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Introduction: Scottish Romanticism

*Murray Pittock**

* murray.pittock@glasgow.ac.uk

University of Glasgow

The idea of national Romanticisms is of course central to the idea of Romanticism itself, but while this is widely acknowledged in many contexts, in the post 1945 era the delineation of national Romanticisms within the British Isles became fuzzy and ill-defined: indeed in many cases, omitted or repressed. The reasons for this are, as I argued in *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (2008; 2011), strongly bound up with the rejection of a Herderian and social notion of Romanticism and Romantic literature in the postwar era in favor of a unified-but in fact quite narrow-aesthetic definition. The growth of historicist and thematic studies of the Romantic era in the post 1980 period was an important corrective to this trend, but in many respects did little to change the denationalized nature of Romantic criticism linked to the British Isles, nor indeed did it alter the undergraduate curriculum, as Sharon Ruston's groundbreaking 2006-7 survey showed (Higgins and Ruston (2010)).

The denationalizing of Scotland in particular was not merely a matter of focusing on a core canon of 'British' writers and pushing less well-known figures or women such as Charles Maturin, Maria Edgeworth, Susan Ferrier or Sydney Owenson to the margins. It was so extreme that writers of unquestionable global significance were simply excluded from the core areas of Romantic curriculum and study. The influence of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns are felt in every part of the globe: yet while in the

1930s, Burns normally ranked in the middle of the pack of “Big Seven” poets by the number of articles published, by the 1950s he was in a catastrophic decline. At the time of Ruston’s study, he did not form a core part of the English literature curriculum anywhere in the UK, though he had some presence in Scotland: yet there were 23 editions of Burns in print. The poet was being sold on London railway bookstalls while being regarded as too *outré* to teach to London undergraduates, almost the reverse of the situation with respect to some of the great figures of Modernism. Scott, for whom the tired quip of the “Great Unread” is still utilized as a label to cut off further thought or the presentation of any evidence, was the first of the Scottish Romantics to be comprehensively re-edited from 1985: the resulting uncompromisingly scholarly and largely hardback edition of the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels has sold well in excess of 100 000 copies. The market for Scott *today* clearly and demonstrably dwarfs that for some other Romantic writers regarded as more ‘mainstream’ as surely now as it did in the period which William St Clair has so ably examined in *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004). In the 1930s, Scott was set for School Certificate in England; in 1989, the present author was asked at a major UK university how Scott could be taught to English undergraduates at all. The shift was nigh on complete.

The situation described above has begun to ease in the years following the 2002 Chatterton lecture,¹ begun to give way in the case of Scott and Burns as surely as it began to do in the case of Scottish Romanticism more comprehensively in Katie Trumpener’s *Bardic Nationalism* (1997). Although the marginalization of the major Scottish Romantics was to some extent the result of an Anglo-American critical turn which can be traced back to the 1930s, criticism and polemical history had their own role to play, sometimes viewing these writers as the purveyors of “Scotch Myths”, the

“sham bards of a sham nation” in Edwin Muir’s words, manufacturers of ersatz national epics and fake tartan iconographies, an unfortunate caricature which was lent unjustified credibility by the later work of Hugh Trevor-Roper, notably his essay in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s collection, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), which attacked the world of James Macpherson just before Fiona Stafford rescued his reputation in *The Sublime Savage* (1988). The discipline involved in recovering, editing and annotating texts in the major editions of Scott (1985) and Hogg (1991) helped focus renewed attention on these writers. Criticism followed in the wake of these editions, including Leith Davis’s *Acts of Union* (1998), Janet Sorensen’s *The Grammar of Empire* (2000), which marked a welcome attempt to integrate Gaelic writing into a study of Scottish literature, and collections such as *English Romanticism and the Celtic World* (eds. Carruthers and Rawes, 2003) and *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Eds. Davis, Duncan and Sorensen, 2004). Ian Duncan’s and Murray Pittock’s conference on Scottish Romanticism in World Literatures, held at Berkeley in 2006, helped to return global attention to some of the key developments of the period, and the organizers provided their own distinctive approaches in *Scott’s Shadow* (2007) and *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (2008) shortly afterwards. An increasing range of single author studies supplemented these analytic explorations, including Andrew Lincoln’s *Walter Scott and Modernity* (2007), Ann Rigney’s *The Afterlives of Walter Scott* (2012) and Robert Crawford’s *The Bard* (2009). The development of a new Burns edition in 2008-10 marked a further point in the move towards a re recognized national Romanticism, and a Ramsay edition may be on the horizon in 2015. Moreover, the Reception of British and Irish Authors in Europe series, edited by Elinor Shaffer, a Coleridge specialist, showed a welcome openness to the enormous influence that the writers of Scottish Romanticism enjoyed

