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Imagining Independence: some modern Scottish novels

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at
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in
D908

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Abstract

Imagining Independence: some modern Scottish novels is concerned with fictional depictions of a future independent Scotland, written in the course of the twentieth century, and possible relationships between such works and the broader political world which they seek to portray.

The thesis brings together for the first time a group of twentieth-century popular novels (listed below) which imagine the achievement of Scottish independence and which, more often than not, prompt the reader to relate fictional possibilities to actual events in the political landscape. The principal concern within *Imagining Independence* is less to provide close stylistic appraisal than to demonstrate recurring thematic continuities (such as the employment of violence to gain political ends, and questions relating to leadership qualities supposed to be lacking in certain areas of modern Scottish politics) among a group of popular novels. To date, these issues have received little or no academic attention. This thesis looks at how they both react to and anticipate historical events during the century which saw the establishment of the Scottish Parliament.

The ten primary texts studied are:

- John Connell, *David Go Back* (1935)
- Charles Hendry Dand, *Scotching the Snake* (1958)
- Alasdair Mair, *The Douglas Affair* (1966)
- Douglas Hurd & Andrew Osmond, *Scotch on the Rocks* (1971)
- Michael Sinclair, *The Dollar Covenant* (1973)
- Antonia Fraser, *The Wild Island* (1978)
- Ross Laidlaw, *The Lion is Rampant* (1979)
- William Paul, *The Lion Rampant* (1989)
- Michael Shea, *State of the Nation* (1997)
- Terry Houston, *The Wounded Stone* (1998)

Contents

Acknowledgements	p. iv
Introduction	p. 1
Chapter One	p. 7
Chapter Two	p. 27
Chapter Three	p. 44
Chapter Four	p. 56
Chapter Five	p. 73
Conclusion	p. 90
Bibliography	p. 95

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Craig R. Buchanan

August, 2000

INTRODUCTION

‘To be the “nation once again”’

‘Those days are past now, and in the past they must remain,
 But we can still rise now, and be the nation again
 That stood against him, Proud Edward’s army,
 And sent him homeward tae think again.’

- Flower of Scotland (words & music by Roy Williamson
 © The Corries (Music) Ltd.)

This thesis is about thrillers which imagine the achievement of Scottish political independence. Though a considerable amount of attention has been paid to the politics of modern Scottish fiction, and reviews of novels such as Terry Houston's *The Wounded Stone* (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998) have been undertaken for specific markets by journalists and academics alike, it is notable that mainstream critics such as Cairns Craig, Roderick Watson, and Robert Crawford, have avoided any detailed consideration of Scottish politics in the thriller genre.¹ Meanwhile, although general studies of the thriller genre acknowledge the importance of authors such as John Buchan in its evolution, they pay little or no attention to the Scottish political arguments which have filtered through into modern popular fiction.²

What is new about *Imagining Independence* is that it is that it brings together for the first time a group of twentieth-century popular novels which imagine the achievement of Scottish independence and which, more often than not, prompt the reader to relate

¹ for reviews see, for example, Douglas Gifford, 'Matters of Life and Death', *Books in Scotland* (Winter, 1998); Standard critical works include Cairns Craig (ed), *The History of Scottish Literature, Vol. 4, Twentieth Century* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987); Cairns Craig, *Out of history: narrative paradigms in Scottish and English culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), and *The modern Scottish novel: narrative and the national imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); Roderick Watson, *The literature of Scotland* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984); Robert Crawford, *Devolving English literature* (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press (2nd ed.), 2000).

² see, for example, Nancy Stone, *A reader’s guide to the spy and thriller novel* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1997); Clive Bloom, *Spy thrillers: from Buchan to le Carré* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), and *Twentieth-century suspense: the thriller comes of age* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990).

fictional possibilities to actual events in the political landscape. The principal concern of the following chapters is less to provide close stylistic appraisal than to demonstrate recurring thematic continuities among a group of popular novels which, to date, have received little or no academic attention. This thesis looks at how they both react to and anticipate historical events during the century which saw the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament.

Shortly before the establishment of that Parliament, in July of 1999, Dublin-based Garda arrested Adam Busby under the provisions of the Republic's strict anti-terrorist laws. Questioned about threats to poison England's water supply, Busby was not detained as a result of any Irish terrorist background. He was no Republican or Loyalist, from however small a splinter group. Instead, this was the self-proclaimed leader of the Scottish National Liberation Army, a group which aims to use any and every means at its disposal to cause the break-up of the union between Scotland and her southern neighbour.

Busby's activities were part of a long-running saga, and he is well known to both the British and Irish police forces. With fifteen convictions to his name in Britain alone, and having been questioned by Irish police in connection with over 50 incidents before being jailed by a Dublin court for two years in 1997, he and his small band of activists have been a thorn in the side of law and order throughout the British Isles for more than twenty years.³ For all that, Busby can hardly claim to be a household name in the land he seems so set on freeing. If he is known at all, it is as a vocal but by-and-large ineffective voice on the fringes of an altogether more moderate movement. It is, after all, one of the great claims of Scottish nationalists that their movement has been a peaceful and democratic one, and that, as the SNP's leader Alex Salmond was at pains to highlight in a recent interview, "there isn't a single person this century has lost their life,

³ David Montgomery, 'Scot questioned in water poison threat inquiries', *The Scotsman*, 12th July, 1999; p. 3.

or even had a serious injury, in arguing for or against the cause of Scottish independence. There are very few countries in the world, internationally, where a political argument has been conducted with the civility that the SNP has progressed its case through impeccably constitutional methods.”⁴

As Andrew Scott and Ian Macleay point out in their *Britain's Secret War - Tartan Terrorism and the Anglo-American State* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1990), most of the incidents of terrorism which have taken place in Scotland in the name of nationalism have been small-scale, badly organised, and may well have been the work of agents of the British state as often as not, keen to discredit their peaceful nationalist rivals. Scott and Macleay’s treatment is the only study of its kind currently available on the violence which is said to exist on the fringes of Scottish politics. However, it only deals with the real world. That may sound strange, but it is less so when one realises that, since the nineteen thirties, there has been an increasing body of fiction in which various future independent Scotlands are imagined. It seems that Scott and Macleay were aware of the concept, for they make brief mention of Douglas Hurd and Andrew Osmond’s *Scotch on the Rocks* (London: Collins, 1971), in so much as it had political repercussions at the time of its television by the BBC. Had the authors of *Tartan Terrorism* looked in more detail at the stable from which Hurd’s novel about an armed uprising in Scotland had emerged, and then studied some similar works which followed in his tracks, they might have been drawn towards some very interesting conclusions, for the fictional war which has been in existence for almost seventy years far outstrips the half-hearted, phoney war which they were chronicling.

Beginning with the publication of John Connell’s *David Go Back* (London: Cassell, 1935), there have to date been at least ten novels which have at their core the concept that Scotland will break away from the rest of the United Kingdom in a violent manner at some projected stage in the near future. Spread evenly throughout the ensuing decades,

⁴ Alex Salmond, speaking on *Newsnight*, BBC 2, April 1999.

they combine to form an intriguing picture of nationalist and establishment views on the likelihood of such a venture. Indeed, they almost form a battle in themselves, with thrust and counter-thrust, from first one side and then the other, which has spanned the entire period, and which looks likely to go on for some time to come. They are not, and do not pretend to be, ‘literary’ fiction, which may explain why they have received nowhere near the coverage that authors such as Lewis Grassic Gibbon, with his *Grey Granite* (London: 1934), or, more recently, Alasdair Gray, with his *Lanark: a life in four books* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1981), and *1982: Janine* (London: Cape, 1984) have achieved in academic circles. Instead, these are unashamedly ‘popular’ fiction, drawing on the conventions of the thriller genre, rather than aiming at literary innovation or distinction.

Each of these novels, in one manner or another, imagines independence or the immediate consequences thereof within a Scottish context, and we can trace through them both the development of ideas, and the stagnation of certain aspects of the nationalist cause over a period of some sixty years. To give but one example here, Charles Hendry Dand, author of *Scotching the Snake*, published in 1958, had his hero pose the question: ‘If Scotland demands a seat in the Security Council what will happen to England? Can they both have seats or won’t the United Kingdom perhaps lose its permanent seat as a Great Power?’⁵ The issue of Britain (or its rump-state equivalent) being allowed a role in world politics out of proportion to its size is every bit as relevant today as it was when Dand posed the question.

We might also be able to trace a number of dominant literary devices through the novels in question. As noted above, they all employ violence in one manner or another, and this thesis will look more closely at the reasons behind this in each separate case, as well as in the overall genre. While acknowledging that there is a certain truth in publishing maxims such as ‘violence sells’, it seems difficult to argue that this is the sole contributing factor in the continuance of this trend.

⁵ Dand, *Scotching the Snake* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958); p. 180.

Many of the authors examined herein were, or indeed still are, journalists, and the reader can trace aspects of their professional interests within their fiction. This is not an employment limited to authors of ‘popular’ fiction. MacDiarmid and Gibbon were both published journalists, for example. However, within the novels in question we will see a tendency to rely on some manner of press extract in the course of the plots in an attempt to lend an added authority, while some also choose to make major characters within their thrillers journalists. And the interaction between journalist and fiction writer would seem to have become a two-way street of late, with futuristic ‘what if?’ articles becoming more popular in the press. Situated at the very heart of the newspaper, *The Scotsman* commentary of 9th November, 1999, by George Kerevan, uses a third of a broadsheet page to discuss what might have happened had the Darien scheme of the late 1600s succeeded. His wide-ranging, and often amusing piece includes such counterfactual histories as an independent Scotland backing the rebel American colonists in 1776, of President John MacCormick signing the Treaty of Rome on behalf of Scotland in 1957, and of President Connery, Prime Minister Salmond, and Independent Labour Party leader Robin Cook meeting in Darien’s New Edinburgh to celebrate three hundred years beneficial empire.⁶ Similarly Fiona McCade, commenting on the opening of the Scottish Parliament, casts herself adrift into the future of our politics to imagine herself telling her grandchildren all of this happened before the coronation of ‘Good King Sean’, and before the establishment of a presidency after the trial of King Jason in 2035.⁷ This may be ironically intended, tongue-in-cheek humour, easily dismissed. But we must remember that many of the authors this thesis will consider have claimed to have been writing tongue-in-cheek as well. There is a clear relationship between journalistic and fictional discourses imagining Scottish independence. Just as the novelists we will examine come from both the nationalist and

⁶ George Kerevan, ‘History revisited - without the Union’, *The Scotsman*, 9th November, 1999; p.13.

⁷ Fiona McCade, ‘What did you do the day they re-opened the Scottish Parliament, granny?’, *The Scotsman*, 3rd July, 1999.

unionist camps, so too do the journalists concerned. Fiona McCade may well have written column-inch after column-inch condemning the SNP, but George Kerevan has by his own admission been a paid-up Party member for many years, and either journalist would be at home with the novelists who preceded them in this area. If journalists have been tempted towards speculative fictions, novelists who imagine independence have also approached matters of clear journalistic interest, such as political arguments, and may have given more space to them than some political commentators. One worth closer inspection in almost all the novels under consideration is that of the lengthy political speech, explaining as it does the politics of Scottish nationalism (and, on occasion, unionism) to a wider market than might normally be reached by party political broadcasts, and the Scottish press.

Never before have these novels been drawn together and subjected to analysis in one study. As was noted above, standard histories like those compiled by Watson or Craig, make no mention of such thrillers. Doing so within this thesis should allow us to form a revealing picture of the politics which led to their creation, as well as noting their reciprocal, sometimes prophetic relationship with the real world which they were written to mimic. In that way we should be able to examine for the first time in any detail these popular, fictional Scotlands which have brought entertainment to readers of thrillers (and mild irritation to politicians, at least on the nationalist side of the political divide) for the last two-thirds of this century.

Chapter One

'If we only had old Ireland over here': Scottish Nationalism, Popular Fiction, and an Irish Genesis

'I was dreaming of old Ireland, of Kilarney's lakes and fells,
 I was dreaming of the shamrock and the dear old Shandon bells,
 When my memory suggested in a vision bright and clear
 All the strange things that would happen if we had old Ireland here.'

- 'If we only had Old Ireland Over Here' (trad. Irish folk song)

Ireland and Scotland are not only near neighbours, they have cultural ties which extend back into the mist-enshrouded eras of myth and legend; they have fought the same enemies down through the intervening years (most often that enemy being their joint neighbour England), and they have both political and religious connections which survive to this day in a very public way.¹ From a negative perspective, James MacMillan, one of Scotland's leading composers, went so far recently as to refer to Scotland as 'Northern Ireland without the bullets and the bombs,' suggesting that both areas suffered from the same tensions and bigotries, and that it was only in the manner of their exposure that they differed.² More positively, Irish President Mary Robinson, in her 1997 Sabhal Mòr Ostaig lecture at the Gaelic college on Skye chose to evoke Sorley MacLean's image of

... the humanity
 that the sea did not tear,
 that a thousand years did not spoil,

¹ See T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700 - 2000* (London: Penguin Press, 1999), or T. M. Devine and D. Dickenson, *Ireland and Scotland 1600 - 1850* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983) for full treatments of Scottish and Irish comparative history.

² James MacMillan, *Scotland's Shame*, Edinburgh Festival Lecture, 9th August, 1999. Details published in Hugh Dogherty, 'Composer hits at anti-Catholicism', *The Scotsman*, 9th August, 1999, and Tracy Lawson, 'Remnants of bigotry exist, admits Dewar', *The Scotsman*, 11th August, 1999. Full text published in T.M Devine, *Scotland's Shame* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2000).

in an attempt to define the long-term relationship between at least the Gaelic components of both Scotland and Ireland.³ Nor was MacLean exaggerating when he spoke in tens of centuries. From the pre-Celtic migrations which are said to have taken place six thousand years before the birth of Christ, through the pan-Celtic alliances of Brian Boru and his descendants the Bruce brothers, to the plantation of Ulster in the 1600s, and all the ensuing problems, be it in terms of James Connolly's contribution to the republican Rising of 1916, or in terms of the Scots who fought for the Black and Tans, the two nations whose eastern and western seabards respectively went to form what was once known as 'the Irish sea-world' are inextricably linked.

Of course, there are as many, if not more, differences as there are similarities between the two nations and their peoples, most notable in modern times in the field of politics. Some of these differences may be cited as reasons behind what Roderick Watson describes in *The Literature of Scotland* (1984) as the 'surprisingly' infrequent use of Irish comparisons during the Scottish Renaissance.⁴ At the close of the twentieth century, the twenty-six counties of the Republic of Ireland have formed a free and sovereign state for almost eighty years, while Scotland maintains its place within the framework of the United Kingdom. Because of that major difference, the internal politics of the two nations have also diverged, with Ireland having suffered years of violent strife, both north and south, while Scotland passed through the century at relative peace with itself. Yet it need not necessarily have been so, and one of the main reasons that it was can be traced back to Scotland's role in the Second World War, prior to which political analysts might have foreseen a very different future for that most ancient kingdom on the outer fringes of Europe.

It is perhaps inevitable that such regional comparisons should filter down into literature. Indeed, the most surprising fact is that it took them so long, and that they did not take root more deeply once

³ Sorley MacLean, 'Elegy for Calum I. MacLean', *From Wood to Ridge* (Manchester: Carcanet Publishing, 1989), quoted in Mary Robinson's *Signatures on our own Frequency, Oraid Sabhal Mòr Ostaig 1997* (Skye: Ostaig, 1998).

⁴ Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland* (London: 1984); p. 327.

there. For it was almost the eve of war, 1935, before one idealistic young author put pen to paper to exploit what he saw as the very real similarities, and to imagine a near-future independent Scotland.

John Connell (1909 - 1965), born John Henry Robertson, was both author and journalist. He had the benefit of a Balliol College education, before leaving his Edinburgh based youth behind him and travelling to London, where he joined the staff of the *Evening News*. Almost forgotten now, he is best remembered, if at all, for his novel *The Return of Long John Silver* (London: Cassell, 1949), in which he continued the tale begun in Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, for his somewhat controversial military biographies of Generals Wavell and Auchinleck, and for the part he played in the local politics of the London borough of St Pancras throughout the 1950s.⁵ These were post-war achievements, however, and our interest lies in his work in the years prior to that event, and most specifically with his third novel, *David Go Back*, published by Cassell in 1935.

Connell's two earlier novels, *Lyndesay* (1930) and *Who Goes Sailing* (1932), both dealt with semi-autobiographical themes from his Edinburgh-based childhood. Perhaps it is not very surprising then that a similarly autobiographical streak can also be traced in their immediate successor. The eponymous hero of *David Go Back* is, like Connell, a Scots-born journalist living and working in London. The novel opens with his return to the land of his birth to attend the funeral of an old schoolmaster, presumably offering the reader at least one plausible explanation of the novel's title. The dead man's employment also offers us our first insight into one of Connell's major concerns - authority figures, and where one turns, as an individual or as a nation, without them. In that sense at least, *David Go Back* is in tune with contemporary novels from the Scottish Renaissance, as published by MacDiarmid and Gibbon, which questioned the direction of the state, and therefore, by default, its leadership.

The Scotland to which David Hamilton returns is a very different one to that which he, and Connell, left. Scott and Macleay's *Britain's Secret War - Tartan Terrorism and the Anglo-American State*

⁵ John Connell, *Auchinleck: a biography of Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck* (London: 1959) and *Wavell: scholar and soldier* (London: 1964).

may have taken two hundred pages to conclude that there is a war going on in Scotland,⁶ but Connell harbours no such doubt. "This is a toff's war," he explains on the opening page. It is not a current one, however. The action is projected some five years into the future to allow for certain changes in the interim. These changes are stark, as the railway station notice, "O.H.M.S. Conditions of travel for Civilians to Scotland and the Disturbed Area," makes clear.⁷ This is not the Scotland that we know, or would have known in the mid 1930 or '40s.⁸ The conversation which Hamilton has with the military policeman as he waits to board his train emphasises that, as well as setting the sarcastic tone which will stay with the lead character for much of the novel.

The officer stared at Hamilton's passport.

"English journalists aren't very popular up there, just now, Mr. Hamilton," he said.

Hamilton's eyebrows rose. He said nothing.

"I'm just warning you," said the officer.

"Thanks. I'm not English. I'm not going on a story, I'm going to bury an old friend."

"I see," said the officer tonelessly; he held the printed sheet. "Are you aware of these regulations?"

Hamilton swayed on his feet. That was the only sign of the drink on him.

"Every word of them is imprinted on my heart," he said gravely.

The officer was too tired to flicker at his insolence. He stamped the permit and held it towards Hamilton.

"Report to the Provost-Marshall in your area within twenty-four hours of your arrival," he said.

"Of course," said Hamilton. "Of course. And I'll hand over all my seditious pamphlets at the Border. Or shall I leave the most treasonable with you?"

"Next please," said the officer.⁹

⁶ Andrew Scott & Ian Macleay, *Britain's Secret War* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1990); p. 200.

⁷ Connell, *David Go Back* (London: Cassell, 1935); p. 9.

⁸ In the sense that Connell's novel involves a shift in time, it is interesting to note that its title is similar to that of James Leslie Mitchell's scientific romance, *Three Go Back* (London: Jarrolds, 1932).

⁹ John Connell, *David Go Back* (London: Cassell, 1935); p. 14.

At Berwick, on the border between England and Scotland, the sleeper train which a disgruntled Hamilton has unwittingly found himself sharing with no less a personage than the Secretary of State for Scotland, is held up - in both senses - by rebels under the command of one Thomas Bruce. One presumes that Connell named him after the historical figure, Robert the Bruce's younger brother, and such naming of characters is a trend with which we shall deal in more depth at a later stage. For now let it suffice to say that this latter-day Bruce is forced to kill the Secretary of State as that gentleman attempts to escape, in spite of which, Hamilton and his old school friend Thompson, witnesses to the shooting, decide to throw in their lot with the rebels. Hamilton's explanation for his conversion is that he is disillusioned with London journalism, and would rather face the dangers of war than return to his desk job down south.

There is a temptation to refer to this sort of twist as coming from the 'adventure stories for boys' school of writing, and to compare it, perhaps, with Alan Breck and David Balfour crossing Scotland together against all the odds. Such a comparison falls down, however, when one considers that Balfour maintains his own Presbyterian, and indeed Hanoverian identity throughout *Kidnapped*, mellowing towards his new-found Jacobite friends in sympathy with their plight, but never with their cause. There is no such depth of conviction, at least on Hamilton's part, in *David Go Back*. Asked why he and his old school friend Thompson agree to join the rebels, he simply replies 'Because I've always wanted to be in a rebellion, and yours seems a jolly one.'¹⁰ Perhaps this is a sign of the immaturity which Connell would later attribute to his early years as a writer, and it certainly sounds hollow to the modern reader. Given that *David Go Back* was published in the same year that George Blake brought out his novel *The Shipbuilders* (1935), in which he attempts to record the grim realities of life in Glasgow's most deprived areas during the Depression, it is possible that readers in the nineteen thirties might have been similarly disappointed at the light-hearted tone which Connell allows his characters to adopt. Then again, this was the period of the Spanish Civil War, when young men from all across Europe, and especially from Ireland (from whence Connell would seem to have

¹⁰ John Connell, *David Go Back* (London: Cassell, 1935); p. 81.

taken much of his inspiration), went to fight, often with little better motive than that which he attributes to Hamilton.

Bruce, by comparison, is portrayed as knowing exactly why he is fighting, and is allowed to explain his motives at some length. This is a very necessary literary device in almost all of the novels we will examine, and the reason for it has hardly changed. Not only are we reading about a future in which certain things will have changed - for example, by this point in *David Go Back*, Scotland has its own political assembly - but it is also important to realise that many prospective readers would have known little or nothing about the nationalist movement in Scotland, so that its aims and objectives would have to have been explained to them in fairly simple steps. How better than in a speech from the rebel leader? It perhaps says little for the movement that, for all its gains in terms of parliamentary seats in the intervening years, this device is still as necessary to modern authors as it proved to be to Connell.

