

**The Cultural Construction of Scotland Beyond Scott-land:
rediscovering voices in the Gardyne collection of Scottish poetry, 1815-1832**

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The recovery of previously marginalized voices from what E.P. Thompson termed the ‘condescension of posterity’ has taken great leaps forward in recent decades (Thompson: 12). While histories – both literary and political – arguably retain a resilient bias towards the ‘great men’, the margins now matter. And while people often tire of fashionable buzzwords, the rise of interdisciplinarity has revealed much shared ground between hitherto discrete areas of scholarly inquiry.

Political and cultural histories of early nineteenth-century Scotland present a case in point. There are many echoes with contemporary Scotland; this was a period that witnessed tumultuous relations with continental Europe, an era in which banking crises brought economic instability, and an age during which controversial Tory Prime Ministers negotiated calls for constitutional change. Encouraged by the works of Sir Walter Scott there was, furthermore, a renewed cultural focus on what it meant for Scotland to be British. And looming over all of this was the spectre of the 1832 Reform Act. Scott’s friend James Hogg remarked that the passing of the Act had proven the final burden for Scott to bear.¹ Scott died 3 months after Reform was passed by parliament. It is perhaps not surprising that the 1830s - the decade of Reform and of the ‘The Great Unknown’s’ demise - is commonly used as a watermark for both the start and end points of political, literary and cultural histories of Scotland.

There was, of course, more to Scottish cultural production than Scott in the early decades of the nineteenth-century. A recent focus on working and labouring-class voices such as James Hogg and John Galt, and those of women such as Margaret Oliphant and Janet Hamilton, has gone a long way toward shedding light upon the margins.² This essay will take that project further, by looking at some relative ‘unknowns’ in the production of poetry in

¹ James Hogg, *The Domestic Manners and Private Life of Walter Scott* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1834), p. 131.

² Glenda Norquay (ed) *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women's Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Gerard Carruthers and Colin Kidd (eds) *The International Companion to John Galt* (Glasgow: Scottish Literature International, 2017).

Scotland in the post-war, pre-Reform years, 1815 to 1832. It will ask what these voices can tell us about the diffusion of political debate, particularly in discourses of national identity, liberty narratives and the usage of the past. Using an (at times frustratingly) understudied and undervalued archive of poetic material held in the Mitchell Library's Gardyne Collection in Glasgow, the relationship between political and poetic discourse proves a fruitful one for further study of the past.³

Scottish past and identity

The promulgation of 'invented traditions' of Scottish nationhood is perhaps the most commented upon aspect of Scott's literary output, and poetic material contained within the Gardyne collection suggests that the historicist approach to Scottish national identity was not confined to the 'triple-decker' novel. J. Rowatt's 1824 verse, 'Cadzow Castle', is a useful starting point for exploring the way in which Scottish poetry uses narratives of the past to construct distinctive national traditions and symbols, which in turn can offer some useful insights for a discussion of identity, nation, and the 'people'. Addressing the importance of history to the poetic narrative, Rowatt writes:

On thee the poet's pen shall dwell
Thy ancient glories to disclose;
The heroes on thy banks who fell,
The storied page shall never lose.⁴

Rowatt deploys 'Proud Edward' and the symbolism of the English 'other', interpreted through the Wars of Independence. This is language steeped in pride and patriotism, with a distinctive Scottish flavour:

Proud Edward's boasted legions came
And camp'd on Avon's rocky side,
Elate with conquests they had won,

³ All Gardyne items cited herein can be located in the Robert Burns Collection (RBC) Bay 7 at the Glasgow City Archives, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Square-brackets denote handwritten notes on otherwise anonymously published poems. Not all poems have individual accession numbers, in which case the Gardyne Collection volume number is supplied only. Note: while engaging with historical contexts, the ensuing discussion focuses on the texts themselves rather than on issues of authorship, literary and poetic merit, authenticity and provenance.

⁴ Mitchell Library, Gardyne Collection [MLGC], 74448, Vol. 33, J. Rowatt, *Cadzow Castle, a Poem* (Hamilton, 1824).

Their glowing bosoms swell'd with pride.

