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Sacred Lambencies and Thin Crusts: The Metaphors of Identity

... They went to the window. The fronting heavens were a black purple. The thunder, which had been growling in the distance, swept forward and roared above the town. The crash no longer roared afar, but cracked close to the ear, hard, crepitant. Quick lightning stabbed the world in vicious and repeated hate. A blue-black moistness lay heavy on the cowering earth.

George Douglas Brown, *The House with the Green Shutters*, 1901¹

If a city hasn't been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively.

Alasdair Gray, *Lanark*, 1982²

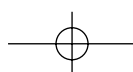
I NATURA MALIGNA

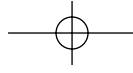
The Atlantic coast was appreciated for the qualities of light and landscape—the soft days of the Irish west, the clarity of Cornwall, the Welsh picturesque at Betws-y-Coed—but Victorian fictionalists encountered a Scotland which seemed irredeemably dour: bleakness of moorland, withered grasses, stunted trees, flailed by a merciless wind; towns and villages slattern and sullen; great cities truly hellish chasms of filthy streets and pandemonian crowds. ‘Land of the mountain and the flood’ characterizes some of this. The ‘Bonnie Briar Bush’ of the Kailyarder Ian MacLaren waves outside the window of a talented boy dying of tuberculosis. The same malady kills Cunninghame Graham’s returning migrant at ‘Beattock for Moffat’. George Douglas Brown in *The House with the Green Shutters* granted himself a couple of sentences of exhilaration, but soon let fly with *natura maligna*.

Ibsen’s Norway is no more friendly, but it was *like that*—the drenched fjord towns, the terrific mountains, the seas pounding on Rosmersholm’s beach. By contrast, educated Scots—the bellwethers of the Atlantic intellect—made their landscape a metaphysical horror. After the delight in their land’s beauty of such Gaelic poets as Duncan Ban MacIntyre and Alasdair MacMaisthir Alasdair (who had otherwise little reason for content), the likes of Alexander Smith, John Davidson,

¹ (Edinburgh: Nelson, c.1950), 129.

² (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1982), 243.





Robert Louis Stevenson, George Douglas Brown, and Lewis Grassie Gibbon wielded sternness and wildness—at best, with bleak tropes of rocks, graves, and peewits—relentlessly. The human geography expertly displayed by Sir Walter Scott stayed quiet until its sensibilities were rediscovered by such regionalists as Neil Gunn and George Mackay Brown in and after the 1930s.³

The Scots literati were notable cosmopolitans—the inventors of English literature, in Robert Crawford's thesis, the 'red Scots' of my own *Scotland and Nationalism* (1977)—whose migration contributed crucially to British, and Welsh and Irish, nationality in the Victorian epoch.⁴ But the psychological cost was high; symbolized by the inverted sublime of the above as well as by the 'divided self' from James Hogg via Stevenson to R. D. Laing. Were they also deliberately spurning a society bent on what Scott called a 'terrifying and unnatural' urban life, as Andrew Noble has alleged?⁵ Imaginative writers don't just interrogate, and recoil from, reality. As the language and symbols of the Victorian Scots came from a literary tradition which was conscious of social semiotics, this equipment could be formidably directive.⁶ Two driving metaphors were the result: the psychological metaphor of dualism, and the equally powerful physical-social metaphor of 'the thin crust of civilisation'.

The German scholar Elmar Schenkel, an adept of such post-industrial Celts as the Powys brothers and David Jones, has argued that the speed of change in industrial society makes the ideal of 'completeness'—the overcoming of alienation—affirmable or deniable only through metaphor. The actualities of childhood, the village, the small community have changed so much that invoking them makes them, as it were, metaphors of a metaphor. Schenkel argues that, to escape intolerable reality and unstable metaphor, writers in industrial societies implicitly align themselves with 'green' and 'small-is-beautiful' projects aimed at a non-industrial, utopian *logos*. This provides a bearable trajectory for discourses which in turn condition the history that they survey.⁷ I want to trace the linked ways in which a peculiarly influential elite interpreted, and recoiled from, an overtaxing project: the maintenance of human personality in a society in upheaval. The result was what John Buchan called the civilization–barbarism frontier: 'a thread, a sheet of glass', a phrase which Graham Greene in 1941 reckoned as summing up the character of the twentieth century.⁸

G. M. Young, whose subtle *Portrait of an Age* (1936) 'composed' in Lukács's terms the English establishment's—'Bladesover's—subjugation of social change to

³ I owe the Stevenson–Grassie Gibbon comparison to Angus Calder.

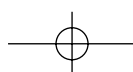
⁴ Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), chap. 1; Christopher Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism, 1977* (London: Routledge, 2004), 4.

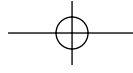
⁵ Andrew Noble, 'Urbane Silence: Scottish Writing and the Nineteenth-Century City', in George Gordon, ed., *Perspectives of the Scottish City* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985), 70.

⁶ See, for example, Rory Watson, 'Carlyle: The World as Text and the Text as Voice', in Douglas Gifford, ed., *The History of Scottish Literature, iii: Nineteenth Century* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988).

⁷ Elmar Schenkel, 'The Poet as Placemaker', in Lothar Fietz, Paul Hoffmann, and Hans-Werner Ludwig, eds., *Regionalität, Nationalität und Internationalität in der zeitgenössischen Lyrik* (Tübingen: Attempto Verlag, 1992).

⁸ Graham Greene, 'The Last Buchan', in *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), 119.





political continuity, had told Greene's generation to 'Go on reading until you can hear people talking'.⁹ It was able to sort and structure this within an intellectual as well as temporal dimension because it was still conscious of biblical and classical exegesis. This sort of personal history seemed redundant in the collective ethos of the 1960s and 1970s, which was seen as accelerating the research/learning process.¹⁰ Since then market forces as well as the dwindling of the British state have compelled a reversal to the biographers, military historians, and heritage merchants, suspended between Merchant and Ivory and Sellar and Yeatman, exuding 'the glamour of backwardness'. In Scotland, Ireland, and Wales collectivity still seems stronger: witness the three volumes of *People and Society in Scotland* (1988–92) and the four volumes of the *History of Scottish Literature* (1987–8). But interpretative lacunae remain, most notably concerning the economy and culture of Victorian Scotland.

This is partly because historians tend to interrogate the texts of the period for fact rather than discourse. When argument and symbol are analysed, other preoccupations emerge. In the emerging 'world' of the Atlantic coast—as we shall see—Thomas Carlyle was the 'central singer', but his texts have to be teased out. Did he read James Hutton on geology? Was he influenced, in his idea of political community, by Thomas Chalmers's 'Godly Commonwealth'? The literary scholar is more concerned with aesthetic and emotional impact, the stylistic and ideological imprint of earlier authors. W. B. Yeats, whose 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' (1923) would become an equally emphatic summing-up, called this 'the half-read wisdom of daemonic images'. In a present of precipitate change, with the fragmentation of the traditional Anglo-British context, such images count for so much that interdisciplinarity and intertextuality become unavoidable.

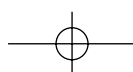
For Ernest Renan, history was the pivot of nationality, and the dialectic between imaginative writing and social change seems crucial to the recent Scottish cultural renaissance, whether in the exploration by William Donaldson and Tom Leonard of Victorian popular literature or, conversely, the 'conjectural history' of Alasdair Gray's novels.¹¹ In my study of British political fiction *The Centre of Things* (1991) I analysed literary texts, not just to distinguish purpose and historical impact but, through examining language and allusion, to locate writers and politicians' arguments in an evolving series of stylistic and literary 'epiphanies'. This suggested a possible approach to the peculiarly faulted Scotland of the Victorians, analysing the success of their cultural incorporation into the Union State, especially in the 1840s, and its ambiguous psychological and social consequences.¹²

⁹ G. M. Young, *Today and Yesterday* (London: Hart-Davis, 1948) 112; and see Georg Lukacs, *Essays on Thomas Mann* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1965), p. vi.