Outlining the differences between the current political settlement and ‘real independence’ (and here, Connell may well be attempting to enlighten an audience furth of Scotland as to the politics therein), Bruce, an academic sort with “the voice of an Oxford don,” (allowing Connell to neatly draw upon a mildly anti-English sentiment even as he critiques a Scottish Nationalist) who is cast rather in the mould of Pearce and de Valera (intellectuals, both of whom taught prior to their insurrections), proposes to capture Edinburgh.¹¹ Bruce explains that he expects to hold it for only a few short days before he is brought to heel by superior English forces. “Only a lunatic,” he concedes in a very matter-of-fact way, would envisage it ending anywhere else than before a firing squad.¹² Their main goal will be to rally the people to support independence, after which their own fate will be that of political martyrs down through the ages. Bruce himself would seem to be taking on something of the mantle of the dead schoolmaster in terms of an authority figure for Hamilton by this stage, and for the country as a whole.

¹¹ John Connell, *David Go Back* (London: Cassell, 1935); p. 37.

¹² John Connell, *David Go Back* (London: Cassell, 1935); p. 41.

There can be little doubt that Connell is here displaying a well developed ability to cut and paste history into his fiction, for we have two different periods of recent Irish fact grafted onto a root of Scottish fiction. His grand military scenes involving the capture of the North British Hotel from the English, and the declaration of a provisional government from the steps of the rebel headquarters in the Royal High School (of later nationalist and devolutionist fame) are all very clear throw-backs to Dublin's Easter Rising of 1916, though they provide a great deal of local colour, in that they describe the Edinburgh of the period in great detail. Connell has also, however, added a dose of 1920s Dublin to the mixing pot, in that he has included a semi-devolved government in Edinburgh, which he calls the government of the 'Free Kingdom of Scotland', echoing the Irish Free State, as well as later points from the early 1930s when Ireland went from being the Free State to the Republic under Eamon de Valera, which would appear to be Bruce's aim in the novel itself.¹³ That said, there are anomalies too. Why is Edinburgh, the capital of a semi-independent Scotland, garrisoned by English troops, for example? By the 1920s the Irish were not fighting the English so much as fellow Irishmen, for all that Churchill had threatened intervention in the event that the Free State government proved unable to cope with the insurgents. Perhaps this is simply a symptom of a more general refusal among nationalists to accept one of the major differences between the Irish and Scots movements. Ireland's enemies, perceived or otherwise, have generally come from outwith, Scotland's from within. If trying to convince the more tartan-clad nationalist that Bonnie Prince Charlie and his 1745 Rising were brought down by fellow Scots as much as by Englishmen seems unpalatable, how much more so the acknowledgement that the main opponents of Scottish independence in this century - "Scotland's enemies", as a nationalist of Bruce's calibre would almost certainly term them - have been the Scots themselves. Portraying it as a stereotypical clash between nations, rather than between factions, allows one to overcome such niceties, at least for a time. And, of course, Connell is not writing about Ireland, so the reader can more than allow for some differences in outcome, even if some of them lead him to wonder at the logic of the projected position.

¹³ John Connell, *David Go Back* (London: Cassell, 1935); p. 43.

Having gained command over the city centre, and in the process captured the Governor-General, there ensue a number of wordy speeches in which the various sides are allowed to describe their political principles, presumably for the reasons mentioned above as much as to add colour to the tale; and to give him his due, Connell is even-handed, allowing everyone a moment of eloquence. He has the Governor-General complaining that the British government has given Scotland a perfectly generous settlement, and that Bruce is destroying the country through his opposition to it; the Lord Provost of Edinburgh makes a heart-felt (if somewhat predictably self-seeking) plea for peace in order to save the city, and Bruce himself proclaims that, while the English will win this battle, it will serve to show his fellow countrymen that they can indeed stand up for themselves. This even-handedness (an admirable trait which Connell may be attempting to attribute to the Scots in general through his own actions) can have drawbacks, however, and it is sometimes difficult to decide which side of the conflict Council wishes his readership to sympathise with, though arguably in a book which asks more questions than it provides answers for, the author himself may not have been certain on this point.

Matters proceed as Bruce, previous Irish examples, and simple mathematics always suggested that they must. The English bombard the city, to terrible effect, before sending in their tanks. The rebels are driven back to make their final, romantic stand close to the castle's ancient battlements, and the main players, including Bruce and Hamilton, are captured, amid scenes such as the following which allow Connell to show both dramatic flair and local knowledge.

The wild tornado of sound did not slacken. Hamilton, thrown against the far wall at the first shock, felt dazed and sick; he found himself staring out of the broken window at the western side of the square, and curiously and impartially watching a peculiar happening.

The dome of St. George's had been hit. Its big copper-green expanse was swaying like a child's rubber ball upon the grass; suddenly it caved, as if someone had put a pin into it, and collapsed inwards, its big gilt cross tumbling down like a little jewel into a dark pit.

A second window in the drawing-room cracked, and it fell, not outwards, but back into the room. A big splinter scored across Hamilton's forehead and cheek; it did not hurt, it was only like a swift stroke by a great finger. Then he put his hand up and felt all his face sticky with blood.

"Stand back!"'" Bruce shouted above the tumult.

Obediently, but like a toy jerked on a string, Hamilton stood back. The whole of the rest of the window, glass and frame and all, fell into the room. A sofa and a card-table were crushed and broken by the fall; all the floor was sprayed with broken glass and splintered wood.

"Direct hit on G.H.Q.," Bruce yelled. "The English gunners are either devils or lucky."¹⁴

The novel then closes with the trial of the rebel leaders in London, which provides Connell with a final stage upon which to set his dramatic speeches, as well as allowing him to draw upon previous trials, such as that of William Wallace in the fourteenth century, as well as more recent Irish examples. Despite their eloquence, the rebels are, of course, found guilty of the charge of treason, and sentenced to death. The knowledgeable reader in 1935 Britain must by this time have been crying out for common sense to prevail. This very detail in 1916 Ireland led to the eventual overthrow of British rule, with the martyred leaders gathering more support to their cause in death than they were ever able to claim in life. Nonetheless, Connell depicts history repeating itself twenty-five years later, and who is the reader to say that it might not have done just that? For his part, Bruce seems to welcome the martyr's crown which the government has gifted him. His is the final speech of any length, as he concludes from the dock:

'A country may be poor and weak and friendless, but in the spirit of her men and women is her chance for freedom. I wanted to create that spirit again. I wanted men to believe that Scotland was worth living for, worth fighting for, worth dying for ... My challenge and my fight do not die with me or my friends, they are only just the beginning. That is my failure - or my victory.'¹⁵

Connell, *David Go Back* (London: Cassell, 1935); p. 302.

Bruce is perhaps never more like Pearce, the Irish leader of 1916, than in his final moments. Not only has he foreseen his own death since before the fight began, but his closing words hold echoes of those of Pearce before him when he wrote

¹⁴ John Connell, *David Go Back* (London: Cassell, 1935); pp. 243 - 244.

¹⁵ John Connell, *David Go Back* (London: Cassell, 1935); p. 302.

One man can free a nation,
Just as one Man freed the world.¹⁶

Cross the Irish republican hero's certainty of the future with the crucified Christ, the nobility of Sir Walter Scott's Fergus Mac-Ivor in the closing courthouse scenes in *Waverley*, and one almost has Connell's romantic rebel leader in full and glorious profile.

The judge asks the other defendants if they have anything to add to Bruce's words. 'Nothing,' they reply, and with that grim finality Connell brings his novel to a close, having given the last word to the nationalists. Correct as that may have been within the confines of his own text, Connell and his fictional rebels were to be proved wrong. For there was yet much to be added, on both sides of the debate, and Bruce's 'beginning' began a war of words which was to last for the remainder of the century.

We have already noted in passing that the Second World War was a central factor in Scotland's continuing relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom. While Ireland sat out 'the Emergency' in the relative safety of neutrality, service personnel from all over the UK were thrown together in traumatic situations throughout the world, as the Empire rallied to fight a common enemy. Many of the gripes of the 1930s were forgotten, or at least postponed, in the wartime camaraderie which ensued, and radical west-coast Scotland seemed to grow calmer with it.

Connell himself is a remarkably good case in point. His journalistic background led to his posting to Palestine as intelligence officer and press censor, before his promotion to the post of Chief Military Press Censor to India in 1944. The early years of his military career offer us both a unique and a keen insight into his state of mind both before and after the war, laid down as they are in his

¹⁶ Padraic Pearce. 'The Singer'. *Padraic Pearce: Rogha Dánta* (Dublin: New Island Book, 1993); p. 45.

autobiographical text, *The House by Herod's Gate*, published in 1947, which deals chiefly with his intelligence work in and around Palestine. If wartime values changed attitudes within Scottish society as whole, then they certainly changed them in Connell's own case. Local politics must now be seen in terms of global trends, as he observes when he acknowledges that, 'when machine-gun fire sounds in Allenby Square [Jerusalem], it is not just the boys and girls of the Irgun Zvai Leumi shooting up British troops; it is not - as it very well might have been - the S.S. using the Fast Hotel or the strong-rooms of Barclay's bank as a military execution yard. And the convert to globalism also speaks freely of his earlier 'snobbish and Scots-trained mind', and of the 'nagging, wearisome fears of middle-class life,' before concluding that his early immaturities are well behind him. In one of the most detailed passages dealing with his own pre-war life, he claims that he would not return to his youth for any reward, condemning as he does 'all the spiritual muddle and looseness' of his twenties.¹⁷ Of course, Connell was in his twenties when he wrote *David Go Back*, so that we might take some of that condemnation to refer to the kinds of ideas we see portrayed in that and his other early novels. If so, then it can certainly be argued that Connell is too harsh on himself. He was certainly not the only novelist to imagine independence for Scotland, or to use the Irish example as a spring-board to it. Compton Mackenzie, for example, offers us a context in which to place Connell's earlier, seminal work.

Based in the 1930s and early 40s, though written some years later, Mackenzie's *The North Wind of Love* presents us with an established, mainstream author intent upon dealing with many of the points which Connell handled in his earlier novel. Mackenzie even has his own predictions, from the need to re-enumerate the monarch's regnal names, a problem which raised its head a little over a decade later, culminating as it did in acts of violence against anything bearing the ERII logo, and the 'theft' of the Stone of Destiny, which Mackenzie suggests fully eight years before Ian Hamilton and his confederates set out to return the relic to Scotland by stealth.¹⁸ Both of these, though more

¹⁷ John Connell, *The House by Herod's Gate* (London: Samson Low, 1947); pp. 1 - 2, & 15.

¹⁸ Compton Mackenzie, *The North Wind of Love* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1945); Vol.II, p. 249.

particularly the latter, raise a question which will recur throughout the present analysis; namely, can political fictions of this kind influence the reality from which they stem?

But perhaps more importantly, in the context of the early novels at least, Mackenzie links the two neighbouring Celtic cultures of Scotland and Ireland once again. Having dealt at length with the Irish question in *West to North*, the precursor to *The North Wind of Love*, he begins the latter with a discussion of the two nationalisms in tandem.¹⁹ That political connection is then allowed to take on a physical form in the person of Padraig, the son of a dead Irish revolutionary, whom Ogilvy, the lead character in the series, and once again named after a major Scottish house (and, indeed, a significant religious martyr of Scottish origin), adopts and raises.

The other striking feature of Mackenzie's novel is the use of purported press cuttings in an attempt to both inform and, one imagines, to give both an authoritative voice, and a national outlook to what might otherwise appear to be a rather parochial subject of little interest to the population - and, by extension, readership - in Britain as a whole.²⁰ A journalist had, of course, begun the cycle here examined, and those who followed him, often journalists themselves, were often keen to use this device of fictional press extracts, often to explain Scottish politics succinctly to a readership which might not be conversant with all its facets. Charles Henry Dand, for example, in his *Scotching the Snake*, follows the joint lead given by Connell and Mackenzie in the decades preceding him, and makes good use of the Press in his satirical reply to many of the points raised by Connell's novel, and by the prospect of militant nationalism in general within a Scottish context.

If Connell and other idealists had seen cause to hope that Scotland might forge ahead on her own in the middle of the century then their successors in the 1950s must have felt that it was increasingly

¹⁹ Compton Mackenzie, *The North Wind of Love* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1945); Vol. I, pp. 1 - 10.

²⁰ Compton Mackenzie, *The North Wind of Love* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1945); Vol. II, pp. 245-248.

unlikely that nationalism would sweep the electoral board in Scotland within their lifetimes. Experience showed that most people sympathised with aspects, but that few were prepared to do anything positive to bring it about - not even to vote, let alone to fight, for independence, as Connell had proposed. The most famous nationalist episode of the early post-war era, the affair of the Stone of Destiny, had about it an aura of undergraduate farce rather than of mature national epic, and it is therefore not surprising that *Scotching the Snake*, written by Charles Hendry Dand, and published in 1958, bore a very different stamp to that of its predecessor. While we might have problems categorising Connell's own politics during the period in which he wrote *David Go Back*, no such difficulties face us in relation to Dand. If we could not gather it from the tone he employs in *Scotching the Snake*, then other of his writings point clearly to his having been a committed Unionist, so much so that the reader must ask whether or not his novel, for all that it was published a little more than twenty years after Connell's, might not be seen as a direct response to, and indeed attack upon, that earlier work.

Scotching the Snake is, first and foremost, a satire. Dand begins by addressing it to an English audience, and claims to be warning of the possible dangers inherent to such an audience in a nationalist uprising, but his after-thought that it might nonetheless be of interest to some Scots shows it for what it is - a poke in the belly to nationalists at a political ebb, as much as to the Establishment caricatured in the aptly entitled first chapter, 'The Under-Secretary of State receives a Poke in the Belly.' That manner of subtitling sets the tone for much of the remainder of the book, and reassures the reader that the influential political writers of Connell's day, such as Grassic Gibbon, with his *Grey Granite* (1934), and Hugh MacDiarmid, with his equally famous poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926) - both exponents to a greater or lesser extent of a class struggle taking place at the heart of Scottish politics - were relics of a distant past.

The plot of Dand's novel is fairly simple, though if one is not careful this simplicity can overshadow some of the most interesting features therein. Donald Cameron, a recently returned émigré, is employed by the Government to infiltrate the Scottish Nationalist movement. It is becoming troublesome, but (so far) only by such exploits as spraying the Secretary of State with red paint

during the Kelvin Hall Carnival. But when they escalate to the kidnapping of prominent Scots dignitaries, the Government allows its concern to show.

Cameron does not think the Scottish Nationalist (sic) Party is to blame - none of its leaders, he maintains, have a sense of humour after all! (Dand, like other authors up until the early nineteen seventies, maintains a fictional air by re-naming the political parties somewhat, distancing himself from their real-life counterparts.) Someone else, he is sure, must be behind it. To discover whom, he makes a provocative Nationalist speech at a concert, in the hope of being contacted by the extremists. The ruse succeeds, and he is introduced to the rebel leaders, of whom the only one named is a comely young lady who goes by the ironically un-Scottish name of Camilla, a graduate of St. Andrews University who turned to politics in despair on finding that the Scottish Universities were not ready for a female Professor of Logic (another dig by Dand at the seemingly unchangeable face of the Scottish Establishment). The other leaders are given code-names, such as 'The Boss' (calling to mind Mussolini's 'Il Duce'), 'The Poet' (combining the Irish imagery of Pearce with the native fame of Scottish nationalist figures, most noticeably MacDiarmid), and 'The Doctor' (possibly a veiled reference to Dr. MacIntyre, the SNP's first Member of Parliament, and leading light within the movement for some years prior to Dand's publication).

The rebels are operating under the guise of the 'Sons of the Hills', an officially sponsored outward-bounds type body. They have extended a conspiracy into many influential quarters, and nobody has yet found them out. Their plan is to stage a coup, after which (contrary to Connell's view in 1935) they believe that the English, having already given independence to so much of the Empire, will concede it to Scotland. All this is to be done peacefully, but secretly and suddenly. They will seize all the main buildings in Edinburgh at once, though Dand gives no details of their plan, except to stress that it will all be brought about with unloaded guns, making it a bloodless ruse of a revolution. Their success will then be announced in special editions of the newspapers, and on the radio.

The hero, who has by this time, rather predictably, fallen in love with Camilla, ponders whether or not to do his duty. Finally he decides to reveal the existence of the plot, but not to reveal the identity

of its leaders, therefore protecting his fiancé. The conspirators take over St. Andrews' House, home of the Scottish branch of the Civil Service, at midnight. The Boss reveals that he believes that England is in terminal decline (perhaps not an altogether unwarranted prediction given the post-war politics at work in the late 1950s), and claims that a free Scotland could attain the moral leadership of the world. Cameron realises that the Boss is a megalomaniac, and that his plot must be foiled. This section is filled with speeches which go into the usual great political detail.

Then the *Deus ex Machina* ending appears. By chance it transpires that the Boss is a rabid Total Abstainer. He proposes after independence to abolish the Scotch Whisky industry. Cameron takes the opportunity to add a new article to the Independence issue of the 'Scotsman'. The 'Scotsman' printers, lunch time drinkers to the man, rise up against their captors, discover that the guns are not loaded, and the coup collapses. The leaders disappear into obscurity, Donald goes off with Camilla, and they, along with all good Unionists, live happily ever after.

Scotching the Snake, of course, does not have to pass the test of realism. It is a tissue of fantasy, as opposed to mere fiction, from beginning to end. Some of its sections are admittedly very funny, perhaps none more so than that in which the rebels kidnap the Lords Provost of the four ancient cities, replacing them with circus clowns - a farcical situation which might as easily have been written by a modern-day leader writer at one of the national newspapers as by a 1950s novelist, and one which stands in stark contrast to Connell's respectful, yet realistic portrayal of Edinburgh's senior dignitary some years prior. It also gives Dand an opportunity to use his love of the jaunty ditty - a device which he allows the rebels to employ on a number of occasions.

Later that evening I was called to the telephone in the hotel in Edinburgh, where I was putting up, to speak again to Inspector MacPartlin in Glasgow.

'Do you want the news?' he asked. 'The Four Belaskoffs have turned up. One here in Glasgow, one in Edinburgh, one in Dundee, and one in Aberdeen. All four of them sitting in the Lord Provosts' chairs in the Council Chambers, all bound and gagged, and all dressed in the Lord Provosts' robes, chains of office, and all. And all four of the Lord Provosts are missing, can't be found anywhere, and nobody knows anything about them.'

'Good heavens! But when - how do you know?'

'Phone call to this office from a call-box half an hour ago. Asked the

constable who answered to take down a verse. Just like a charade or a crossword puzzle. This was it:

Where four are missing, four will be found;
In four civic centres look around.
We've given you back your clowns, both pairs,
And taken away four performing bears.

So we looked in the civic centres and there they were.'

'Good Lord! What are you doing?'

'Just what they are doing in Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen - hunting for clues to a missing Lord Provost. What do you make of it?'

Before I could reply he continued:

'You know, perhaps old Cockburn's not so ga-ga after all. But it's the rummiest beginning to a revolution I've ever heard of.'

'You're telling me,' I replied with much feeling if not very helpfully and hurried off to see if I could learn anything from the Edinburgh police.

The Irish, with a national reputation for humour, had taken all their bids for independence desperately seriously. Could the Scots, I wondered, really be about to start theirs with a joke?²¹

And indeed, riddles and jokes are at the heart of *Scotching the Snake*, its most significant feature being that it is held together by farce rather than by any pretence at epic narrative - arguably a fairly accurate assessment of the public image of nationalism at the time of its publication, with the SNP at something of an ebb.

Neither of these texts can be treated simply as novels though. They are both political statements, and it is therefore both right and necessary for us to ask what the authors' intentions were in producing them. Dand is the simpler to deal with in this context, for his other publications, and most notably his history of the Union of 1707, mark him quite distinctly as a Unionist, so that, taking the various plot lines of *Scotching the Snake* into account, the reader can conclude that it was written primarily as an attack on extremes of nationalism, with a side-swipe at the establishment which might force such a reaction.²² Connell is by far the more difficult of the two. He went on to be an ardent

²¹ Charles Hendry Dand, *Scotching the Snake* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958); pp. 42 - 43.

²² Charles Hendry Dand, *The Mighty Affair - How Scotland Lost Her Parliament* (Edinburgh:

defender of the British Empire in all its facets, which allows the reader to compare his adventure-story style to that of the other great British adventure writer of Scottish extraction, John Buchan. We must question, then, whether Connell might have been writing as a Unionist all along, and, like Dand, wrote of a fear rather than a hope, or whether he simply underwent a conversion after having written *David Go Back*. The latter would seem to have the more foundation, and there we must rely on his short autobiographical text, *The House by Herod's Gate*, for what little evidence we have. In the course of that book, as mentioned previously, he occasionally alludes to his earlier years, though rarely with any warmth. Then in his mid thirties, he writes that

A man does not really in his thirties "find his youth again". Many things which my youth held I would not experience again for any brief reward that life could offer. I would not ask to have the transient, shimmering ecstasy of being seventeen because I know now that for me there lay beyond it years of pain, bewilderment and lamentable folly.²³

And later, in a combination of words which force one to concede a link to his earlier fictional work, he summarises the position, by telling the 'dreaming lad in the dusk twenty years ago' that 'there can be no going back.'²⁴

He goes on then to speak of 'a spiritual muddle' and a 'looseness' which dogged him throughout his twenties, and of the 'nagging, wearisome fears of middle-class life' which came to an end with the advent of the Second World War. The young man who joined the army with a 'naïf, snobbish and Scots-trained mind,' returned to civilian life, in his own opinion at least, a good deal older, and a good deal wiser.²⁵ A distinct shift in politics would seem to have accompanied this growing process, so that he became, in the words of one obituary writer 'a militant right-winger' by his untimely death in 1965 at the age of fifty-six.²⁶ His political career, which culminated in his

Oliver & Boyd, 1972)

²³ John Connell, *The House by Herod's Gate* (London: Sampson Low, 1947); p. 91.

