's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. George Galloway's ill-received closing remarks on a panel discussion addressed at young voters in Glasgow, in which he based his case for unity and union on the common struggle their grandparents endured to overthrow the evils of Nazism, showed two things: firstly that this sort of rhetoric is now largely perceived to be unacceptable, and secondly that this particular version and narrative of Britishness no longer holds the same sway over the Scots as it once did.[53] The extent of the seemingly ubiquitous Great War anniversary celebrations, however, constantly reminded the people of that imperial past. The question as to whether it was intentionally orchestrated and was thus politically motivated, or whether it had a great impact on the eventual vote, will perhaps never be answered conclusively. There was a fear of accusations of nationalistic English-bashing on the one side or Scot-bashing on the other, as well as an anxiety at possibly being associated with UKIP and racialist bigotry. And in connection with this, both factions recognised that

Johnson, 'David Starkey: Alex Salmond is a "Caledonian Hitler"', *telegraph.co.uk*, 19 April 2012, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9214792/David-Starkey-Alex-Salmond-is-a-Caledonian-Hitler.html, accessed 25. October 2014.

[51] Paul Kavanagh, 'The A to Z of Independence - Sorting Myth from Fact: Braveheart the Woad to Independence', *newsnetscotland.com*, 14 February 2014, http://www.newsnetscotland.scot/index.php/scottish-opinion/4341-a-unionist-lexicon-an-a-z-of-unionist-scare-stories-myths-and-misinformation#braveheart, accessed 12 May 2014.

[52] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (1995; London, 2013), 6.

[53] Asa Bennett, 'Scottish Independence: George Galloway Denies Calling SNP Nazis', *huffingtonpost.co.uk*, 12 September 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/09/12/george-galloway-snp-nazis-independence-denial_n_5809260.html, accessed 12 September 2014.

they had to include in the new Scotland the large immigrant population of
English, Irish, Indian, Pakistani and Eastern European origin who were also
voters. A further reason is that, as the debate developed, there was also a certain
pride to be felt throughout Scotland that the campaign was mostly conducted
in an informed, civil and forward-thinking manner, so that Scotland's 'national
pastime' of old, nostalgia, had become inappropriate for the debate, as this
past was exactly what was to be left behind.[54] And finally there was no need to
politically instrumentalise nostalgia to generate votes, when the independence
debate had developed a future-oriented dynamic of its own. As the Unionist
case was in defence of the status quo, this dynamic was mainly determined by
the Yes side and the pro-UK campaign was obliged to follow suit.

Although seldom openly invoked, the past hung over the entire
independence debate like a Damoclean sword. For a number of reasons
considered here, it would have been extremely difficult for either sides to
overtly instrumentalise restorative nostalgia, and by extension a less extreme
reflective nostalgia. What has also been shown is that nostalgia in its various
forms was only used sparingly, and was most notable for its absence. When
it did surface, it was met with acute scepticism and often treated as irrelevant
or unduly manipulative. I would also claim that the official Yes side (and their
unofficial following) was slightly more cautious with regard to exploiting
nostalgic sentiment than the official Better Together campaign. The imminent
threat to Unionist identity, and preservationist character of the campaign,
explains the more emotive and direct appeals to British heritage (especially
by 'unofficial' pro-UK voices). An exclusively Scottish identity, on the other
hand, was in no way threatened by the referendum: on the contrary, it has been
energised and reinforced, and likewise its 'heritage' precursors. The 'cultural'
strand of the debate was dominated by the unofficial part of the Yes side: in
fora such as the National Collective and the Bus Party, with (mainly young)
artists and activists conducting an informed and open debate that was, when at
all nostalgic, reflective in character. In general, the Yes campaign seems to have
profited by heeding Stephen Maxwell's 1981 advice that 'to succeed left wing
nationalism must look to Scotland's future, not her past'.[55] The tendency not
to '[bring] back the old life that comes not again'[56] has done more to counter

---

[54] Liz Lochhead, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off and Dracula*
(Harmondsworth, 1989), I.1.14.

[55] Stephen Maxwell, *The Case For Left Wing Nationalism: Essays and Articles* (Edinburgh,
2013), 143.

[56] Andrew Lang, 'Culloden', in Mrs (sic) Lang (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Andrew Lang*,
vol. 1 (London et al., 1923) 52–3, 53.

and debunk myths of Scottish history than to capitalize on their emotional – and political – resonances.

In the weeks following the referendum outcome, the pro-independence playwright David Greig pondered 'what sweeter way to spend a lifetime than drinking to the memory of a glorious future that never happened'.[57] But this is highly unlikely. Whatever Scotland's constitutional future might hold, the reflective side of nostalgia has certainly prevailed over the restorative thus far. The legacy of the debate will remain a valuable re-assessment of the entire Scottish relationship to England, a re-arranging of the United Kingdom, and a re-invention and coming-of-age of a Scotland that looks to the future instead of to a mythical past.

---

[57] David Greig, 'Back to Work', *front-step.co.uk*, 24 September 2014, http://www.front-step.co.uk/2014/09/24/back-to-work/, accessed 1 October 2014.

Flyting: 1964 and 2014

Corey Gibson

In 2014, National Collective proposed a new model of discourse among the various strands of the Yes campaign, one that would epitomise the imaginative and participatory approach they had repeatedly called for since their inception in 2011. Titled 'Project: Flytings', this intervention was inspired by the so-called 'Folksong Flyting', a public dispute in the opinion pages of the *Scotsman* in the spring and summer of 1964 between Hugh MacDiarmid and Hamish Henderson.[1] These exchanges were initially concerned with the political credibility and cultural value of the contemporary folk revival, but soon generated a trenchant and wide-ranging interrogation of the role of the artist in modern Scotland. MacDiarmid insisted on the exigency of an avant-garde who would deign to elevate the people through the gravity and impenetrability of their work, and thereby pursue 'ever more edifying artistic alloys, superior forms of Lenin's "monumental propaganda"'.[2] Henderson, by contrast, rallied behind the wisdom and revolutionary potential of the 'common weill', championing a popular art that he understood to be *collective* and collaborative in its formal origins as well as in its inferred political disposition. The salience of this 50-year-old dispute for National Collective is clear: it asked whether a *national* and *collective* culture was possible; it asked whether this might be built upon or directed towards certain political aims; and it challenged its participants to find a role for the artist in this programme.

The 'Flyting' is more than just another anecdote testifying to MacDiarmid's thorniness and his appetite for bombastic rhetoric. It was an exchange between two cultural movements – the literary renaissance and the folk revival – as prescribed, promoted and defended by their principal strategists.[3] To see the

---

[1] National Collective, 'Project: Flytings', http://nationalcollective.com/2013/03/10/project-flytings/, accessed 11 February 2015.

[2] Alec Finlay (ed.), *The Armstrong Nose: Selected Letters of Hamish Henderson* (Edinburgh, 1996), 128.

[3] A selection of these exchanges are available in Finlay (ed.), *The Armstrong Nose*, 117–41. For more in-depth analyses of the various flytings between Henderson and MacDiarmid see Corey Gibson, 'The Folkniks in the Kailyard: Hamish Henderson

opinion column controversy in these terms is to examine the possible forms and purpose of a so-called 'committed' art.[4] Those organising under the banner 'artists and creatives for independence' perhaps took lessons from the 'Flyting' in this regard, inhabiting a clear tension between the cultural activism of a self-appointed vanguard and, as Gramsci called it, the 'National-Popular'. While National Collective have not been so concerned with theorising 'commitment', their insistence on both heterogeneity and collectivism leaves the individual artist in a bind all too familiar to Henderson and MacDiarmid.

In a playful extension of the speculative thinking that came to typify sections of the independence debate, National Collective later advanced '5 New Traditions for a New Scotland'.[5] The Collective's first directive is to 'imagine a better Scotland'. The very act allows for a vast field of alternatives, and encourages us to break with a notion of tradition that relies on gradual accretions, adaptations, and slippages that go unnoticed except with hindsight. The purposeful establishment of 'New Traditions' would be a forceful, almost violent proposal were it not for the hypothetical realm it inhabits. The list is predicated on classic studies of the contrivance and paraphernalia of national myths: on Homi K. Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990), and Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983).[6] National Collective's call for the establishment of 'new' national traditions is therefore inflected by a droll acknowledgement of the manipulation that would be required of such an intervention. In drawing from those who, using the apparatus of post-structuralism, revealed the capacity of western imperialism for conjuring, maintaining and promulgating claims to authenticity and therefore modernity, they ask us to consider why these processes might not be means for other ends

---

and the 'Folk-song Flyting' in Eleanor Bell and Linda Gunn (eds), *The Scottish Sixties: Reading, Rebellion, Revolution?* (Amsterdam, 2013), 209–25; and Corey Gibson, *The Voice of the People: Hamish Henderson and Scottish Cultural Politics* (Edinburgh, 2015).

