

SCOTLAND AND EUROPE

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As a homage to Tom Nairn (who passed away on 21 January 2023), the editorial board of SNM has decided to republish Nairn's article 'Scotland and Europe' (first published by the New Left Review in 1974), encouraging readers and scholars to keep critically engaging with Nairn's seminal works and theses on nationalism.

For a number of reasons this seems an appropriate moment to reconsider the problem of Scottish nationalism.¹ With its November 1973 electoral victory in the Govan Constituency the Scottish National Party has recovered from its setbacks in the 1970 general election. At the same time the Kilbrandon Commission has supplied a stimulus to regional self-government in the United Kingdom, by recommending the establishment of Scottish and Welsh parliaments. Both the tenor and the reception of these recommendations indicate, significantly, that nothing will come of them unless they are strongly and vociferously supported in Scotland and Wales. The English majority will not enact such reforms unless pushed. But then, why should it do so? In Ireland we are at the same time witnessing a wholesale alteration of the constitutional status of Ulster. But it is not only the United Kingdom's multi-national state which is in motion. In continental Europe too important movements have arisen in a similar direction. In a recent study of the present condition of the nation-state, Nicos Poulantzas wrote that we are seeing 'ruptures in the national unity underlying existing national states, rather than the emergence of a new State over and above them: that is, the very important contemporary phenomenon of regionalism, as expressed particularly in the resurgence of nationalities, showing how the

internationalization of capital leads rather to a fragmentation of the state as historically constituted than to a supra-national State . . .² More recently, *Les Temps Modernes* has devoted a special issue to an extensive survey of national minorities in France, perhaps the most strongly unified of the 'historically constituted' European nations at the state level.³ In Italy, where regional self-government has become a question of practical politics, intellectual concern with the topic is also increasing. Perhaps the most valuable overview of repressed and resurgent nationalities in western Europe is provided by Sergio Salvi's *Le nazioni proibite: Guida a dieci colonie interne dell'Europa occidentale*.⁴ Hence, it is indispensable to try and view Scottish or Welsh developments in a European perspective. This is the aim of the present paper.⁵ I would like to look at certain aspects of Scotland's nationalism and modern history in a wider, more comparative, and more objective way than has usually been done in the past.

The Theory of Nationalism

What do the terms 'objective' and 'comparative' mean here? 'Real understanding of one's own national history begins only where we can place it within the general historical process, where we dare to confront it with European development as a whole,' writes Miroslav Hroch in his own invaluable comparative study of the genesis of nationalism in seven smaller European lands.⁶ More generally still, it should be remarked that the history of theorizing about nationalism displays two dramatic faults. One is a tendency to treat the subject in a one-nation or one-state frame of reference: so that each nationalism has to be understood, in effect, mainly with reference to 'its own' ethnic, economic, or other basis—rather than by comparison with the 'general historical process'. The second (and obviously related) tendency is to take nationalist ideology far too literally and seriously. What nationalists say about themselves

and their movements must, of course, be given due weight. But it is fatal to treat such self-consciousness other than extremely cautiously. The subjectivity of nationalism must itself be approached with the utmost effort of objectivity. It should be treated as a psycho-analyst does the outpourings of a patient. Where—as is not infrequently the case with nationalism—the patient is a roaring drunk into the bargain, even greater patience is called for.

In short, the theory of nationalism has been inordinately influenced by nationalism itself. This is scarcely surprising. Nationalism is amongst other things a name for the general condition of the modern body politic, more like the climate of political and social thought than just another doctrine. It is correspondingly difficult to avoid being unconsciously influenced by it.⁷

So we must try and avoid the empiricism of the nation-by-nation approach, and the subjectivism involved in taking nationalist rhetoric at its face-value. What exactly should we compare to what, in circumventing such influences? Broadly speaking, what merits consideration here is, on the one hand, the characteristic general evolution of European nationalism, between say 1800 and the major nationalist settlement of 1918–22; and on the other, whatever ideas and movements in modern Scottish history can be held to correspond to that general development. I am aware of course that the general category begs a number of questions. Nationalism did not come to a stop in Europe in 1922 after the Versailles agreements. Everyone knows that nationalism is still extremely alive, if not exactly in good health, everywhere in present-day Europe. But that is not the point. It remains true nonetheless that by the time of the post-World War I settlement European nationalism had gone through the main arc of its historical development, over a century and more. And the main lines of that settlement have proved, in fact, remarkably tenacious and permanent. Hence it is the outline provided by that century's development which—

without in any way minimizing Europe's remaining problems of *terre irredente*—should provide our principal model and reference point.