²⁴ John Connell, *The House by Herod's Gate* (London: Sampson Low, 1947); pp. 195 & 192.

²⁵ John Connell, *The House by Herod's Gate* (London: Sampson Low, 1947); pp. 91, 13, & 15.

²⁶ Anon., 'Obituary', *The Times*, 6th October, 1965.

election as Deputy-Mayor of St Pancras, could not have been further from the one he envisaged for the semi-autobiographical David Hamilton twenty years previously.

If Connell has therefore offered us the more lively (and politically thought provoking) material, Dand offers us an interesting exercise in supposition in the relationship, or lack thereof, of *Scotching the Snake* to Connell's earlier work. In short, did Dand write in a relative vacuum, or was he aware of the publication of *David Go Back* some twenty years earlier? As we will see, other, later authors have been willing to concede their indebtedness to earlier writers in the field, but Dand is no longer available to comment. We will probably never know for sure, but the fact that he makes his hero, Cameron, a government employee recently returned from semi-clandestine work in the Middle East, must give the reader pause for thought, coming as it does upon the heels of Connell's own autobiographical reminiscence about his time spent in a similar manner. The mimiking of certain roles, such as that of the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, seems a little too coincidental, and, given the lamentable state of the SNP in the late 1950s, it is certainly difficult to imagine what sort of nationalist threat Dand envisaged himself ridiculing, if not one previously portrayed within the pages of Scottish fiction. And for all that he is writing sometimes whimsical satire, Dand would seem to have been addressing some of the same questions which Connell broached. His 'Boss' is, after all, another off-beat leadership figure in a country depicted as lacking in leadership, while both Dand and Connell seem to see the media, and particularly the press, as filling some of the gap hitherto left by that lack. A well-read man, the balance of probabilities surely has to be that Dand at least had knowledge of, if he had not himself read, Connell's earlier work.

Either way, the two novels do betray similarities of device which it would be well to highlight here, for we shall see them repeated in many of the novels which follow. Firstly, we have the question of nomenclature, as mentioned briefly above. Both Connell and Dand use figures whose names might easily have come out of a history book. As previously noted, Thomas Bruce has obvious, and not entirely nominal, connections to Robert the Bruce's younger brother of that name, a vigorous campaigner against English oppression in his own era, while Hamilton and Thompson are both good Scots names. The Hamiltons comprise the senior House in Scotland after the royal family, so that

invoking their name can be seen as adding legitimacy to the use of Bruce, an earlier royal line. Thompson is less iconic, though it may have been an attempt to call upon the image of George Thomson, an associate of Robert Burns, who moved back to Edinburgh from London a century before, and thus adding a faintly cultural strand to Connell's fictional rebellion.²⁷ Dand's use of the surname Cameron is similar to Connell's use of Hamilton, in that the Camerons were heavily involved in the Jacobite Risings, while his insistence on giving the main rebels codenames rather than real ones not only side-steps the problem of possible identification with living people, but keys the novel in with, for example, Pearce's play *The Poet*, where the exponent of revolution is referred to throughout as 'The Singer.' For all the novel's humorous overtone, that sort of naming helps to give it a more sinister background in the reality of insurgence.

Both turn a journalistic eye to the politics of their own respective periods, Connell from his own professional perspective, and Dand with the use of headlines and newspaper extracts to add an air of authority to his tale.²⁸ The fact that Dand gives his conspiritors access to the offices of a major newspaper in the course of their uprising greatly helps in this regard, but he begins a more solid trend of extract inclusion which will continue to the present day. One commentator, reviewing a later novel in this sub-genre, went so far as to suggest that the newspaper extracts were by far the best written parts of it.²⁹

Both novels employ violence, as opposed to simple democratic means, in the projection of their insurgencies, bringing an arguably alien concept to bear on the Scottish political scene. That Connell does so to add to the romance of the piece, while Dand employs the same device to enhance the pathos of his own work, only serves to make the matter all the more difficult to analyse. What is certain is that the trend which these two began, that of including a violent streak within fictional Scottish politic, has continued down to this very day, in spite of a real-life political scene which

²⁷ William Anderson, *The Scottish Nation* (Edinburgh: A Fullerton & Co., 1869); p. 560.

²⁸ See especially Dand, pp. 34, 171, 193, and 210 - 211.

²⁹ M. Stuart, *Douglas Hurd, the Public Servant. An Authorised Biography* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1998); pp. 59 - 60.

might sometimes have seemed as far removed from that fiction as it was possible to be. The novels and novelists who succeed to Connell and Dand's respective creations move them on in line with political developments in their own eras. So Dand himself did by adding a love interest to his text, bringing it that little bit closer to the conventional modern novel. Connell's fiction, however, was anchored in a decade which grew accustomed to political pamphlets and their rhetoric. The fact that both Connell and Dand were taking *Irish* examples and bringing them to bear on Scottish situations, seems to be overlooked by later writers. It is almost as though, by the very act of publishing their respective novels, these two have let the genie out of the bottle. With two previous examples of violence in fictionalised politics, and a small rise in real-life attempts to bring force to bear, successive authors have felt all the freer to employ this concept of political violence as though it were native to modern Scotland. Yet the major literary devices remain the same in these later novels as they were for these two very different authors. Essentially the same political arguments, the insistence upon a violent struggle, the use of fictional press voices to lend imagined authority, of high-brow pleas, and low-born fears, continues through four decades to the present day, so that Connell's 'nothing to add' ending seems as false as Dand's proposal that everyone might live happily ever after.³⁰

³⁰ John Connell, *David Go Back* (London: Cassell, 1935); p. 302.

Chapter Two

"The State must be protected ... He was a Communist." - Scotland and the Wider World Picture -

'Nation shall speak unto nation'

- Motto of the British Broadcasting Corporation

Charles Hendry Dand's *Scotching the Snake* may well have been a damning satire on perceived nationalist trends within Scotland at the close of the 1950s, but his portrait of a section of the nation battling to define its own political identity was almost prophetic in parts, and not least so in his insistence that events on the broader world stage were likely to play an increasingly large role in terms of Scotland's political self-worth.

Connell had, as we have seen, concentrated his attention almost wholly within the British Isles, taking Ireland as his revolutionary model, while Dand limited the action of his reply to Scotland's often parochial central belt, allowing for little or no outside influence. Yet the words of 'The Boss', suggesting that independence was nearer now as a result of the struggles of other nations around the globe were a herald for what was to follow in terms of fictional depictions of the independence struggle, and no where more so than in Alistair Mair's 1966 novel, *The Douglas Affair*.

Like Connell before him, Mair was a well travelled man with a military background. A pathologist in the R.A.F.'s Tropical Medical Unit, his demobilisation in the late nineteen forties saw the young Glasgow University graduate journeying first to China and then to Japan as a ship's surgeon, then marrying a girl from Melbourne, Australia, before his return to his native Scotland, and to a small Argyllshire village, where he set up in general practice, and began to publish his first books. An outdoor man, he continued to travel widely through Europe with his family, and it is not difficult to see how his travels influenced his written work.

The Douglas Affair, Mair's sixth novel, can be seen from the very outset as being far less insular than its two predecessors, for it begins not in Scotland, nor even in London, but in Franco's Spain, where James Douglas and his wife, returning from holiday, witness the shooting of a Basque Communist by the roadside. The reader is immediately thrust into international politics, with hinted connections between the Basques and the French Communist movement, and as early as page nine of the novel its central theme has been set up. Speaking of the dead man, the Spanish Captain responsible for his death insists, "The State must be protected ... He was a Communist."¹ Blind protection of the state for its own sake will predominate in Mair's text from this point on.

Douglas, musing on the dead man's vain struggle of thirty years against the full strength of his government and legal system, returns home to his country seat, his multi-million pound company, and to the National Party of which he is a key committee member, intent on change. That change takes two forms: a national newspaper with a distinctly nationalist bent, and a new break-away party, led by Douglas himself, both enterprises to be financed primarily from his own fortune, and run with the help of his own considerable business skills. What the nationalists have lacked to date, according to a number of Mair's more thoughtful characters, is leadership and cash. In Douglas they have both. And in Mair, his readership similarly have something new, for his command of the business environment and of the world of high finance lend *The Douglas Affair* a realism which was lacking in both Connell and Dand's work, grounding Mair's novel very much in the real world. That all three choose to focus on leadership, and its apparent lack to date in nationalist politics in Scotland is therefore all the more striking.

As a synopsis of the state of the nationalist cause in Scotland in the mid-1960s, Mair's line is not an inaccurate one. Scotland's swing to Labour from the Conservatives reached a record high in 1966, the year of *The Douglas Affair*'s publication, with the former taking 46 out of the available 71 seats in the Commons. There were the beginnings of a stirring amongst nationalists, under the new leadership of William Wolfe, who, in the 1962 West Lothian By-Election had easily beaten both the

¹ Alasdair Mair, *The Douglas Affair* (London: Heinemann, 1966); p. 9.

Tory and Liberal candidates to take second place after Labour, but the Glasgow lawyer and Chartered Accountant was, at heart, a middle-class leader, unable to galvanise the population to anything other than By-Election victories and close second places, particularly when faced with a hostile press.² Mair's projected future saw the need for a leader who could go beyond that, and who could combine business acumen with personal (albeit self-made) wealth and a sort of dour, down-to-earth charisma with which to rally the nation behind him. He would also have to achieve one thing which, to date, has eluded the nationalist leadership in Scotland, in spite of the often spirited assistance of the Scottish edition of the *Sun*. To rally the nation behind him he would first have to get at least a portion of the popular press on board, disseminating his message through their pages on a daily basis. Thus journalism and its usefulness as a political tool comes centre stage in Mair's work, as it had begun to in Connell's, with his journalistic hero, and increased in Dand with the attempted 'independence day' copy of 'The Scotsman.'

As late as the 1998 Scottish election, the Scottish National Party found itself faced with the same hostile, Unionist press which Mair portrayed in the mid-1960s, and tried, with less success, to employ a very similar answer to the one employed by the fictional James Douglas to overcome it, though its own paper, published just days before the election, met with little success. Willie Wolfe observed of the 1962 West Lothian by-election that, "the daily Press, radio and TV paid scant attention to it," while the SNP itself "was treated as a joke by the Press." Mair's answer in 1966 was very similar to the Party's answer in 1998, best summed up in the words of the old adage, 'if you can't beat them, join them,' or, in this particular case, if the existing press aren't prepared to convey your message as you believe it deserves to be conveyed, then it is up to you to found a paper which will. The SNP of the 1990s already had a weekly, and to all intents and purposes internal, newspaper, *The Scots Independent*, a history of which would make the basis for an interesting thesis in its own right, and from that beginning went on to publish the aforementioned small, daily newspaper in the closing stages of the 1998 election campaign. Of course, in real life the Party did not have the benefit of Douglas's fictional financial capital, nor was it trying to draw on a

² For a detailed account of Wolfe's own involvement in the nationalist movement see his *Scotland Lives* (Edinburgh: Reprographica, 1973).

comparative development some sixty years earlier, as Mair almost certainly was. Ireland was about to make its influence felt within fictional Scottish nationalism once again, if in a less direct manner than it had in the work of Connell and of Dand.

The idea of a press-oriented political campaign must, after all, trace some of its origins to Eamon de Valera's founding of the *Irish Press* in 1931, having himself founded a political party, Fianna Fail, some five years earlier. Even the suggested means of distribution - basic, yet effective - resemble those brought into play in Ireland thirty years before: Douglas, with access to his printing press a problem for dispatch vans, and de Valera, employing bus drivers, commercial travellers, and even the occasional farmer and his donkey to deliver his papers as necessary.³ Indeed, the only real difference lies in the source of financing for such an enterprise, with American share options being a dated and unworkable concept by the 1960s. Better still then to throw in a healthy dose of Scotland's much vaunted Protestant work ethic, and to see the resulting paper born out of Douglas's own, hard earned cash, and capable of presenting serious political issues to its Scottish readership. Mair makes this point, without actually quoting from the paper itself, in relation to its first edition.

The *New Scot* remained folded until Douglas reached his office. Then he spread it out on the desk and lit his pipe, eager to see what use Jock Anderson had made of his editorial freedom. When he turned over the last page, he was well enough pleased. It was a competently produced first issue, light on features, carrying rather too much agency news and distinctly too little advertising, and with a dignified Editorial stating the paper's aims, standards and intentions as far as these could be stated at this point in time.

There was also a first-class unsigned leader, behind which Douglas thought he detected the polished hand of Sam Gold. In it, the basic causes of Scotland's current economic problems were brilliantly summarised and placed in a historical and an international context and perspective, and it concluded by making it clear that this was to be regarded as a kind of prologue to a series of articles which would be of great national importance. These would permit the various points raised to be dealt with by acknowledged experts who would analyse them at length and would discuss the lines of action most likely to produce lasting solutions. In parallel with these articles, the paper would provide a platform where anyone qualified to comment would be invited to do so and where discussion could take place on these and any other matters relevant to the well-being of the nation.

³ Alasdair Mair, *The Douglas Affair* (London: Heinemann, 1966); p. 80; Tim Pat Coogan, *De Valera: Long Fellow, Long Shadow* (London: Arrow, 1993); p. 430.

It was a useful beginning.⁴

And for all that this press-based element may rely on an Irish source (as the first and second of our texts, discussed in Chapter One, certainly did) Ireland is far from the only national source of inspiration for Mair, though its connection through Oonagh, Angus's Irish nanny, is very noticeable. As well as Spain and France, already mentioned, he draws on, or alludes to, America, Italy, Holland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Malawi, South Vietnam, Russia, Germany and Aden, as well as the more local examples of England and Wales, in the course of his work.

Nor is the printed word the only means by which Mair proposes to allow his fictional characters to express themselves to the nation. Connell and Dand, Mair's immediate predecessors, wrote in times when new technologies were in the development and early implementation stages. When Mair set down his ideas in the mid-1960, those technologies had become a part of everyday life, and he set about allowing his characters the extra scope which they provided, though not in an unrealistic way. Take radio, for example. Although the theme is not seen through to its conclusion in the novel, Mair clearly portrays Douglas as being intent on setting up of a pirate radio station off the coast of Scotland. This was certainly topical, as the Isle of Man parliament (very like that which Douglas claimed to want for Scotland) had only just extracted itself from a battle with Westminster over the licensing of a similar station, long run in pirate fashion, within its own waters.⁵ Nor is that the most important development, for Mair then goes on to give Douglas a short television appearance, which turns out to be the catalyst for the Establishment's reaction against him, and his own eventual death at the hands of agents of the state. Douglas's outbursts are too much for the radio authorities, though he more than makes his point in the time allotted to him.

'... Next year it is more than likely that there will be a General Election. When

⁴ Alasdair Mair, *The Douglas Affair* (London: Heinemann, 1966); p. 124.

⁵ Owen Dudley Edwards & Hugh MacDiarmid (eds), *Celtic Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1968); p.302. It is perhaps also worth noting in passing that the Isle of Man, when it was a protectorate of the King of Scots in the early 1300s, was under the direct control of one of Robert I's most loyal knights, also called James Douglas, so that, while Mair doubtless had more general reasons for calling his hero after this earlier Scots patriot, the decision rings particularly true in this particular context.

that time comes, we shall be ready. Indeed, we are ready now. Every single one of the seventy-one Parliamentary seats in this country will be contested. Every voter in this country will have the opportunity to vote for the policies which will be presented to you in detail before that time.

'Nothing will be rushed into. And there will be no attempts to rush you, the people of Scotland, into premature judgements. You will be given the facts and time to consider them. If, as I believe - '

'That's it,' said Sam Gold.

The picture had vanished.

'They've cut him off,' said Archie. 'They must have.'

Jock Anderson glanced at his watch.

'Seven minutes,' he said. 'I didn't think he's get as much.'

'No,' said Margaret. 'Look.'

'There is a fault. Do not adjust your set.'

'Fault my foot,' said Archie. 'They've cut him.'

'Now the lady,' said Sam. 'Any minute.'

She appeared, looking cool and unruffled.

'We apologise for that break in transmission from our Glasgow studios,' she said. 'Our engineers are trying to put it right. Meanwhile you might like to see some film taken when out outside broadcast cameras were in the Hebrides last summer.'

'There endeth the first lesson,' said Sam Gold softly as he switched the set off. "It'll be interesting to see what comes out of that."⁶

What comes from it is a direct attack on Douglas, whose own subterfuge in convincing the B.B.C. to allow him air time is, in fact, very believable. We have already noted William Wolfe's comments on the treatment meted out to the SNP by all the media, including television, in the run-up to the West Lothian by-election, but in the sphere of television in particular the reception offered to the nationalists was distinctly frosty. Mair's suggestion that the Corporation considered themselves to be the voice of national opinion, if not quite, as Sam Gold would have it, of God Himself, would have rung a bell with many fringe politicians, both at the time of Mair's publication, and more recently. During discussions on the possibility of separate party political broadcasts for Scotland and

⁶ Alasdair Mair, *The Douglas Affair* (London: Heinemann, 1966); p. 137.

Wales in 1962, the Postmaster-General's Office, the government department which had responsibility for such issues, actually refused to include the SNP and their Welsh counterparts, Plaid Cymru, in discussions on the subject, and it was subsequently decided that the status quo, whereby a party required 50 or more seats in parliament to be eligible for inclusion in the national broadcast schedule, would continue to apply. This remained the case until 1964, when the rules were relaxed to allow any party contesting 20% or more of the seats to take place in cross-party discussion broadcasts, and by 1965 the SNP managed to negotiate its first five minutes of air time on television and radio.⁷ Given this sense of struggle against the Establishment within broadcasting, Mair's portrayal of Douglas's deception can be seen in a kinder and more sympathetic light. The reader can also understand his insistence that the broadcasters cut short any such broadcast when it is realised that the first five minute television slot allowed in September 1965 was watched by an estimated one and a quarter million Scots, and that the SNP received over 1,200 written requests for membership and further information within four days of the broadcast.⁸

That the state is the instigator of the violence in the novel is certainly the point which most sets *The Douglas Affair* apart from the other novels in the sub-genre to which it belongs, certainly prior to its publication, and, to a certain extent, thereafter as well. If nothing else, it categorises Mair's work as being distinctly pro-nationalist in relation to those novels which preceded it. Against the advice of the Government's own Secretary of State for Scotland, the intelligence services decide that Douglas is a threat to national security, and, believing that the party he has founded will flounder without his guidance, decide to eliminate that threat once and for all. Mair's own justification for such an outcome almost certainly lies at the beginning of the novel, when a fellow Western European government is seen, through one of its officers, to condone the brutal killing of a dissident. The idea that 'the State must be protected,' has returned to Scotland with Douglas, and if it can manifest itself in such a brutal fashion in one modern Western European state, then why not in another? Of course, there will always be those critics who maintain that such a thing could never happen here, and

⁷ Willie Wolfe, *Scotland Lives* (Edinburgh: Reprographica, 1973); p. 73.

⁸ Willie Wolfe, *Scotland Lives* (Edinburgh: Reprographica, 1973); p. 73.

doubtless many nationalists within their various traditions in Britain would adhere to that belief as well. Nevertheless, it is possible for one to draw an interesting comparison with later events, which might portray Mair's projections in an almost prophetic light, with fiction turning strangely into, albeit unverifiable, fact.

Douglas's death, towards the end of the novel, takes place as he drives home to his rural estate on a fog-bound evening, fully aware that he is being followed, though unsure exactly by whom. Special Branch officers from London, rather than locals, tail his Mark Ten Jaguar out towards Drymen, where a tired Douglas, in an attempt to flee from what he has been warned is almost certain death, is forced into a collision with an on-coming truck.⁹ As Mair has Douglas and several other characters note throughout the novel, it is hard to believe that there might be circumstances in which the British government would authorise such an action on the part of its officers, and if that is the case then Mair's novel fails to convince the reader at its very climax. It might be argued, however, particularly at the extreme fringes of the more traditional nationalist movement in Scotland, that the turning point in this argument came in April 1985, with the death of another Glasgow-based lawyer, and colleague of William Wolfe, Willie McRae. McRae, a life-long activist who was thought to have connections to militant groups such as Siol Nan Gaidheal, and who had vocally opposed a number of the government's nuclear projects in Scotland, had been driving to Dornie in the middle of the night when his car left the road a few miles short of Invergarry. At first it was universally assumed that McRae had been the victim of a simple accident, but later medical examination showed that he had suffered a single gunshot wound to the head. A number of inconsistencies in the details of the case have led to newspaper articles, a television documentary, and repeated calls for a public inquiry by those who maintain that McRae was in possession of potentially damaging information relating to government nuclear facilities in Scotland. It is certainly not unreasonable for the reader to see Mair's James Douglas - a combination of the real-life Willie Wolfe and some serious capital investment - as having come to a fictional end similar to that of another Glasgow lawyer some twenty years later, at the hands of an Establishment which would have disapproved of any one of the three of them.¹⁰

⁹ Alasdair Mair, *The Douglas Affair* (London: Heinemann, 1966); p. 240.

Once again, Mair may have been before his time, and one might almost say prophetic in his analysis of the ways in which both nationalism and the Establishment's reaction towards it would develop. It can certainly be argued that, with hindsight, the McRae case makes Mair's plot all the more convincing and sinister, and show him to have been a shrewder political analyst than Connell or Dand, who simply looked to the repetitions of relatively unrelated history for their ideas.

There is also an aspect of depth in Mair's work which was lacking in earlier attempts to tackle the same subject. At first glance the reader might be forgiven for thinking that Mair is simply a more balanced writer, given his treatment of women and of familial relationships within the novel. Connell, after all, included no love interest in what was essentially a political tract in the guise of a novel, while Dand's ridicule of the situations in which his characters find themselves might be considered to negate any gentle introduction of such an interest between Cameron and Camilla in *Scotching the Snake*. And it is certainly true that there are a large number of female characters, most treated sympathetically, in Mair's novel, though one might productively argue that this is nothing more than another strand of the nationalist message which runs throughout the novel.