[4] It should be noted that MacDiarmid and Henderson's exchanges came ten years before Adorno's elucidation on 'committed and autonomous art' was translated (by Francis McDonagh) and published in the *New Left Review*. It should also be stressed that, while the crux of their debates might be usefully considered in relation to Sartre's *What is Literature?* (to which Adorno was responding) the poets themselves were not overtly, or perhaps, consciously, participating in this public discourse. Their frame of reference was more immediate, more personal, and significantly more *national*.

[5] Christopher Silver, '5 New Traditions for a New Scotland', http://nationalcollective.com/2014/01/19/5-new-traditions-for-a-new-scotland/, accessed 11 February 2015.

[6] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Introduction: narrating the nation', in Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (Abingdon, 1990); Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

entirely.[7] This is not an advertisement for the 'dark arts' of political spin; nor is it a primer in Cultural Studies. It is a challenge to the movement National Collective describes: to engage, ceaselessly, in critical self-awareness.

Thus the 'new traditions' were to be modelled after what Bhabha called 'foundational fictions' – though they came with some caveats. For example, they might borrow from elsewhere, as in the case of 'The Bairn's Box' inspired by Finland's universal provision of 'maternity packages' to expectant mothers. They might be ostentatious about their agenda and the selective lens they deploy to promote it, as in the case of a programme for 'National Empathy' founded on a passage from 'the much misunderstood' Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Or, they might be emphatically de-centered: celebrating 'Inter-dependence' day over the exceptionalism that is supposed to attend a 4 July model.

The last of these 'New Traditions' was to be a 'National Flyting Festival' to replace the Party Conference Season: a week-long ritual debate, inspired, inevitably, by Nordic social democracy, and in particular the Swedish *Almedalsveckan*.[8] Each political party represented in Parliament, regardless of size, would be assigned a day to set out their commitments. The whole process is thereby intensified and enlivened. It takes on the appearance of a direct and explicit public dialogue as opposed to the staid platform for party unity, the anaemic display of previously agreed-upon policy announcements: 'The Flyting Festival… would provide a space where policy could be crowdsourced, dogma could be questioned and politicians could check in on their mandate'. Instead of a scenario where the conflict is, quite transparently, over the tactical courting of the news cycle, this event would be a direct incitement to *engage in* conversation.

Drawing on the MacDiarmid-Henderson flyting as an appropriate model of discourse among 'Yes' campaigners, or for the political elite in a projected 'New Scotland', does, however, invite more confusion than clarity. It speaks to a reckless impulse to get wilfully tangled up in and impeded by competing ends: measured and dispassionate debate, and an exultant kind of vituperative theatre. 'Flyting' first denoted any public quarrel or scolding, particularly those that ought to have been private but which spilled out into the public sphere. Now, it is principally associated with the formalised bardic contest,

---

[7] We might also add Benedict Anderson and Tom Nairn to the roster.

[8] Ben Duckworth, 'Yet another thing Sweden does better than us: party conferences', *New Statesman*, 27 June 2013, http://www.newstatesman.com/2013/06/yet-another-thing-sweden-does-better-us-party-conferences, accessed 11 February 2015.

distinguished by the show of virtuoso versification and powerful invective, and practised by the great fifteenth and sixteenth-century Scottish Makars. In William Dunbar's famous flyting with Walter Kennedy, for example, the poets display the kind of colourful personal attacks that would greatly improve the entertainment-value of our enervated current affairs programming, but would do little to advance a pundit's agenda. Even at First Minister's Questions our representatives resist the temptation to sneer about misshapen owls, maggoty sheep, scabby cormorants, unfeeling sows, or insane werewolves. Some critics have mapped the flyting's influence through its cousins 'sherracking' and 'scalding'; others have found its traces all throughout the Scottish literary tradition: in Gavin Douglas, David Lyndsay, Alexander Montgomerie, Allan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson, Robert Burns, Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Thomas Carlyle and MacDiarmid.[9] However, these examples are too diverse even to cohere around a vague sense of provocation or prickliness, and they rely, fundamentally, on a notion of cultural exceptionalism that no longer holds sway in the study of Scottish literary history.

In her work on Dunbar, Priscilla Bawcutt has done a great deal to further confound modern champions of the flyting form, describing its asymmetry; its pattern of 'accusation and rebuttal'; its 'comic fantasy' superstructure in relation to its base, or 'substratum', of fact; and its connections to a 'lynch mob' mentality, wielding – and thereby demonstrating – the power of public humiliation.[10] Like Tom Nairn's account of the Scots' love of 'fiery debate edging on violence, yet leading safely nowhere', this is the kind of exchange that can continue in perpetuity, chasing its tail.[11] Its innovations are stylistic but they are not germane to reasoned debate and the sincere pursuit of truth. As a contest for patronage there was something at stake for the poet: financial reward and a guaranteed audience. If only in this respect, it is the forbearer of the literary prize. Exchanges were circulated in manuscript form, read aloud for gathered crowds, or left nailed to the kirk door; from there to the *Scotsman* opinion columns, comments threads, hyperlinked 'evidence', and the mythic conflicts of 'trolls' and 'moderators'. Unlike the comments thread or a Twitter melee, the medieval flyting expected its audience to be in on the joke, and to take often perverse insults in the spirit in which they were given. Despite its flamboyant viciousness, this was a performance that demanded collusion, and

---

[9] Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh, 1958), 78, 100, 128, 164, 173, 208, 229, 241, 242, 287.

[10] Priscilla Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar* (Oxford, 1992), 227, 225, 235, 244.

[11] Nairn, *Faces of Nationalism*, 184.

a degree of good faith. In this respect, the flyting becomes an inversion of the scepticism and irony with which we are accustomed in observing political slanging matches and reading high literary modernism: it is no more than it appears to be and it does not pretend otherwise.

In 1964 the stakes were at once higher and lower than the medieval slanging match: the subject matter was more serious, but the impact of the debate on political – or even literary – realities, was negligible. Through their exchanges, MacDiarmid and Henderson contested the conception of literary 'value', and, in particular, political expediency as a measure of this value. In doing so, they considered the role of the popular and the populist, they examined distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture, and they fought at length over the respective merits of 'communal' and 'individual' models of authorship. Where MacDiarmid imagined himself at the vanguard, dragging the people into class-consciousness and revolutionary fervour, Henderson sought to dissolve his agency in a vast, anonymous resurgence of collective political (and poetical) action. Together they asked how political action is inspired and, finally, taken: in the minds of individuals, or through a collective consciousness.

The two poets conspired in enacting this back and forth, encouraging their readers to consider the kind of art, and the kind of artist, appropriate to the needs of modern Scotland. As both men were in on the joke, they could afford to play up to the performance, exaggerating the terms of disgust, distrust, and disapproval of the other, and, potentially, refining their own arguments, smoothing the edges through conflict and abrasion. Theirs was an honest per-formance and investigation: impartiality and objectivity were not staged, but rejected outright. The cynicism of gesture politics is dispelled with and replaced with something more provisional, equivocal, and inquisitive. A conclusion is not reached because it would require concessions, and those are unthinkable. If agreement were possible, the controversy would never have begun. This is a debate that performs its own shortcomings wholeheartedly: it is not an impasse in the model of the exclusive disjunction of yes/no, but an affirmation of two competing, even contradictory forces in the processes of culture and politics: the individual and the collective. Claims and counter claims posed in the flyting will always go untested: they are part of a performance and ought to be judged as such. The more vividly described, the more compelling the nar-rative, the more spectacular the delivery, the more successful the combatant. There is no real pretence of reasoned argument. The dispassionate outlook is passionately asserted and the irony is not lost on anyone.