internationally, with *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (2006), *The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe* (2007) and *The Reception of Robert Burns in Europe* (2014) all appearing, in company with a two volume Reception study of Byron. The Edinburgh University Press *Companions* series produced four Companions on Scottish Romantic writing, including the present author's *Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism* (2011). The lineaments of an alternative literary history, in which-as Courthope had argued many years before, and Rosenmeyer as late as 1969-Allan Ramsay was as much a progenitor of Romanticism as Thomas Percy, began to re-emerge (Rosenmeyer (1969), 10).

The re-nationalization of Romanticism did not simply affect Scotland. The work of Luke Gibbons (*Edmund Burke and Ireland* (2003), *Gaelic Gothic* (2004)), Jarlath Killeen (*Gothic Ireland* (2005)) and Mary Jean Corbett (*Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing* (2000)) among others in Irish literature began to redefine the potential of the Romantic era in Ireland, as well as demonstrating the inflection of genre (see below) through increasingly acute thematic explorations of the Gothic in Ireland, and the particular local cultural significance of the Big House, portraits, vampires and other symbols of expropriation and its legacies. Theoretical concepts such as 'auto-exoticism', introduced by Joep Leerssen in *Remembrance and Imagination* (1996) became central to the debate over the re-emerging critical interest in the national tale, Owenson and in particular Edgeworth, who like her Scottish counterparts, was sustained by a critical scholarly edition, in this case the 12-volume *Works* (1999-2003) under the general editorship of Marilyn Butler. Dialogue between Scottish and Irish Romanticism became increasingly visible as the first decade of the new century progressed, as the re-emergence of an understanding of the national qualities of Romanticism opened up the possibility in literature of a 'four nations'

approach which had begun in history much earlier, and one where dialogue between these nations as well as dialogue between them and London could be seen to be key to the development of their structures of national Romanticism. Developments such as these were prioritized through the Irish-Scottish Academic Initiative, run from the University of Aberdeen through much of its funded life from 1999-2009, and the Ireland-Wales Research Network run by Claire Connolly in 2007-9. Wales too- though with a much more powerful linguistic divide than either Scotland or Ireland- became engaged with this debate in books such as Sarah Prescott's *Eighteenth-Century Writing from Wales* (2008) and most significantly the Iolo Morganwg and the Romantic Tradition in Wales and Wales and the French Revolution major projects run from the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies (*Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd*) in Aberystwyth.

The case for distinctive national Romanticism- and indeed a distinct national culture more generally- can be seen as resting on a number of premises. First is the presence of a distinctive public sphere within the country in question. In Ireland's case, this rested in the period on the complex relationship of the surviving or collected national culture with the independent professional and associational national life run by and for the Anglican ascendancy in what was until 1801 the parliamentary capital of Dublin, and in Wales's on the language and the efforts made by Welsh cultural societies to promote a distinctive national life through it and the traditions it represented, heightened to the point of invention by the cultural enterprise of Iolo Morganwg. Scotland meanwhile retained and indeed continued to develop a distinctive civic society in the years after Union with England 1707. Most of the national institutions- the Church, the Law, the schools and universities, the banks and the professional organizations – had designedly been left intact by the Union. At a