Mair also succeeds in updating, and elaborating, the theme of the Union itself. Interpersonal relationships can be read as mirroring various stages of the relationship between the two constituent parts of the Union. Indeed, in his own variation on this theme Mair even refers to one of the partnerships in question, from the feminine perspective (which was often Scotland's in the marriage analogies which spanned the period of the Union), as being 'a union in which her only part was to be devoured, consumed to feed the diminished fire of his hidden self.'¹¹

Douglas's own marriage can be seen as the ideal, in which each partner allows the other the freedom to carry out their own goals, while offering support and stability where necessary. This is surely

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of the McRae case, see *Britain's Secret War: Tartan Terrorism and the Anglo-American State* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1990); pp. 166 - 192.

¹¹ Alasdair Mair, *The Douglas Affair* (London: Heinemann, 1966); p. 118.

Douglas's own idea of a union between Scotland and England which returns to the status quo of the Union of the Crowns, each with separate parliaments, but under the umbrella of the same monarch.

By comparison, the relationships which the next generation of Douglas's find themselves in (i.e. the political generation after the Union of the Crowns, the Union of the Parliaments) are far more fraught, with one partner, intentionally in one instance and unintentionally in the other, dominating the relationship. If the said relationship were a caring, nurturing one, such as that enjoyed by Anne and Peter, then there might be hope for the future, but if on the other hand it proved to be a manipulative one, such as that endured by Angus (named for the Celtic god of love, for all that he is in a loveless marriage) and Julia, then divorce is the best, and indeed the only sane way forward. Divorce, but not isolation, just as Scotland must move on from the Union, but remain in touch with the rest of the world. Thus it is no surprise (and arguably no coincidence in terms of nationality) that Angus has the Celic Oonagh to comfort him through his break-up, while Douglas himself spends a good deal of his time trying to make sure that Sally, his attractive but sensitive secretary, does not go through life a spinster. Even the novel's title, with all the inter-personal connotations which can be attached to the word "affair", can be viewed as additionally relevant in this context. It is surely tempting to read a subtle message into the above - namely that the kind of comprehensive devolution which Douglas advocates is all well and good for his generation, but that if it is not forthcoming, then circumstances are likely to call for a more drastic solution.

Yet, if the Douglas family and its associates are to be seen in a more human light than their predecessors from the pens of Connell and Dand, that is not to suggest that Mair provides the reader with any less of a political perspective than they did. Douglas himself may come to represent the Spanish rebel at the novel's opening, but he never strays so far as to allow for a one hundred per cent comparison, and for one very simple reason: Douglas remains a capitalist throughout. It is his success in the cut-throat world of capitalist industry which allows him to move into politics, and to attempt to turn his dream for Scotland into reality. Thus he acts as something of a counter-balance to the nationalism of figures such as Hugh MacDiarmid, who were firmly to the left of the political spectrum. Certainly, he sees jobs and better living conditions for the working class as a priority, but

no evidence is presented to justify the label of ‘Communist,’ as there was with the activist shot dead by the Spanish police. For that label to stick, Scotland’s reading and viewing public would have to wait another five and seven years respectively, yet when it did, it would stick like mud.

By 1973 the question was no longer ‘if’ the SNP was to be allowed television coverage, but exactly what sort of coverage it was entitled to. The Party made its own political broadcasts, putting across its case in its own words, yet there were still some, including senior figures within the SNP itself, who would argue that there remained a distinctly anti-nationalist bias within the broadcast media, and that nothing did more to prove that point in the early 1970s than its televisation of Douglas Hurd and Andrew Osmond’s novel, *Scotch on the Rocks* (London: Collins, 1971).

Hurd would later become an influential figure within the upper echelons of Margaret Thatcher and John Major’s Conservative Parties, first as Home Secretary and then as Foreign Secretary under Thatcher, and continued in the latter post under her successor, John Major, for all that he was touted by some as a possible future leader in his own right. But in 1971 he was still a little-known figure outside political circles, serving as Private Secretary to Mrs Thatcher’s predecessor, Edward Heath, as well as putting his spare time to good effect as an accomplished political novelist. His co-author, Osmond, was, like Hurd, an ex-diplomat who had turned his hand to journalism, co-founding the politically satirical *Private Eye* magazine. Together the two had written a trilogy of contemporary political novels, beginning with *Send Him Victorious* (London: Collins, 1968), which dealt with a future succession to the throne, before moving on to *The Smile of the Tiger* (London: Collins, 1969), in which they projected an attempted Chinese take-over of Hong Kong set in 1976. The series, which was held together by one common thread, the political career of its fictional Prime Minister, Harvey, then culminated in the 1971 Collins publication of *Scotch on the Rocks*.

Set at some undisclosed point in the future (though given that it involved the same Prime Minister as had the earlier novel set in 1976, and given a passing reference in the text to events which had already taken place in 1978,¹² the reader might like to speculate that it takes place somewhere

¹² Douglas Hurd & Andrew Osmond, *Scotch on the Rocks* (London: Collins, 1971); p. 177, where the Begum Aga Khan mentions that a particular merchant was believed to have headed the Breton nationalist delegation to the “Conference of

towards the end of the 1970's), *Scotch on the Rocks* deals with an attempted uprising on the part of a small group of activists, headed by an unknown political leader, and leaving a trail of chaos in their wake as they progress towards, at the very least, a devolved Scotland. Like Mair's, this novel's sights are quite widely set, taking in events in France, Ireland, America and Russia, while Hurd and Osmond, like Mair before them, concentrate on the need of a leader to take events forward.

Perhaps the main difference in the kind of leader they create for their plot can be seen in a comment made in the course of *Scotch on the Rocks* by Cameron, the mastermind behind the military section of the campaign, when he asks Lord Thorganby, the kidnapped Secretary of State (rather reminiscent for his own part of Connell's kidnapped Secretary) towards the end of the novel, as he attempts to justify his own thinking:

"Do you know Africa?" he asked.

"Not well." Thorganby disliked riddles too.

"There are twenty-odd countries in Africa now - flags, corrupt Presidents, unsafe airlines, the lot. But only two nations. Algeria and South Africa. The rest are lines on the map, but those two will last. Why? Because thousands of people were killed, chased out of their homes, lives turned upside-down in the making of them. Blood and tears. An old recipe, but we can't make Scotland without it."¹³

If one were looking for a real-life figure on whom Cameron might have been based, this suggestion of foreign service in the British Army before returning to a politically altered Scotland might incline the reader to think that Hurd and Osmond had partially modelled their military hero on Colonel Colin Mitchell, better known first to his men and then to the general public as "Mad Mitch", the leader of the British Army force sent into Aden in 1968 who later served a single term as a distinctly flamboyant Member of Parliament for a constituency in the Scottish borders (In fictional terms, one might also make an interesting comparison between Cameron and Jock Sinclair, the hard-fighting and somewhat obsolete soldier who is the hero of James Kennaway's *Tunes of Glory* (London:

Celtic League, Dublin 1978."

¹³ Douglas Hurd & Andrew Osmond, *Scotch on the Rocks* (London: Collins, 1971); p. 210.

1956)). They also fit with Hurd and Osmond's realisation that the 'Scottish Question', if one might call it that, was no longer something which could be handled at a purely internal level, but had to be conceded as semi-international. Thus they allow their hero to travel to France to investigate connections between the extremists and Breton terrorists,¹⁴ make reference to international conferences in Dublin,¹⁵ and foil the eventual plot by revealing that its finding comes via French Communists (rearing their head once again, as they did in *The Douglas Affair*, though now considerably closer to home), from Moscow, all of them international markers within the text, but all of them, like Cameron's comments quoted above, negative ones. It is, in fact, the revelation that the novel's 'Scottish Liberation Army' receives its funding from the USSR which puts paid to their attempted rising, making that the most negative marker of them all to have emerged within what is, after all, a Cold War novel, however regionalised. Of course, it is difficult for any writer to write positively about terrorism, and there can be no doubt that the acts which occur under the guise of the Scottish Liberation Army within the novel are just those, terrorist acts, yet Hurd and Osmond suggest at other (noticably early) points in the novel's development a sympathy towards the root causes for such actions. For example, towards the beginning of the text, the Chief Constable of Glasgow says to Hart,

"Birmingham and Manchester flourish while Glasgow is allowed to decline, like some abandoned slagheap. You can do what you like to undermine the Nationalist movement, Mr Hart - and nothing that you have said persuades me that that is not your purpose - but you can't get rid of these facts. The English have often been afraid that a revolution would begin in this city, and with good reason."¹⁶

This would seem to be a fairly well balanced view, suggesting at least some recognition on the part of its authors of the driving force which, by 1971, had pushed Scottish Nationalism to an all-time

¹⁴ Douglas Hurd & Andrew Osmond, *Scotch on the Rocks* (London: Collins, 1971); p. 177.

¹⁵ Douglas Hurd & Andrew Osmond, *Scotch on the Rocks* (London: Collins, 1971); p. 177.

¹⁶ Douglas Hurd & Andrew Osmond, *Scotch on the Rocks* (London: Collins, 1971); p. 24.

high, and yet they retain a negative attitude throughout the novel which ends up dominating the whole. For example, Hart, a few lines further down page 24 reacts privately to the Chief Constable's comments with the thought that "Wogs begin at the Tweed." Later, no lesser organ of public opinion than *The Times* is depicted as saying that the Tory party in particular has

long been accustomed to bombs and similar nonsense from the Irish, the Arabs and other lesser breeds; but Scottish terrorism has come as a rude shock.¹⁷

Whether the reader takes this to mean that the Scots in question are a lesser breed, or rather that terrorism from a group who are distinctly *not* lesser is of ultimate concern, is a matter of individual interpretation.

The fact remains that none of these questions would have been of great relevance had it not been for the fact that the B.B.C. decided to adapt the novel (without benefit of the other books in the trilogy) for television. A relatively small readership, such as had been the case with Connell and Dand's novels was, over night, multiplied incalculably, as were the reactions which such a scenario produced on both sides of what was increasingly coming to be seen as Scotland's nationalist/unionist political divide.

It is arguable that no one would have noticed that Hurd and Osmond had used the name of an actual political party, the SNP, in their novel, had it not been transmitted nation-wide. It is also likely that, even had it been noticed, such an infringement would have met with little reaction, given the relatively small audience to which it was addressed. The 1973 televisation, which retained the SNP label, called off all bets in that regard, however. Gordon Wilson, who was to lead the SNP in the 1980s, but was at that time the party's Vice-Chairman as well as being one of its senior legal advisors, immediately wrote to Charles Curran, the Director-General of the B.B.C., complaining that 'the Party is shown to have elements favouring violence for political ends and to have extreme left

¹⁷ Douglas Hurd & Andrew Osmond, *Scotch on the Rocks* (London: Collins, 1971); p. 149.

wing associations.¹⁸ He went on to accuse the B.B.C. of being guilty of nothing less than a political slur on the SNP's good name, and gave as evidence of the damage being done the fact that the Conservative candidate in the Dundee East by-election some five months previous had used this same smear against the SNP's candidate, who happened to be Wilson himself.

It is certainly true that the B.B.C.'s own printed media, in the form of the *Radio Times*, had written about the first episode of the series in such a way as to relate it specifically to the real SNP, and went on to cite the 'occasional rumours of a secret Scottish army' which arose from time to time. Curran's reaction, however, was to maintain that the series was nothing more than an 'entertainment,' and that he saw no likelihood that such a fictional series might 'establish any kind of pattern for the real future,' and Lord Hurd himself was keen to promote a similar interpretation as recently as November 1998, when he suggested, in a classic example of the Establishment put-down, that he himself

never took *Scotch on the Rocks* at all seriously as a piece of political analysis ... I was very surprised when the SNP complained to the BBC about the televised version, and thought this showed a lack of perspective, let alone humour on their part.¹⁹

In the end, the question did not come down to what Curran, Hurd, or even Wilson thought, but to the reaction of the viewing public, most of whom doubtless agreed with Curran and Hurd that the series and book provided a harmless entertainment, rather than the calculated slur which the SNP chose to read into them. However, the problem, as Scott and Macleay note in their study *Britain's Secret War - Tartan Terrorism and the Anglo-American State*, lay not in the average viewer, but in his more susceptible neighbour. 'Young Scots in their teens and twenties,' they observe, 'found the programme inspiring!'²⁰ Their most extreme reactions to it almost tempt one to quote from the novel itself, when Macnair, explaining the rise in nationalist violence to Rennie, notes that,

¹⁸ Andrew Scott & Ian Macleay, *Britain's Secret War - Tartan Terrorism and the Anglo-American State* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1990); p. 76.

¹⁹ Lord Hurd's letter of 25th November 1998 to the author.

²⁰ Andrew Scott & Ian Macleay, *Britain's Secret War - Tartan Terrorism and the Anglo-American State* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1990); p. 77.

'At first it was just paint jobs - you've seen those - UDI, Nats OK, that sort of thing. But now they're getting braver,'²¹

for those youths who were inspired by the programme certainly did seem to become braver. Thus, the statue of Queen Victoria in the centre of Wilson's own Dundee was paint-bombed, just as its Edinburgh counterpart had been blown up in the course of the novel;²² young nationalists stole explosives from Army depots, and so many Union Flags were stolen or burned that many local authorities simply refused to replace them, leaving their flag poles empty. One of the worst scares came when the Scottish Tar Distillers in Camelon reported the theft of a large amount of gelignite, leading to the arrest and detention of four youngsters, all under the age of sixteen. Several more young boys from the Dumbarton area were later to appear in the High Court in Glasgow charged with making having created home-made explosives, and with having experimented with the same in a disused quarry near their homes. All had connections to nationalist youth organisations.²³

Perhaps the most notable of the real attacks came on New Year's Day, 1973, when another young nationalist, Alasdair Nicholson, set fire to an office in St Andrews House, the home of Scotland's senior civil servants, by throwing a petrol bomb through a ground floor window. Nicholson, who was arrested and convicted, went on to become one of the SNP candidates for the Scottish Parliament in 1998,²⁴ but in 1973 he was just one in a worrying list of teenagers who had decided to take direct action in their search for Scottish independence, all of which came, perhaps unsurprisingly, close on the heels of the B.B.C.'s production.

²¹ Douglas Hurd & Andrew Osmond, *Scotch on the Rocks* (London: Collins, 1971); p. 12.

²² Douglas Hurd & Andrew Osmond, *Scotch on the Rocks* (London: Collins, 1971); pp. 42-43.

²³ Andrew Scott & Ian Macleay, *Britain's Secret War - Tartan Terrorism and the Anglo-American State* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1990); p. 78.

²⁴ Scottish National Party, *SNP Prospective Parliamentary Candidates List, 1998* (Edinburgh: Scottish National Party, 1998); p. 5.

The real Scottish National Party was, of course, quick to distance itself from such actions, with Gordon Wilson to the fore again, this time issuing a statement to the effect that 'the Tartan Army are Scotland's enemies.²⁵ Nonetheless, a link had almost certainly been formed in the minds of the electorate - not just in Scotland, but in England too, where less detail of the nationalist cause was likely to be known - between the SNP's leadership (represented in the novel by Mackie), communism, and a band of mythical terrorists. And yet the very invention of these terrorists would seem to have breathed life into the idea of violence in the cause of Scottish independence, where little or no such idea existed before in the real world. The media, which provided a running motif through Connell, Dand, and Mair's novels, had taken over with a vengeance, taking Hurd and Osmond's creation into living rooms around the country, and justifying in some minds the very things that, presumably, its authors, and the producers of the subsequent television series, had deplored.

The mid to late 1970s was to see the SNP at an all-time high point in terms of their Westminster representation, but it also saw a distinct rise in acts of terrorism within Scotland, and occasionally in England too, whose roots would be traced back to the nationalist cause. Fiction would take those events and use them to good effect in the years ahead, but it would also have to take a share of the blame for creating such a violent situation in the first place.

²⁵ Andrew Scott & Ian Macleay, *Britain's Secret War - Tartan Terrorism and the Anglo-American State* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1990); p. 67.

Chapter Three

'If at first you don't succeed ...' Writing and Re-Writing Scotland's Future

Till their own dreams at length deceive 'em,
And oft repeating, they believe 'em.

Matthew Prior, *Alma*, Canto III

When Peter Preston, ex-editor of *The Guardian*, published his debut novel, *51st State* (London: Viking, 1998), it opened a new chapter in futuristic political fiction, for it was in many ways the first post-devolution novel of its kind. Set some twenty or thirty years after the disintegration of the Blair government, this comical look at the future of England and its (by then) independent satellite states as they struggle to come to terms with European integration is refreshing, particularly because it deals primarily with England. The peripheral nations of the British Isles, Scotland, Wales, and Ulster, are just that - peripheral to the story-line. They are not ignored, but rather are given their rightful place, post-devolution, in a novel which focuses on English politics.

Preston, who, having served as editor to one of the major British broadsheets, might be thought of as an old hand at political analysis, has his hero, back bench MP Rupert Walker, head up a movement dedicated to withdrawal from the European Union in favour of closer ties with the United States, a move which seems to be gathering fringe support of late. In the short term this means English membership of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Area), with her independent neighbours following suit, and in the long term points to full inclusion for each as a separate state within the Union. In terms of this basic economic plot, however, Preston is not as original as he can be said to have been in his post-devolution national approach.

Perhaps the first serious suggestion within political fiction that mainland Europe might not provide the only trading forum for Britain's constituent parts came, in fact, as early as 1972, in a novel entitled *Norslag* (London: Gollancz, 1972) by Michael Sinclair. Sinclair's second novel, the plot of

Norslag revolved around a dissident group of northern nationalists, both Scots and Scandinavian, whose aim was to establish a form of federalism among the northern peoples, and to promote EFTA (the European Free Trade Area) over and above its chief rival, the European Economic Community, forerunner of the present European Union.

One might be tempted to dismiss such an idea out of hand, were it not for the fact that Sinclair could be said to have first hand knowledge of the sort of international politics involved in the setting up of any such a confederation. In truth, Michael Sinclair was the pseudonym of a middle ranking British diplomat, whose career was to take him within reach of the very pinnacle of the British Establishment itself, serving for ten years as Press Secretary to the Queen.

Michael Shea, to give Sinclair his real name, was educated at Gordonstoun, and then at the University of Edinburgh, from which he graduated with an MA and then a PhD in Economics, before being the first entrant from a Scottish university to gain admission to the Foreign Office's elite administrative corps in 1963 at the age of twenty-seven. After in London and Ghana, Shea spent three years in Bonn as Second, and then as First Secretary (Econ.), before returning to Britain, on secondment to the Cabinet Office, and taking up his secondary career as an author of popular fiction.¹

Shea was obviously keen to use the knowledge he had gained in his travels in a fictional guise, but equally keen to be discreet as to his sources. "I wrote under the pen name Michael Sinclair because, in those days, the Foreign Office preferred their diplomat-authors to be anonymous," he explains.² Understandable, perhaps, when one considers that the plots he engineered during the early and mid-Seventies included the attempts to dissolve the United Kingdom violently from within and without, attempts on the part of multi-nationals to buy-up an entire nation, and supposition on the likely diplomatic fall-out from revelations that Hitler had survived the war and lived in peaceful seclusion

¹ *Who's Who* (London: 2000); Michael Sinclair, *A Long Time Sleeping* (London: Golancz, 1975); biographical note.

² Correspondence with Michael Shea, 14th June, 2000.

in small-town America until his death in 1967.³ Yet Shea is equally keen to defend his plots as realistic ones. Speaking specifically about this last plot line, which formed the basis for his fourth novel, *A Long Time Sleeping* (London: Gollancz, 1974), he insisted, ‘I did as I have always done, and wrote about a life and environment which was very familiar to me. And while the book was written some twenty-five years ago, it is still very much up to date.’⁴

If such staying power can be exhibited in thrillers concerning modern-day Nazi intrigues - a variation of the spy genre which Shea suggests was less common in the early nineteen seventies than it has since become - then it can be found in equal measure in novels depicting Scottish independence, which we have seen pre-date the Second World War. Shea’s own contribution, in the form of his third novel, was to exhibit even more staying power than its predecessors, however, for, first printed in nineteen seventy-three under the title *The Dollar Covenant* (London: Gollancz, 1973), it was to entertain the public a second time when, more than twenty years later, in nineteen ninety-seven, an updated version was released, under Shea’s own name, entitled *State of the Nation* (London: HarperCollins, 1997).

But, at least at this stage, our primary interest should not be in the fact that Shea’s novel managed to resurface successfully after more than twenty years. The plot of *The Dollar Covenant*, like that of its moderately re-worked successor, has within it a number of interesting variations on the theme which was otherwise building within this branch of political fiction. For this reason alone, it more than stands out from other titles discussed in the context of this thesis. The first and foremost of these variations is that Shea (as we will refer to him in relation to both novels, for simple ease of reference) did not overly concern himself with the process of attaining independence for Scotland. That is delivered as a *fait accompli* in the novel’s very first two chapters, as Shea explains that Scottish home rule is already four years old.

³ This last forms the plot for Sinclair’s *A Long Time Sleeping* (London: 1975).

⁴ Michael Shea, *The Shadow Falls* (London: Severn House, 1999); Author’s note.

Instead, the author's contention is that the going might be far from smooth in an independent nation as small, and as relatively new-born, off the coast of Europe as those who advocate varying degrees of separation from the United Kingdom might like to think. But it is not to Scotland's traditional antagonist that Shea turns when he wants to depict the fledgling state in trouble. Instead, he looks both further afield, and yet at the same time closer to home - to big business, and to the concerns of the international markets.

After four years of independence, Scotland is still a member of the Commonwealth, and retains the Queen as its head of state (in line with SNP policy in both the nineteen seventies and the nineteen nineties). The country is suffering, however, as unemployment rises and international scepticism about the future of small emerging nations grows. There are two distinct schools of thought in Scotland as to the best solution for what is fast becoming an economic crisis, each as extreme as the other. One camp, filled with those from the far left of the political spectrum, favour a more radically nationalist approach, and would ditch all remaining ties with England, before declaring Scotland a Republic; their opponents, meanwhile, insist that any return to the prosperity which the country previously knew can only be achieved with the re-creation of the United Kingdom. The moderate nationalist government which steered the nation to independence so recently now finds itself fighting off the effects of an unstable economy, whilst under attack from the Republicans on the one hand, and the Reunionists on the other. Like all economic problems, these concern the average man in the street as much as they do governments, and the tensions which threaten to tear the newly independent country apart are evident at both those levels from the novel's outset, as Shea outlines the hardships being endured on Glasgow's Clydeside.