The prominence of 'proud Edward' in this work, and in others in the Gardyne collection, shows the readiness of contemporary poets to adopt the heroic narratives of the Scottish past. An 1835 poem, attributed to 'Macdonald', shows the recurrence of this discourse:

Till Scotia's King appears himself in state

And till at Bannockburn he seals proud Edward's fate.⁵

The Scottish past invoked by Rowatt and Macdonald is not restricted to a 'proud Edward' version of history. More recent historicisms are presented: 'And less I ween brave Fingal's sod, and glorious Ossian's dread-nought Isle' (Rowatt). Reference to the Ossianic cult – James MacPherson's infamous set of poems published from the 1760s, presented as the authentic work of the ancient Scots Gaelic bard named Ossian – draws the discussion on to an important topic in modern Scottish historiography. Colin Kidd has written extensively on Ossian and the importance of literary myth making in the formation of national identities in Scotland. (Kidd, 221). Kidd's analysis of Ossian, as it relates to the construction of the 'nation', is important to consider, because it offers a framework for understanding the uses of the Scottish past – here Ossian, and before that 'Proud Edward' – in expressions of national-political identity in the poetry of the Gardyne collection.

Two themes are worthy of reflection in this regard: myth making and the symbols and iconography of the nation, as well as the uses of the Scottish past to construct the nation in term of 'self' and 'other'. For Rowatt, this 'self-other' paradigm is straightforwardly between 'brave Scotia's hardy sons' and the 'boasted glory' of England.⁶ Indeed, there are further examples of poetry in this vein. In 1816, John Bell invoked heroic days of independence in Scotland's past, in stanzas on William Wallace and the 'country's woes' at the hands of 'butchery... by southern foes'. The poem goes on to describe a skirmish between the outnumbered Wallace and English soldiers who had murdered Wallace's lover:

Death sat upon each hero's [sic] sword,

And back recoil'd the southern horde.⁷

⁵ MLGC, 74575, Vol. 56, [MacDonald], 'Address to the Maid of Morven', *Address to the Maid of Morven, and Captain MacLean etc.* (Glasgow, 1835), p. 19.

⁶ *Cadzow Castle*, pp. 11, 13.

⁷ MLGC, 74501, Vol. 43, John Bell, *Cartlane-Craigs* (Edinburgh, 1816), p. 61.

This is an unambiguous binary presented in terms of the villainous ‘southern horde’ and the heroic and noble Wallace. Robert Clerk in 1836 also alluded to a Scottish past that was defined by the invader:

Then success to old Scotia, where liberty’s nurs’d
Where tyranny proud is didain’d,
Who dares to invade, here, shall lowly be laid.⁸

This appears to present a Scottish national identity posited against an English ‘other’. However, as we shall see in the discussion below, such binaries begin to fray upon closer analysis of the poetic material.

Patrick Joyce’s concept of populism stresses the importance of symbolism in the forging of popular identities. In the 1832 ‘Lines to a Thistle’, anonymously authored in Scots, the themes featured in the work of Rowatt intertwine with the symbolism of the Scottish thistle.⁹ The heroic past is told alongside the *motif* of Scotland’s national flower:

Midst scenes o’ weir, in days o’ yore,
When the ground swat wi’ life’s red fore,
An’ Scotia’s land, frae shore to shore,
Groaned sair wi’ waes.

In evoking the heroic Scottish past the poem covers familiar ground, though we are given an indication as the verse progresses of how the discussion here of identity and history might develop beyond a binary of Wallace-Edward/Scotland-England:

When Bruce, on Bannockburn’s red field,
Gart Edward’s mighty army yield...
...By bright fu’ springs o’ freedom fed,
Nae blast thou fear’st.’

The mention of ‘freedom’ is of significance. The passages we have discussed up until this point have alluded to a moral and just struggle in the Scottish past, without explicitly employing the language of ‘freedom’. In the next stanza, the author draws the reader back from the past and into the present, when ‘thy native land is free as air’. The binary of oppressor-oppressed – the Edward-Wallace dialectic of the Scottish past – is left to history when the author turns

⁸ MLGC, 74470, Vol. 36, Robert Clerk, *Original poetical pieces* (Paisley, 1836), p. 7.

⁹ MLGC, 74436, Vol. 29, Anon., Alexander Campbell (ed.), *The Unknown Poets of Scotland* (Leith, 1832), p. 49.

her or his attention to the present. The ‘social smile’ of ‘love and true friendship [of the] glorious pair’ now ‘adorns the soil’ on which the thistle grows.

Unionist-nationalism

It is worth introducing into the discussion a concept favoured by Gordon Pentland in his studies of early nineteenth-century popular politics: the ‘unionist-nationalist’ paradigm (Pentland: 155). First coined by Graeme Morton in his study of mid-nineteenth-century local governance in Edinburgh, ‘unionist-nationalism’ is characterized by the deployment of particular Scottish national symbols alongside narratives of Scotland’s past within the context of Britain. In other words, this is a Scottish nationalism that embraces Britain as a political entity, but combines with it a distinctive Scottish identity. Pentland concludes that political culture and national identity via ‘unionist-nationalism’ were interlinked to such a degree that the reform movement during the years leading up to 1832 represented Scotland’s first mass unionist-nationalist movement.