¹⁰ See Theodore Roszak, *The Dissenting Academy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).

¹¹ Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?', 1882, trans. I. H. Grant in Stuart Woolf, ed., *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1996). See also William Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland: Language, Fiction and the Press* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), and Tom Leonard, ed., *Radical Renfrew* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990).

¹² Christopher Harvie, *The Centre of Things: Political Fiction from Disraeli to the Present* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1991), 38–9.



II A PATRIOT FOR WHOM?

Nineteenth-century Scots identity has been called British, but it was more complex than that. ‘British’, if politically accurate, was too cumbersome a formulation for diplomats, merchants, and publicists to deal with. ‘English’—eliding language and predominant state—was a sort of default position. The Scots had to live with it, and what they made of it was patent in a key document of Scottish Unionist identity, *The Scottish Students’ Song Book*. This was edited in the 1890s for the Students’ Representative Councils set up by the Universities (Scotland) Act of 1889 by Prof. John Nichol of Glasgow University, biographer of Robert Burns and the friend of Mazzini and Swinburne. It came hard on the heels of the celebration of the centenary of the Kilmarnock edition of Burns in 1886, stage-managed by the Earl of Rosebery, from which the modern Burns cult essentially dates: one of many celebrations of enlightenment, radicalism, technical progress, and dynastic survival that filled the last quarter of the nineteenth century. David Cannadine has termed the British element of this ‘ornamentalism’, yet the language of cult and songbook was not uniquely that of empire or ethnic heroism but of commerce and civic choice, or blends of both.¹³ Its anthems repay study.

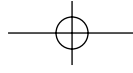
‘God save the King’, though figuring in formal ceremonial, did not appeal. Composed around 1740, perhaps by Henry Carey, it took off during the Jacobite crisis of 1745, its fourth stanza instructing God:

Lord grant that Marshal WADE
May by thy Mighty Aid
Victory bring.
May he Sedition hush,
And like a Torrent rush,
Rebellious Scots to crush,
God save the King.¹⁴

It was a Tory Party song, customary only in that phase of Churchill-cinema Britishness, from 1939 and 1955. Yet its historical twin ‘Rule Britannia’, also from 1740, was by James Thomson of Ednam, the Augustan poet, and Thomson was not the last transferred patriot. In 1801, only eight years after Burns’s ‘Scots wha hae’, another Scottish radical, Thomas Campbell, wrote ‘Ye mariners of England’, and in the 1840s yet another, Charles Mackay, wrote ‘Cheer boys, cheer!’ and ‘England over all!’ But Campbell accompanied ‘Ye mariners’ (he had not actually visited England) with ‘An exile of Erin’, sympathizing with the Irish rising of 1798, and would die revered by

¹³ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2001) deduces from orders, durbars, and jubilees an imperial ethos; Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), grants this, at best, only fleeting significance. Elfie Rembold’s study of the Glasgow Exhibition and Caernarfon investiture of 1911, *Die festliche Nation: Geschichtsinzenierung und regionaler Nationalismus vor dem ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Philo, 2000), is subtle in assessing the interplay of regional and imperial politics.

¹⁴ David Nichol Smith, ed., *The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 302.



the Poles. MacKay, editor of the *Illustrated London News* and father of the astonishing Marie Corelli, spent his later life campaigning for Gaelic poetry. Did Robert Crawford's Anglo-Scots create, besides English literature,¹⁵ an 'imperial song' which was masculine, positive, and *portable*, compared with a Scottish patriotism—Jacobite songs composed after the Cause was safely dead, or Lady Nairne's post-Flodden *tristesse* in 'The Flowers of the Forest'—gone winsome?¹⁶

In 1886 Burns was all but unavoidable. 'The aforesaid "old-kind chiel" remains to my heart and brain almost the tenderest, manliest (even if contradictory) dearest flesh-and-blood figure in all the streams and clusters of by-gone poets,' wrote Walt Whitman, in a shrewd, affectionate appraisal, rubbishing his Jacobitism and claiming him for America: 'Without the race of which he is a distinct specimen, (and perhaps his poems) America and her powerful democracy could not exist today—could not project with unparalleled historic sway into the future.'¹⁷ But where did this leave national culture? Not simplified when Burns's key contribution is deconstructed, exclamations, emphases, and all:

Scots, wha hae wi' WALLACE bled,
Scots, wham BRUCE has aften led;
Welcome to your gory bed,—
Or to victorie!—

Now's the day, and now's the hour;
See the front o' battle lower;
See approach proud EDWARD's power—
Chains and Slaverie!

Wha will be a traitor-knave?
Wha can fill a coward's grave
Wha sae base as be a Slave?
—Let him turn and flee!

Wha for SCOTLAND's king & law
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
FREE-MAN stand, or FREE-MAN fa',
Let him follow me.—

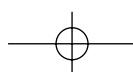
By Oppression's woes and pains!
By your Sons in servile chains!
We will drain our dearest veins,
But they shall be free!

Lay the proud Usurpers low!
Tyrants fall in every foe!

¹⁵ Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 16–44.

¹⁶ William Donaldson, *The Jacobite Song in Scotland* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1993).

¹⁷ Walt Whitman, 'Robert Burns as Poet and Person', in *November Boughs* (Philadelphia: D. MacKay, 1888).



LIBERTY's in every blow!
Let us DO—OR DIE!¹⁸

The poem is less simple, and much less ethnic, than it looks. Burns's opening in stanza 1 is a statement of fact, not the rousing command 'Allons, enfants de la Patrie!' which starts the 'Marseillaise'—though it still *sounds* like a command, a Gaelic *slo-gan* or war-cry, calling up martyrs and liberators, anticipating sacrifice before eventual triumph. The comparatively downbeat mood continues in stanza 2; the looming crisis isn't Rouget de L'Isle's 'le jour de gloire est arrivé' but the grimmer 'see the front o' battle lower', with enslavement threatening national pride. Stanza 3 presents a choice: become a traitor, coward, or slave—and in his pre-Bannockburn career Bruce had arguably been all three—by clearing off, or risk death by fighting for the right. Stanza 4 then establishes a social compact in the style of the Declaration of Arbroath of 1320, via Archdeacon Barbour's long narrative poem *The Brus* of 1376. 'Scotland's king & law' will triumph through the strength of freemen fighting for freedom. The alternative is stated in stanza 5: oppression, pain, and slavery will continue until Scotland gains freedom by blood sacrifice. Stanza 6 is the only one to use an ethnic argument. Usurpation by the English transfers guilt to individual English soldiers: 'Tyrants fall in every foe'. These lines, Burns wrote, were taken not from Barbour but from the later and much more aggressively anti-English Blind Hary's *The Wallace* (c.1476). The final couplet states that national liberty demands success or death, but by embodying the motto of the Douglasses 'Doe or die!' sounds a less-than-reassuring echo of where over-mighty nobles would later get the country.¹⁹

The song in fact posits choices, not the ascriptive attitude: 'you are Scots, you must do this' as in the ethnic patriotism of 'La Marseillaise'. Rouget de L'Isle composed the latter in April 1792, and it was broadcast after the insurrection of 10 August.²⁰ Burns wrote 'Scots wha hae' five months after the execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793 (the declaration of war on Britain came in February) yet it was not published in, or politically directed at, Scotland. Burns sent it, anonymously, to the London *Morning Chronicle*, a Whig daily, where it appeared on 8 May 1794, when the confrontation between the English Friends of the People and the government appeared imminent.²¹ Enthusiasts such as the Whig composer Robert Nares, and in 1841 Thomas Moore, regarded it as 'a song which in a great national crisis, would be of more avail than all the eloquence of a Demosthenes'.²² Its Scottish identity was more enigmatic.