By the gates of the idle, deserted ship yard, the marchers turned a corner into another anonymous, dirty street lined with boarded up shops. For a moment the rain and the misery obscured the view. Then the leaders saw the men waiting for them. A crowd of some three hundred of the strikers, spread right across the street ahead, standing silent, black and yellow industrial helmets glistening in the morning rain.

The Police Sergeant in charge shouted an order. PC Wraight spoke urgently into his transisterized radio. Back at Constabulary Headquarters an alarm bell sounded.

By now only fifty yards separated the two groups, the Republicans outnumbered at least four to one. The shipyard strikers weren't there by accident, and wouldn't clear a path without trouble. Both sides knew their enemy. It had happened too often before.⁵

As the clash between these two opposing groups spreads throughout the country, their protests grow more and more violent, with Reunionist bombs eventually going off at key establishments, including television and radio stations. At this point, the Bondi Corporation, an American-based multi-national, steps in, and offers to bolster the failing government, in particular providing them with the transmitters they need to keep the public informed of developments. It seems that, in its hour of need, Scotland has found a willing ally in the form of a philanthropic American corporation, one which is not only willing to continue to invest in Scotland in spite of the economic downturn, but which is also willing to shore up its moderate government in the process.

In truth, however, it is the Bondi Corporation which has been behind the growing troubles all along. They have been feeding money to radicals on both sides, in the hope that they can step into any eventual power vacuum which might occur. And when one fails to come along quickly enough to suit their plans, they simply create one. Having bought the allegiance of several government ministers, Bondi's agents stage a coup, kidnapping those who continue to oppose them, including the Prime Minister. The blame, of course, falls upon native political extremists, and a caretaker Prime Minister, Ian Campbell, hitherto the Director of the National Bank, and therefore seen as an ideally qualified candidate during an economic crisis, takes office.

At this point is perhaps worth noting that his choice of names for key characters (a trend which we have already had cause to look at in relation to other novels discussed in preceding chapters) does tend to let Shea down. Almost all the Scots are given obviously native surnames, ranging from MacDowell through to MacKinnon, and on to the admittedly unusual MacPake. While names may mean little to the well travelled author, it is tempting to suggest that he considers them a necessary tool as far as his readership is concerned, even commenting in relation to Police Constable Waight, who appeared in the earlier quotation, that he must be considered 'no Scotsman, judging by his

⁵ Michael Sinclair, *The Dollar Covenant* (London: Gollancz, 1973); p. 6.

name.⁶ It comes as no surprise then when the reader discovers that Acting Prime Minister Campbell (whose surname has been synonymous with intrigue through hundreds of years of Scottish history) is not, in fact, cast in the role of national saviour, but is instead a stooge, put into office by the Bondi Corporation with instructions to pacify Scotland and to pave the way for a full-scale take over of the country.

The Bondi plan is an audacious yet simple one. High taxes and unsympathetic legislation is slowly eating into corporate profits back in the United States, and the Corporation needs an off-shore tax haven in which to base its headquarters. It also needs to find a new source of cheap, and under-regulated workers, and if these two requirements can be met in one location, all the better. A national take-over would seem to be the answer, and Scotland the ideal location.

Shea is keen to point out that this is not as far-fetched a scenario as it might at first appear.

The genesis of my *Dollar Covenant* plot was reading that the annual turnover of General Motors, at that time, was greater than the national incomes of all but about the ten countries in the world. There were a number of countries, Liberia, Chile, and others which were almost entirely owned by American big business. Firestone Rubber Company, as I remember it, were by far the biggest employer in Liberia, for example.⁷

So, to his own mind, all Shea was doing with *The Dollar Covenant* was bringing to bear national economic realities from other small countries within the framework of a future independent Scotland. And his suggestion of civil unrest as the result of job losses and factory closures can almost certainly be traced to the real life events which took place around the time of the novel's publication closer to home than Latin America, as Britain suffered its own economic crisis, culminating in the famous 'Winter of Discontent' in late nineteen seventy-three.

⁶ Michael Sinclair, *The Dollar Covenant* (London: Gollancz, 1973); p. 6.

⁷ Michael Shea's correspondence with the author, 14th June, 2000.

That unrest is finally brought to an end by Michael Mockingham, a junior government minister who has been overlooked during the coup on account of his earlier hospitalisation. He manages to get out of the country, and travels to New York where, with help from the English Delegation, he is able to raise the issue of Scottish sovereignty on the floor of the United Nations, bringing such information as he has been able to secure to the attention of the world's media in the process. International support proves meaningless, however, and while diplomatic protests are carefully worded weeks pass without any perceivable change in Scotland's new status quo. Finally it occurs to Mockingham (whom Shea is now using as a narrator for his tale) that he and his small band of colleagues have been looking at their problem from entirely the wrong perspective. They have been acting as politicians, intent upon freeing their country. What they are facing is not a government *per se*, but a corporate entity, and if they are unable to fight it in a political arena then they must shift their focus to economics instead. In short, the Scots must fight with the enemy's choice of weapons.

The mini government-in-exile has realised that it can weaken the Bondi Corporation's position in Scotland most effectively if it attacks the parent company in America. Calling in every business marker that they can, the group build up a picture of Bondi's international commitments, and then set about undermining them in the most effective way they can - with rumour and innuendo.

The effectiveness of the story was its simplicity. At the prearranged time the telephoning began: the Bondi Corporation was insolvent; bankrupt. Severe mismanagement was the cause.

The rumours spread at once. We started up in each country as the stock markets opened. But rumours aren't quite enough for cautious stockbrokers and wary city editors. They were as used as racing tipsters to deliberate planting of false information. They queried the story and the evidence. The evidence, equally carefully fabricated, was produced for the asking. Then the geographical scale of out misinformation effort began to pay dividends. 'If you don't believe me,' the incredulous brokers and journalists in London were told, check up with your colleagues, your business contacts in Wall Street, among the gnomes of Zurich or Basle or Frankfurt ... Their colleagues and contacts had the same story, and the same evidence. It was too much. Big crashes had happened before and it was safer to stand right clear. And where the public puts up with a lot of rumour before even thinking of changing their political loyalties, when it comes to their pockets, their investments, their profits and their dividends it's a very different matter.

It was frighteningly successful. Within hours, millions had been lopped off the value of Bondi shares in the world's Stock Markets.⁸

⁸ Michael Sinclair, *The Dollar Covenant* (London: Gollancz, 1973); p. 136.

The panic-stricken Bondi executives, realising that their downfall has been orchestrated by dissident Scots, decide that it is time to cut their loses and head home, leaving their puppet Prime Minister to face his fate at the hands of those he earlier deposed. And thus Scotland's future is once again in the hands of her own citizens, though Shea might be seen to be taking something of a pot-shot at that concept when he almost immediately has Mockingham accept an offer to teach at the Harvard Business School, and shows him ready to depart the country in the final two pages of the novel. If the hero of the piece is not willing to stay to shape his country's future, then the reader must surely wonder if that future is likely to be a worthwhile one. But one has equally to admit that the ending allows Shea to maintain his focus on economics, and to relegate the politics which have arisen in the natural course of the plot to their original, secondary level once again.

As noted briefly above, the plot of *The Dollar Covenant* was not wholly out of place in the Britain of the early nineteen seventies. Governments were rising and falling with almost remarkable frequency, unemployment was rising, as was inflation, and the strike-ridden 'Winter of Discontent' saw the introduction of the three-day working week for the first time in British industrial history. And in the face of a very different sort of strike - that made in the North Sea oil fields - and the resultant rise in popularity of the SNP at the polls, devolution, if not outright independence, must have seemed a very likely outcome indeed. By the middle of the nineteen nineties, however, much had changed. Governments were far more stable. Indeed, the same party had been in power at Westminster for seventeen years. The tendency of the working classes to strike over employment conditions was a thing of the past, and inflation was under tight control. Yet, beneath the surface, some factors did remain surprisingly similar. Unemployment might have been at a low in terms of the UK average, but in Scotland and the north of England, it was still high, with the heavy industries which had sustained those areas (such as the shipyards mentioned in the opening pages of *The Dollar Covenant* as a possible source of conflict) under serious threat. Devolution, dismissed as damaging by successive Conservative governments under both Margaret Thatcher and John Major was once

again on the political table, proposed this time by Labour leader John Smith, a Scot and an ardent supporter of what he termed the 'unfinished business' of the last Labour administration. And the SNP, while nowhere near as popular in terms of parliamentary seats as they had been in the mid-seventies, were still a force to be reckoned with, polling close to thirty per cent of the vote in some seats.

And it was into this new political mix that Shea injected his *State of the Nation* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), which he explained as having been 'very loosely based' upon his earlier text.⁹ The similarities are almost too numerous to mention, however, and *State of the Nation* comes across as little more than an updated version of *The Dollar Covenant*. Of course, that is fascinating in itself, for it suggests that very little had changed in the intervening years. We will see in the course of Chapter Four that the years of the Conservative administrations from the late nineteen seventies through to the mid- nineteen nineties were very unproductive in terms of this type of political fiction, producing instead a grimmer, more depressing literary picture of Scotland, such as can be found in the novels of that period published by authors such as Alasdair Gray, whose *Lanark* (1981) is not only a very different type of futuristic imagining but also a cornerstone of Scottish fiction of the nineteen eighties, and Irvine Welsh, whose *Trainspotting* (1993) was to perform a similar role in the successive decade.

Yet, as well as highlighting a stagnation in traditional political aspirations within Scotland during the period in question, Shea's re-working of his nineteen seventies story also shows some interesting changes in style. For example, he completely alters the tone of the piece by doing away with the first person narrative which ran through so much of *The Dollar Covenant*. Everything in *State of the Nation* is in the third person, giving the novel a much less biased feel. The in-depth knowledge which a insider such as Mockingham was able to bring to his narration is replaced with something which we began to see develop in Hurd and Osmond's *Scotch on the Rocks* (1971), and which we will observe in the course of the next chapter to have been advanced under William Paul in the course of his *The Lion Rampant* (1989), namely the use of newspaper extracts. Lacking an

⁹ Michael Shea, *State of the Nation* (London: HarperCollins, 1997); 'Author's Note'.

identifiable, strong leadership figure, the people turn to the media for their information during a crisis of the magnitude recounted in *State of the Nation*. Thus, instead of Mockingham giving details of his plot to cripple the Bondi Corporation, it is a Financial Times reporter who tells of the aftermath of the Scots attack on the Unity Corporation, Bondi's sarcastically named successor in the nineteen nineties. The press article reads as follows:

Shares depressed by London/Wall Street jitters

Shares in Unity Corporation suffered again yesterday, both in London and New York, as market traders and analysts reacted adversely to rumours of the company having overstretched its debt position. Confidence was further undermined by reports of boardroom conflicts between Executive Chairman, James Fulton, and some of his senior colleagues over future strategy. This particularly referred to the controversial move their entire HQ to Scotland, given the current insecure political situation there. Negative reports were reflected in the FTSE 100 Index and in afternoon trading on Wall Street where the Dow Jones Index was also affected.

Further rumours hit Unity's share price in Tokyo and Zurich. This followed suggestions that the company's debt position could only be rectified by massive management restructuring and cost controls, with the closure of several factories in Scotland where overproduction of personal computers has flooded the market. This would, market analysts speculated, undoubtedly lead to the loss of thousands of skilled and semi-skilled jobs in an economy that is already suffering badly.

Shares eventually tumbled twenty pence on the London market to close at 612p, in spite of the group's announcement that all was well and that no significant management restructuring was anticipated. Relations between Mr Fulton and his board were, it was emphasized, excellent. Further losses are nevertheless expected overnight, coupled with a poor response to the new Scottish Government Bonds offer, with investors reluctant to take positions with so much uncertainty in the market.

(Report, *Financial Times*)¹⁰

That sort of supposedly unbiased reporting adds a good deal of strength to Shea's second narrative, adding an authority not present in a single narratorial voice, as well as allowing him to impart a great deal of information in a very short burst. The final note with which the reader was left at the close of *The Dollar Covenant* has also received a slight re-write. Keith Sinclair, who replaced Mockingham

¹⁰ Michael Shea, *State of the Nation* (London: HarperCollins, 1997); pp. 196-7.

as the non-narrating hero in the second novel, also accepted an offer to teach at Harvard. It is for one year, however, with every suggestion that he will return again to take up the political reins.¹¹

Many of the names which might have been seen as stereotypical in his earlier novel have also gone from its rewritten successor. Campbell remains, as does MacDowell, while the un-Scots Constable Wraight has a minor change which brings him back within the national boundaries as Constable Wright. Meanwhile, Michael Mockingham, the narrator for so much of *The Dollar Covenant*, is done away with entirely, and relaced by the more Scottish-sounding Keith Sinclair, as noted above.

And so, Shea has provided this particular genre of Scottish fiction with two ‘firsts’, having been both the first to take on board a post-independence, economically-based plot, and having then been the first to see his creation re-born in print after a considerable period, remarkably unscathed by the intervening passage of time. Though few have chosen to follow Shea’s lead into the fictional field of what we might term economic terrorism, there have been a few exceptions to that rule. The most notable recent novel to employ a similar scenario, though based on this occasion in Ireland, was Mike Lunnan-Wood’s *Dark Rose* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), published just months before Shea’s own re-launch. Lunnan-Wood, more usually associated with ‘shoot-em-up’ novels based around fighter aircraft and battleships, suggested a gradual buy-up of both the Irish countryside and Irish businesses by a secretive group of Middle-Eastern investors, who turn out to be a front organisation for the PLO. Their leaders have decided that, having been denied a homeland of their own in Palestine, they will hold Ireland to ransom, offering to return its sovereign rights to its people when they themselves are treated in a similar manner. Ignoring decades of wariness between the Republic and the United Kingdom, not to mention centuries of mistrust between the citizens of both islands, Lunnan-Wood depicts a joint operation to free Ireland, backed by predominantly British forces, with the help of the world-wide Irish Diaspora, and headed up by the somewhat unbelievable figure of a High Queen of Ireland, produced as the result of some dexterous genealogical footwork

¹¹ Michael Shea, *State of the Nation* (London: HarperCollins, 1997); p. 212.

aimed at holding this fragile alliance together. With some interesting economic insights into the Ireland's Celtic Tiger economy (which some would be keen to see an independent Scotland attempt to emulate in the future), and at a little more than the same length as Shea's two books put together, *Dark Rose* certainly makes for interesting reading. Lunnan-Wood is not, however, a native of Ireland. Born in Africa, educated in Australia and New Zealand, and having spent ten years in the Middle East, he brings a whole wealth of knowledge to his writing, but somehow lacks the native touch which Shea brings effortlessly to bear.

And it may well be that Shea's other 'first', that of being the only author of a novel within this small genre to have his work re-published after a considerable time lapse, may also be short lived. His co-author Andrew Osmond is dead, but Douglas Hurd has confirmed that he is in negotiation with his publishers over a possible re-write of their classic *Scotch on the Rocks*, while William Paul, author of *The Lion Rampant*, is keen to stress that all rights in regard to that novel have reverted to him in the wake of the Robert Maxwell publishing industry collapse, and that he would be interested in updating his own work to take account of ten years worth of political change, particularly within the SNP.¹² And so it seems that Bruce, namesake of Connell's rebel leader in the first futuristic nationalist novel to be published in relation to Scottish politics, may have provided a number of modern authors with the only motto they need to continue in their quest for a future Scotland: "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again!"

¹² Lord Hurd, letter to the author, 25th November, 1998; William Paul, interview with the author, 7th August, 2000.

Chapter Four

'Great men tremble when the lion roars'
The Long Decade: 1979 - 1989

When the Lion of Alba trips a measure,
 The foxes watching take their pleasure.
 But when the Lion reaches Man's Estate,
 Let those watchers watch their gait.

Nigel Tranter, *True Thomas* (London: Hodder and Soughton, 1981)

Best selling Scottish novelist Ian Rankin, in the course of one of his recent 'Inspector Rebus' novels, posited that the Scot has always been 'at his happiest when in denial'.¹ It is certainly tempting to suggest that the word 'denial' might best have summed up the political situation, both factual and fictional, in which Scotland found itself in the decade immediately following the 1979 referendum on devolution. That decade was one which was neatly bracketed by two novels on the future of nationalism and its drive towards independence within Scotland. Both are similarly named, and each is a convenient signpost to real-life developments during the period in question. Before we can look at them, however, it is necessary to survey the political situation which existed as the decade began.

Immediately prior to the referendum it must have looked to the reader of popular fiction as though Douglas Hurd and Andrew Osmond, with their predictions of organised rebellion and razor-wielding gangs terrorising Scotland's inner-cities in pursuit of a radical political settlement, had at least been proved wrong. The first part of Michael Sinclair's plot, involving a bloodless coup in favour of self-determination, would have seemed nearer the mark. Indeed, in the face of record SNP support, fuelled in no small part by an increasing public awareness of Scotland's abundant natural resources in the North Sea's oil and gas fields, James Callaghan's Labour government went so far as to introduce and then steer through Westminster a bill which became law as the Scotland Act, receiving the royal assent on the 31st of July, 1978.² Devolution, be it seen as an end in and of itself, or as a

¹ Ian Rankin, *The Hanging Garden* (London: Orion, 1999); p. 275.

² *The Journal of the House of Lords*, Vol. 211, p. 927.

stepping stone to full independence in the future, had been agreed in principle by the British establishment without a single shot having been fired. It was now up to the people of Scotland themselves to take what was on offer and turn it into a solid political reality. An Edinburgh Assembly, with extensive powers in areas such as health, law, and education, looked finally to have left the pages of fiction, and to loom large upon the political stage.

In fact, the settlement which was proposed within the 1978 Scotland Act, for all that it would have established an Assembly rather than a fully-fledged Parliament, would arguably have seen more powers transferred to local control in Edinburgh than proved to be the case with the settlement which was finally reached twenty years later. Any power not specifically listed in the Scotland Act as being retained at Westminster would automatically have fallen within the remit of the new Scottish government. There was, however, a sting in the tail of the 1979 legislation, because it not only required that the referendum approval on the part of the Scottish electorate for the Act to come into force (as, indeed, was the case with the 1998 legislation which succeeded it), but also specified the level of approval required. At the insistence of a Labour MP, George Cunningham, a unique clause was included in the legislation - for the Scotland Act to come into force, forty per cent or more of all those eligible to vote within Scotland would have to record a 'Yes' vote in the plebiscite to be held on the 1st of March, 1979. And, in the end, while the result translated into a fifty-two per cent 'Yes' vote in conventional electoral terms (i.e. fifty-two per cent of those who voted, rather than those who were *eligible* to do so), this amounted to only thirty-two point nine percent of the Scottish population as a whole in favour of the proposed changes. Though this would have been a narrow victory, it would have been enough to put a government in power at a general election. It was not, however, deemed sufficient to enforce the Act.³

Some of the thirty-point-eight per cent of the population who had voted 'No' had doubtless done so in the belief that devolution would lead to a further surge in SNP popularity - which was already sitting at a record thirty-six per cent in the opinion polls - and to the eventual break-up of the United

³ Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London: Century, 1991); p. 447.

Kingdom. Conversely, others, many nationalists among them, claimed that the legislation did not go far enough, and might derail what many of them saw as an imminent nationalist victory on a far grander scale. And some may well have been convinced by the somewhat odd figure of the Conservative and Unionist Party's ex-Prime Minister, Lord Home, who called for a 'No' vote to allow his own party time to bring forward better devolution proposals under a future Conservative administration. In so doing, he echoed Edward Heath's famous Declaration of Perth, in which he pledged Conservative support for the principle of Scottish devolution. Lynch points out in his *Scotland: A New History* that, at this point, the 'plot began to resemble a Victorian melodrama, with Lord Home cast in the unlikely role of the saviour of Home Rule.⁴' Pun or not, it is arguable that his role is nearer to that of Lord Thorganby in Hurd and Osmond's *Scotch on the Rocks*, which we have already seen may have been based in part of the ex-premier in the first place. However unlikely a figure Home can be said to have presented, in conjunction with others from various and diverse political traditions, he was successful in his immediate aim, possibly more so than he could have hoped. For not only did the Scotland Act fall, but so too, in the wake of the famous 'Winter of Discontent,' did the Callaghan government, with an SNP supported vote of no-confidence toppling the Labour administration by just one vote, and replacing it with the Conservative - and more distinctly Unionist than ever - government of Margaret Thatcher in May of 1979.

This then was the very real political backdrop against which the next two novels to depict an emergent Scottish nation were played out. Both were by young authors, and both were, as previously noted, surprisingly close in title to each other. At a time when the Scottish lion was presumed by many to be, at best asleep, and at worst dead and very nearly forgotten, Ross Laidlaw's *The Lion is Rampant*, and William Paul's *The Lion Rampant*, for all that they had amazingly similar titles, were to take two very different approaches to proving that perception wrong.

For Laidlaw, *The Lion is Rampant* provided him with his 1979 publishing debut. Subtitled 'A Political Thriller', Laidlaw's novel was replete with the combined images of a semi-automatic rifle

⁴ Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London: Century Ltd., 1991); p. 447.

and the traditional lion rampant standard alluded to in the title. Published close on the heels of the referendum vote, it predicted a worrying reaction to a political situation in which there was increasingly little regard for any Scottish political dimension within the United Kingdom. Moreover, the flags which had very literally driven the likes of Colonel Cameron, Hurd and Osmond's hero/anti-hero, to lay down their lives in previous novels still had the power to sway many on the nationalist fringe.