The incursions of the literary world on the independence debate, while

opening up more imaginative engagements with the issues, rarely reflected directly on the role of the artist in society. There are, of course, notable exceptions, not least, Scott Hames' *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence* (2012). However, even amongst that selection, a great many were at pains to insist that their contributions were not privileged, or even distinct, due to their designation as 'writers'. In the context of William MacIlvanney's touted but unrealised involvement in the writing of the White Paper; Alasdair Gray's 'settlers and colonists' brouhaha; Edwin Morgan's posthumous contribution to the pro-independence war chest; Liz Lochhead's dual role as Scots Makar and Yes ambassador; Alan Warner's warning just a few weeks before the referendum, that a No vote would be 'the death knell for the whole Scottish literature "project"', and countless other public pronouncements, this invocation of a fifty-year-old dispute reconnects with another time when the literary community was very vocal, though perhaps not so audible, in arguments about politics, culture, and national identity.[12]

Throughout the last hundred years there have been several points at which Scottish literary culture has, by force of circumstance, turned its attention to the national question. These make for a familiar picture: where literary lights concern themselves with Scotland's constitutional status; with its political direction relative to Westminster; or with the limitations and/or boundlessness of the national paradigm more generally. It is common for loose groups of contemporaneous writers to be celebrated as 'Scottish' coteries; where the writer's efforts to individualise and localise experience are glossed over in

---

[12] Kevin McKenna, 'Alex Salmond aims for independence white paper with a literary twist', *The Observer*, 13 July 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jul/13/alex-salmond-white-paper-william-mcilvanney, accessed 11 February 2015; Scott Hames, 'Responses to Alasdair Gray's "Settlers and Colonists"', https://storify.com/hinesjumpedup/alasdair-gray-does-not-do-twitter, accessed 11 February 2015; Brian Currie, 'SNP reveals its £1m independence fund', *Sunday Herald*, 23 October 2011, http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/home-news/snp-reveals-its-pound1m-independence-fund.15560082, accessed 11 February 2015; Jane Bradley, 'Scots Makar Liz Lochhead called to resign over SNP', *The Scotsman*, 29 November 2014, http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/top-stories/scots-makar-liz-lochhead-called-to-resign-over-snp-1-3620051, accessed 11 February 2015; Alan Warner, 'Scottish writers on the referendum – independence day?', *The Guardian*, 19 July 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jul/19/scottish-referendum-independence-uk-how-writers-vote, accessed 11 February 2015.

favour of the notion of a concerted movement. They are arranged in this way
so that they might speak of a broader malaise plaguing the nation, one that
would, inevitably, only become manifest in the political culture ten years, or
perhaps a generation, later.[13] This is literature as political barometer, and the
artist as (sometimes unwilling, or at least, unselfconscious) vanguard. Matthew
Hart has noted that MacDiarmid only succeeded in his synthesis of romantic
nationalism and socialist internationalism on the page, and there, only in the
early lyrics and *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926).[14] This reconciliation
is perhaps only possible in cosmic pastoral, where the mundane and the
transcendent are always mutable and capable of swift symbolic transformations.
Certainly, MacDiarmid's efforts to graft the national to the international failed
utterly in the political sphere. Now, however, the independence referendum
and the success of the SNP hold the potential to foster a diluted twenty-
first-century nationalist internationalism. At least rhetorically, this was borne
out in the skittishness displayed around the term 'nationalism' among many
Yes voters, particularly in the distinctions between 'civic nationalism' and its
'cultural', or worse yet, 'ethnic', variants. However, to plot MacDiarmid on
the same historical trajectory as the vaunted broad church of Yes would be to
indulge in something of the poet's own inventive relationship with the radical
national tradition.

At the time of their 'flyting' MacDiarmid and Henderson were on similar
political latitudes: both campaigned for an independent, socialist Scottish
republic of one shade or another, and both felt that their political ideals could
be effectively engendered in their art. Where they differed was in their notions
of *how* this art might relate to realpolitik. Their exchanges scrutinised the
respective responsibilities of the intellectual elite, and the general mass of the
people in affecting this change. Evidently National Collective saw this kind of
wrangling over tactics, and over high-minded notions of the agency of artists
and their audiences, as relevant to the independence debate.

[13] For recent critiques of this tendency in contemporary Scottish literary commentary,
see Scott Hames, 'Introduction' in *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence* (Edinburgh,
2012), 1–18; Scott Hames, 'Scottish Literature, Devolution, and the Fetish of
Representation', *The Bottle Imp*, Supplement Issue 1 (2014), http://asls.arts.gla.
ac.uk/SWE/TBI/TBISupp/TBISupp1/Hames.html, accessed 2 April 2015; Alex
Thomson, '"You can't get there from here": Devolution and Scottish literary history',
International Journal of Scottish Literature, 3 (2007), http://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue3/
thomson.htm, accessed 11 February 2015; and Alex Thomson, 'Review Essay:
Writers on Scottish Independence', *Scottish Literary Review* 5:1 (2013), 129–37.
[14] Hart, Matthew, 'Nationalist Internationalism: A Diptych in Modernism and
Revolution', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 31:1 (2007), 21–46.

National Collective insist that our first duty is to '*imagine* a better Scotland'. Their 'Flytings' project was described as a reflexive endeavour: 'an attempt to build a public sphere of correspondence, about ourselves and our movement'. It asked that community meetings throughout Scotland submit questions and responses, in any medium, reflecting on 'where the human and the artistic lies in relation to the political'. The inaugural post, addressed to Edinburgh, asks:

> What are the main components of "Scottish identity"? Bring something to the meeting that encapsulates it, then take a photograph of the assembled objects.
> What is meant by "social justice"?
> What are the best ideas from the "Freedom Come A' Ye" [sic]?[15]
> What do you think when you see this photograph? [the launch of the Yes Scotland campaign, May 2012]

> How do you feel about England?

It is a proposal that the National Theatre's project, 'Dear Scotland', pursued in a slightly different format. Inviting 'rants and regrets', 'love letters and break-up cards', 'advice', 'demands', 'hopes and dreams' throughout the year of the referendum, the focus and purpose was unspecified and produced

---

[15] Henderson's song, 'The Freedom Come-All-Ye' has long been touted as an alternative national anthem but it has had its profile raised significantly in the past year. It was performed to great acclaim by South African soprano, Pumeza Matshikiza, at the opening ceremony of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games in 2014, and in his speech at the Hydro in Glasgow during the SNP Tour of November 2014, Alex Salmond declared his support for its claim as a future national anthem.

a diverse catalogue of 'notes': from Trip Advisor-type reviews ('We really enjoyed our visit!') to personal testimonies and political edicts.[16] Contemporary writers were also commissioned to produce a series of monologues under this title (Dear Scotland), each one written for a different voice from the past or present and inspired by artworks in the National Portrait Gallery: Jimmy Reid, The Cromarty Fool, Boswell, Michael Clark, Jackie Kay.[17] The project invites, if not dissent, then at least variety; it insists on containing multitudes. There is no dearth of pronouncements on the artist and the question of Scotland's constitutional resettlement speaking with a communal, but not homogenous, voice. There remains an eagerness to explore the opportunities this referendum provided outside of the 'official discourse' of the main campaign organisations, to reflect on social, political and cultural life, and to escape 'a pattern sponsoring the reduction of all politics to identity politics'.[18] The 'nation' is always at least a foil, though it can be anything from a ghost at the feast to a lumbering protagonist who has taken on too many contradictions to be convincing. While identity politics invites us to weigh and balance the competing and overlapping conceptions of self and community that pervade, the flyting presents a challenge to this logic, a structure of contradiction and tension that neither offers nor seeks resolution.

Before National Collective and the *Unstated* volume, the full scope of this notion of variance and contestation was embraced by the artist and author Momus (moniker of Nick Currie), who, in 2009, published *Solution 11-167: The Book of Scotlands*. Written in response to the SNP's success in the 2007 Holyrood election, it set out to use 'any language, that is, except the "wooden tongue" of official discourse', and to outline

> in a numerical sequence, one hundred and fifty-six Scotlands which currently do not exist anywhere. At a time when functional independence seems to be a real possibility for Scotland – and yet no one is quite sure what that means – a delirium of visions, realistic and absurd, is necessary.[19]

In this premise we discover:

---

[16] 'Dear Scotland', http://dearscotland.net, accessed 11 February 2015.

[17] 'Scots from Past and Present Have Their Say On Scottish Independence', http://www.thespace.org/artwork/view/scotlandvote, accessed 11 February 2015.

[18] Hames, 'Introduction', 5.

[19] Sternberg Press, http://www.sternberg-press.com/index.php?pageId=1242, accessed 11 February 2015.

SCOTLAND 164
The Scotland in which four hundred years of profound influence from
Calvin is replaced by four hundred years of profound influence from
Calvino.

SCOTLAND 41
The Scotland in which a thousand flowers bloom, and a thousand
schools of thought contend.

SCOTLAND 59
The Scotland which isn't just readable, it's writable.[20]

Momus takes seriously that much-vaunted notion of MacDiarmid's: 'Scotland
small? Our multiform, our infinite Scotland *small*?'[21] Now one of the twenty-six
quotations carved into the Canongate Wall of the Scottish Parliament, these
words have, at least in that context, lost their political potency, appearing as
part of a pastiche that includes those of Andrew Carnegie, Mary Brooksbank,
Hamish Henderson, Psalm 19:14, and of course, Anon. With Momus, we
are asked on the strength of a pun, to imagine a Scotland out of historical
sequence where postmodernity had taken hold in lieu of the Reformation:
Invisible Cities (1972) over *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536).[22] A 'thousand
flowers' invites dissent and criticism even as its Maoist resonance evokes the
brutal suppression of counter-revolutionaries, and the iron consensus of 'On
the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People' (1957). Momus
does not specify whether Scotland 41 lives up to the proclamation, or to the
historical context of which it is shorn in *Solution 11-167*. The implications
are left unuttered in lieu of another vision, in service of the premise of
limitless (im)possibilities. One of these is Scotland 42: 'The Scotland in which
the flowers wilt, and the schools agree' (52). In *this* alternate Scotland, only
dejection follows the promise of heterogeneous democratic discourse.