Burns the enlightenment intellectual was salient in 'Scots wha hae': the youth who, with other farmers' sons, was privately tutored by John Murdoch, and admired Adam Smith, both the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations*

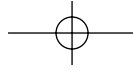
¹⁸ *The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. John de Lancey Ferguson, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), ii, 195.

¹⁹ For Blind Hary's politics see Harvie, *Scotland: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 40, 65.

²⁰ For text and background to 'La Marseillaise' see *Grande Encyclopédie Larousse* (Paris: Larousse, 1960–4), vii, entry 6703.

²¹ Smith, ed., *The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse*, 676.

²² D. S. Low, ed., *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1974), 174.



(1776). Smithian ideas underlie not just the idea of contract and mutuality in ‘Scots wha hae’, but Burns’s sociable principles, as in the ‘Epistle to J. Lapraik’ (1786):

But ye whom social pleasure charms,
Whose hearts the tide of kindness warms,
Who hold your being on the terms,
‘Each aid the others.’
Come to the bowl, come to my arms,
My friends, my brothers!²³

Smith’s ‘sympathy’ gives a ‘composure’ to much of Burns’s poetry, notoriously present in ‘The Cottar’s Saturday Night’, a near-parodic bit of rustic Augustan about a class which would be dead almost before Burns himself.²⁴ Elsewhere reality forced itself on him, as in ‘To a Mouse’, in which the little animal dehousing by the coulter of his plough is compared with the poet’s own failure to establish himself on a farm:

But thou art blest compared with me
The present only troubles thee
While oh! I backward cast my ‘ee
On prospects drear
But forward, tho’ I canna see,
I guess and fear.²⁵

Politically, this is untenable self-pity. The Irish critic Luke Gibbons has contrasted Smithian ‘sympathy’—a learned drive towards the conscious and rational presentation of the individual—and the emotional self-degradation of the Greek warrior Philoctetes, who displayed his wounds to excite sympathy: an accusation often levelled at the Irish on account of their own anthems ‘The Wearing of the Green’ (1798) and T. D. Sullivan’s ‘God save Ireland’ (1867).²⁶

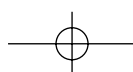
‘To a Mouse’ is Burns in Philoctetic mode. ‘Scots wha hae’, though drawing on patriotic sources, presents a politics of contract. The enemy is not named as English, the breach remains civic, not ethnic. The echoes of the Declaration of Arbroath reflect Bruce’s own Anglo-Norman background and concerns common to both countries in 1200–96 when the Plantagenet kings, preoccupied with their French possessions, kept the peace. Proud Edward, the father of the enemy at Bannockburn, had disrupted this balance, but it could be rearranged in Whig fashion. The result has a lot in common with ‘Rule, Britannia’:

When Britain first, at heaven’s command,
Arose from out the azure main;
This was the charter of the land,

²³ *Robert Burns: Selected Poems*, ed. William Beattie and H. W. Meikle (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952), 107, and see Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2002), 116–19.

²⁴ *Robert Burns: Selected Poems*, 80–7. ²⁵ *Ibid.* 88–9.

²⁶ Luke Gibbons in Terence Brown, ed., *Celticism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 281, and see Seamus Deane, ed., *The Field Day Anthology*, 3 vols. (Derry: Field Day, 1991), ii, 106, for T. D. Sullivan, ‘God save Ireland’, originally in *The Nation* (7 Dec. 1867).



And guardian angels sung this strain:
 'Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
 Britons never will be slaves.'²⁷

Thomson's constitutional patriotism is similar to the contract element—'king and law' in Burns—and is also agnostic about England, although the song originally featured in a play, *Alfred*, in which 'Britain' could only have been a remote notion. The concepts Burns regarded as alien—slavery, autocracy, ill-disposed foreigners, internal weaknesses—are all flayed in Thomson's longer poem *Liberty* (1736):

... Theirs the triumph be,
 By deep *Invention's* keen pervading eye,
 The heart of courage, and the Hand of *Toil*,
 Each conquer'd ocean staining with their blood,
 Instead of Treasure robb'd' by ruffian War,
 Round social Earth to circle fair Exchange,
 And bind the Nations in a golden Chain.²⁸

Burns's expansive Whiggery responded to the Scots *menu peuple*, threatened by agricultural improvement and industrialization. His arguments in 'Scots wha hae' parallel those of Sir David Lindsay's John the Commonweal in *The Three Estates* (1544)—plunder by the 'folk above', and the landlords barring the people's right to 'come into the body of the kirk'—and though the play doesn't seem to have been known to him, its ideas almost certainly reached him via Allan Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* (1725) and the Tory and Jacobite Robert Fergusson, who had been influenced by Bolingbroke's *Patriot King* (1738). Burns revered the Covenanters, whose sense of democratic struggle he brought out in another short poem:

The Solemn League and Covenant
 Now brings a smile, now brings a tear,
 But sacred freedom then was theirs.
 If thou'rt a slave, indulge your sneer²⁹

This was not the National Covenant of 1638 but by the 1643 agreement between the Scots and English parliaments, which endorsed a 'British' identity similar to Thomson's. Even treason is defined in enlightenment terms. In an earlier ballad, 'A Parcel of Rogues', Burns had attacked the destruction of the Scots parliament in 1707:

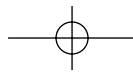
The English steel we could disdain
 Secure in valour's station.
 But English gold has been our bane.
 Such a parcel of rogues in a nation.³⁰

But this also fitted into the arguments of Smith and Ferguson that the actual fruits of commerce could lead to 'luxury and corruption'. Populist patriotism was difficult,

²⁷ Smith, ed., *The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse*, 252–3.

²⁸ Reproduced *ibid.* ²⁹ Quoted in McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical*, 7.

³⁰ Quoted in *Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 643–4.



when the nature of the state was founded not on ethnic but on negotiation. Hence 'England': intellectually with Carlyle himself and his 'Condition of England Question' of 1839, practically with the assumption that the red duster of the merchant marine was a symbol that in everyday business mattered far more than the saltire. Contract inhibited the emotional appeal and the allure of martyrdom. English gold, or French gold, was part of the negotiation and couldn't be wished away. Money—David Marquand's 'universal pander'—meant complexity. Deconstruct 'Scots wha hae' and we find, besides nationalism, Whiggery, Freemasonry, Bolingbrokeism: something the hard-headed Edinburgh reviewers of 1802 could live with.³¹

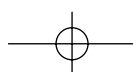
In its religious or federal-covenant form, Burnsian democracy was flexible, and could apply beyond the national community itself. The cost was ambiguity. Take 'Chains and Slaverie' in 'Scots wha hae' or 'the coward slave' in 'A Man's a Man'. In Scotland in 1793 some colliers *were* slaves, a status defended a century earlier by Fletcher of Saltoun with nationalist arguments.³² Scots pressed for the end of black slavery, but benefited greatly from its products, the tobacco and cotton which commercialized the country. Had Burns settled in Jamaica in 1786 he would have been a part of this.³³ Even the triumph of 'liberal' economics was coupled with the rise of wage-slavery. As Carlyle's 'cash-nexus', its radical interpretation would influence nineteenth-century social criticism and Marxism. Less reassuringly, as Scottish democracy consolidated, wage-slavery became defined racially as a low-cost Irish labour force. Burns died before the Irish rising of 1798, but would probably have sympathized as a Presbyterian radical of the Henry Joy McCracken, William Drennan sort. Yet Ulster Presbyterian radicalism was bribed out of existence, and his own Ayrshire became deeply hostile to Catholicism. Burns's Freemasonry and popularity among Ulster Scots—who continued to quote the Declaration of Arbroath on their banners, but directed it against Dublin rather than London rule—would reinforce their Protestant Unionism.