Nor was such a threat entirely unimaginable. Having helped their arch-rivals into power, the SNP were seen to have scuppered any immediate chance of a revival of the devolution debate. The charge of belonging to a party of 'Tartan Tories' might well have driven many of the more radical SNP members into the arms of fringe organisations less committed to constitutional means. Scotland, voting for left-of-centre parties in a Union dominated increasingly by South of England, right-of-centre politicians, was in a political wasteland. Such a condition was certainly registered in the literary fiction of Alasdair Gray, James Kelman, William McIlvanney, and others. While Laidlaw's reading of the political situation did not emerge in real life, it was nonetheless feasible.

Indeed, the pleas of Laidlaw's nationalist characters would not have been out of place in the mouths of many of their left-of-centre counterparts in the Scottish political arena at that time. Take, for example, the speech given by Maclean, the nationalist's second-in-command, at the beginning of the novel. Like his predecessors, Laidlaw uses this device to explain in as short a space as possible, the political background to his novel to those, presumably from outwith Scotland, who might be unaware of its significance. He also allows Maclean to do so as well as any of this predecessors within the genre.

"Scotland is being bled white," he expounded in his West Highland voice, to a rapt audience. "Every week, Westminster closes down more of our factories, another shipyard, axes one more of the few railways still left to us, holds back funds promised to the Chamber. The Chamber of Scotland." Maclean sneered contemptuously, " - a paper parliament with less teeth than a District Sewage Committee. A worthless sop to appease Scotland's demand for nationhood. When we complain, does Westminster listen? Does it think with shame and concern of the growing dole queues in Scotland's cities, of mothers going without so that their barns shall not be hungry? No - the only answer we get from Westminster is yet another cant slogan about 'tightening out belts' or 'all pulling together'." He looked around the circle of intent young faces surrounding him and his

eyes glittered. "I tell you, that Scotland's only hope for the future is to cut free from England. Not partnership, not devolution, not some half-baked federal compromise, but separation - complete, irrevocable. Remember 79! The English in Westminster killed the Assembly even though the greater number of votes were cast in favour of it in Scotland. That was just the start of their campaign to stamp out every vestige of independence and make Scotland a mere province of England. What has Scotland ever gained from England that she should wish to preserve a partnership which has drained away her wealth, her brains and the flower of her sons? What has been the cause of all Scotland's ills since the year seventeen hundred and seven and before? What is it that has prevented Scotland from becoming a free and wealthy nation? I look around at you, my young eagles, and I see the answer in your faces. Our bondage to the English - that is the cancer that is eating away at our nation's life. Am I not right?"⁵

Right or wrong, the stage is set from that point on in Laidlaw's novel, as the charismatic leadership charms its young followers, leading them deeper and deeper into the radical plot, not just to break Scotland away from the rest of the United Kingdom by force of arms if necessary, but also to withdraw from NATO, and to seek assistance from the great post-war enemy Russia should England seek to use similar force to restrain them.

In this Laidlaw is doing little that is new. Indeed, he might simply be picking up the plot where Hurd and Osmond left it eight years earlier as their own radical politician, Macleod, headed off into exile in Russia, having failed in a very similar scheme. Laidlaw does differ from Hurd and Osmond in a number of ways, however. The most radical of these is the way in which he embraces an international flavour which the previous novels have only begun to explore.

Laidlaw does this by introducing as his hero a foreigner, Nicholas Wainwright, who has returned to the land of his distant forefathers from Kenya, intent upon setting up a cattle ranch in the Highlands of Scotland to rival those he has left behind him in Africa's warmer climes. It is Wainwright who, while waiting to clear the bureaucratic red-tape of the Land Use Development Board, finds himself in an Edinburgh cafe listening to Maclean's fiery speech, which in itself begins to make him wonder if he has come to Scotland at the best of times. Having fled radical left-wing land reforms in Kenya, Wainwright cannot help but wonder if he had left himself open to more of the same in the land he thought would provide him with a refuge.

⁵ Ross Laidlaw, *The Lion is Rampant* (Glasgow: Molendinar Press, 1979); pp. 13-14.

And that is Laidlaw's other, very original development, for as Wainwright's fears become a reality, and as he tries to escape with news of the NATO withdrawal plot (about which he hopes to warn the English before it becomes a fact) he not only travels through some of Scotland's traditionally most beautiful landscapes, but comes to hate them with a vengeance. It is almost as if he sees the land itself as an enemy to be battled against in the course of what becomes a noticeably Buchanesque flight south in search of the border. So noticeable are these views, and so greatly does Laidlaw dwell upon them in the course of Wainwright's first person narrative (reminiscent of the narrative style of Sinclair's *The Dollar Covenant*), that the Scots reader at least must wonder after a few chapters if the Kenyan really is the novel's hero, or if the author is playing a trick - as he may well seem to have done by the end of the novel - on his less-than-suspecting readership.

Wainwright is a foreigner looking in, so we might well expect him to arrive in Scotland with some preconceptions which would be tackled during the course of the novel. Hurd and Osmond's MI5 character, Hart, started off by insisting that 'Wogs begin at the Tweed', but that image was soon dispelled as the novel picked up pace, and as an increasing amount of sympathy came to be allotted to the nationalists within the text.⁶ The reverse seems to be true of Laidlaw's character, however. Wainwright sets out to explore Scotland in a hopeful enough frame of mind, if one jaundiced by the delaying tactics he has encountered in Edinburgh. Yet from the point at which he uncovers the nationalist plot and attempts to flee south to warn the government, the Scottish landscape takes on many features of harsh, frontier country, partly in need of civilisation by Wainwright, and partly beyond any civilising effort.

For all that the novel claims on its dustjacket to have 'a strong flavour of John Buchan', none of the love of the landscape which Buchan displays (and which one might expect from Laidlaw, who lists hill walking among his hobbies in the short biographical note appended to the book) is evident. Instead, the land is portrayed as an enemy to be overcome, an almost unnatural force to be battled

⁶ Douglas Hurd & Andrew Osmond, *Scotcl: on the Rocks* (London: Collins, 1971); p. 24.

against. For example, great banks of fog surge 'up out of the glen' to hinder him in the 'utter desolation' of this 'Arctic and inhuman world.⁷ Glens which are renowned the world over for their innate natural beauty represent for Wainwright a frightening 'lunar world of bare boulders and sand', a sinister landscape, which he describes at one point in what the reader is increasingly forced to view as his exaggerated and biased narrative as being 'like a painting of the Mouth of Hell by Bruegel.⁸

Nor is Wainwright's treatment of the inhabitants of this grim landscape any more balanced. Having noted that his opening treatment of the two leading political characters is reasonably balanced, it must then be said that both develop into megalomaniacs as the story unfolds. His military leader, "Daft Davie" Campbell would appear, like his counterpart in Hurd and Osmond's novel, to be a composite of traits found in nationalist fringe leader Major Boothby and soldier turned politician Lt. Colonel "Mad Mitch" Mitchell of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Laidlaw, however, does not show the same restraint as Hurd and Osmond, making "Daft Davie" into something of a caricature, with a broad Scots accent which it is hard to imagine ever having passed through Sandhurst. Lesser nationalist characters are almost always portrayed in stereotypical and derogatory terms, at best being termed as 'natives', and at worst 'murderous nomads', while references to imagined traits such as 'the mad battle fury latent in the Scottish character' can be found throughout the text,⁹ alongside 'deep primitive urges' and 'the stirring of the hunter's instinct', as Wainwright performs before what Laidlaw has him describe, somewhat melodramatically, as 'a backdrop from some grim Wagnerian drama.¹⁰

As these phrases might suggest, there is a certain atavistic tinge to many parts of Wainwright's escape. Fleeing his pursuers, hunter and hunted alike shun anything more technologically advanced

⁷ Ross Laidlaw, *The Lion is Rampant* (Glasgow: Molendinar Press, 1979); pp. 66, 79, and 78 respectively.

⁸ Ross Laidlaw, *The Lion is Rampant* (Glasgow: Molendinar Press, 1979); p. 86.

⁹ Ross Laidlaw, *The Lion is Rampant* (Glasgow: Molendinar Press, 1979); pp. 51, 81, and 72 respectively.

¹⁰ Ross Laidlaw, *The Lion is Rampant* (Glasgow: Molendinar Press, 1979); pp. 48-49, and 79 respectively.

than hunting knives in what becomes a test, not so much of their political ideals, as of their manhood. Indeed, the chase takes on an almost ritual air, as the captor allows his captive a sporting chance to escape at one point before what he fully presumes will be the final kill.

"Dinna fash yersel', English," called Docherty, holstering his revolver. He gave his horrible, mad giggle. "Yon wis jist a warnin'. Ah'm comin' tae get ye wi' this," and he flicked open a cut-throat razor. I ducked as something came spinning through the air to land at my feet. I picked it up. It was a sheath knife - my own Bowie.

Docherty put a hand over his eyes. "Ah'm coontin' tae a hunner', English," he called. "Then Ah'm comin'. Yin ... twa ... three ... fower ..."

I had no choice but to join in Docherty's hideous game of hide and seek. The blow on the head I had given him must have really sent him over the edge, I thought dully. I forced myself to shake off the numb despair that had gripped me and looked wildly round at the encircling crags. At first glance they looked unclimbable. Then I noticed on the far side of the valley, opposite me, a furrow scored by a stream which cascaded down the near-vertical face. It looked as if it might go, as climbers say.

"... sixteen ... seeenteen ..."

As I stumbled off through the boulder field, a sullen anger began to replace my physical fear of Docherty. So I was to mouse to Docherty's cat, was I? I swore to myself I'd make him wish he hadn't, in the event of his closing with me. After his humiliation at my hands the previous evening, he would be obsessed with the need for personal revenge. This crazy duel was his means of reinstating himself in his own eyes and, I suppose, mine.

(Ross Laidlaw, *The Lion is Rampant*; Glasgow: Molendinar Press, 1979; p. 80)

And as Wainwright is forced to take part in what is at once a childish and yet a deadly serious game, Laidlaw may have touched upon one of the reasons for the central role of organised violence in so many of the novels which depict attempts to achieve Scottish independence - the fact that a conflict, however misguided, can reinstate a sense of personal - and national - pride.

As a character, Docherty closely resembles that of Brodie in Hurd and Osmond's *Scotch on the Rocks*. He is the unintelligent, easily provoked muscle backing up the unscrupulous politician for little more than the hold it gives him over others less physically adept than himself. He fails in his duel, falling to his death after being out-thought by Wainwright, who regresses safely south, and informs the British authorities of the nationalist plot about to unfold. Wainwright is then redeemed somewhat as a character by his insistence on returning to Edinburgh to rescue a captive friend,

before bringing the novel to a conclusion with another atavistic battle, this time between himself and maddened political leader Tam Linn, the implements of this particular duel having evolved as far as spears. The conclusion of the novel, however, is likely to throw the reader off balance, and to call for a re-analysis of many of the more obvious interpretations undertaken throughout the preceding one hundred and fifty pages. For within a few short pages the rebel leader, Tam Linn (so-called in an obvious reference to the main character in a ballad of that name, whose trips into the land of Fairie might compare with his modern namesake's far-fetched vision of Scotland, in Wainwright's eyes at least¹¹), of whom we have seen remarkably little in the course of the novel, meets a somewhat gruesome end, falling from the ramparts of Edinburgh Castle, and Laidlaw ties things up with a summary of the trial of the remaining rebel leaders, and a suggestion that the political future is less than certain.

Of Tam Linn no trace was ever found. It is inconceivable to me that he could have survived either the spear wound or the fall from the Half-Moon Bastion; nevertheless one hears occasional rumours that he is in hiding in the Highlands, moving from village to village receiving the same hospitality once accorded to a fugitive Stewart Prince.

If so, it will be no easy task for him to rally Scotland again. With Daft Davie Campbell and the other Republican leaders awaiting trial for High Treason and an English Army of Occupation policing the land, with the Chamber permanently dissolved, Scottish representation at Westminster ended, and the running of the country in the hands of a Minister for Northern Affairs, any attempt to regain independence might seem hopeless. The present situation could be likened to that which obtained in Scotland after the execution of William Wallace - that is, before Bruce came along to fan the embers into a blaze which all the world never dreamed of seeing again.¹²

(Ross Laidlaw, *The Lion is Rampant*; Glasgow: Molendinar Press, 1979; p. 152)

In this light, the reader who has spent the novel coming to dislike Wainwright for his obvious contempt for Scotland and its inhabitants (and to transfer some of that dislike to Laidlaw himself) now has to ask what the author's overall intention might have been. Has he, perhaps, been leading the reader on, building him up to an angry point at which he can legitimately suggest a brighter

¹¹ see 'The Ballad of Tam Linn', rpt. in John MacQueen & Tony Scott (eds), *The Oxford Book of Scottish Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966); pp. 276-282.

¹² Ross Laidlaw, *The Lion is Rampant* (Glasgow: Molendinar Press, 1979); p. 152.

future? If so, it is a final twist in what must then be viewed as a much more original interpretation of the theme of future independence for Scotland within literature.

It might not, however, take a Bruce to follow on from Laidlaw's surprisingly up-beat ending. We have already noted the use of historical names throughout these novels, and the opening of the next in the series returns us to that theme, while at the same time offering us a number of direct links to its predecessor.

Unlike Laidlaw, William Paul's similarly entitled book, *The Lion Rampant* (London: Macdonald, 1989), was his fourth novel. Nor are the almost identical titles the only suggestion that Paul, an Edinburgh-based journalist, was trying to follow directly on from Laidlaw's novel. The fact that he chooses to name his nationalist hero Andrew Wallace, drawing together both historical Guardians of the Realm, Sir William Wallace and Sir Andrew Moray, is significant in that it allows a direct link to Laidlaw's closing passage of ten years prior. And, like Laidlaw, Paul is keen to draw on foreign view points, opening his novel in Australia, and recounting scenes in mainland Europe and America before focusing the action between Edinburgh and the Highlands.

The international feel with which Paul opens is perhaps as much a product of the ten-year gap in publication between his own novel and that of Laidlaw (the contents of which he freely admits to being aware of while writing his own book, leading one to wonder all the more about the almost identical titles of both thrillers¹³). The late nineteen seventies and early nineteen eighties produced some distinctly dark fiction, most notably Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (Edinburgh: 1981), which looked to the future in a far different manner than the authors discussed here were attempting to do, bringing to bear some aspects which were almost science fictional in terms of their style and deployment, and comparative works such as *The Wasp Factory* (London: 1984) by Iain Banks. These were novels which, like Laidlaw's, came out of the early Thatcher years, when Scottish politics itself had taken on a bleak and somewhat isolated air, given that little could be done in the face of such strong

¹³ William Paul, interview with the author, 7th August, 2000.

government opposition at Westminster to any enhancement of Scotland's voice, within the United Kingdom or without. Political hopes did not begin to blossom again until the mid-nineteen eighties, when the Labour Party began to take a new approach, having replaced the old-guard leadership of Michael Foot with that of the younger, more dynamic Neil Kinnock. This led to the Labour Party being seen, not only in Scotland but throughout the UK, as the only viable means of ousting the Conservative government; hopes which were dashed, first in nineteen eighty-three, and then again, in spite of predictions from the pollsters up until the close of voting, in nineteen eighty-seven. So, by the time Paul published *The Lion Rampant* in nineteen eighty-nine, the idea that things needed to change, particularly in Scotland, which had seen fewer and fewer members of the governing party returned in each election, were common, and only the means by which they could best be changed was under discussion, with Labour offering to resurrect devolution in the face of SNP calls for complete independence.¹⁴

Perhaps because of his journalistic background, Paul uses a device which was last seen in Hurd and Osmond's *Scotch on the Rocks*, and which was to feature prominently once again when Michael Shea re-published his novel on future nationalist politics, *State of the Nation*, in nineteen ninety-seven, namely that of the fictional press cutting, to preface each of his chapters. We have already noted that at least one commentator, sympathetic to Hurd, considered the press extracts in his earlier novel to be among the best written sections of the text, and Paul not only employs a similarly punchy style, but, by vastly increasing the frequency of such extracts, allows the reader to keep track of political developments without having them intrude upon the character-based story-line. One might almost say that the novel includes two parallel and complementary streams of consciousness, and that an understanding of the political situation can be gained solely from a reading of the prefaces to each chapter. The best example of this comes from an analysis of the openings and contents of each of the first three chapters of the novel.

The reader finds the following press cutting at the head of chapter one:

¹⁴ For full election results for 1983 and 1987, see the House of Commons website at: <http://www.parliament/commons/lib/fact.htm>

Andrew Wallace, leader of the resurgent Scottish Nationalists, is our undisputed choice as man of the year.

He has wrought something akin to a miracle in his own land by reshaping a previously dormant party and bringing it to within a whisker of gaining real political power. The British Government is at a loss over how to deal with somebody who has taken them on at their own constitutional game and is beating them all ends up.

Who is to say now that Scotland will not secure independence after almost 300 years in the shadow and in the control of its neighbour England? Exiled Scots have been responsible for running countries the world over. Perhaps the time is ripe for them to take charge of their own.

*Time Magazine*¹⁵

The chapter is not, however, directly related to Wallace and his activities at all. Instead, it introduces the reader to Murray Taggart who, for all his Scottish name might suggest, is an Australian long-distance lorry driver and small-time crook. By juxtaposing the Scottish political scene (as seen through American eyes) and an apparently unrelated trip through the Australian outback, Paul adds a good deal of mystery, while imparting a reasonably large amount of information within his first few pages.

Chapter two also has an international flavour, opening with another American cutting.

The British Government has been severely embarrassed by the outstanding success of the Scottish Nationalists in their latest propaganda drive in the US and Canada.

Prime Minister Black is known to be angry with the deference and respect shown to Nationalist leader Andrew Wallace in Washington, despite fears in the White House about the future of American bases in any independent Scotland.

Wallace's popularity is riding at an all-time high and he has a further opportunity to enhance his status as an international statesman when he opens the debate on national self-determination at the United Nations in New York next month.

*International Herald Tribune*¹⁶

¹⁵ William Paul, *The Lion Rampant* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1989);p. 7.

Again, however, the reader who expects to meet Andrew Wallace in the course of this chapter will be disappointed, for Paul uses it to further enhance the suspense, detailing a meeting between Wallace's Highland housekeeper, Mrs MacPherson, and a mysterious - but as yet harmless - foreign visitor passing through Argyll. Again, the combination of international press speculation and local gossip, as supplied by the garrulous Mrs MacPherson, give the reader a considerable amount of information, albeit speculative, before the novel has really had time to launch itself.

Chapter three finally sees a unity established between the press coverage and the main text, as Wallace returns to Scotland from Washington, and the real machinations begin.

Scottish Nationalist Party leader Andrew Wallace flies home tomorrow at the end of a gruelling North American tour, well satisfied with what he has achieved.

The charismatic figure has been a sell-out attraction wherever he has spoken, and has convinced many more thousands of people that his dream to restore independence to one of Europe's oldest nations is within his grasp.

Mr Wallace (47) spent the weekend holding private talks with White House officials. Last night he emerged in public again as the guest of honour at a special performance of *Macbeth*, at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington.

*Washington Post*¹⁷

Wallace is then introduced within the body of the text, and the novel begins to pick up real pace.

Paul's portrayal of the nationalist leader is far more sympathetic than Laidlaw's Tam Linn. Wallace comes across to the reader as a man very much in control, both of himself and of his party. In fact, in many ways, Paul's Andrew Wallace bears a striking similarity to the SNP's Alex Salmond. This

¹⁶ William Paul, *The Lion Rampant* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1989); p. 17.

¹⁷ William Paul, *The Lion Rampant* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1989); p. 25.

may not be surprising, of course, given that Paul was working as a Scottish journalist at the time, and had a professional interest in and knowledge of contemporary political affairs.

It might seem strange, given the similarities mentioned above, and given the reaction within the SNP to previous fictional portrayals such as *Scotch on the Rocks*, that Paul was not publicly criticised by the SNP when *The Lion Rampant* first appeared in print. The answer may, however, lie in those very similarities. For, unlike *Scotch on the Rocks*, with its maverick politicians and its schemes to establish a People's Republic of Scotland, Paul's novel is an almost complimentary portrayal of the Party and its aims, particularly in terms of violence as a means towards eventual independence. One might almost be reading quotes from Alex Salmond when one reads Wallace on the subject. Take, for example, his comments to the United Nations (where his address takes a very different, more confident tone to that given by Mockingham in the course of Sinclair's *The Dollar Covenant* - the only other fictional example of Scottish nationalism featuring in a UN debate), and compare them to recent statements by the SNP leader.

'I need offer no blood-soaked examples to show the nationalist beast at its worst. We have all seen them for ourselves, or read about them. Violence is among the most common expressions of nationalist feeling, but I and my Party repudiate all violence. The untimely death of a single man, woman, or child as a stepping-stone to independence would make the ultimate achievement a poisoned victory. In my opinion, the ends cannot be portrayed as justification for the means.'

'Scotland has no need of violence, terrorism, or freedom-fighting. The will of the people does not have to resort to such methods. The will of the people does not have to be enforced by the barrel of a gun. It can be written down: a million crosses on a million ballot papers. The will of the people can give a clear and unmistakable message: democracy is our means and our method.'¹⁸

(William Paul, *The Lion Rampant*; pp. 198 - 199)

Salmond, in a television interview in the run up to the first Holyrood elections, was at pains to get the same message across.

¹⁸ William Paul, *The Lion Rampant* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1989); pp. 198-199.

Scottish nationalism, I think, has achieved a very positive force. I mean, there isn't a single person this century has lost their life, or even had a serious injury, in arguing for or against the cause of Scottish independence. There are very very few countries in the world, internationally, where a political argument has been conducted with the civility that the SNP has progressed its case through impeccably constitutional methods.”¹⁹

Indeed, one might argue that the only major difference between the fictional Wallace and his real-life counterpart is that Paul had more time to consider Wallace’s words, so that they are a little more eloquent than Salmond’s.