---

[20] Momus, *Solution 11-167: The Book of Scotlands* (New York, 2009), 15, 49, 136.

[21] MacDiarmid, 'Scotland Small?', *Complete Poems* (Manchester, 1994), 1170.

[22] In *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited* (London, 1997), Tom Nairn predicted that
globalization, rather than laying 'nationality politics' low, might produce something
akin to Calvino's *Invisible Cities*: 'an imagined proliferation of fantastically different
urban-based cultures haunting the future as rural ghosts once dominated the past'
(72).

If the national paradigm is so elastic, if it can be reimagined in endless variations, then it simply becomes a framework for rehearsing its own internal contradictions. Scotland is cosmopolitan and parochial, revolutionary and reactionary, and is not unique in this. MacDiarmid and his peers, not least Henderson, sought to reconcile a decaying romantic nationalism with an ascendant socialist internationalism in the early and mid twentieth century – what better clue to the inchoate character of the nation as approached through its literature? Momus' cover speaks to the same notion. In a typeface reminiscent of *Ingsoc*, against the backdrop of an orange (Pantone 1655) Saltire on a white background, it states: 'Every lie creates a parallel world. The world in which it is true'. There is, therefore, no authority or authenticity in any one of these 'lies'; boundlessness abounds.

If we set these notions next to Alasdair Gray's ubiquitous 'work as if you live in the early days of a better nation', we are, in fact, placed squarely in MacDiarmid's camp. MacDiarmid wrote for a revolutionary future that would not be realised. His work absorbed this wished-for future and enacted it in the present, in a stubborn and insistent denial of the political landscape. This approach was unavailable to Henderson. In the mid-1930s MacDiarmid could write for Glasgow in 1960 and envisage an Ibrox crowd for an academic debate on psychotherapy and autosuggestion; but Henderson was unable to leave anyone behind in imagining the future, and so, was constrained to the present and to the accumulated past.[23] In this sense at least, their exchange might be neatly described in the same terms Gerard Carruthers used in suggesting that the final lines of 'To a Mouse' could have been written for the Yes and No campaigns respectively: 'Och! I backward cast my e'e/On prospects drear!' for Yes; 'An' forward, tho' I canna see,/I guess an' fear!' for No.[24]

Henderson was restrained not simply by popularity or populism, but by the demand to disestablish his individual agency in favour of a collective will, and entrust his political ideals to that precept. For MacDiarmid, the collective culture symbolised by folk song was reactionary if it was capable of political significance at all. It was certainly not to be promoted as a revolutionary historical force, despite its appetite for contradiction and discord. Though MacDiarmid, like many of his peers (and many critics and historians since), wrote of a democratic impulse in the Scottish literary tradition, it was always

---

[23] MacDiarmid, 'Glasgow, 1960', *Complete Poems*, 1039.

[24] Gerard Carruthers, 'Robert Burns and the yes campaign', *The Guardian,* 19 July 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jul/19/why-robert-burns-yes-campaign-alex-salmond, accessed 11 February 2015.

framed as an historical phenomenon from which contemporary work might spring. It may have survived into the present, but it was not sufficient for the imagined revolutionary future – it only helped to articulate the stasis that needed overturning ('The seed has died; we have the harvest').[25] As MacDiarmid wrote in the 'Flyting', the Communist cause was to advance through a class-consciousness that would be hard-won at the level of the individual, because 'the interests of the masses and the real highbrow, the creative artist, are identical, for the function of the latter is the extension of human consciousness'.[26] Later in the same letter MacDiarmid reminds his readers of the scale and ambition of this project: 'The grandeur of the time requires grand syntheses' akin to Lenin's 'monumental propaganda'.[27]

The rhetoric of an inclusive, participatory movement for Scottish independence is caught in the same tensions played out in the 1964 flyting. MacDiarmid describes the future he seeks, and the poetry that will mark its arrival; Henderson looks for evidence of its emergence from among that romantic construction, 'the people'. From contemporary Edinburgh playground skipping songs, to the dusty manuscripts housed in the University of Aberdeen, Henderson's search turns up too much that lies far outside the scope of the radical underground folk culture and too little easily reconcilable with the language of the revolutionary vanguard. In the words of Henderson's other most treasured luminary, Gramsci: 'there is nothing more contradictory and fragmentary than folklore'.[28] As a foundation for political action, it is too vast and variable. It renders absurd any attempt at bloody-minded intransigence, and, as Henderson's stock-in-trade, it is both his strength and his weakness in debate.

On the surface of things, the 'Folk-song Flyting' is an unlikely paragon of measured, reflexive discourse. It was characterised by cruel invective, rhetorical posturing, misinformation, and purposeful misinterpretation: quotations are unburdened by context, opponents are rendered as caricatures, straw men appear at every juncture, and the intellectual and imaginative limitations of each participant are relentlessly targeted. Personal attacks and lofty intellectualism are bundled up together and hurled at the opinion columns of the *Scotsman*. MacDiarmid had lambasted the folk revival as 'a wallowing

---

[25] Finlay (ed.), *The Armstrong Nose*, 134.

[26] Finlay (ed.), *The Armstrong Nose*, 127.

[27] Finlay (ed.), *The Armstrong Nose*, 128.

[28] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (eds), trans. William Boelhower (London, 1985), 194.

in the mud-bath of ignorance' and '[a] re-emersion in illiterate doggerel'.[29] Henderson denounced the poet as 'the apostle of a kind of spiritual apartheid', a champion of the 'self-elected elect'.[30] From the comments thread to the debating chamber, discussions surrounding the independence referendum have been replete with these devices, though on the most public of stages they are coded in less colourful, and less interesting, registers. Often, they have relied on the most impenetrably boring focus-grouped euphemisms. On the other hand, efforts have been made to curtail some of the most obviously reductive or diversionary hyperbole, though it persisted throughout the 2014 campaign, and after. As one line of argument, or particular phrasing, becomes over-wrought, it gets debunked and is wielded as proof of the intellectual bankruptcy or tawdry affectations of the other side. What horrors would visit an independent Scotland? Which are reserved for a Scotland with the temerity to vote 'No'? And how many legitimate criticisms, or probing questions, can be deflected or dismissed as 'cynical ploys' from the other side? This is not substantive or analytical discourse, but posturing. In this sense the 'flyting' may seem like a form that describes the shortcomings of the debate, rather than the kind of conversation we should have aspired towards. And its relevance to the diverse groups that have, perhaps only temporarily, come together to campaign for a common aim, seems even more mysterious.

By invoking the 'Flyting' National Collective made a plea for two important developments in their movement: first, a vigorous reflexivity that might foster unity by encouraging discourse, and second: an implicit and explicit connection with a distinct national cultural tradition that could be imaginatively *modernised* — where the old violence of the vituperative duel might be conjured up without being embraced, and threatening the integrity of the project's *collective* credentials. However, the real thing, with all its abuse and irrationality was raging all around them in the mainstream debate. The only thing missing there was the irony and self-awareness that gives the 'flyting' mode its power. In one sphere, therefore, the flyting was too timid and too concerned with consensus; and in the other, it was missing its performative self-consciousness.

Henderson and MacDiarmid were not debating whether or not Scotland displayed 'cultural confidence' in its art, nor were they debating whether or not such 'cultural confidence' would be a reliable measure of the popular appetite for political or constitutional change. They were not promoting or critiquing the 'mythology of Scottish exceptionalism'. Yet these are the terms that arise

---

[29] Finlay (ed.), *The Armstrong Nose*, 94.
[30] Finlay (ed.), *The Armstrong Nose*, 132.

when we think critically about the role of writers in the contemporary debate. In response to T. M. Devine's late statement of support for a 'Yes' vote, David Torrance, citing Allan Massie, reminded us that this 'cultural confidence' within the Union, which is so often aligned with the nation's literary figures, goes 'both ways': it might signify an appetite or a readiness for political autonomy, or it might show that 'Scottishness' is perfectly sustainable within the framework of the Union.[31] Of course, neither of these propositions is true; but diluted, more compromised versions of both hold a concurrent and observable kind of truth. 'Cultural confidence', if it can be measured at all, might tell us very little about a singular direction of political will – especially when forced into the narrow binary of a yes or no debate. Life and literature are more complicated.