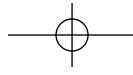
The Scottish attitude to France was quite different: the optimism of James Mackintosh's *Vindiciae Gallica* (1791) certainly gave way to Burkeian pessimism; but the revolution was regarded as inevitable in John Galt's *Annals of the Parish* (1820), in which he followed many of the literati such as Robertson, Ferguson, and Reid. Carlyle's *French Revolution* (1837) took the same line, seeing with Burns the French King as an indolent fathead who courted his inevitable downfall, much like the Stewarts. This evolutionism was passed on to Engels, typical enough of the radicals who universalized Burns (he liked to believe that his Irish partner, Mary Burns, was a kinswoman) while dismissing Scots exceptionality: an occluded vision bequeathed to the later generation of historians and literary scholars, from Christopher Hill to Raymond Williams, who established Marxism at the heart of the Anglo-British canon.

³¹ See David Marquand, 'How United is the Modern United Kingdom?', chap. 16 of Keith Stringer and Alexander Grant, eds., *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History* (London: Routledge, 1995).

³² *Fletcher of Saltoun: Selected Writings*, ed. David Daiches (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1979), p. xxiv.

³³ Catherine Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns*, 1930 (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1990), 150.





III AULD SCOTIA—WHO SHE?

Burns's nationality was hard-wired, realistic—influential in Wales and in the Ireland of Tom Moore and Thomas Davis—but it was also emotionally attenuated. What's lacking is national pathos, or more directly, sex: Scotia not only isn't Britannia, *she* doesn't seem to be there at all. Woman-as-nation can personify integrity—the national matron—along with dependence, martyrdom, and liability to rape. With the last comes miscegenation, an attack on ethnic purity. So she is both radical and conservative: Marianne and, alternatively, Marie Antoinette. Seamus Deane has cited Burke on the French Queen as the birth of anti-modern Irish nationalism.³⁴ Eccentric? Tom Paine was read far more than Burke in Ireland itself, yet Marianne/Marie Antoinette personifies powerful if antithetical images of the nation: the fructifying mother and the symbol of traditional reverence. Both have roots in Catholic cults of the Madonna. Deane rightly sees this as critical: the nation as an aspect of Burke's *sublime*.

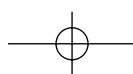
Burnsian patriotism has different roots: in the covenanted nature of the Scots state. This also concurs with the 'authoritarian family' detected by the French social anthropologist Emanuel Todd: the Scots family as a contractual, not an affective, unit, underwritten by male actors and political will.³⁵ The nation of 'La Marseillaise' is female, her subjects are her children; 'Wha for Scotland's king & law . . .' implies no such relationship. Its maleness is further emphasized by Wallace, castrated, beheaded, and quartered, symbolically eradicating the Scottish nation. 'Scots wha hae' involves a rebirth, but the seed is the blood—and cooperation—of warriors. Women do not figure at all.

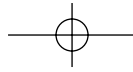
Scottswomen were mistrusted, even if they actually kept society in existence. In recurrent witch-hunts social solidarity was bought through female sacrifice as the 'authoritarian families', whose various layers and 'estates'—kirk, law, burghs, schools—made up the state, turned on them as scapegoats when things did not work out. The literati responded by engineering a sort of Smithian 'sympathy': adopting 'feeling' of the Henry Mackenzie sort, and incorporating female characteristics which also met certain conservative criteria. A more general status of victimhood could be conferred on Celtic monks slaughtered by the Norsemen, George Wishart and the Calvinist martyrs, and in the late seventeenth century the Covenanters. This was when Scotland's two images, Covenanter and Highlander, confronted each other; Whiggism and nationalism interwove and created extreme psychological pressure. James Hogg seems to have been peculiarly alive to it, in *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* (1815), with insights learned from his friend the pioneer psychoanalyst Professor Andrew Duncan. This got full play in *The Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1823).³⁶

³⁴ Seamus Deane, 'Irish Nationalism and the Romantic', paper read at Tübingen, July 1997.

³⁵ See Emmanuel Todd, *The Causes of Progress: Culture, Authority and Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), chap. 2.

³⁶ See Christopher Harvie, 'The Covenanting Tradition', in Graham Walker and Tom Gallagher, eds., *Sermons and Battle Hymns: Protestant Popular Culture in Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990); and see Karin Straub, 'Psychological Disturbance in the Scottish Novel of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', PhD thesis, Stuttgart University, 2005.





Sado-sexual themes, central to ‘the romantic agony’, have an uneasy presence in a nation dominated by sublimation and repression.³⁷ In John Galt’s *The Provost* (1821) a pretty, silly teenager is tried, condemned, and hanged for infanticide; Scott has an adulteress immured in *Marmion* (1808), fragile women persecuted in *The Heart of Midlothian* (1816) and *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819). George Douglas Brown’s *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901) ends up with the Gourlay women killing themselves to the accompaniment of 1 Corinthians 13—‘for here abideth faith and hope and charity, and the greatest of these is charity’—expressive of all that Victorian Scotland was not. Femininity—or sensitivity in general—became a sort of civic disqualification, to be overcome by becoming ‘more like men’. This emotional inflexibility, latent in R. D. Laing’s critique of the family, has since had its Scottish roots analysed by such neo-Jungian feminists as Kay Carmichael in *For Crying Out Loud* (1993) and Carol Craig in *The Scots’ Crisis of Confidence* (2003).

What does one do in such circumstances? One answer was to re-engineer ‘sympathy’ to stress tactical victimhood, exile, and loss, even by those who had success in commercial life. The ambitious young Scot Donald Farfrae performs this with a Jacobite ballad in Thomas Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886):

The singer himself grew emotional, till she could imagine a tear in his eye as the words went on:—

‘It’s hame, and it’s hame, hame fain would I be,
Oh hame, hame, hame to my ain countree!
There’s an eye that ever weeps, and a fair face will be fain,
As I pass through Annan Water with my bonnie bands again;
When the flower is in the bud, and the leaf upon the tree,
The lark shall sing me hame to my ain countree!’

Young Farfrae repeated the last verse. It was plain that nothing so pathetic had been heard at the Three Mariners for a considerable time. The difference of accent, the excitability of the singer, the intense local feeling, and the seriousness with which he worked himself up to a climax, surprised this set of worthies, who were only too prone to shut up their emotions with caustic words.³⁸

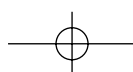
It was to be in the 1880s that Scots expatriates, under pressure for sharp business practices and energetic colonial activity, were to bind themselves together in Burns clubs and St Andrew or Caledonian societies. R. L. Stevenson would give them yet more pabulum in *The Master of Ballantrae*. En route to America, and the novel’s strange climax, the Master, Alexander Durie, trying to win over his steward Ephraim McKellar, launches into ‘the saddest of our country tunes, which sets folk weeping in a tavern’:³⁹

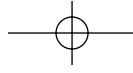
Now, when the day dawns on the brow of the moorland,
Low stands the house, and the chimney-stone is cold.

³⁷ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 1930 (Cleveland: Meridian, 1965), 120.

³⁸ Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (London: Macmillan, 1886), 60–1.

³⁹ See Margot Finn, ‘Scottish Credit Drapers, Solidarity and Patriotism’, in Martin Daunton, ed., *Consumption and History* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), and H. J. Hanham, *Scottish Nationalism* (London: Faber, 1968), 97–8.





Lone let it stand, now the folks are all departed,
The kind hearts, the true hearts, that loved the place of old.⁴⁰

Stevenson's image is that of the Clearances—an issue revived by Scottish Land Leaguers in the 1880s—but the Master is a formidably confused character: he and his dour, competent brother suffer not just from national history but from the proto-schizophrenia and post-Darwinian degeneracy which, at the same time, naturalist writers such as Flaubert, Zola, and Nordau were diagnosing in French bourgeois society.

Injections of sentiment provided a sort of charm against the corrosion that 'luxury and corruption' could inflict on the contractual state. Allan Ramsay the elder, Adam Smith, and Henry Mackenzie, the psalmody of the Covenanters *and* the Jacobite songs, washed Scotland into tactical martyrdom by a combination of patriotism and sentiment. A sentimentalized Burns, Jacobite, radical *and* romantic, could revive nationality through song and the fetishizing of exile, blamed on remote landlords, religious rivals, the immigrant 'other'. But acrobatic intellectualism brought disadvantages.