The foregoing examples from the Gardyne collection support Pentland’s hypothesis of popular political culture in the period. Returning to Bell’s 1816 poem ‘Cartlane-Craigs’, the early stanzas depict Wallace as the noble hero pitted against the tyrannous southern ‘other’. Yet, the author, in the space of a few pages, makes the seamless transition from the narratives of Scotland’s past to the language of contemporary *British* patriotism:

When Wellington’s heroic band... curb the insolence of France;
her haughty tyrant teach to yield
In Waterloo’s redoubted field.¹⁰

The rhetoric makes a like-for-like substitution of Wallace for Wellington as the hero, and the ‘southern’ tyrant becomes France. The heroic narrative of the Scottish past in poetry features individuals and events promoting a self-other dichotomy along the lines of Scotland-England, but this distinct Scottish history grounds a British patriotism of the present.

In an early display of ‘unionist-nationalism’ in the mid-century, in a poem from 1819 Robert Moffat called for permanent monuments to Bruce and Wallace to be raised. The Scottish past was clearly being renegotiated by many poets alongside the British present once

¹⁰ Bell, *Cartlane-Craigs*, p. 72.

again: 'Britannia since can boast; down to the hour, despotic power, at Waterloo was lost'.¹¹ There is no sense of contradiction between the Scotland-England binary of the past and the Britain-other (usually France) dynamic of the present. The political culture and identities as espoused in much of the Gardyne poetry lend weight to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, displaying different factors that work in relation to one another as opposed to a set of exclusive binary discourses.

Liberty narratives

Those historians who have broadened the scope of traditional historical analysis by using a range of diverse source material have revealed the centrality of liberty narratives in popular political expression in the nineteenth-century. Nancy D. LoPatin's study of the reform movement of the early nineteenth-century focuses on political unions, public space, material culture, language and rhetorical devices, and finds narratives of English liberty closely bound to popular political expression. James Epstein's earlier work, exploring symbolic and ritual elements of popular radicalism as well as language and rhetoric, found the language of popular constitutionalism and narratives of English liberty to be crucial to our understanding of the history of radical reform movements in England. Meanwhile, Gordon Pentland has convincingly deployed Epstein's 'constitutionalist idiom' - a liberty narrative - in the Scottish context of popular politics in the early nineteenth century. According to Pentland, Scotland's 'national reform movement' made a 'common appeal to patriotism through the language of 'popular constitutionalism'' (Pentland 2005: 1001).

The Gardyne poems shows that a Scottish liberty narrative was a common element in political cultural expression. This narrative essentially rests upon traditions and mythologies of the Scottish past, and is closely tied to many of the themes we encountered above:

Sweet Scotland – home of liberty and lore...
Land of the free, where slave has never trod;
Land, where the Roman's conquering was stal'd.¹²

The above excerpt from Symons' 'A Weaver's Saturday' (1838) shows the oft-deployed historical lineage of Scottish liberty that begins with the national mythology surrounding the

¹¹ MLGC, 74562, Vol. 55, Robert Moffat, *Cause and Effect, or nature's proofs of a divine creator* (Edinburgh, 1819), pp. 74, 78.

¹² [J.C.Symons], *A Weaver's Saturday* (Glasgow, 1838), p. 24.

repelling of the Roman invasion. This is a good example of how ‘invented traditions’, the phrase is of course Hobsbawm’s, draw on pre-national history to help forge a national narrative for the present. It is the language of liberty that gives those national mythologies a contemporary political relevance.

The use of Scotland and the Roman Empire as a liberty-oppression binary absorbs the now familiar Wallace-Edward paradigm to cement the notion of Scotland as a bastion of liberty:

And till at Bannockburn he seals proud Edward’s fate...His country, groaning
‘neath a man’s captivity stood up to... the proud Roman state.¹³

This interweaving of historical legacies is common in the Gardyne sample.¹⁴ The malleability of the useable past sees poets incorporate the Roman narrative into an ideal of Scottish heroism in the face of tyranny, including historical references to Bannockburn, Culloden, and even to struggles for religious freedom including the Reformation and the Covenant years.¹⁵ This did not translate into a popular nationalism opposed to the 1707 Union. Rather, it was adaptable to different political contexts.