time when government was remote and attempted to do far less than it does now, the retention of the institutional and associational life of the former Scottish state was very important, as was its further development and renewal. In this sense, the Scottish Enlightenment (particularly the ideas of Hume, Robertson and Smith in areas such as association, stadial history or sympathy) was very much closer to the world of Romanticism than the Enlightenment is often held to be elsewhere. Far larger percentages of the population were engaged in professional occupations in Edinburgh in particular, but also in the other major cities, than was the case outside London in England. From the 1690s, there was distinctive and increasingly assertive and independent newspaper culture, while the clubs and societies of the Enlightenment generated a distinct national tone of the teleology of civility, the application of reason to knowledge in a context of material improvement, which added an interest in commercial and later technological progress, 'useful learning', to the models of the French *philosophes*, and presented in the foundation of institutions such as the Royal Society of Edinburgh (1783) and the University of Strathclyde (Anderson's University, 1796) a radical connectivity between social utility, female education and access to higher education for the poorer in society (David Livingstone was to be perhaps the outstanding nineteenth century product of this) which were highly influential in a range of developments from the founding of Birkbeck College to the early campaigns for female suffrage. This paradox of striving for modernity amid the relics of an ancient nation which was no longer a state can be seen in the practice of many of the Romantic writers: Scott, President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh from 1820-32, may have been a pioneer of the historical novel, but he was also a pioneer of domestic gas lighting. By this time, the power of Scottish periodical culture

in the shape of *Blackwood's* and the second *Edinburgh Review* had come to dominate not only Scottish but wider literary and critical debates throughout the British Isles.

The second feature of a national culture, and in this case a national Romantic culture, is that of inflection of genre, seen both in a distinctive approach to the politics and use of language, and in the concept of “altermentality”, where

national elements in literature are in part created and sustained by particular inflections in genre, and that such inflections are important in developing a picture of the features of a literary landscape which exemplify the performance of a culture. (Pittock (2008), 25).

Inflection in genre can be demonstrated in a number of media, from architecture to music; it can be seen in distinctive approaches to language politics and the use of register; and it can also be visible in the way literature is used to address or confront distinctive topics. An example of the first might be the hybridization of Scottish and classical music explored in David Johnson’s *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (1972) and subsequent studies, quite different from the development of music culture in England, and which both preserved the national tradition in an apparently “authentic” but effectively highly hybridized variant, which in turn made writers like Burns more attractive to major composers such as Beethoven and Haydn. The development of the use of literary Scots or Hibernian English in writers such as Ramsay and Edgeworth is an example of the second, while the whole national tale phenomenon in Ireland and its successors in Scott’s novels is an example of a distinctive approach being articulated from what sociologists might describe as “peripheries”, as is the adoption of the supernatural as a national identifier in Scottish

Gothic. Just at the very cultural moment when “English” was born as a discipline out of the marriage of rhetoric and belles lettres to the homogenization of linguistic norms in the pursuit of an internationally applicable commercial and imperial civility, so the challenge the British state had in understanding its own peripheries-let alone its global mission-was linguistically foregrounded by the Romantics in Scotland and Ireland. Chapter 8 of Edgeworth’s *Ennui*, a novel in so many ways influenced by Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (6th ed, 1790), provides a textbook display of the breakdown in uniform commercial language, as Glenthorn asks question after question without receiving in return any answers he understands. Hiberno-English turns out to be no English at all.

If altermentality and its accompanying inflections of genre are key to national culture in the Romantic era, so too is the taxonomy of glory. This is the creation or adoption of a literature or culture, which traces its national development from a remote past, which was less politically problematic than the present. In the aftermath of Culloden, both Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair’s *Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill* and James Macpherson’s Ossian poetry are clear examples of that quest for an examination of the problems of the present through the invocation of a heroic past, a feature notably present both in Ireland and in Wales through the work of Iolo Morganwg. This formation of national antiquity was very influential outside the Anglophone world on the development of national movements and epics in Europe, as can be seen from the reception of Scott in cultures innocent of his Enlightenment historiographical paradigm and the creation of national epics in Finland and elsewhere as catalysts for political and cultural renewal. Collecting, or collecting with the addition of editing or inventing, was one of the key strategies used in the construction of the taxonomy of glory.