Instrumental Scottishness had to dispense with the precise geography of Hoffmann von Fallersleben's 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles' (1841), otherwise very Burnsian in its addiction to wine, women, and song, or the linguistic loyalties of the Parry brothers' 'Hen Wlad fy Nhadau' (Land of my Fathers) (1854) which stemmed from defence of the Welsh language against the 'treason of the Blue Books' or the Anglo-Scottish education commissioners of 1848. On the other hand its portability featured in the patriotic democracy of T. B. Macaulay's 'Lays of Ancient Rome' (1842), as much as Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859):

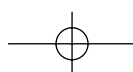
And how can man die better, than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers and the temples of his Gods?⁴¹

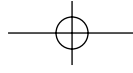
Derived in part from Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1841), this was a calculating commitment to a utilitarian-run Empire which was—unlike the Union or success in trade—more British than English, and friendly to the Scots. The Radical Martyrs of 1793–1820, the victims of the Clearances, the Free Kirkers who lost church and manse: through emigration and democracy in the colonies, all of these could use disruption to transform their status from victim to elite. A century of success followed in which the superman forged in such a mill—from Carlyle via Smiles's engineers to MacDiarmid's Lenin—was Scotland's version of the sublime.⁴²

⁴⁰ R. L. Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae* (London: Longman, 1889), 194.

⁴¹ T. B. Macaulay, *Lays of Ancient Rome* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), Stanza xxvii, p. 11.

⁴² It might seem odd to number the grand Whig Macaulay among the instrumental martyrs—and indeed he figures very little in Michael Fry, *The Scottish Empire* (Edinburgh and East Linton: Birlinn and Tuckwell, 1999)—but the Gael in him comes out in his passionate treatment of the Massacre of Glencoe in his *History of England* (1848–55).





IV A THIN CRUST

So far, so straightforward. But when in 1914–18 this floating world of contract was damaged by international breakdown, another image became almost pervasive, to be encountered everywhere from thrillers to the essays of J. M. Keynes: ‘You think that a wall as solid as the earth separates civilisation from barbarism. I tell you the division is a thread, a sheet of glass.’⁴³

John Buchan would become a central figure of Allied propaganda, which Joseph Goebbels would credit with the *Dolchstoß* (stab-in-the-back) demoralizing of Germany. His thriller *The Power-House* (1913) contains his most famous line, given to a Tory-anarchist supervillain, Andrew Lumley. It seemed, Graham Greene later noted, to describe the predicament of twentieth-century man.⁴⁴ Did Buchan believe it? Probably not at the time of writing. Political thrillers are usually paranoid, but *The Power-House* is rather complacent. Lumley is seen off by two MPs, Tory and Labour, whose decent inadequacies seem to prove the strength of Westminster constitutionalism, just as the ‘very ordinary fellow’ Richard Hannay outperforms British as well as German intelligence in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915).⁴⁵

The upheaval of World War I made Buchan reconsider. In *The Three Hostages* (1924) he used his near-professional knowledge of psychiatry to get a medic, Dr Greenslade, to state:

the fact of the subconscious self is as certain as the existence of lungs and arteries [but] with the general loosening of screws they are growing shaky and two worlds are getting ruined . . . you can’t any longer take the clear psychology of most human beings for granted. Something is welling up from primeval deeps to muddy it.⁴⁶

Lumley’s lines were certainly floating about in the years before 1914, but if they weren’t a reaction to actuality, where did they come from? There were earlier sightings in Buchan, in short stories and in the longer political novel *The Half-Hearted* (1900). But as David Daniell has noted, Buchan seemed to make the civilization-barbarism stand-off the point of complication rather than simplification.⁴⁷ Not untimely, of course when according to Virginia Woolf, a friend of his wife Susan, the things that had changed human nature in December 1910—post-Impressionism, the Ballets Russes, psychoanalysis—mixed up the savage with the sophisticated in a very public way.⁴⁸

Closer reading however showed up two things. One: in *The Power-House* this line is given to a man whose Nietzschean ambition—‘Once concentrate the intellect of the world and the age of miracles will come’—also recalls the doomed project of

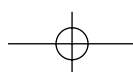
⁴³ Buchan, *The Power-House*, 64. ⁴⁴ Greene, ‘The Last Buchan’.

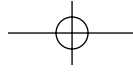
⁴⁵ Christopher Harvie, introduction to Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), and see Harvie, *The Centre of Things*, 150.

⁴⁶ John Buchan, *The Three Hostages*, 1924, in *The Adventures of Richard Hannay* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 17.

⁴⁷ David Daniell, *The Interpreter’s House* (London: Nelson, 1975), p. xix.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Noel Annan, *Our Age*, 1990 (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 76.





Stevenson's Dr Jekyll in that classic of Scots dualism.⁴⁹ Two: Lumley echoed a similar usage by the thriller's dedicatee, Arthur Balfour. In H. G. Wells's *New Machiavelli* (1911) there's a strange scene, apparently drawn from memory, in which idealistic, priggish Richard Remington tries to convert the Tory Party to his welfare panacea of 'Love and High Thinking'. He dines at a grandee's house, and there endures Mr Evesham (Balfour) presiding with elegant callousness over some nasty baiting. Those assembled discuss the West's rape of Peking. Evesham comments, 'What is civilisation but a mere thin net of habits and associations?' and then they settle on Remington as the entrée.⁵⁰

At the end of the novel, Remington's deserted wife nails his political character:

'You remind me—do you remember?—of the time we went from Naples to Vesuvius, and walked over the hot new lava there . . . One walked there in spite of the heat because there was a crust: like custom, like law. But directly a crust forms on things, you are restless to break down to the fire again.'⁵¹

Where *did* Lumley stand anent civilization-versus-barbarism? The super-civilized man, able to use barbarism where and when he wanted, to gain 'advanced' ends? How was barbarism to be defined? Buchan knew his *Culture and Anarchy*, where Matthew Arnold's 'barbarians' were the landed gentry, the upper crust of England's 'layer-cake of fine class distinctions'.⁵² Lumley brandished pure intellect just when the same gentry were threatening civil war during the Ulster crisis. A threat at first outlandish, given the overfed complacency of Edwardian society—the philistinism of Forster's Wilcoxes, the pedantry of Woolf's Mr Ramsay, the paralysis of Joyce's Dublin—took its place with the near-psychopathic neuroses that George Dangerfield would later diagnose in his *Strange Death of Liberal England* (1934).

Where did the metaphor come from? One source is that omnium gatherum of permissible myth, Sir James George Frazer's *Golden Bough*:

It is not our business here to consider what bearing the permanent existence of such a solid layer of savagery beneath the surface of society, and unaffected by the superficial changes of religion and culture, has on the future of humanity. The dispassionate observer, whose studies have led him to plumb its depths, can hardly regard it as otherwise than as a standing menace to civilisation. We seem to move on a thin crust which may at any time be rent by the subterranean forces slumbering below.⁵³

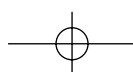
But there is a further, and more political clue. Benjamin Disraeli's last novel, *Falconet*, started shortly before his death in 1881, remained unread until Money Penny

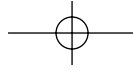
⁴⁹ Buchan refers to Nietzsche, trans. into English, 1900–13, by the Scot Thomas Common, in *Greenmantle*, 1917 (London: Nelson, 1942), 252; see Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, 1885 (London: Cassell, 1907), 72–3.

⁵⁰ H. G. Wells, *The New Machiavelli* (London: John Lane, 1911), 529–30. ⁵¹ *Ibid.* 558.

⁵² Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 1868 (London: Macmillan, 1869), 66; Ralf Dahrendorf's fetching phrase is from *On Britain* (London: BBC Publications, 1982), 55 ff.