Broadening our appreciation of Scottish liberty narratives can aid our understanding of the significance and meaning of their uses. The following lines from Robert Pollok from 1840 echo concerns similar to those poets discussed above:

The Dane, the Pict, and Bourbon, sought thy home,
And on thee burst the legioned hosts of Rome.¹⁶

This language strongly resembles that potent historic statement of Scottish liberty, the Declaration of Arbroath, particularly in the line, ‘The Britons it first drove out, the Picts it utterly destroyed’.¹⁷ This is significant in that the use of symbolic documents is a vital part of liberty narratives in popular political culture in the early nineteenth-century. Indeed, the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights feature heavily in the 1820 ‘Radical War’ Proclamation.

¹³ [Macdonald], *Address to the Maid of Morven*, p. 19.

¹⁴ See also MLGC, 74445, Vol. 31, Robert Pollok, *The British Patriot* (Glasgow, 1840); 74472, Vol. 37, William McLaren, *Isabella* (London, 1828), pp. 54-60.

¹⁵ MLGC, Vol. 49, Allan Stewart, *The poetical remains of the late Allan Stewart*, (Paisley, 1838), pp. 43, 73, 89.

¹⁶ Robert Pollok, *The British Patriot* (Glasgow, 1840).

¹⁷ National Records of Scotland, SP13/7, Transcription and Translation of the Declaration of Arbroath, 6 April 1320, <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//research/declaration-of-arbroath/declaration-of-arbroath-transcription-and-translation.pdf>, accessed 5 February 2018.

While the events of 1820 are contested in current historiography, the appropriation of the narrative of English liberty is self-evident in the rhetoric of those involved. As Pentland has argued, the ‘language of the radicals was not nationalist, but based around discussion of British constitutionalism and the rights that it conferred on Britons’ (Pentland 2008: 8). An 1829 poem, ‘Verses on visiting Stirling Castle’ in the Gardyne sample shows a nuanced blend of the Scottish and English pasts combining to sustain the shared liberty narrative of the present:

Our Magna Charta’s power we prize,
Our laws together blend,
Proud nations are our grand allies,
We champions both can send.¹⁸

James Miller, writing in the following decade, addresses explicitly the contemporary political context, but still draws on history:

Like Flodden’s phalanx, round their kind will stand...
A Burke’s sagacity, a Fox’s skill,
And Pitt’s, that led the many at his will;
Like great Belhaven, gloriously oppose
Dire innovations plann’d by Scotland’s foes.¹⁹

Flodden punctuates the heroic narrative of the Scottish past with tragedy – unlike Bannockburn, it was a tale of Scottish defeat. Miller’s invocation of the heroic monarch, James IV, who died alongside ‘the floo’ers of the forest’ at Flodden, is given a contemporary frame of reference with the mention of modern political figures including former Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger, philosopher and Whig Edmund Burke, and Lord Belhaven, who had famously spoken out against the proposed Union in the Scottish Parliament in 1706 (Davis: 32). Miller links the notion of ancient liberty and rights derived from Scottish and English history to contemporary political movements, and particularly to Reform:

Or like another Hampden take the field
Than to tyrannic measures tamely yield...

¹⁸ MLGC, 74501, Vol. 42, Mary Ann Cookson, *Poems on Various Subjects, Third Ed.* (Leith, 1829), p. 6. The female authorship of this poem is notable, given that the Gardyne sample is overwhelmingly male in terms of authorship and content.

¹⁹ MLGC, 74575 Vol. 56, James Miller, *Verses to Lord Ramsay* (Edinburgh 1836) p. 17.

Bid loath'd Corruption hide her hydra form,
And where 'tis wanted, grant the boon Reform.²⁰

Alongside the examples from the Gardyne sample discussed above, this meeting of past narratives with present political impulses closely resembles a tradition of English radicalism evident in Chartist discourse, as shown in the research of Epstein. Epstein's work locates the idea of liberty within a historical trajectory stretching 'from the ancient Greeks to Blackstone, from the Anglo-Saxon legal code and the ancient *posse comitatus*, through the Anglo-Norman constitution to the Stuarts, from the "glorious" revolution of 1688 and the misrule of the Hanoverian Whigs to the present day' (Epstein: 554). A Scottish equivalent, as gleaned from the Gardyne poets, could be said to begin, as the Declaration of Arbroath did, with the repulsion of the Britons, Picts and Romans, moving thence to Bruce and James IV (heroic in defeat) to the Covenanters and (perhaps counter-intuitively) Bonnie Prince Charlie and 'the 45'. This trajectory of Scottish liberty combines with an equivalent English lineage to ground *British* claims for reform.