The tagline for the *If Scotland…* conference in August 2014 was 'what will be the history of now?'[32] In returning to this speculative framework, we ought to consider that the future historians of that 1964 moment would not, could not, and did not pick a side and explain its place in the grand narrative. The flyting form and its subject matter protects against this. It is both dynamic and static: and it has no contribution to make to a retrofitted pattern of cause and effect. In a late contribution to the 'Folk-song Flyting', Henderson wrote of MacDiarmid:

> A person who can argue like this may not impress the readers of a newspaper controversy, but at least he would never find any difficulty earning a living as a contortionist. Is Mr MacDiarmid trying to emulate that other MacD. [Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937)], whose Parliamentary performances earned him the title of 'the boneless wonder'?[33]

In another of Henderson's reflections on MacDiarmid, the poet is described as a rival for the title of 'supreme practitioner of the art of the belly-flop' with the great William McGonagall.[34] These kinds of jocular performance analyses

---

[31] David Torrance, 'Arguments about cultural confidence work both ways', *Sunday Herald*, 17 August 2014, http://www.heraldscotland.com/comment/columnists/arguments-about-cultural-confidence-work-both-ways.25047434, accessed 11 February 2015.

[32] 'If Scotland…', http://ifscotland.wordpress.stir.ac.uk, accessed 11 February 2015.

[33] Finlay (ed.), *The Armstrong Nose*, 136.

[34] Hamish Henderson, *Alias MacAlias: Writings of Songs, Folk and Literature* (Edinburgh, 2004), 280.

belie, I think, a sneaking admiration for the unapologetic, the obstreperous, and the vicious. MacDiarmid's exulted contradictions are expounded in the form of the contortionist, and his loud and bombastic style is graced with the subtlety and nuance of the belly flop. But, the 'flyting', as a focus for these characteristics, describes irresolvable tensions – tensions that cut across debates on the national past and its future. And these ought always to have their place, if only to show by contrast the hypocrisy that proliferates in other performances.

The 'Flyting' is a reminder of the vitality of those debates that cannot be eschewed or suppressed too long without compromising on long-held, well-rehearsed principles. National Collective can, unquestionably, be placed on Henderson's side: campaigning for a culture commensurate with both collaboration and dissent, that might accommodate a given political agenda, but that cannot be forced. While critics of National Collective have described it as a 'clique', few seem prepared to go as far in their praise (or condemnation) as to call them an 'avant-guard'. Certainly, the broader Yes campaign featured charismatic voices capable of rhetorical contortions of one form or another, but it was missing its MacDiarmid. In their eagerness to embrace the broad coalition of Yes, prominent figures in the campaign bypassed the bloody-minded intransigence that was typical of the poet who saw his role as that of 'the catfish that vitalises the other torpid denizens of the aquarium'.[35] While dissent and discourse have been frequently welcomed, we might ask how sincere this request was. The 'Flyting' does not offer us a united front against political conservatism, the British State, or the vagaries of bourgeois aesthetics; nor does it offer a proliferation of ideas free to drift and settle or dissipate, or dangle side-by-side like the leaves of National Collective's 'wish trees'. It offers us factionalism: irreconcilable visions of the role of the artist in society. And what comes out of that is not reconciliation, but resolve: 'Unremittin', relentless, / Organized to the last degree'.[36]

---

[35] In the spring of 2015 it looked like this kind of dynamic had arrived, with Loki – hip-hop artist and community activist – and his critique of National Collective. Loki described the tone of the site's articles as ranging from '*Guardian*-lite' to 'esoteric academic theory'; he described its outlook as 'narrow' and 'twee' with something of the ceilidh about it; and he accused some of its founding members of being too close to the SNP and established power. See 'Loki on National Collective', http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2015/03/10/loki-on-national-collective/, and Loki's own site: http://lokithescottishrapper.com, last accessed, 2 April 2015.
[36] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Second Hymn to Lenin', *Complete Poems* (Manchester, 1993), 328.

Reveries of a Progressive Past: The Missing Scotland as Indyref Heritage

Arianna Introna

Two months after the vote, the consensus among political and cultural commentators has persisted that the referendum debate was a time of exceptional political and cultural engagement, in which Scotland's progressive essence was realised. Fintan O'Toole's observation, a week before the vote, that 'Scotland at the moment is what a democracy is supposed to be: a buzzing hive of argument and involvement, most of it civil, respectful and deeply intelligent',[1] encapsulated the general perception at the time: namely, that the event permitted a sense of empowerment that was inextricably connected to people's conviction that their vote was going to shape history. As Loki put it, 'Democracy has awakened… we must pause for a moment and reflect on the present moment we find ourselves in. A moment we have carved out of a history we were only supposed to learn about, but never attempt to shape. We are now living in the most democratic period in recent British history'.[2] This empowerment, it was widely remarked, showed a concern with social issues which both underpinned and exceeded the nationalist framework within which pro-independence politics was conducted. Aptly, the last issue of Bella Caledonia's *Closer* to be released before the referendum proposed to articulate 'a reverie for a new Scotland based on a different set of values', committed to social inclusion, and conducive to democratic renewal.

Alongside narratives of progressiveness responding to the renewed feeling of grassroots empowerment, however, there proliferated accounts that argued for the emancipation of the Scottish psyche from a 'miserablist' outlook, and of the Missing Scotland from political disengagement. The Missing Scotland was a concept introduced by Gerry Hassan to describe a population disconnected from politics, one that could be 'found in every part of our

---

[1] Fintan O'Toole, 'Scotland's vote is not about Braveheart or kilts or tribal nationalism. It's about democracy' in *The Guardian*, 12 September 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/12/scotland-vote-braveheart-nationalism-democracy-independence. accessed 29 November 2014.

[2] Loki, 'The Sleeping Giant Stirs', 12 September 2014, http://lokithescottishrapper.com/2014/09/12/loki-the-sleeping-giant-stirs/, accessed 29 November 2014.

country', and which was 'over-concentrated among younger, poorer voters and those who live in social housing'.[3] In indyref discourse, the Missing Scotland came to operate as the 'other' against which the Yes campaign defined itself, partly because of the ways in which, as a constituency, the Missing seemed to embody the idea of miserablism – the attitude held to be responsible for disconnecting people from purposeful political engagement. Willie Sullivan, in his study The Missing Scotland, worried that Scottish political life itself might be threatened or even rendered illegitimate 'by the fact that large parts of our population are missing from the actual operation of our democracy'.[4] The paradox I am interested in is how Hassan's important demand that 'we see our myths as what they are, namely, myths and challenge them'[5] did not extend to the rhetoric of progressiveness itself – a rhetoric with which the discourse on the Missing Scotland was surely complicit. In imagining how the indyref will be remembered in a few decades, I want to explore the dynamics that connected the idea of a progressive Scotland to that of a Missing Scotland. In 2005, Hassan and Eddie Gibb published Scotland 2020, a project driven by the proposition that 'a useful antidote' to the fatalism that had set in after the establishment of the Scottish parliament was 'the ability to think imaginatively about the future – or "futures literacy"', within a framework in which 'Imagining a better future for an individual or for a nation is a first step in creating one'.[6] As opposed to this, my looking forward to, and thinking back from, 2034 is not meant to be an exercise in futures literacy, but a scrutiny of the progressive imagination that pits 'fatalism' against the ability to imagine 'a better future' during the referendum debate. In doing so, it will speculate as to the possible legacy of the totalizing drive of these radical imaginings, once preserved through recollection and responded to in post-referendum politics and culture.

For Alain Badiou, 'An event is not by itself the creation of a reality; it is the creation of a possibility, it opens up a possibility. It indicates to us that a possibility exists that has been ignored'.[7] Most Yes and No supporters

---

[3] Gerry Hassan, 'Time for some fun with our politics', *The Scotsman*, 8 November 2013, http://www.scotsman.com/news/gerry-hassan-time-for-some-fun-with-our-politics-1-3181280, accessed 29 November 2014.

[4] Willie Sullivan, *The Missing Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2014), 10.

[5] Gerry Hassan, 'A Letter to Scotland's new radicals', *Scottish Review*, 9 July 2014, http://www.gerryhassan.com/blog/a-letter-to-scotlands-new-radicals/, accessed 29 November 2014.

[6] Gerry Hassan and Eddie Gibb, *Scotland 2020: Hopeful Stories for a Northern Nation* (2005), 14.

[7] Alain Badiou with Fabien Tarby, *Philosophy and the Event* (Cambridge, 2013), 10.

would agree that the possibility created by the referendum resided in mass participation in politics and culture, unthinkable in post-democratic pre-referendum times. Most important for the purposes of the present exploration, concerned with the developing fortunes of the idea of progressiveness and of its 'other' (the Missing Scotland and miserablism) in post-referendum decades, is how, for Badiou, the significance of the event lies also in the legacy it leaves for future generations to be faithful to, in preparation for the next event. Badiou suggests that '[i]n every situation, there are processes faithful to an event that has previously taken place … The possibilities opened up by the event are still present within a situation throughout an entire sequential period. Little by little, they peter out but they are present'.[8] Which aspects of indyref politics and culture, we might ask, will the progressive imagination deem fit to be extracted and preserved as legitimate recipients of the faithfulness of future generations in Scotland? It is important to ask this, because in a context of post-vote indyref exceptionalism and re-assertion of party politics as the norm, it may become increasingly difficult to detach the significance of the referendum from the progressive flourishing it enabled.