⁵³ *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, 1890 (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), ii, sect. 1, pp. 74–5; and see also a similar passage in Frazer's Liverpool inaugural lecture, repr. in *Psyche's Task* (2nd edn, London: Macmillan, 1913), 166–70. See also Christopher Harvie, "For Gods are Kittle Cattle": J. G. Frazer and John Buchan', in Robert Fraser, ed., *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination* (London, Macmillan, 1990), 255.





and Buckle published it in *The Times* in 1905. A mystery man appears in English society, with an international conspiracy in tow:

‘Society is resolving itself into its original elements. Its superficial order is the result of habit, not of conviction. Everything is changing, and changing rapidly. Creeds disappear in a night. As for political institutions, they are all challenged, and statesmen, conscious of what is at hand, are changing nations into armies.’⁵⁴

As an undergraduate the methodical Buchan had planned to write a biography of Disraeli, despite a shared Conservatism fascinated and repelled by the man’s ruthlessness and ultra-intellectualism. Semitism apart, there is a lot of Disraeli’s Sidonia in the ‘archetypal Buchan villain’, the Irishman Dominick Medina in *The Three Hostages*.⁵⁵ But what was Disraeli’s source?

V ENLIGHTENMENT AND UNCERTAINTY

Enter Carlyle, and in particular *The French Revolution* (1837). Robert Blake considers it unclear whether Disraeli ever read Carlyle.⁵⁶ Disraeli in fact injected quantities of Carlyle into his novels, and even offered him a knighthood (feelings which were not reciprocated at all). In the 1830s he was writing passable imitations, and would encounter a recurrent Carlyle metaphor of the volcano seething under the crust of society: ‘the infinite gulf of human Passion shivered asunder the thin rinds of Habit, and burst forth all-Devouring, as in seas of Nether Fire’.⁵⁷ This was from ‘Characteristics’ of 1831, Carlyle’s defence of social science. By 1837, when *The French Revolution* appeared, it roared away *in extenso*:

IMPOSTURE is in flames, Imposture is burnt up: one red sea of Fire, wild billowing, enwraps the World; with its fire-tongue licks at the very Stars . . . Higher, higher get flames the Fire-Sea; crackling with new dislocated timber; hissing with leather and prunella. The metal images are molten; the marble Images become mortar-lime; the stone Mountains sulkily explode.

RESPECTABILITY, with all her collected Gigs inflamed for funeral pyre, wailing, leaves the Earth: not to return save under new Avatar. Imposture how it burns through generations: how it is burnt up; for a time. The World is black ashes;—which, ah, when will they grow green?⁵⁸

This is not the eternal nay of secular-Calvinist hellfire. To Carlyle the crust is both the necessary ‘bands’ of society, and also something calcified and rigid. The volcano

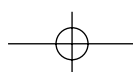
⁵⁴ Printed in George Money Penny and H. T. Buckle, *Disraeli*, ii (London: John Murray, 1905), 1548 ff.

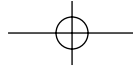
⁵⁵ Janet Adam Smith, *John Buchan* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1965), 80. The commander of the Spanish Armada was the Duke of Medina-Sidonia.

⁵⁶ Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London: Methuen, 1968), 191.

⁵⁷ This is from Thomas Carlyle, ‘Characteristics’, *Edinburgh Review* (1831), repr. in *Scottish and Other Miscellanies* (London: Dent, n.d.), 221; and see Morris Speare, *The Political Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1924), 164–6.

⁵⁸ Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1895), iii, bk 7, chap. 7 (5 Oct. 1795), 322–3.





destroys and renews. To an earlier generation, the evangelical Thomas Chalmers for example, the upheavals after the end of the Napoleonic Wars were ‘a glimpse into pandemonium’, but Chalmers’s then assistant, Carlyle’s friend Edward Irving, wrote to him in the year of the Bonnymuir rising, 1819: ‘I do not warrant against a radical rising, though I think it vastly improbable. But continue these times a year or two, and unless you unmake our present generation, and unman them of human feeling and Scottish intelligence, you will have commotion’.⁵⁹ Carlyle agreed. Far from being Engels’s reactionary monster beached by the tide of history, his radicalism carried on up to the 1840s. Carlyle viewed Chalmers the *ci-devant* rationalist with mistrust: religion involved active reason, while Chalmers’s defensive dogmatism hinted at a weakness of fundamental religious impulse.⁶⁰ But the Chalmersian ideal of the ‘Godly Commonwealth’ burned fiercely in the younger man, combined with an intense nationalism which was, like that of Burns, intellectual rather than *völkisch*:

A country where the entire people is, or even once has been, laid hold of, filled to the heart with an infinite religious idea, has ‘made a step from which it cannot retrograde.’ Thought, conscience, the sense that man is denizen of a Universe, creature of an Eternity, has penetrated to the remotest cottage, to the simplest heart.⁶¹

That poor temple of my childhood is more sacred to me than the biggest cathedral then extant could have been; rustic, bare, no temple in the world was more so; but there were sacred lambencies, tongues of authentic flame which kindled what was best in one, what has not yet gone out.⁶²

The plebeian piety of Burns’s ‘The Cottar’s Saturday Night’ is visible here. The ‘infinite religious idea’ is plainly less conventional, but is still compatible with the common-sense theism of the enlightenment, as defined by George Elder Davie:

... it is inherent in the nature of the belief in an external world or in the mathematical ideals to envisage facts not contained in the sum of the various elementary experiences involved in the genesis of these items of the common sense, and this peculiar and fundamental fact of self-transcendence is held . . . to be an ultimate irrational mystery.⁶³

Carlyle’s political interventionism, and indeed his *étatisme*, was in part a *réprise* of the existential civic ideal which Adam Ferguson constructed over this fundamental mystery. As his friend the landowner and modernist theologian Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (correspondent of Madame de Stael, Guizot, and F. D. Maurice) recognized, with Carlyle ‘political science . . . [became] one with religious obligation’.⁶⁴ Erskine, a scarcely researched figure, was probably the Scot closest to the Christian

⁵⁹ Letter of 28 Dec. 1819, quoted in J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life* (London: Longmans Green, 1885), i, 77; for Carlyle’s later recollections see *ibid.* 73.

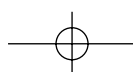
⁶⁰ Fred Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 48–9.

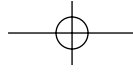
⁶¹ Thomas Carlyle, ‘Sir Walter Scott’, *Edinburgh Review* (1838), repr. in *Scottish and Other Miscellanies*, 71.

⁶² Carlyle, quoted in Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, 18.

⁶³ George Elder Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Century*, 1961 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1961), 275.

⁶⁴ Thomas Erskine to his sister, 6 Feb. 1838, quoted in *The Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, ed. William Hanna, i (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1877), 301.





Socialists—Maurice, Kingsley, and company—and, like Carlyle, stressed ‘good government’ over ‘self-government’. Yet Carlyle remained fiercely radical, as in *Sartor Resartus*:

Call ye that a Society . . . where there is no longer any Social Idea extant; not so much as the idea of a Common Home, but only of a common overcrowded lodging-house? Where each, isolated, regardless of his neighbour, turned against his neighbour, clutches what he can get, and cries ‘Mine!’ and calls it Peace, because in the cut-purse and cut-throat scramble, no steel knives, but only a far cunninger sort, can be employed?⁶⁵

He was equally strongly Scottish. When Goethe wrote at length to him in 1828 about his *Life of Schiller* he specifically dwelt on Carlyle’s Scottish identity, and the ways in which national and international identities complemented each other:

The efforts of the best poets and aesthetic writers throughout the world have been directed towards the general characteristics of humanity . . . [but] one must study and make allowances for the peculiarities of each nation, in order to have real intercourse with it. The special characteristics of a people are like its language and currency. They facilitate exchange; indeed they first make exchange possible.⁶⁶

Goethe’s Scottish enthusiasm had begun in the 1760s, when the *Sturm und Drang* of Macpherson’s Celtic epic *Ossian* was balanced against the secular ethic of ‘improvement’: militant juxtaposed with market society. In the early 1830s Carlyle swithered between similar but now inverted choices: the history of the Scottish Church and that of the French Revolution: the crust of a developed civil society and the lava of social upheaval. At the same time the political compromise which had underpinned Scots semi-independence broke apart, in the ‘Ten Years’ Conflict’ which preceded the Disruption of 1843; ‘sacred lambencies’ spluttered into the religious legalisms that he would later denounce as ‘Hebrew old clothes’.