For Paul’s nationalists violence is not an option then. Yet the novel has it in abundance. As Taggart and his colleagues prepare to destabilise the political situation by claiming that Wallace’s young wife has been having an affair behind her older husband’s back, other, even more sinister forces are at work. A bomb goes off in a busy shopping centre, killing a number of passers-by, then another explodes hours later on-board a packed commuter train. When a third bomb explodes just yards away from the Secretary of State for Scotland’s official residence in Edinburgh’s Charlotte Square, public opinion looks to have turned against the nationalists, linked as they are by the mysterious three W’s found scrawled at the blast sights - WWW being the symbol of the ‘We’re With Wallace’ campaign (though it is an abbreviation which has now been overtaken by technological developments). Interestingly, it is the British rather than foreign press on whom Paul now relies for his chapter prefaces, and each one more condemnatory than the last. So it is ‘The Times’ and ‘The Daily Record’ who go after Wallace, with references to ‘the inherent dangers of any break-up of the UK’, and the danger of any such ‘ill advised attempts to challenge the constitutional integrity of the UK.’²⁰

In the end it emerges that the bombs have not been planted by nationalists at all, and that the “We’re With Wallace” group is a cover for a small band of ultra-Unionist politicians and their supporters,

¹⁹ Alex Salmond, speaking on *Newshight* (BBC Television); September 1997.

²⁰ William Paul, *The Lion Rampant* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1989); pp. 156 & 170.

with support from Northern Irish loyalists, and headed by none other than the Prime Minister's son, himself a back bench Conservative MP. Thus it is that when the news breaks of the ring-leader's arrest under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the British establishment is shaken to its very core, and Wallace's success with the Scottish voters is assured.

William Paul's is still a recognisable name in Scottish political commentary, writing as he does for *Scotland on Sunday*, and his knowledge of nationalist politics in Scotland is to be respected. Even today he is frequently seen in the company of senior politicians such as Alex Salmond, and so can be expected to have an almost unique insight into the workings of the SNP and affiliated groups in comparison to other authors considered here. Perhaps strangely then, he is almost as keen as Hurd to distance his own work from reality.²¹

The Party obviously have a difficulty with the violence in these sorts of novels. If folk are depicted as going around bombing and shooting, and are then associated with the Party, they won't want anything to do with that. Speaking personally though, the violence sells. *The Lion Rampant* was the first book I ever got an advance for without having written a word.²²

Referring to the Govan by-election of 1988, Paul is also keen to acknowledge the changes which have taken place since he first published *The Lion Rampant* in nineteen eighty-nine.

I was writing in the aftermath of Govan - that was the event on which things could be said to have turned. Now, of course, that seems a bit dated. If I were going to re-write it for the present day, rather than simply re-publish it as a kind of historical novel, I would want to take more time to look at the rise of the gradualist wing of the Party, as well as bringing in the changes caused by devolution.²³

The overall suggestion, based on his own comments, is that Paul's novel would appear to be a balancing act between the most interesting points from political reality, and the most exciting, and

²¹ William Paul, interview with the author, 7th August, 2000.

²² William Paul, interview with the author, 7th August, 2000.

²³ William Paul, interview with the author, 7th August, 2000.

attention-grabbing, areas of best-selling fiction. The one, it seems, is unlikely to sell without substantial aid from the other.

If Laidlaw's novel was a tale of what can go wrong when one man's simple dreams come up against the politics of a nation, then Paul's centres on what can happen when one man's dream for that nation win through against the odds. In that sense, the two novels are critiques of two very different styles of leadership within nationalism - the emotional, increasingly unstable leadership of Linn and his colleagues (one of whom, we have seen, is even called 'Mad'), and the rational, calculated political reasoning of a leader such as Wallace in Paul's later novel. Interestingly, none of the novels which have treated this theme have done so from a female perspective, seeming to discount in the process the leadership contributions of figures such as Dr. Winnie Ewing, currently SNP President, and Margo Macdonald, a long-term leading light of the fundamentalist wing of the Party. And, just as the *The Lion Rampant* is about a male leader, it is very much about one specific man, because Paul is attempting to touch upon the same point which Mair made before him - the need for a charismatic, yet rational leader if the Scottish Nationalist cause is to flourish in spite of broad Unionist opposition. And like Mair before him, Paul presents the reader with a mature political party, committed to constitutional means, headed by a charismatic leader. Here too, the violence within the novel is orchestrated, not by nationalists keen to advance their cause by any means at their disposal, but by figures within the establishment. Yet Paul goes further than Mair was able to, and does not limit his establishment conspiracy to the British Isles, but brings in American military and business interests as well, echoing Sinclair's *The Dollar Covenant*, and heralding at least one novel yet to be published, Houston's *The Wounded Stone* (Argyll: 1998).

Chapter Five

**‘Will ye no come back again?’
From Romantic Past to Political Future - the Jacobites Return**

Here Stuarts once in triumph reigned,
And laws for Scotland’s weal ordained;
But now unroof’d their palace stands,
Their sceptre fall’n to other hands;
Fallen indeed, and to the earth
Whence groveling reptiles take their birth.
The injured Stuart line is gone,
A race outlandish fills their throne;
An idiot race, to honour lost;
Who know them best despise them most.

- Robert Burns, ‘On seeing the Royal Palace
in ruin’ (1787)

Proudly defiant in his role as a prominent Scottish Unionist, Niall Ferguson, Fellow and Tutor in Modern History at Jesus College, Oxford, maintained in a newspaper article published just prior to the establishment of the new Scottish Parliament that the one thing which Unionists in Scotland had which their Nationalist opponents lacked was a sense of and an appreciation for history.¹ In so far as he expressed a concern that people were far more inclined in the run-up to the Parliament’s opening to look forward, asking ‘what will happen if...?’, rather than looking back to find possible answers in Scotland’s long and often complex history, he may well have had a point. He is wrong to think, however, that *everyone* has taken to looking forward, for a small but select band have indeed looked to history, and while one might not expect an historian of Ferguson’s calibre to approve of the way in which they have couched their ‘what if...?’ questions, he himself recently edited a volume of ‘What if...?’ stories, entitled *Virtual history: alternatives and counterfactuals* (London: Picador, 1997), so that he can hardly dismiss some of the interesting variants on the futuristic Scottish political scene which novelists have imagined.

Ferguson insisted in his essay that the reality of the modern British state began with the Battle of Culloden, and the defeat of the Catholic Highlands at the hands of Hanoverian Britain. Current

¹ Niall Ferguson, ‘The Saturday Essay’, *The Scotsman*, 14th November, 1998; p. 14.

British stability can, he argued, be traced to this event. Whatever one might think of Ferguson's overall tone, his arguments are down-to-earth, and display a pragmatic realism which one might traditionally have associated with the Lowland Scot. The last thing he lays himself open to is a charge of romanticism. In his matter of fact way he insists that, 'the Scottish Question was killed off by the dynamics of the Reformation, the failure of the Stuart attempts at Restoration and finally the economic transformation of the north of Scotland which we refer to as "the Clearances".'²

Yet, if Ferguson is not a romantic, then these other authors who looked back, as he suggests one should, certainly were. And perhaps the most popular theme to emerge from such questioning is one of the very ones Ferguson touches on above, the attempts at Stuart Restoration. Not that his essay leads one to believe that the Jesus College scholar would approve of the outcome of their imaginings, for these authors have posed questions ranging from 'what if things had turned out differently?' to 'what if we were to try again?', each in its own way linking the Stuart cause to that of modern-day Scottish politics.

As far as the current author's research has been able to ascertain, fictional tales involving modern Stuart monarchs in place of their real-life Hanoverian counterparts can be dated to Jacobite historical expert Sir Charles Petrie's short story, 'If: A Jacobite Fantasy', first published in *The Westminster Weekly* of January, 1926, and then re-published for a wider audience in J.C. Squire's anthology, *If It Had Happened Otherwise*, alongside speculative fiction from such distinguished authors and historians as Winston Churchill and A.J.P. Taylor.³ Petrie's tale, relating events directly after a successful advance south from Derby by Bonnie Prince Charlie's forces, and making reference in the process to a current monarch, 'His Most Sacred Majesty King James VI and XI', only whets the appetite, however, in terms of later, longer explorations along similar lines. It is, in fact, surprising that so little has been made of the tale by other authors, particularly given Petrie's position as a scholar of the Jacobite period. Even a key analysis of the impact of the Jacobite movement on

² 'Niall Ferguson, The Saturday Essay', *The Scotsman*, 14th November, 1998; p. 14.

³ J.C. Squire (ed), *If It Had Happened Otherwise* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1932); pp. 219 - 297.

modern Scottish culture such as Murray Pittock's *The invention of Scotland: the Stuart myth and the Scottish identity, 1638 to the present* (London: 1991) seems to pass over this short but fascinating contribution to speculative fiction and national identity without comment.

Another such major publication managed to coincide with a brief convergence of fact and fiction in the summer of 1976, when another Stuart claimant - legitimate or otherwise - made his way to Britain, and caught the imagination - however briefly - of the British media in the process. This 'Young Pretender from Belgium' as *The Scotsman* christened him, was one Michael James Alexander Stewart (his family having reverted to the older Scots spelling of their surname some years previous), and he apparently returned to the land of his ancestors with a Stewart Restoration uppermost in his mind.⁴ Given the timing of his arrival, and the publicity it received, at least in the Scottish press, it is difficult to imagine that this Prince Michael of Albany, as he styled himself, was not a highly significant influence upon the plot of Lady Antonia Fraser's second Jemima Shaw mystery, *The Wild Island* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978).

In a contemporary Highland setting, *The Wild Island* saw the heroine (indeed, to date the only such female lead in a genre which has preferred to relegate women to subservient roles) pitting her wits against a family of predominantly virile young men whose surname, Beauregard, only momentarily hides their Stuart background, introduced as the two leading members are as Charles Edward and Henry Benedict respectively.⁵ Following a modernised Jacobite script, it emerges that this modern Henry may be responsible for attempts to disinherit his late brother's children (a claim made in relation to his more historically-based predecessor by Michael Stewart and others), and it is while attempting to unravel the complex web of family loyalties and disloyalties which lie at the heart of the 'mystery' section of the novel that Shaw stumbles into areas of more immediate interest to the current study, namely a covert group of neo-Jacobites calling themselves the Red Rose.

⁴ Anon., 'Young Pretender from Belgium', *The Scotsman*, 20th August, 1976.

⁵ Bonnie Prince Charlie was more properly Charles Edward Stuart, while his younger brother, later titular Cardinal Duke of York, was christened Henry Benedict Stuart.

This mixed band of dreamy-eyed romantics and steely-eyed realists, their distinct nationalist agendas rubbing alongside one another for the time being, are set upon replacing the Hanoverian monarch with one of their own, namely Clementina, supposed heir to the Stewart throne. And insofar as it goes, *The Wild Island* has a good deal in common with other novels which imagine a break in the Union. There is, for example, a good deal of talk about ‘the land’ and the inheritance of obligation, and while there are admittedly no long and detailed political speeches by nationalists or their unionist counterparts, we do get a hint of something similar in pithy lines such as those of Aeneas to Jemima on her capture.

“All the lairds of Scotland shall hang one day from the battlements when the Red Rose reigns over Scotland. And the Scottish people shall enjoy the freedom of their own land, with no lairds to harry them from their crofts.”⁶

We also see a stereotypical character from the other novels under discussion, this time in the form of Ossian, the scheming politician who attempts to maintain an air of constitutional commitment while secretly organising the Red Rose into a fighting force, and whose name immediately conjures up the accusations of fraud leveled at James Macpherson when he published his Ossianic fragments in the eighteenth century.⁷ While the picture the reader is left with is not one to stand close scrutiny alongside others such as Hurd and Osmond’s Mackie, or even Laidlaw’s Tam Linn, whose name also draws on an older literary romance, Ossian nonetheless deserves to be included towards the bottom of their roll.

Yet, for all its attempts to put forward a political scenario, *The Wild Island* is, first and foremost, what its sub-title proclaims it to be - a mystery novel. Politics plays a secondary, and often quite improbable role. The reader can never really claim to have cause to fear for the future of a Union

⁶ Lady Antonia Fraser, *Wild Island* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1978); p. 123.

⁷ see Howard Gaskill, *The Poems of Ossian, and related works* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1996), as well as Fiona Stafford, *The sublime savage: a study of James Macpherson and the poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1988).

harried by such quaint and outmoded figures as the Beauregards and their followers, given that Fraser's is a reasonably whimsical story, suited to the lighter genre in which it was published.

This is not to suggest, however, that Jacobite associated threats can always be treated with such disdain, for arguably the most detailed and believable novel to deal with the issue of a future Scottish breakaway comes from the very stable which housed Petrie and Fraser, though it brings with it a gritty realism which was notably lacking in the work of both. Terry Houston's *The Wounded Stone* was published in 1998, to equal public acclaim and condemnation, with several of the twists and turns of its plot line making front-page news in Scotland's broadsheets.⁸ At four hundred and sixty-two pages, Houston's is the longest novel to deal with future independence to date. It is a classic example of the interaction between two distinct historical periods, with none of the anachronistic characters which were necessary to hold Fraser's mystery together. The novel opens in the Highlands of Scotland, in May 1747, with a clansman and his daughter looking out over the physical landscape surrounding Loch Arkaig, and the mental landscape of a country still reeling after the defeat of the clans at Culloden Moor, which Ferguson used as the starting point of British stability and prosperity.

Pulling his plaid more tightly around him against the hut's dankness he resumed his seat, scratched absently at the itch at his groin, and not for the first time that long, sombre day thought about the brave men of Scotland still being hunted like stags on the hills behind him by Cumberland's butchers. The young Prince, though, was safe in France, thanks be to God. A year might have passed since Culloden, but there were brave hearts still in the land. There would be another day ... the money to finance a second rising was tantalisingly close by. In the waters of Loch Arkaig before him lay a King's ransom in French gold. A fortune to rally a new army to the Royal standard.⁹

Houston's opening style is either less than polished, or he is intentionally employing clichés such as the 'stags on the hill' (and the conceivably tongue-in-cheek reference to 'brave hearts', coming as the novel does in the wake of Hollywood's *Braveheart*) to distance the old fashioned romantic ideas

⁸ Louise Anderson, 'I'm not anti-monarchy says author who killed Queen', *The Scotsman*, 25th May, 1998; p. 1.

⁹ Terry Houston, *The Wounded Stone* (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998); pp. 9-10.

of the eighteenth and nineteenth Jacobite set from the modern era of mercenary soldiers and casual carnage to which he is about to introduce his readers. Of course, history (as opposed to the romance which is sometimes allowed to masquerade in its place) tells us that, while Cluny's Gold - as the Jacobite's reputedly lost treasure-trove came to be known - may well have had a basis in fact, the second rising which it might have funded never came to pass. Or, as Houston would have the reader believe, it has not *yet* come to pass, for having introduced the treasure and its guardians in their 1747 setting he then jumps forward two hundred and thirty years to 1977 (and again we should note the proximity to the return to Scotland of a publicised Stewart claimant). It is not Scotland that we see in Houston's nineteen-seventies section, however, but Angola, where, in a brief shift into literary territory more often associated with authors such as Frederick Forsyth, the reader is introduced to two young Scots, Duncan MacLennan and Jamie Stuart, who are serving - as many of their counterparts may have done before them in the wake of Culloden - as mercenaries in another country's conflict. Oddly, given their surnames, it is MacLennan who holds the key to the secret location of Cluny's Gold, and who, dying of injuries sustained during a particularly heavy bout of fighting, passes the knowledge to Stuart, along with details of the clandestine society which was formed to protect the treasure and its purpose centuries before. Thus the stage is set for Stuart's return to Scotland, and his assumption of a position as one of the five Guardians pledged to safeguard the Jacobite legacy.

Having introduced the history behind his plot, Houston's novel then gathers a rollercoasting momentum which it successfully, if somewhat improbably, maintains through to its conclusion. We move forward to a point just a couple of years in the future, wherein the Scottish Parliament has seen two years of legislative autonomy under the 1998/9 devolution settlement, and the country is beginning to come to terms with the reality of a measure of self-government under a New Scottish Labour Party administration. At this point the reader is introduced to Father Vincent Mulholland, who sits by his mother's hospital bed as she makes her last confession, and tells him that the father he had long thought dead had in fact lived, leaving them to fend for themselves when Vincent was only a young child. Reeling from this revelation, Mulholland is leaving the hospital when a batch of

letter bombs, posted through the mailbox in the hospital car park, explode prematurely, ripping though buildings and people alike, and turn Mulholland's ordered life upon its head.

Rushing to comfort a young man who has lost both hands in the blast, Mulholland inadvertently gets his fingerprints on the dying man's jacket, a fact which comes to light when the police formally identify the man as the planter of the letter bombs. This innocent mistake on the priest's part is further compounded when the same police officers, somewhat heavy handedly, arrive to take the man's mother in for questioning, only to find Mulholland at her flat, offering what comfort he can. Sure that he must somehow be involved, they take him in for questioning as well, in the face of public demands for a swift resolution to the case.

The police are not the only interested party looking into Mulholland's background, though. The Westminster government have involved MI5 in the case, and they in turn send an undercover operative north with instructions to kill Jamie Stuart, whom they now know to be the mastermind behind Alba 2000, the group responsible for the bomb blast. A check of Mulholland's birth certificate reveals that his father was listed as one James Stuart, and the hitman, convinced that the priest must be involved in his father's organisation at a senior level, sets about trying to kill Mulholland as well.

At this stage, it would be no exaggeration to say that the novel thrives upon confusion, in both nationalist and unionist camps alike. Not only does Houston present this chaos to his readers, he seems to positively revel in it. He summarises many of its strands in a succinct and humorous passage a little before the half way mark in the novel.

The inquiry seemed to grow arms and legs at will. It had started out as a murder investigation of five innocents killed in a bomb blast that had gone wrong, plus a dead bomber. Inside of a week, it had sprouted a terrorist execution, a priest and a cop murdered, and a hitman on the trail of another priest - not to mention a minor street riot, a full-blown constitutional crisis, and a politician trying to overthrow the government whom unknown to the detective, very shortly might be added to his list of victims.¹⁰

¹⁰ Terry Houston, *The Wounded Stone* (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998); p. 184.

The constitutional crisis to which Houston refers comes about when the Scottish Parliament refuses, by only a few votes, to come out and condemn the terrorists for their actions. The mainstream parties, Labour, the SNP, the Liberals and Conservatives, all agree to bury their differences at an official level, but rebels in the Labour and SNP camps, combined with MSPs from Militant Scotland, and a number of independents, defeat the motion, forcing the Scottish Prime Minister (sic) to consider desperate measures, including an invitation to the Queen to come north to address the Parliament. This is meant to be nothing more than a ploy to bring at least some of his own back bench troops behind him again, but it is one which backfires dramatically on the Prime Minister in short order. (Other than his mistake in referring to the First Minister as the Prime Minister - a debate on the subject of which was still underway when *The Wounded Stone* was published - Houson employs the new terminology of devolution to good effect, seemingly quite at home with MSPs and their roles).

This was one of the twists in Houston's somewhat convoluted plot which caught the interest of the press, and led to at least one front-page article in a Scottish broadsheet in the week of *The Wounded Stone*'s publication. For the Queen hosts a garden party at Holyrood to celebrate her visit, and, in their hurry to compile a guest list at short notice, no one realises that one of the disabled charity volunteers invited to attend is a member of the very Alba 2000 active service unit which police are hunting in relation to the hospital bomb. Mary Anderson, a wheelchair-bound thalidomide victim whose doctors have just diagnosed her condition as terminal decides to act without the knowledge of Alba 2000's leaders, and, through Glasgow gangland contacts, has her electric wheelchair converted into a mobile bomb which she then detonates within feet of the royal party, killing herself and the Queen in the process.

Press reaction to this melodramatic fictional regicide, coupled to suggestions earlier in the text that Tony Blair had died some months prior to the setting of the novel as the result of brain aneurysm, was far from sympathetic, with Houston being accused of anti-monarchical leanings, a charge which

he denied, simply stating that the plot ‘called out for a cataclysmic event.’¹¹ Houston did receive backing elsewhere, though. The most notable praise came from Douglas Gifford in the course of his regular review column in *Books in Scotland*, where he observed that, in spite of a somewhat doubtful grasp of modern political complexities, the novel showed ‘real style’ in the course of its ‘witty and ironic speculation regarding Scotland’s future’.¹²

Anderson’s decision to cross Glasgow to visit Father Mulholland for confession before she goes to the party is the final straw for intelligence and police officers alike who, as convinced now as the hitman is of Mulholland’s complicity, set out to arrest him, only to have their catch slip the net through the good offices of a local rogue who owes the priest a favour. Increasingly worldly-wise, Mulholland decides that the only answer to his predicament is to seek out his father and to confront him in the hope that he will give himself up to the authorities, and thereby reinstate his son’s good name.

After a spell spent in hiding in the grounds of a local convent, playing the part of their handyman to allay any suspicions, the priest sets out to walk the West Highland Way, assured by his friendly local contacts in the criminal world that Alba 2000 have agreed to send someone to meet him on his way north, someone who can take him to meet the much sought after Jamie Stuart. It is interesting to compare Mulholland’s track north with the southerly flight of Nicholas Wainwright in Laidlaw’s *The Lion is Rampant*. Both men are on the run in scenes reminiscent of Stevenson’s *Kidnapped* or Buchan’s *39 Steps*, and both are being pursued, though Mulholland is not aware that the hitman, Thomas O’Hare, is following close behind him in the hope that the son will lead him to the father’s lair, where both can be eliminated in one neat operation. O’Hare is not in the same class as Laidlaw’s Docherty, or Hurd and Osmond’s Brodie, for this is no bestial creature set upon violence for its own sake. Instead Houston presents a dangerously intelligent hunter, whose services have been purchased not by the nationalists as in previous scenarios, but by sinister underworld figures

¹¹ Terry Houston, quoted in ‘I’m not anti-monarchy says author who killed Queen’, *The Scotsman*, 25th May, 1998; p. 1.