One outcome could be a form of what Wendy Brown calls 'radical nostalgia', by which she means 'the sense of not only a lost movement but a lost historical moment; not only a lost theoretical and empirical coherence but a lost way of life and a lost course of pursuits'.[9] The loss of the vote and of post-vote independence as goals to work towards may leave progressiveness as the main unifying feature of the pro-independence movement, and the call to radical action and thought as its most telling legacy. In such a scenario, radical nostalgia would not only hasten the erasure of the uncomfortable presence of a not-yet-redeemed Missing Scotland from left-wing imaginaries; it would also prevent its critique as a concept formulated and popularised at a specific historical conjuncture. In the altered circumstances of post-referendum Scotland, the consequences of a radical nostalgia nurtured by indyref exceptionalism might therefore become responsible for the failure to develop, through contestation of the main conceptual categories organising the independence campaign, a new spirit 'that embraces the notion of a deep and indeed unsettling transformation of society', which Brown sees as necessary for the Left to emerge from the conservative and melancholy spirit fostered by radical nostalgia.[10]

---

[8] Ibid., 12.
[9] Wendy Brown, 'Resisting Left Melancholy', *boundary 2*, 26.3 (Autumn 1999), 22.
[10] Ibid., 26.

An academic version of radical nostalgia, too, may assert itself. Given the lively dialogue that was forged between academics and independence movement under the umbrella of a radical campaign for self-determination, it seems likely that the academy will reproduce forms of indyref exceptionalism and endorse progressiveness as the essence of pro-independence politics during the referendum. The distinction Colin Barker and Laurence Cox make between 'academic' and 'movement' intellectuals is apposite here. They suggest that while 'social movement scholars produce knowledge *about* movements… movement intellectuals produce knowledge *for* and *within* movements';[11] and while for the academic intellectual 'the primary "community" that validates her or his work *qua academic* is that composed of other academics… The community that validates movement intellectuals is different: it is the movements themselves'.[12] During the referendum debate, these distinctions were blurred in a space where academics had the opportunity to contribute to progressive theorising and practice. After the referendum, academic radicalism may come to resemble that described by Benjamin as 'left-wing radicalism', or 'the attitude to which there is no longer any general any corresponding political action',[13] which might in turn encourage idealisation of the progressive spirit that informed the referendum.

As the second part of this article will delineate, if an uneasy tension was maintained during the indyref between glorification of progressiveness and acknowledgement of its reliance on the idea of a 'still missing' Scotland to be emancipated, post-vote dynamics can be expected to defuse this tension while fulfilling its logic through the annihilation of the Missing Scotland to the point of oblivion. In particular, the selective remembering that will accompany the radical nostalgia for indyref progressive activity will entrench the erasure of the tension between progressiveness as a principle and reality realised in the independence movement and any logic or experience resistant to its positivity. As Gordon Asher and Leigh French argued, amongst independence supporters 'What could be an opportunity for dialogue is instead functioning as a process of closure, where independence is posited as *ipso facto* "progressive"'.[14] Responding to this, the rest of this article will explore the

---

[11] Colin Barker and Laurence Cox, '"What have the Romans ever done for us?": Academic and activist forms of movement theorizing', *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference on Alternative Futures and Popular Protest* (2001), 4.

[12] Ibid., 5.

[13] Walter Benjamin, 'Left-Wing Melancholy', *Screen*, 15.2 (Summer 1974), 30.

[14] Gordon Asher and Leigh French, 'Crises Capitalism and Independence Doctrines', *Concept*, 5.1 (Spring 2014), 1.

relationship between the idea of a progressive Scotland, as represented by the independence movement, and the idea of a Missing Scotland, defined by that constituency's non-participation in the movement. My examination will be especially concerned to unpack the ways in which the dialectic of presence absence that informed this relationship might make for a differential remembering of 'progressive' and 'missing' Scotlands in 20 years' time.

The dynamics animating the commitment to deny representative status to the Missing Scotland, and the centrality of the association of the Missing Scotland with miserablism as part of these dynamics, can be explored via the distinction Erik Ringmar makes between identity and interest representation.[15] When identity representation is considered, the rejection of miserablism corresponds to the refusal to elevate a certain section of the population (reminiscent of the Missing Scotland) to the status of full participants in Scottish society. In their treatise on miserablism, published months before the vote, Eleanor Yule and David Manderson proposed that miserablism, as a genre, revolves around the story of 'a male tragic working-class hero, often a drifter and/or "hard man" struggling with addiction'.[16] At one level, they contested this as an inaccurate version of Scottish society because, as Yule notes, 'relatively speaking Scotland is a developed, wealthy nation, despite some deprivation and inequality',[17] If miserablism has provided 'a sense of identity and a voice for the working classes', then, Yule considers, it is time to 'make space for new voices to emerge'.[18] On the other hand, Yule and Manderson's argument about the necessity of Scotland not being connected to a miserablist aesthetic framework, or to the miserablist attitude this reproduces, ties into the Ringmar's 'interest' type of representation, as miserablism is portrayed as detrimental to Scottish self-determination and flourishing. For Yule, 'the health of a nation is reflected in its creative imagination and the way in which it chooses to project itself'.[19] On Manderson and Yule's account, miserablism has 'kept　[Scottish identity] down, stopping it from getting above itself.. it's the cast of mind that thinks Scotland is great… but will vote No in the forthcoming referendum'.[20] This encapsulates the extent to which if, in the progressive imagination of the indyref, the Missing Scotland was rejected

---

[15]　Erik Ringmar, 'The Idiocy of Intimacy', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 49.4 (1998)
[16]　Eleanor Yule and David Manderson, *Moving Beyond Scottish Miserablism* (Edinburgh, 2014), 22.
[17]　Ibid., 20.
[18]　Ibid., 22.
[19]　Ibid., 20.
[20]　Ibid., 27.

as an inadequate representative of a nation that was being renewed and energised by the radical politics of the independence campaign, this was only seemingly confined to the level of identity and culture, as the undesirability of the Missing Scotland as an icon was connected to its being deemed not conducive to delivering an independent, or simply a better, Scotland - from the perspective of an 'interest' type of representation.

Interestingly, while Ringmar associates the principle of identity representation with nationalism,[21] there was a resistance in the Yes campaign to presenting itself as nationalist, and a determination to be associated instead with constitutional patriotism and democratic renewal. However, what the struggle over the Missing Scotland suggests is that there was considerable concern to identify an essence, an identity, which would aptly represent an emergent (or re-emergent) nation. On the one hand, this very concern points to the nationalist framework within which the campaign operated. On the other, it indicates an intertwining between identity and interest representation that complicates Ringmar's distinction. This intertwining coloured many nationalistic responses to the Commonwealth Games 2014. As Hassan has noted, 'The Glasgow of the games was very different from… the powerful hackneyed and miserablist images of the city which have crowded out other accounts', suggesting that the 'rare moments such as the Glasgow games when our nation is portrayed' in non-miserablist fashion, provided 'an uplifting and empowering experience – which in some ways is ultimately a political one'.[22]

These discourses reproduce the neoliberal logic at work in the rejection of the representative status of the Missing Scotland. This same logic underpins what critical medical humanities theorists Lynne Friedli and Robert Stearn call the 'general conspiracy of optimism, normative cheerfulness and resilience in the face of adversity'.[23] And this validates Asher and French's concerns about Yes 'consensualism, and forced positivity from progressives generally', for 'if they were successful, they should leave us *in*, *with*, and *for* the nexus

---

[21] Erik Ringmar, 'The Idiocy of Intimacy', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 49.4 (1998), 540.

[22] Gerry Hassan, 'The Glasgow Games, the Great War and A Requiem for the Post-War Dream', National Collective blog, 4 August 2014, http://nationalcollective.com/2014/08/04/gerry-hassan-the-glasgow-games-the-great-war-and-a-requiem-for-the-post-war-dream/, accessed 29 November 2014.

[23] Lynne Friedli and Robert Stearn, 'Whistle While You Work (For Nothing): Positive Affect as Coercive Strategy – The Case of Workfare', December 2013, http://centreformedicalhumanities.org/whistle-while-you-work-for-nothing-positive-affect-as-coercive-strategy-the-case-of-workfare/, accessed 29 November 2014.

of capitalism / nation state / representative "democracy"'.[24] It is within this framework, I would argue, that the process whereby the Missing Scotland was *made* missing in indyref imaginings, while Yes radicals became the icon to be repackaged and transmitted to posterity as representative of the new Scotland, is best understood.