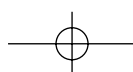
Carlyle’s failure to establish himself in Scotland, despite the support of education, family structure, and locality, was part of a basic disjunction in his thought between Enlightenment rationalism and millenarianism. The Scots Enlightenment’s central metaphysical notion presupposed a similar human system of ratiocination in every state of civilization. Essentially conservative, Adam Ferguson’s Society or Adam Smith’s Sympathy inhered within human Conscience, Consciousness, or Common Sense. But if these qualities were inherent, how was Common Sense to react to the dynamism of the market, technology, and imperial expansion?

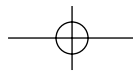
One reaction was to insist that all change implied decay, and oppose it, like the ‘hanging judge’ Lord Braxfield, who, by insisting that only landed authority counted, represented civic *virtú* at its most conservative.⁶⁷ But Carlyle’s background in evangelical millenarianism led him to reject this post-enlightenment stasis, and laud the

⁶⁵ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, published in *Fraser’s Magazine* (1833–4), repr. in *Sartor Resartus and On Heroes and Hero Worship* (London: Dent, 1956), 174. For the philosophical basis of the Christian Socialists see Duncan Forbes, *The Liberal Anglican Idea of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 39 ff.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, 414–20.

⁶⁷ This conservative view of the enlightenment is strongly put by Bruce Lenman, *Integration, Enlightenment and Industrialisation: Scotland 1746–1832* (London: Arnold, 1981), 113.





'fire and strength' of his Calvinist upbringing: he agreed with 'old Ferguson' as to the strength of society, but he recognized that, under pressure, it could break up and compose itself in new forms. The influence of Henri de Saint-Simon complemented his fading theism, by insisting on social progress, not as a steady continuum but as the alternation of 'organic' and 'critical' periods: the latter called for all the 'sacred lambencies' they could get.

VI GALATEA

Saint-Simon also represented social science, and to make this transition, as with so much else, Carlyle needed the stimulus of Goethe. Goethe had absorbed the 1780s debate on the origins of the earth between the followers of the Saxon Abraham Gottlob Werner and those of the Scotsman James Hutton. The Wernerians or Neptunists believed that rocks were laid down by accumulations of marine sediment; the Huttonians or Vulcanists saw them as the results of volcanic activity. To Goethe these explanations symbolized evolution and revolution, concepts which he dramatized in *Faust*, fusing his reactions to the French Revolution with his geological learning. According to Georg Simmel, his interpretation of the debate was symbolic rather than scientific: 'It was not the explosive force that was involved in Vulcanism that counted against it in his eyes, but that this was simultaneously part of the natural order and something that tore the unity of this order apart'.⁶⁸ Goethe wrote in his geological commentaries, part of his duties as administrator of the mines of Saxe-Weimar, that the randomness of Vulcanism conflicted with the deistic idea of design: 'What is the whole upheaving of the mountains but fundamentally a mechanical act, without any understanding of the possibility of a purposive effort being involved?'⁶⁹

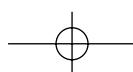
This debate, latent in much of *Faust: Part Two*, which Goethe worked on between 1808 and 1831, climaxes at the end of Act II, set in the rocky inlets of the Aegean Sea. The Homunculus, Goethe's symbol for a Frankenstein-like artificial intelligence, born of mechanism and out of his element in the mythic Neptunist realms, is thrust towards the conch of the sea-nymph Galatea, literally in her own element:

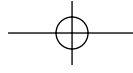
THALES Homunculus this, whom old Proteus misleads . . .
And the signs show the longing and will of their master,
Boding the pangs and the moans of disaster,
His glass will be shattered against the bright throne,
Comes in a flash, on the floods he is strown.

SIRENS The waves are transfigured with fire-laden wonder,
They glitter in impact, in flame leap asunder.
Here's shining and swaying, and spurting of light,
With forms all aglow in the track of the track of the night.
And lapping of fire touches all things around:

⁶⁸ Quoted in Werner Dunckert, *Goethe: Der mythische Urgrund seiner Weltanschauung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1951), 77.

⁶⁹ Goethe, 'Über die Bildung der Erde', notes of 1790, quoted *ibid.*, 78.





Let Eros who wrought it be honoured and crowned!
 Hail to the Ocean! Hail to the wave!
 The flood of the holy fire to lave!
 Waters hail! All hail the fire!
 The strange event hail we in choir!
 ALL VOICES IN CONCERT Hail light airs now floating free!
 Hail earth's caves of mystery!
 Held in honour evermore
 Be the elemental four!⁷⁰

To Goethe this was the modern crisis: fire symbolizing the liberation of carbon, the holy fire of palaeotechnology, but also the problem of whether it could be controlled: the problem faced, as every child knew, by his 'Sorcerer's Apprentice'.⁷¹ His resolving figure was Galatea, the eternal female, the synthesizer of fire and water, erotic as well as reconciling. Carlyle took on the geological dialectic and made this powerful synthesis another of his repertoire of signifiers.⁷² But the erotic as reconciler proved too much for his inhibitions. The man who in the 1840s set out to brand contemporary mores as 'The Phallus and the Money-Bag' ended up as yet another stricken refugee from a Scotland where intellect consistently triumphed over feeling.⁷³

Goethe stressed imperative change which disrupted the cyclic pattern of history on which Scots social thought had been founded. Carlyle was caught between two philosophies: a cyclic, civic conservatism, and a millenarianism posited on either Christian or collective beliefs. Any return to the Christian equilibrium in Scotland was implausible, and the utopianism of Saint-Simon and his own sense of crisis drove him, despite Goethe's warnings, into the greater arena of England in the 1830s and 1840s, where his impulses and injunctions were transformed first into positive movements for reform, and then to personal frustration.⁷⁴

But social change also indicated a turbulence verging on what Emil Durkheim would call *anomie*.⁷⁵ The menaces that Carlyle warned against became actual when industrialization set Scotland, like the towns affected by the railway in 'Hudson's Statue',

a-dancing, confusedly waltzing, in a state of progressive dissolution, towards the four winds; and know not where the end of the death-dance will be for them, in what point of space they will be allowed to rebuild themselves.

⁷⁰ J. W. Goethe, *Faust: Part Two*, 1832, trans. Philip Wayne (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959), 155–6.

⁷¹ This was written in 1797. It appeared as part of Walt Disney's *Fantasia* with Mickey Mouse in the title role, in 1937.

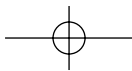
⁷² Carlisle Moore, 'Carlyle and Goethe as Scientist', in John Clubbe, ed., *Carlyle and his Contemporaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1976), stresses Carlyle's interest in the *Farbenlehre* (theory of colours), but is unforthcoming on *Faust* or Vulcanism.

⁷³ Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle*, 332–3.

⁷⁴ K. J. Fielding, 'Carlyle and the Saint-Simonians', in Clubbe, ed., *Carlyle and his Contemporaries*, 35–59, esp. p. 41.

⁷⁵ Thomas Carlyle, 'Characteristics', *Edinburgh Review* (1831), repr. in *Scottish and Other Miscellanies*, 221.