Internationalist liberty and Scottish poetry

The Gardyne sample illustrates how ideas of liberty in poetic utterance in the early nineteenth-century were not restricted to Scottish and British contexts. Poland is the country most commonly referenced in commentary upon international politics:²¹

Poland! Thy fields are wet with blood
And there is not a limpid flood
Poland! Thou art low indeed!-...
...I have tears for thee!-
Once, the birth-place of the free...
Let their Tyrants feel the rod
Of an outrag'd, insulted God!²²

The above excerpt from 'To Poland' (1838) is typical of sympathetic approaches by the Gardyne poets to Polish independence struggles. The narratives of liberty forged from the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²¹ See MLGC, 74562, Anon., *The Spirit of the Times* (Paisley, 1836) p. 20; 74532, Vol. 49, Allan Stewart, *Poetical Remains* (Paisley, 1838), p. 137; 74631, T. Campbell, *Poland. A Poem* (2nd ed.) (London, 1831); 77463, J. Mitchell, *The Dying Pole* (Aberdeen, 1831).

²² Anon., *Rhymes at Random, by a Gallovidian Ploughman* (Colchester, 1838), p. 33.

'invented traditions' offered by the past could be applied to political contexts both at home and overseas. Political poetry in Scotland, therefore, had a broad and varied frame of reference that suggests an internationalist dimension to popular attitudes.

Alexander Rodger in the following excerpt from 1821 shows how the heroic narratives of the Scottish past combine with international lineages and figures of freedom to forge a radical contemporary vision of liberty:

Spirits of immortal Wallace ,
Bruce, Tell, Doria, Washington,
And ye noble Six of Calais...
Hampden, Sidney, Marg'rot, Gerald,
Palmer, Kosciusko, Muir,
Names dear to a groaning world!
Names which tyrants can't endure!²³

Rodger's approach, blending past and present and citing figureheads of liberty movements across Scotland, England, and Europe, is typically radical and politically astute in terms of the contemporary political environment.

Yet Poland is far from the only international political concern of the Gardyne poets. Edward Allan in 1837 appealed to the sense of internationalism inherent in popular conceptions of liberty in his poem 'Lines suggested by the present movements throughout the European nations':

Hark! The sounds hither borne from Iberia and Gaul,
The thrall has at length snapped his chain ;
Even Germany rouses at last to the call,
And freedom re-echoes from hovel and hall...
Bid the tyrant to shake in his sumptuous hall...
Soon those whom his long-usurped powers still appal,
The thousands his gold hold in misery and thrall.²⁴

Far from being parochial, the political concerns of Scottish poets extended across Europe. Kirstie Blair has illustrated how working-class Victorian poetry in Scotland was steeped in

²³ MLGC, 74313, Vol. 5, Alexander Rodger, *Scotch Poetry* (1821), p. 17.

²⁴ MLGC, 74567, vol. 54, Edward Allan, *Original Poems* (Glasgow, 1837) p. 94.

European interests and influence, and the Gardyne sample bolsters this position.²⁵ Popular expressions of internationalism in nineteenth-century Scottish poetry undoubtedly offer fruitful prospects for further research, and the Gardyne collection would be an ideal starting point for the researcher.

Conclusion

The Gardyne collection of Scottish poetry presents a rich source for the study of political-poetic discourse in early nineteenth-century Scotland. Constructions of the nation evident therein fuse Scottish national identity with Britishness through heroic symbolism: what Murray Pittock has termed the 'taxonomy of glory' (Pittock: 27). Liberty narratives derived from a mythologized past drive a 'unionist nationalism', which also interacts with international concerns while inflecting popular political discourse surrounding issues like Reform. What this suggests is that those on the 'margins' of Scottish literary histories of the era reflected to no small degree some of the nation-constructing political tropes embodied in Scott's historical novels. *Waverley* is, after all, a 'Scottish and a British book' (Mack: 54). Furthermore, the Gardyne collection of poetry held at the Mitchell Library suggests that the binary categories of 'Unionist' and 'Nationalist' offer very little in terms of understanding Scotland's literary and political histories. Neat categories tend to fray because of the dialogism of texts. 'Did Sir Walter Scott invent Scotland?', Juliet Shields asked in a lecture at the Museum of London in January 2017.²⁶ Perhaps he did, although hitherto overlooked literary archives go some way towards shedding light upon the margins and proving he was not alone.

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²⁵ Kirstie Blair, "'Auld Scotland" and "Garibaldry": European Politics, Victorian Scotland and the Working-Class Poet', Mitchell Library, Glasgow, 28 May 2014.

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