In examining the ambiguity that characterises the term 'People', Giorgio Agamben notes that 'the constitution of the human species into a body politic comes into being through a fundamental split' between 'naked life *(people)* and political existence *(People)*'.[25] The 'biopolitical fracture' that in the indyref progressive imagination separated the missing Scotland (people) from the People of Scotland involved in political life can be appreciated through consideration of how discourses of compassion, development, and participation were deployed in the indyref public sphere. Here the Missing Scotland functioned as the recipient of human rights to be delivered in ways that would realize the scenario delineated by Costas Douzinas, whereby if *'The end of human rights is to resist public and private domination and oppression. They lose that end when they become the political ideology or idolatry of neo-liberal capitalism or the contemporary version of the civilizing mission'*.[26]

When the tension between progressive Scotland and Missing Scotland is considered in relation to discourses on participatory development, research has shown how these often rely on a neoliberal logic of personalisation and blaming that undercuts their progressive credentials. What Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari describe as 'participation as tyranny'[27] can be criticised, as Frances Cleaver argues, for its 'inadequate model of individual action and the links between individual participation and responsibility', in which 'there is little recognition of the varying livelihoods, motivations and impacts of development on individuals over time'.[28] In the same spirit, in her exploration of the 'will to empower', Barbara Cruikshank argues that 'democratic citizenship is less a solution to political problems than a strategy of government',[29] within a framework in which 'Technologies of citizenship are voluntary and

---

[24] Asher and French, 'Crises Capitalism', *Concept*, 5.1 (Spring 2014), 7.

[25] Giorgio Agamben, 'Form-of-Life',*Means Without Ends* (Minneapolis, 2000), 31.

[26] Costas Douzinas, 'The Paradoxes of Human Rights', *Constellations*, 20.1 (2013), 52.

[27] Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, 'The Case for Participation as Tyranny', *Participation: The New Tyranny?*,ed.Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London and New York, 2001), 3.

[28] Frances Cleaver, 'Institutions, Agency and the Limitations of Participatory Approaches to Development', in Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (eds), *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, (London and New York, 2001), 47.

[29] Barbara Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* (Ithaca and London, 1999), 1.

coercive at the same time; the actions of citizens are regulated, but only after the capacity to act as a certain kind of citizen with certain aims is instilled. Democratic citizens, in short, are both the effects and the instruments of liberal governance'.[30] Indeed, it is difficult to read Lesley Riddoch's call to empower a Scottish people '[s]tuck with the shortest life expectancies in Europe because of self-harming addictions, grief and powerlessness'[31] as advocating the 'participation as empowerment' Asher and French called for.[32] Rather, Riddoch's narrative unfolds within the neoliberal scenario of forced positive affect delineated by Friedli and Stearn, into which the Missing Scotland as recipient of human rights was inserted by Yes radicals. This confirms Douzinas' idea that in advanced capitalism, 'Right claims reinforce rather than challenge established arrangements' as '[t]he claimant accepts the established power and distribution orders'.[33]

The unequal power positions assigned to progressive Scotland and to Missing Scotland were entrenched through the rhetoric of compassion that was supposed to evince the progressiveness of the Yes campaign. Riddoch argued that 'Correcting the inbuilt tendency towards bad health and self-harming needs compassion, understanding, long-term funding, a slow transfer of control and considerable vision'.[34] Similarly, Hassan declared that what his *Caledonian Dreaming* '[set] out to value [was] empathy', 'understanding the needs and interests of others'.[35] However, Lauren Berlant's collection of essays on compassion as '*an emotion in operation*' powerfully delineates how the idea of compassion 'implies a social relation between spectators and sufferers, with the emphasis on the spectator's experience of feeling compassion' in ways that reinforce structurally unequal power relations.[36]

Similar dynamics obtained in the public sphere of the referendum debate, despite the consensus that this was animated by an unprecedented variety of voices, enshrined in the commitment articulated by Mike Small to 'create new structures for a more participatory democracy' and, in this way, 'a new Scotland based on a different set of values'.[37] If, as Jürgen Habermas claims,

---

[30] Ibid., p. 5

[31] Lesley Riddoch, *Blossom: What Scotland Needs to Flourish* (Edinburgh, 2013), 303.

[32] Asher and French, 'Crises Capitalism', *Concept*, 5.1 (Spring 2014), 1.

[33] Douzinas, 'The Paradoxes of Human Rights', *Constellations*, 20.1 (2013), 59.

[34] Riddoch, *Blossom* (Edinburgh, 2013), 60.

[35] Gerry Hassan, *Caledonian Dreaming: The Quest for a Different Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2014), 27.

[36] Lauren Berlant, 'Introduction: Compassion (and Withholding)',*Compassion* (London and New York, 2004), 1.

[37] Mike Small, editorial, *Closer: A Reverie for a New Scotland* (2014), 4.

the public sphere is constituted by the 'intersubjectively shared space of a speech situation',[38] the Missing Scotland was defined by its absence from this space, and its voices by the need for others to notice their absence and speak for them. (Central to Hassan's book is the need for a discourse that 'explores and identifies, the missing voices of Scotland [that] have to be noticed').[39] In light of this, the public sphere of the indyref could be seen to resemble Nancy Fraser's rather than Habermas's public sphere. For Fraser, 'Habermas's account idealizes the liberal public sphere'; as she puts it, 'despite the rhetoric of publicity and accessibility, the official public sphere [rests] on… a number of significant exclusions'.[40] In the rhetoric of development and compassion as well as in the public sphere of the indyref, the Missing Scotland was (figured as being) *made* missing through the progressives' agency, in ways that prefigured how the totalizing icon that would be transmitted to posterity as representing the nation would be constituted. This chillingly resonates with Agamben's idea that 'our time is nothing other than the methodical and implacable attempt to fill the split that divides the people by radically eliminating the people of the excluded'.[41]

On the one hand, the democratic, political, civic side of such an exclusion from the public sphere is reminiscent of Hannah Arendt's distinction between public / political and private realms, according to which those excluded from the former are deprived 'of a way of life in which… the central concern of all citizens [is] to talk with each other'.[42] On the other hand, the fact that this exclusion took place within the public sphere of the referendum debate calls attention to the nationalist dimension of the latter, creating a scenario close to that described by Arendt, in which 'The Rights of Man… proved to be unenforceable… whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state'.[43] With this in mind, my examination will turn, finally, to how the tension between progressive imagination and Missing Scotland was informed by nationalist thinking.

---

[38] Jürgen Habermas, 'Civil Society and the Political Public Sphere', *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, 1996), 361.

[39] Hassan, *Caledonian Dreaming* (Edinburgh, 2014), 19.

[40] Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, 1992), 113.

[41] Agamben, 'Form-of-Life', *Means Without Ends* (Minneapolis, 2000), 34.

[42] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1958), 27.

[43] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego and London, 1968), 293.

Tracing the recurrence of the figure of the Missing Scotland and of miserablism in indyref culture helps foregrounds how a fictive ethnicity is produced in a Scottish context in ways that became acceptable and banal through the indyref. Étienne Balibar describes a 'fictive ethnicity' as the product of practices and discourses that work 'to make the people produce itself continually as national community… as a people'.[44] How ideas of a Missing Scotland and of miserablist attitudes were caught up in these dynamics is enshrined in Manderson's idea that miserablism is 'capable of making us – by whom I mean anyone who lives in Scotland or has Scottish connections and lives abroad or shares the Scots' "sensibility of the mind" – able to speak out in a certain way'.[45] It is also apparent in Hassan's contestation of the myths 'we' tell 'ourselves' – including '[t]he account of Scottish inadequacy and lack of confidence… which has had too much power through our history'.[46] At the same time, Balibar contests the distinction between the model of the cultural and that of the political nation by drawing attention to the political project that animates both,[47] and to the 'rule of exclusion' on which this rests.[48] These insights capture the exclusionary logic of discourses that revolved around the idea of the Missing Scotland, and of miserablism, which can be taken to be informed by the spirit of both civic and ethnocultural nationalism, yielding two specular, oxymoronic figures.[49]

For Nicholas Xenos, the oxymoronic character of civic nationalism lies in the dynamics whereby 'The nation-state has required a mythologizing naturalism to legitimate it, thus blurring the distinction between "civic" and "ethnic"'.[50] This becomes apparent when one considers the ways in which both miserablism and progressiveness were portrayed as rooted in the Scottish psyche, conceived in ethnocultural terms that inflected the political project of civic nationalism. On the one hand, within a framework reminiscent of Anthony Smith's ethnosymbolist ideal of national identity as *'the continuous*

---

44 Étienne Balibar, 'Racism and Nationalism', *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*(London, 1991), 59.

45 Yule and Manderson, *Moving Beyond Scottish Miserablism*(Edinburgh, 2014), 26.

46 Hassan, *Caledonian Dreaming* (Edinburgh, 2014), 39.

47 Étienne Balibar, '*Homo nationalis*: An Anthropological Sketch of the Nation-Form', *We, The People of Europe: Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans.James Swenson(Princeton and Oxford, 2004), 16.

48 Ibid., 49.

49 My thanks to Leigh French for pointing me to Nicholas Xenos' article and for his thoughts on the uneasy distinction between civic and ethnocultural nationalism.