... Joplin of Reading, who had anchored himself in that pleasant place, and fondly hoping to live by upholstery and paperhanging, had wedded, and made friends there,—awakens some morning, and finds that his trade has flitted away... Sad news for Joplin:—indeed I fear, should his sagacity be too inconsiderable, he is not unlikely to break his heart, or take to drinking in these inextricable circumstances!⁷⁶

As a vision of *England* this was extreme. The railway only accelerated the urbanization of the canal and turnpike age. Joplin remained reasonably prosperous and sober. In palaeotechnic Scotland, however, the railway-driven industrialization after 1830 was volcanic, based on industries which were noisy, lurid, and polluting. The working class was low-paid and appallingly housed; once away from the churches and artisan virtue (which on the whole had it by the tail) it anaesthetized itself with whisky or erupted in pointless violence. The middle class could be traumatized by disasters like the collapse of the City of Glasgow Bank in 1878.⁷⁷ If such extremities provoked the synergic work of the Carlyle-influenced Patrick Geddes, they also made a humane reform of Scots social divisions appallingly difficult.⁷⁸

To return to that chronicle of damnation, George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters*, set in the 1860s, is to find formless, questionably creative chaos. Brown's purpose had originally been that of Carlyle in 'Hudson's Statue'—personalizing the impact of transport change on Scottish society:

When a man who has been jogging comfortably along, under the old conditions, suddenly finds his world revolutionised, finds that in middle life, perhaps, he must adapt himself to strange and unpleasing ways, his end is often inevitable tragedy... Such tragedies happened more than once when railways began to push their way along the quiet and sequestered valleys of the south of Scotland. Men of importance in the parish, men who had held their heads high at Kirk and market, grain-merchants, cheese-merchants, who had inherited businesses from their fathers, suddenly found that the ground on which they had stood so long was being taken from beneath their feet.⁷⁹

Brown's final draft gave the death-struggle of male tyranny against economic nemesis a brutal poignancy, and made John Gourlay symbolize the damage that industrial Scotland inflicted on itself. Like Stevenson's *Weir of Hermiston* (published only four years earlier) this involved a *jeté* back to the Scotland of the revolutionary epoch.

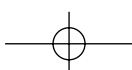
Young Gourlay's revolt against his father, undirected by any philosophy, ends in a private reign of terror. The just society appears only as an ironic ghost in the final chapter, when the doomed Gourlay women fruitlessly invoke the Christian charity of 1 Corinthians 13. Brown had worked with David Meldrum on editing John

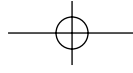
⁷⁶ Thomas Carlyle, 'Characteristics', *Edinburgh Review* (1831), repr. in *Scottish and Other Miscellanies*, 229.

⁷⁷ See James Buchan, *Frozen Desire: An Enquiry into Money* (London: John Murray, 1997), chap. 8.

⁷⁸ For Geddes see Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁷⁹ George Douglas Brown, Unpublished 'Prologue', in Brown's notebook, National Library of Scotland (NLS MS 8171), quoted in Alistair McCleery, 'The Devil Damn Thee Black: A Note on *The House with the Green Shutters*', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 16/1 (May 1989), 45; compare with Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), 228–30.





Galt, and saw in Galt's 'theoretical histories' the destructiveness of individualism unconstrained by community. The fate of the Gourlays is in fact the working out, in Carlylean terms, of Galt's pessimism about the future of the polis: something which had resonance in a Wales scarred by coal and slate waste and chemical pollution, and Ireland after famine, sectarianism, and repression.⁸⁰ Buchan himself would resume the inquest, scarcely more optimistically, in his greatest historical novel, *Witch Wood* (1928), where the harsh discipline of Calvinism conjures up its devil-worshipping alternative. He wrote *Witch Wood* after reading his way through Scott and Hogg, and was particularly impressed by one little-known Scott work, *The Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827). This makes explicit, in two short stories of self-destruction, 'The Highland Widow' and 'The Two Drovers', the suppressed social tensions of a multinational state based on highland subjugation, and is framed by a long introduction in which Scott's narrator 'Chrystal Croftangry' uses Edinburgh to symbolize the nature of his country:

A nobler contrast there can hardly exist than that of the huge city, dark with the smoke of ages, and groaning with the various sounds of active industry or idle revel, and the lofty and craggy hill, silent and solitary as the grave; one exhibiting the full tide of existence, pressing and precipitating itself forward with the force of an inundation; the other resembling some time-worn anchorite, whose life passes as silent and unobserved as the slender rill which escapes unheard, and scarce seen, from the fountain of his patron saint. The city resembles the busy temple, where the modern Comus and Mammon hold their court, and thousands sacrifice ease, independence, and virtue itself at their shrine; the misty and lonely mountain seems as a throne to the majestic but terrible genius of feudal times, when the same divinities dispensed coronets and domains to those who had heads to devise and arms to execute bold enterprises.⁸¹

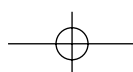
Arthur's Seat is, of course, an ex-volcano.

For Scotland the turmoil of industrial and social disruption persisted for most of the century after Carlyle's death, albeit with native 'captains of industry' giving way to multinational capital. Because the Victorian crisis was comprehensive, metaphors of 'disassociated sensibility' built up to an awareness of full-blown schizophrenia, from Hogg to Laing.⁸² The fundamental tension between 'sympathy', inherently conservative, and individualism, inherently disruptive, became stasis. The thin crust of civilization and whatever was roaring and slurping away underneath it was inorganic, forceful, and male. The customary way out was precisely that, with ready-made contractual equipment to hand, while domestic reform implied compromise with remedial forces which were biocentric, conciliatory, and female. Their germ was visible in two works of Carlyle's disciple John Ruskin, *Unto this Last* (1861) and *Ethics of the Dust* (1872), with their appeal to craftsmanship, woman as conservatrix, and

⁸⁰ Brown was himself half Irish, Patrick McGill of *Children of the Dead End* and A. J. Cronin of *The Citadel* wholly so. Regina Weingartner has documented Brown's influence on Caradoc Evans's scathing criticism of Lloyd Georgite Welsh Nonconformity; see *Planet*, 75 (June–July 1989).

⁸¹ Buchan, in his biography *Sir Walter Scott* (London: Cassell, 1932), praised the Turgenev-like 'economy and certainty' (p. 315) of Scott's *Chronicles of the Canongate* of 1827; and see Christopher Harvie, 'Scott and the Image of Scotland', in Alan Bold, ed., *Sir Walter Scott: The Long-Forgotten Melody* (London: Vision, 1983), 31–2.

⁸² See Straub, 'Psychological Disturbance'.



piecemeal, sensitive, social reconstruction. These recurred in Patrick Geddes's projects for the Edinburgh Social Union after 1884 and his sociological laboratory the Outlook Tower, and later in the boundless ambitions of Geddes's disciple Hugh MacDiarmid.⁸³

MacDiarmid, temperamentally akin to 'volcanic Carlyle', regarded his own creativity as necessarily disruptive: 'I produce heat and light and also a great deal of rubbish.' Yet his celebration of Goethe in 'The Oon Olympian' (1932) also shows him adopting the latter's reconciliatory Neptunist symbolism: water and femininity invoked against nihilistic destruction:

Consciousness springs frae unplumbed deeps
 And maist o' men mak haste
 To keep odd draps in shallow thoughts
 And let the rest rin waste.
 Quickly forgettin' ocht they catch
 Depends on the kittle coorse
 O' a wilder fount than they daur watch
 Free-springin' in its native force
 Against the darkness o' its source.⁸⁴

MacDiarmid's friend William Power wrote that the nation was the Galatea of the young nationalists of the 1920s, a reconciler, an epiphany of the planned and dignified society. But her appeal would be limited in the empty forges and slipways of the world's former workshop.

⁸³ The Ruskin–Geddes continuum, and its social as well as aesthetic consequences is sensitively described by Duncan Macmillan, *Scottish Art*, 1990 (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2000), chap. 15.

⁸⁴ Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Oon Olympian', in *Collected Poems* (London: Martin Brian and O'Keefe, 1985).