The last dimension of national cultures in Romanticism to be identified is that of the distinctive performance of self in diaspora, which can lead to the adoption of other cultures as mirrors for one's own. The defensive adoption of orientalism in Scotland and Ireland (v. for example Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism* (2004), Sydney Owenson's *The Missionary*, Scott's use of Judaism or Islam to problematize the English heroic history of Richard the Lionheart or Moore's *Lalla Rookh*) is one feature of this, as is the adoption of minority or oppressed cultures elsewhere in the world. Examples include Boswell and Corsica, Elphinstone, Hindu supremacism and the opposition to Anglicization in India, Joseph Hume and Greece, Octavian Hume and the Congress Party, William Lyon Mackenzie and the 1837 Canadian rising, Sheridan and the Maroons, Cochrane and Chile, Alexander MacGillivray, Chief of the Creeks and John Ross, Chief of the Cherokee, Charles James Napier's radically prophetic *Colonization* (1835) and many others. The networks, familial relations, education, politics and formations of outlook that led up to these can collectively be described as "fratritism", the understanding of the self through identification with an other seen as sharing some of the same challenges and problems, "the transmutation of patriot discourses from the first to the third person" (Pittock (2011 [2008]), 240).

The essays which follow in this volume all bear out the distinctive themes of Scottish Romanticism, and indeed national Romanticisms more generally. Pauline Mackay's "Low, tame, and loathsome ribaldry': Bawdry in Romantic Scotland" presents one aspect of the incorporation of native song tradition into poetic subject matter which seamlessly incorporates "low" culture for "high" audiences in a classic act of altermentality and its challenge to the equation of metropolitan and polite. The presentation in "The Jolly Beggars" of the traditions of native Scottish festival poetry in a form verging on the bawdy showed the inflection of traditional genre into a new

frame which could serve as a means of the articulation of the sexual and radical politics characteristic of the 1790s but presented in an almost carnivalesque format. Indeed, the application of Bakhtin to the autochthonous ideology of Scottish Romantic writing is a very profitable one. It is one of the reasons we misunderstand Burns as in reality the peasant he sought to portray, as the poet towards the end of his life typically had more income than Jane Austen, and earned as much from the Edinburgh edition of his poetry as Smith did from *The Wealth of Nations*.

Murray Pittock's "Thresholds of Memory: Birch and Hawthorn in the Poetry of Robert Burns" examines the incorporation of native and folk traditions into an interrogation of the key questions of human existence, nativizing the existential in a classic case of the inflection of genre towards the non-rational, "folk" elements being used to characterize the British peripheries, and being adopted there in turn in order to provide a nativist identity. Vivien Williams' "The bagpipe and Romanticism: perceptions of Ossianic 'northernness'" looks at one of the key cultural markers of Scotland through the prism of the taxonomy of glory and the power of Ossianic reception, as well as the rather loose but highly persistent cultural symbol of the bagpipes; Caroline McCracken-Flesher's "Better to Arrive: the Last Voyage of Walter Scott, Romantic" shows the importance of the realization of self through other cultures and the banality of the "Northern Minstrel" out of his element, while Angela Esterhammer's "John Galt's *The Omen*: Interpretation and its Discontents" examines another feature of the distinctive heteroglossia of mind which was a key part of altermentality in such features of Scottish and Irish writing in the period as Maria Edgeworth's unreliable narrator, James Hogg's double narratives or Robert Burns' triumphant interrogation of the antiquarian's lust for the supernatural in *Tam o'Shanter*. The five contributors come from four different countries and work in three:

and this is an earnest of the importance of Scottish literature, reflected in the first World Congress in 2014, which was oversubscribed at the first call for papers, with further Congresses due in Vancouver in 2017 and Prague in 2020.

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¹ Murray Pittock, 'Robert Burns and British Poetry', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 121 (2003), 191-211.