Scottish Belatedness

What corresponds to this now classical model of development in Scotland's case? Here, we encounter something very surprising right away. For what can reasonably be held to correspond to the mainstream of European nationalism is astonishingly recent in Scotland. As a matter of fact, it started in the 1920s—more or less at the moment when, after its prolonged gestation and maturation during the 19th century, European nationalism at last congealed into semi-permanent state forms. Thus it belongs to the last fifty years, and is the chronological companion of anti-imperialist revolt and Third World nationalism, rather than of those European movements which it superficially resembles. While the latter were growing, fighting their battles and winning them (sometimes), Scottish nationalism was simply absent.

I am aware that this assertion of Scottish belatedness also begs many questions. There is much to say about the precursors of nationalism in the 19th century, like the romantic movement of the 1850s and the successive Home Rule movements between 1880 and 1914. These are well described in H. J. Hanham's *Scottish Nationalism*. But all that need be said here is that they were quite distinctly precursors, not the thing itself, remarkable in any wider perspective for their feebleness and political ambiguity rather than their prophetic power. While in the 1920s we see by contrast the emergence of a permanent political movement with the formation of the National Party of Scotland (direct ancestor of the SNP) in 1928. And, just as important, the appearance of the epic poem of modern Scottish nationalism (a distinguishing badge of this, as of most

other European nationalisms), MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, in 1926.

So, we have to start with a problem—a problem written into the very terms of any comparison one can make between Scotland and Europe, as it were. Why was Scottish nationalism so belated in its arrival on the European scene? Why was it absent for virtually the whole of the 'founding period' of European nationalist struggle?

But we cannot immediately try to answer this. We must turn away from it and return to it later—for the simple reason that, as I hope to show, the belatedness in question is in no sense merely a chronological fact (as nationalists are likely to believe). It is intimately related to the essential historical character of Scottish nationalism. To understand the one is to understand the other. Hence to approach the problem correctly we must first make some progress at a more fundamental level.

The Tidal Wave of Modernization

Let us turn back to the general European model. How may we describe the general outlines of nationalist development, seen as 'general historical process'? Here, by far the most important point is that nationalism is *as a whole* quite incomprehensible outside the context of that process's *uneven* development. The subjective point of nationalist ideology is, of course, always the suggestion that one nationality is as good as another. But the *real* point has always lain in the objective fact that, manifestly, one nationality has never been even remotely as good as, or equal to, the others which figure in its world-view. Indeed, the purpose of the subjectivity (nationalist myths) can never be anything but protest against the brutal fact: it is mobilization *against* the unpalatable, humanly unacceptable, truth of grossly uneven development.

Nationalism in general is (in Ernest Gellner's words) 'a phenomenon connected not so much with industrialization or modernization as such, but with its uneven diffusion'.⁸ It first arose as a *general* fact (a determining general condition of the European body politic) after this 'uneven diffusion' had made its first huge and irreversible impact upon the historical process. That is, after the combined shocks engendered by the French Revolution, the Napoleonic conquests, the English industrial revolution, and the war between the two super-states of the day, England and France. This English–French 'dual revolution' impinged upon the rest of Europe like a tidal wave. What Gellner calls the 'tidal wave of modernization'. Through it the advancing capitalism of the more bourgeois societies bore down upon the societies surrounding them—societies which predominantly appear until the 1790s as buried in feudal and absolutist slumber.

Nationalism was one result of this rude awakening. For what did these societies—which now discovered themselves to be intolerably 'backward'—awaken into? A situation where polite universalist visions of progress had turned into means of domination. The Universal Republic of Anacharsis Cloots had turned into a French empire; the spread of free commerce from which so much had been hoped was turning (as Friedrich List pointed out) into the domination of English manufactures—the tyranny of the English 'City' over the European 'Country'. In short, there was a sort of imperialism built into 'development'. And it had become a prime necessity to resist *this* aspect of development.