¹² Douglas Gifford, ‘Matters of Life and Death’, *Books in Scotland* (Winter, 1998); p. 11.

within the machinery of government. Nor is Mulholland labouring under the technological limitations which Laidlaw imposes upon his own hero. Instead we have electric ski lifts and high-powered rifles in a very modern fight which sees Houston's priest running north, back to his roots, rather than south towards England, as his fictional predecessors have done. Interesting too to note that, while Houston's rebel leaders spend a good deal of time discussing the land as an entity to be fought for, there is no suggestion of it displaying the sort of animate characteristics found in Laidlaw's earlier novel. The landscape of mountain trails and empty glens neither helps nor hinders pursuer and pursuant, but merely exists as a harsh but natural backdrop to their battle.

And it is as he heads north towards his biological and cultural roots that Houston inserts another of his over-the-top twists, for not only is Mulholland met by Maria Donatello, his father's long-time companion, but, having saved her in his struggle with O'Hare, the two fall in love. This allows Houston to carry on with a sub-theme which has been present throughout the novel, if only at a discrete level hitherto, namely the problems faced when religion and politics intermingle. By casting his central protagonist as a Roman Catholic priest (a role which Houston seems more capable of depicting with sincerity than he does later with the somewhat improbable love triangle of Mulholland, Stewart and Donatello), Houston has already allowed us to view some of the latent bigotry present in modern Scottish society, for example when Inspector Aitken suggests that, if it were up to him, he would have "put that priest inside and thrown away the key." The fact that the man he is referring to is primarily 'that priest', rather than 'that terrorist', or 'that criminal', combined with references to 'your guys' and 'some of your lot', only add to the sense of cultural division and exclusion.¹³ The underlying assumption on Aitken's part is obvious - Catholics, and particularly Catholic priests, can be presumed to be involved in crimes of sedition. It is, after all, the assumption which still underpins a good deal of British legislation to this day, including the Act of Settlement, which was recently in the news again for that very reason.¹⁴ Houston's answer to any such charge is equally clear. Mulholland is not involved, and when he does become embroiled in Alba 2000's plans towards the end of the book it is as an individual. As a priest he has by that point

¹³ Houston, *The Wounded Stone*; p. 100.

¹⁴ see, for example, James MacMillan's Edinburgh Fringe Lecture, published in T.M. Devine, *Scotland's Shame?* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2000), and subsequent media coverage.

broken several of his vows, having slept with Maria as well as having killed O'Hare, albeit in self-defence. And this, along with the broader republican themes which run through the novel, highlights one very positive aspect of this type of fiction, seen at its broadest when Hurd and Osmond transferred their own creation onto film: topics which might be left quietly to one side by both the press and politicians (such as the true extent of sectarianism in Scotland, or the likelihood of an independent Scotland becoming a republic) can be voiced much more freely within the confines of fiction than seems possible elsewhere.

Arriving safely at Thunder Bay, Alba 2000's secret base in Argyll, Mulholland is drawn in to the group's plan for a spectacular publicity stunt to see them through to the arrival of the French arms consignment arranged some weeks earlier between Stuart and the French Foreign Minister (again, it is interesting to note that the rebels, while dealing with France, are not in negotiation with the Basque separatists, or the French Communist Party, as was suggested in previous novels, but are talking to a major multi-national company and to the French Government itself, from whom they receive assurances of national recognition as soon as their planned coup is underway). Given that the Stone of Destiny is due to be removed from Edinburgh Castle and taken south for the new king's coronation, the Guardians decide to risk all in an attack on the castle, securing the stone and the Honours of Scotland, taking the former into their own safe keeping and hiding the latter, just as they were hidden from other eyes for a hundred years after the Union of the Crowns, and again during the Second World War.

Using subterfuge to great effect, the band of some thirty or so rebels, whose number include Mulholland by this stage, unable as he is to allow Maria to undertake such an operation without him, manage to storm the castle, securing not only their objectives, but also one hundred and thirty hostages in the form of tourists, staff, and army personnel. They are surrounded, however, and under constant sniper fire from British forces. For short term respite a small group of Alba 2000 troops manage to haul up Mons Meg, of all things, from the Castle armoury, and, with a combination of ingenuity and plastic explosives, succeed in firing one final shot from the old canon, taking the top off of the Scott Monument, memorial to that most popular of unionist writers Sir Walter Scott, from

which some of the government forces are operating, and in so doing, destroying a piece of architecture dedicated to one of Scotland's most Union-minded of historical figures.

With no hope of escape, and in the knowledge that they can survive one more night at most before the castle is stormed in force, the Alba 2000 members decide to reject pleas for their surrender, and to hold out for as long as they can, forcing the government to pay as heavy a price as possible in terms of human casualties for their eventual defeat. Unbeknown to the rebels, however, a coalition has formed at Westminster between London based SNP, Scottish Labour, and Scottish Liberal MPs, all of whom have walked out of the Parliament, and are heading north to help to liberate those whom the public have come to consider freedom fighters rather than terrorists. This cross-party group arrives the next morning, backed by tens of thousands of ordinary people, and, breaching the police barriers around the castle, allows the rebels to take cover within their ranks and to flee.

It then simply remains for Houston to get his fictional heroes out of the country, which he does in style, causing the Skye road bridge to be destroyed in the process, stranding Aitken and his police colleagues on one side while Stuart, Mulholland, and Donatello take refuge in the French submarine which waits off the coast of the island, just as another French vessel waited for another Stuart passenger some two hundred and fifty years earlier, from whence their escape is complete (and reminiscent of the submarine which Hurd and Osmond also employed to get their rebel leaders to safety in *Scotch on the Rocks*). This also allows Houston to lighten the mood considerably, with a topical quip from one of the local police constables to Aitken when the latter asks about the chances of a ferry to allow him to continue his pursuit to the island,

“Get me a boat,” said Aitken.

The young constable, clearly out of his depth, asked, “Sir?”

“A ferry. I want a ferry to take me over to Skye.”

The constable was gone for nearly an hour. When he returned it was to report failure. “There’s no-one who will take you across, sir.”

“Indeed. Why not?”

The constable hesitated, then said, “They sent me off with a flea in my ear,

sir. They're saying that a man who brought down the Skye bridge can't be all bad."

Aitken thought about that for a minute. The suspicion of a smile trembled on his lips. "That will be all, constable," he said softly.¹⁵

And that very nearly is all as far as Houston is concerned, but for a two page epilogue in which we see travelers from across the globe returning to celebrate Scotland's first Independence Day at some point in the not too distant future, with smiles all around.

It is those smiles, which Houston leaves the reader contemplating, which seem to sum up the most worrying aspect of what was otherwise an interesting and enjoyable novel, if one whose plot called for a suspension of disbelief from time to time, and which was inclined to fall down in terms of the style of prose which it employed. For all that there has been violence galore throughout his text, Houston seems intent on ignoring any consequences, preferring to fall back on a 'happily ever after' ending, strangely at odds with the realism which he seemed to be aiming at in those sections of the novel which were based in Scotland's run-down, urban centres. That sense of realism may not have been achieved in anything like the way in which it has been by other authors, such as William McIlvanney in *Docherty* (London: 1975), or Alasdair Gray in *Lanark* (Edinburgh: 1981) and *1982 Janine* (London: 1984), but then it has to be recalled that these were novels which dealt primarily with urban deprivation, both mental and physical, while this would appear to be only one of a number of aspects which Houston is intent upon covering in a relatively short space. (It is also worth noting that MacIlvanney was one of the reviewers quoted on the novel's dustcover in very favourable terms.) And it may be that same need to condense his storyline which resulted in nothing more being said about the love triangle of Stuart, Mulholland, and Donatello. Indeed, nothing is said about repercussions for any of the terrorists. And the interesting sectarian points which Houston has been able to raise by casting his main protagonist as a Roman Catholic priest are left unaddressed. Not only is there no suggestion of a Loyalist backlash within what is a predominantly Presbyterian

¹⁵ Terry Houston, *The Wounded Stone* (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998); p. 459.

country, but the only character to have shown any noticeably anti-Catholic leanings is seen smiling in sympathy with the rebels as they make good their escape.

Perhaps this odd insistence on a happy ending for all his characters, and a symbolic coming together of all Scotland behind the rebel cause (as shown by the thousands who turn out to help the politicians to release the Alba 2000 members from the castle), is also linked to Houston's attempts throughout the text to treat all of his characters with an equal amount of sympathy. No one is stigmatised by the author, with each individual's viewpoint being explored from perspectives which are portrayed as eminently reasonable to that individual at that time. Whether the violence is inspired by nationalism or by overly protective attitude towards the status quo, Houston seems keen to present his characters motivation in the light in which they see it themselves. Take, for example, the eminently reasonable explanation Jamie Stuart gives to Cameron Cosgrove for the existence of Alba 2000.

"Every sane person hates violence." Jamie told him. "But sometimes the only way to change a wrongful system of oppressive government is to destroy it by force of arms. The English will never relinquish their grip on Scotland without bloodshed."

"Yes, but surely Scotland has only to ask for its freedom? It's all there in the Treaty of Union. It has the right to break away, to become an independent nation if that's what the people want."

Jamie chuckled mirthlessly. "Remember Henry Ford? You can have any colour of automobile you want so long as it's black? With us it's: Scotland can have any future it wants, so long as it's within the Union. It doesn't matter which English political party is in power, the offer is always the same. Meanwhile England's cultural and economic imperialism rampages on. Because of it we've been reduced to a 'monkey see, monkey do' bit part economy. They've made us the white coolies of Europe, and we are powerless to stop it unless we get independence ..."

"Yes, but if the people ..."

Impatiently Jamie cut him off. "When in history did England give up any of its dominions without spilling blood? You can count them on the fingers of one hand - usually because they were bullied out of it by someone bigger and stronger, like China over Hong Kong. Elsewhere, the rest of the countries have had to resort to force to kick out the UK."

"So, what you're saying is there's no alternative to violent revolution to achieve independence?"

"There is an inevitability about it. Self-determination has to be fought for. The human race is territorial by nature. A nation born without bloodshed is a freak of history. You're studying history; you should know that. Violence

works.”¹⁶

This is one of the most detailed speeches given in favour of the nationalist cause within the novel, but, unlike previous novelists, Houston does not feel the need to have it presented in front of a wide audience. Here it is simply a quiet, reasonable conversation between two men, and it is somehow all the stronger for that distinction. Cameron is not convinced through peer pressure, or as a result of some kind of mass mesmerism. It is the quiet insistence of one individual, intense yet personal, which talks him around, and the result is much more thought provoking, lacking as it does any reference to peer pressure or a mob culture, as a result. The speech also seems to be suggesting that it is the English who are the source of Scotland's problems, rather than Unionist Scots, and this sort of assumption (much like the assumption that all of Scotland was 'out' for Charles Edward in 1745, and faced a wholly English occupying force) might well be accepted more readily by a romantic visitor such as Cameron than it would by a more pragmatic native.

Houston's adaptations to the way in which his primary characters address their audiences from a political perspective should not be allowed to detract from the fact that his novel has many of the features which have been noted as distinguishing its predecessors, as discussed in previous chapters of this thesis. It *does* have the political speeches which have marked all the novels from Connell on down; it continues to develop the love/family interest begun with some sarcasm by Dand and continued by Muir and Paul; and it is just as fixated with the persona of the land as Laidlaw was, for all that its conclusions are almost diametrically opposed to those expressed by Laidlaw's characters. Moreover, it builds upon suggestions that big business will come to play an increasingly prominent role in the future of nationalism, though again, Houston takes a positive tack when compared to earlier authors such as Shea and his Irish-based counterpart, Mike Lunnon-Woods.

The Wounded Stone stands out from these earlier novels, firstly because of its current position. It is always going to be difficult to ignore the most recent novel in a field such as this one, simply

¹⁶ Terry Houston, *The Wounded Stone* (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998); p. 293.

because the politics therein are likely to bear the closest resemblance to those presently in operation. Secondly, the very fact that Houston has been able to take threads which have run through many if not all of the novels to treat this theme since the 1930s, and yet is still able to come up with stunningly original twists in his plot - many of them doubtless having been engineered to make the novel stand out in the reader's memory - is of note in and of itself. Finally, coming as it did just a few months before the opening of the Scottish Parliament, it is not only noteworthy for its many predictions concerning the first years of that body's existence, but also points the way for futuristic political novels to come. Many might have presumed that the establishment of a Parliament in Edinburgh would sound the death knell for novels of this sort, but Houston, along with authors such as Ian Rankin, who is said to be working on a number of post-devolution Inspector Rebus novels to follow on from his recent *Set in Darkness* (London: 2000), would seem to scotch such speculation, proving that there is indeed a future for them, though stressing in the process the need for new and innovative plot lines, and for an in depth knowledge of current politics among their authors.

And it is perhaps true that, for authors of political fiction well versed in the real-life politics which they attempt to mirror, fact and fiction merge more often than some of us might think - even the historical facts of Niall Ferguson and the seemingly far-fetched fiction of Terry Houston. Both took Culloden Moor as their starting point, and both came to startlingly different conclusions, as the basis of one man's stability became the basis for another's fictional rebellion. History will judge which was closest to the truth, but it is interesting to note one final convergence of fact and fiction, one which draws both Fraser's *The Wild Island* and Houston's *The Wounded Stone* into the real world of Scottish politics. Both novels, after all, rely very heavily on the imagery of the rose as a symbol of Jacobite sympathy. Houston even has the rebel MPs who walk out of Westminster wearing white roses in their button holes as they do so. Such symbolism surely has no place in the world of modern politics though, but is merely a fictional device, a romantic indulgence? Perhaps. It is nonetheless a piece of symbolism in which the majority of the Scottish National Party's thirty-five MSPs indulged when the Queen opened the Scottish Parliament for the first time on the 1st of July, 1999. White roses, taken by some to be a Jacobite symbol, were more prevalent than kilts on that occasion, so that one might come to the conclusion that Scotland's politicians were intent on the business of

governing the everyday events of nation, but were keen to do so looking back, as Niall Ferguson would have had them do, to Scotland's past in the process.

Conclusion

'There's an end to an auld song.'

**- The Earl of Seaforth, on the
signing of the Treaty of Union**

For all that an increasing number of politicians such as Jeffrey Archer , Nigel West , and Julian Critchley have made their mark in the world of fiction with their own novels based on the British political system, politics and fiction remain two distinct and separate spheres of our national life.¹ If one wanted to see this distinction in action in a Scottish setting, one need look no further than the work of Alasdair Gray, acclaimed author of *1982 Janine* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984). For all that Gray is willing to offer his readers a critique of a particular kind of nationalist in nineteen-eighties Scotland within this type of novel, he reserves his more detailed political analysis for publications of a non-fictional nature, such as his *Why Scots should rule Scotland* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1992; republished, 1997).

Perhaps that is partially because political thrillers would appear to have only one foot in reality, while the other is firmly in the world of fiction, and of publishing expedience. We have seen throughout this thesis, for example, that, while the novels under consideration do provide an interesting commentary on the political climates in which they were written, the worlds which they depict bear only a passing resemblance to the real one, and their predictions for the future have, as yet, been proven to be unfounded.

The serious author might therefore discard this genre, preferring to concentrate either on politics or on fiction, rather than a mix of the two. Nevertheless, the number of thrillers

¹ see, for example, Jeffrey Archer, *First Among Equals* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984); Nigel West, *Murder in the Commons* (London: Macmillan, 1992), and Julian Critchley, *Floating Voter* (London: Hutchison, 1992)

to consider this particular political question in a relatively short space of time, and the staying-power of certain of those novels, suggests that it is a combination which the reading public have an interest in.

This thesis began with the suggestion that the novels in question might provide the reader with some themes common to the whole, and those threads, running from the first novel in the nineteen thirties through to the most recent in the late nineteen nineties, are indeed there to be seen, above and beyond the obvious interest in the independence movement in Scotland. The most striking is the inclusion of violence in each of the texts discussed. So far as can be ascertained, no novel has been published around the theme of Scotland gaining and maintaining her independence through purely democratic means. From the original transfer of Dublin's Easter Rising to Edinburgh in Connell's *David Go Back*, through counter-revolutions by Reunionists, and modern Jacobite rebellions, each novel in the series includes some form of organised violence. And this despite Scotland's real-life terrorists amounting to little more than a disgruntled handful of ex-SNP members and some spray-paint hangers-on. The reasons for the violence in these novels would seem to differ from author to author. Peripheral authors such as Fraser, who come to the genre with no fixed political opinions, seem to see violence as a tool with which to sell their work to a thrill-seeking readership. Unionists of Hurd and Dand's ilk would appear to be keen to warn their readership of the threat which they consider nationalism to pose, both to the Union itself, and to life and limb within it. And the authors who show more pro-nationalist leanings, such as Mair and Houston, would seem to fall somewhere between the two, having been forced to keep their material as well-paced and interesting as their Unionist counterparts, and so falling into the trap of being seen to have linked the very aims they appear to be supporting with violence and terror. Some, Mair and Paul in particular, have attempted to get around this by attributing the violence to the British Establishment and its adherents, but there is still the suggestion within their work that violence will in turn be required on the part of the nationalists if these repressive forces are ever to be wholly defeated.

And then there is the thread which runs through all the novels, and upon which none of the authors, unionist, nationalist, or indifferent, seem to disagree to any great degree - the need for some kind of radical change of leadership style if the nationalists are ever to succeed in their primary objective. From Connell's Thomas Bruce, with his Oxford don-like accent and his similarity to the real-life Patrick Pearse, through Mair's self-made businessman-turned-politician, right up to Houston's cross between a tartan-clad warrior fresh from Drumossie Moor and a modern-day mercenary with political pretensions, leadership, its possible shape, or its complete lack, has been at the heart of each of the thrillers under discussion.

In the novels we have identified as having been written by pro-unionist authors, the men who appear to be the leaders are often revealed to be little more than puppets, with the puppet masters hiding in the background until the various heroes uncover their sinister plots. Thus Hurd and Osmond's Mackie is revealed as the driving force behind the terrorist uprising on the west-coast, but the man who was thought to have been in charge, Colonel Cameron, turns out to have been a patriotic dupe, unaware of Mackie's Communist credentials. Dand's "Boss" is not really driven by nationalist fervour, but is secretly intent on achieving independence so that he can bring in his own form of prohibition. And Laidlaw's Tam Linn, intent upon his own far-fetched vision of a Scotland which passed into the mists of time centuries ago, if it ever existed at all, is, like Cameron before him, being manipulated by a modern left-wing politician who has his own pro-Russian agenda to fulfil. Laidlaw's politics are unknown, but we have seen that Dand was a self-acknowledged unionist, while Hurd was a leading member of one of the most pro-Union administrations to have governed Britain in the twentieth century. For these authors then, nationalism is not only dangerous and subversive, but it is also inherently left-wing, and, as such, is to be decried at all costs. Their novels, for all that they attempt to dismiss them as simple pieces of light entertainment, are a ready vehicle for such condemnation. Meanwhile the more pro-nationalist authors such as Mair, Paul,

and Houston, agree that leadership is a problem, but not because there is a hidden agenda to nationalism. Instead, they see the need for more charismatic, professional leadership within the SNP, and have taken to fiction to depict the ways in which the nationalist cause might develop if such leadership were to be forthcoming. Interestingly, not only were the vast majority of the authors who wrote these thrillers male, but so too were all of their primary characters. With the substantial rise in female representation since the opening of the Scottish Parliament, however, it must seem doubtful if this trend can continue, with politics and fiction alike having to come to terms with demographic reality.

And as William Paul pointed out when interviewed for this thesis, leadership and its many facets may well be where the interest will remain in the years to come.² Certainly, the style of leadership has changed since Mair wrote of the need to find a leader with proven business abilities. Most particularly, it has changed since Alex Salmond took over as National Convenor of the SNP in 1990, aged just thirty-five, and with a background in economics gained within the Royal Bank of Scotland, fulfilling many of Mair's suggested requirements. And since Paul wrote *The Lion Rampant* in nineteen eighty-nine, the Party has undergone even more change. If the SNP's victory in the nineteen eighty-eight Govan by-election was considered a turning point then, now the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh must be seen as the major influence, particularly in the way in which it facilitated a power swing away from the fundamentalists, who aim to achieve outright independence as soon as possible, and the gradualists, who are willing to work with the half-way--house of devolution until a better opportunity presents itself - a split which looks to be at the heart of the leadership battle to replace Salmond, who recently announced his intention to stand down as leader at the party's conference in September 2000.

² William Paul, interview with the author, 7th August, 2000.

William Paul has already mentioned his interest in re-writing *The Lion Rampant* to take account of these changes, while Douglas Hurd has been in discussions with his publishers about a re-print of his nineteen seventy-one classic, *Scotch on the Rocks*. Both books, in their original form, are still attracting sufficient interest in public libraries up and down the country to gain their authors annual royalty cheques.³ Taken together, these two facts would seem to suggest that there is sufficient interest in novels which depict a future independent Scotland for it to be worth the while of authors, both new and old, to keep writing them. How the plots of those novels develop will, in part, depend on parallel developments in the real world in general, and in the Scottish and Westminster parliaments in particular. Authors like Paul Johnson, who has already published a series set in the independent city-state of Edinburgh in the 2020s (and whose work is set a little too far into the future to be of direct relevance to this thesis), will undoubtedly continue to ask searching questions about the current political settlement in Scotland by couching them in a futuristic setting, while politicians-turned-novelists such as Edwina Currie will contribute to the broader, UK-wide trend for fictional predictions, spiced up with the mix of gossip and the spin which make up modern politics.⁴ These and other novels may not mirror exactly the society which they claim to depict, and, on past experience, will almost certainly include the sort of violence which has no discernible basis in reality. However, if they allow us to continue to form a picture of the progression of the nationalist/unionist argument through popular fiction on into the twenty-first century, then they will be serving more of a purpose than any single novel in the series, read on its own, might lead one to believe.

³ William Paul, interview with the author, 7th August, 2000; Mark Stuart, *Douglas Hurd, the Public Servant. An Authorised Biography* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1998); p. 60.

⁴ Paul Johnston, *Body Politic* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997); Edwina Currie, *The Ambassador* (London: Little, Brown, 1999)

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