50 Nicholas Xenos, 'Civic Nationalism: Oxymoron?', *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society*, 10.2 (1996), 213.

reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions',[51] the Missing Scotland was associated with a cultural essence reproduced as undesirable because detrimental to the wellbeing of the Scottish people. This was epitomised by how Hassan connected his *Caledonian Dreaming* to Carol Craig's *The Scots' Crisis of Confidence*, which argues that 'to build a healthier, wealthier and wiser Scotland we need to change some of our mindset'.[52] Along similar lines, for Chris Bambery the radical essence of Scotland, embodied in 'the voices of ordinary Scots who have stood up and put themselves on the line in pursuit of justice, equality and the greater good', would be realised in the case of a Yes vote.[53] In specular fashion, the undesirability of miserablism infoming political projects dictated its undesirability at the cultural level. This was exemplified by how, for Mike Small, when attempting to transform democracy, the 'challenge' was 'to throw off decades of self-doubt and "learned failure" about Scotland, Scottishness and the Scots'.[54] In the debate over which aspects of Scottish culture and history should be transmitted as legitimate parts of Scottish culture lies the significance of the referendum conjuncture for practitioners in Scottish studies. Not only did the indyref foreground the extent to which the tradition that was being manufactured was simultaneously civic and ethnocultural, it forced attention to the very act of construction – the operation of what Raymond Williams calls 'selective tradition'. For Williams, 'the hegemonic sense of tradition is always the most active: a deliberately selective and connecting process which offers a historical and cultural ratification of a contemporary order'. And indeed, the rationale behind decisions regarding which aspects of contemporary culture had to be validated and which devalued was clear at a time when the pro-independence movement was under pressure to develop a positive and confident image of the 'Scottish nation'.

In calling for reflection on the forms that indyref memories will take in twenty years' time, as 'finished' objects of tradition, If Scotland introduced a self-reflexive logic in our imaginings and critical practice. If, as Williams says, 'certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded',[55] then what was the

---

[51] Anthony D. Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic* (Oxford, 2008), 59.

[52] Carol Craig, *The Scots' Crisis of Confidence* (Edinburgh, 2003), viii.

[53] Chris Bambery, *A People's History of Scotland* (London & New York, 2014), 324.

[54] Mike Small, editorial, *Closer* (2013)

[55] Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', *New Left Review*, 1.82 (Nov-Dec 1973), 8

rationale underpinning our decision to emphasise certain aspects of Scottish culture and neglect others? And what will the consequences be in terms of the culture that will be associated with the referendum in 2034? In encouraging us to think of the present as simultaneously future and past, If Scotland gives us the privilege of a voice in the construction of a selective tradition, but also the awareness that it was, indeed, a privilege, and one which came with responsibility.

Responsibility to whom? Reflection in cultural studies has focused on the ways in which the responsibility of the critic is 'constitutively riven' between academia and the political projects to which it attempts to contribute.[56] The referendum debate brought to breaking point the tension between the two poles in Scottish studies, I suggest. The model whereby our critical activity could be deployed at a speculative level, divorced from practical effects, was exceeded by the assumptions underpinning our practice: academics publicly participated in cultural and political discussion, realising Stuart Hall's idea that the vocation of intellectuals is 'to alienate that advantage which they have had out of the system … to put it at the service of some other project'.[57] Involvement of intellectuals such as Neil Davidson with RIC and Scott Hames with National Collective provides a measure of the success of this attempt in Scottish studies 2014.

At the same time, rapprochement between pro-independence movement and Scottish studies created a framework in which the latter had a stake in presenting the former as progressive, and will have a stake in remembering it as such. This could be problematic as in order to genuinely engage with a political project intellectuals must preserve a critical stance.[58] Scott Hames attempted to do as much in relation to the pro-independence movement, suggesting to National Collective that 'Right now, in Scotland, there are glimpses here and there of a "cracked nationalism" which ruptures its own claims and visions, which disowns any right to voice a pre-determined groupness; which embraces self-critique'.[59] This article disagrees with Hames' sympathetic perception of the pro-independence movement, but his exhortation undoubtedly provided

---

[56] Paul Bowman, 'Proper Impropriety: The proper-ties of cultural studies (Some *More* Aphorisms, and Aporias', *Parallax*, 7.2 (2001), 51

[57] Stuart Hall, 'The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities', *October*, 53 (Summer, 1990), 18

[58] Jeremy Gilbert, *Anticapitalism and Culture: Radical Theory and Popular Politics* (Oxford and New York, 2014), 6

[59] Scott Hames, 'One Idea for a Better Scotland', talk delivered at Yestival (Edinburgh, 2014)

the cultural campaign with a sense of the direction in which it could have worked in order to realise its rhetoric of progressiveness.

My hope is that critical perspectives unconstrained by radical nostalgia for the 'progressive' alliance that brought together the pro-independence movement and intellectuals will be able, in 2034, to contest the hegemonic function of the selective tradition that originated during the referendum debate, and openly discuss the ways in which progressive ideals as much as contradictions and exclusionary principles constituted 2014 Scottish culture. Remembering the indyref means coming to terms with how contributions, including our 'crimes', could no longer be relegated to the level of theory.[60] This perception has provided the rationale behind my interrogation of the exclusionary logic underpinning the narratives of progressiveness, miserablism and the Missing Scotland during the debate. In larger terms, it suggests the need to approach the legacy of the indyref in ways that allow us to move beyond the constraints that the indyref itself imposed on critique, rather than regarding it as an unproblematic tradition of political, cultural and critical engagement.

---

[60] Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson* (London and New York, 2011).

If Scotland… Notes on Contributors

Cairns Craig is Glucksman Professor of Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen and Director of Aberdeen University Press. Recent publications have included a chapter on Alexander Bain in Gordon Graham (ed.), *Scottish Philosophy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* and on 'Edwin Morgan's Poetry from Scotland' (2015) in Alan Riach (ed.), *The International Companion to Edwin Morgan* (2015).

Robert Crawford's *Young Eliot: from St Louis to 'The Waste Land'* (2015) is now available in paperback; he is Professor of Modern Scottish Literature and Bishop Wardlaw Professor of Poetry at the University of St Andrews.

Corey Gibson is a lecturer in Modern English Literature at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. He was awarded his PhD from the University of Edinburgh in 2012 and he is the author of *The Voice of the People: Hamish Henderson and Scottish Cultural Politics* (EUP 2015), which was nominated and shortlisted for the Saltire Research Book of the Year Award 2015. In 2012 he was awarded the Ross Roy Medal for his research in Scottish literary studies, and in 2013–14 he was a US-UK Fulbright Commission scholar at UC Berkeley.

Scott Hames (co-editor) is a lecturer in English at the University of Stirling, where he chairs the Stirling Centre for Scottish Studies. He has written widely on contemporary Scottish writing and literary nationalism, and edited *The Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*, *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence*, and the *International Journal of Scottish Literature* (with Eleanor Bell and Ian Duncan). He is completing a monograph on Scottish literature and the politics of devolution, partly based on the findings of a two-year research project funded by the British Academy.

Adrian Hunter (co-editor) is a Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the

University of Stirling. He is currently preparing a volume for the Stirling/ South Carolina Research Edition of the Collected Works of James Hogg.

Arianna Introna is an AHRC-funded PhD student in her final year of study at the University of Stirling. Her research interests lie at the intersection between Scottish cultural and literary studies, disability studies and Marxist autonomist theory. In her PhD project she is exploring autonomist narratives of disability in Scottish writing from the start of the twentieth-century to the present day.

Pàdraig MacAoidh is a Lecturer in Literature in the School of English at the University of St Andrews. He is the author of *Gu Leòr / Galore* (Acair, 2015) and *Sorley MacLean* (RIISS, 2010), and is currently co-editing, with Iain S. Macpherson, an anthology of transgressive Gaelic poetry which is due out later in 2016 with Luath.

Catriona M.M. Macdonald is Reader in late Modern History at the University of Glasgow, and author of the monographs *The Radical Thread* and *Whaur Extremes Meet*. She is editor/ co-editor of *Unionist Scotland* and *Scotland and the Great War* and was editor of the *Scottish Historical Review,* 2010-2014. Macdonald is currently PI on a Carnegie Collaborative Project on political poetry and song in Scotland, and is working on a major research project on Scottish historiography from 1832.

Alex Thomson is Senior Lecturer in the English and Scottish Literature subject area at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of *Deconstruction and Democracy* (2005) and *Adorno: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2006) as well as essays on Scottish literature, continental philosophy and political theory. He is currently working on an edition of *Memories and Portraits* for the New Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Works of Robert Louis Stevenson.

Robert Wirth currently teaches at the University of Paderborn, Germany, lecturing in English language and British cultural studies. He received his Magister Artium from the Julius Maximilians University Würzburg, Germany. His primary research interests lie in the field of cultural identity, history and nostalgia with a main focus on Scotland. He is writing his PhD thesis on the role of nostalgia in the Scottish independence debate.