Enlightenment thinkers had mostly failed to foresee this fatal antagonism. They had quite naturally assumed 'a link between knowledge and the increase in happiness', so that (as Sidney Pollard writes) 'Society and its rulers are increasingly able, because of greater knowledge, to combine the individual with the general interest, and the laws of nations will increasingly be changed to increase both. Thus the

undoubted future progress of the human spirit will be accompanied by continuous social and individual amelioration'.⁹ They imagined continuous diffusion from centre to periphery, from the 'leaders' to the regions still plunged in relative darkness. The metropolis would gradually elevate the rustic hinterland up to its level, as it were. It is, incidentally, worth noting that imperialists to this day always cling to some form or other of this pre-1800 ideology, at least partially.

In fact, progress invariably puts powerful, even deadly weapons in the hands of this or that particular 'advanced' area. Since this is a particular place and people, not a disinterested centre of pure and numinous culture, the result is a gulf (far larger than hitherto, and likely to increase) between the leaders and the hinterland. In the latter, progress comes to seem a hammer-blow as well as (sometimes instead of) a prospectus for general uplift and improvement. It appears as double-edged, at least. So areas of the hinterland, even in order to 'catch up' (to advance from 'barbarism' to the condition of 'civil society', as the Enlightenment put it), are *also* compelled to mobilize against progress. That is, they have to demand progress not as it is thrust upon them initially by the metropolitan centre, but 'on their own terms'. These 'terms' are, of course, ones which reject the imperialist trappings: exploitation or control from abroad, discrimination, military or political domination, and so on.

Nationalism' is in one sense only the label for the general unfolding of this vast struggle, since the end of the 18th century. Obviously no one would deny that nationalities, ethnic disputes and hatreds, or some nation-states, existed long before this. But this is not the point. The point is how such relatively timeless features of the human scene were transformed into the general condition of *nationalism* after the bourgeois revolutions exploded fully into the world. Naturally, the new state of affairs made use of the 'raw materials' provided by Europe's particularly rich variety of ethnic, cultural and linguistic contrasts. But—

precisely—it also altered their meaning, and gave them a qualitatively distinct function, an altogether new dynamism for both good and evil.

In terms of broad political geography, the contours of the process are familiar. The ‘tidal wave’ invaded one zone after another, in concentric circles. First Germany and Italy, the areas of relatively advanced and unified culture adjacent to the Anglo-French centre. It was in them that the main body of typically nationalist politics and culture was formulated. Almost at the same time, or shortly after, Central and Eastern Europe, and the more peripheral regions of Iberia, Ireland, and Scandinavia. Then Japan and, with the full development of imperialism, much of the rest of the globe. To locate at least some of the dimensions of the struggle today is simple. All one had to do was look around one in 1972 or 1973. Where were the storm-centres? Vietnam, Ireland, Bangladesh, the Middle East, Chile. Certain of these troubles may, or may not, have involved socialist revolutions and projected a non-national and Marxist image; there is no doubt that every one of them involved a *national* revolution quite comprehensible in the general historical terms of *nationalism* (even without reference to other factors).

Europe’s Bourgeoisies

The picture must be amplified and deepened in certain ways, however, to make it into a model applicable to a particular area like Scotland. We have glanced at the political geography of uneven development. What about its class basis and social content? Sociologically, the basis of the vital change we are concerned with obviously lay in the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie in both England and France: more exactly, in their joint rise and their fratricidal conflicts up to 1815. Their Janus-headed ‘modernity’ was that of bourgeois society, and an emergent industrial capitalism.

And it was upon the same class that this advancing 'civil society' everywhere had the principal impact. In the hinterland too there were 'rising middle classes' impatient with absolutism and the motley assortment of *anciens régimes* which reigned over most of Europe. Naturally, these were far weaker and poorer than the world-bourgeoisies of the West. The gross advantages of the latter had been denied them by history's unequal development. Now they found themselves in a new dilemma. Previously they had hoped that the spread of civilized progress would get rid of feudalism and raise them to the grace of liberal, constitutional society. Now (e.g.) the German and Italian middle classes realised that only a determined effort of their own would prevent utopia from being marred by *Manchestertum* and French bayonets.

Beyond them, in the still larger Europe east of Bohemia and Slovenia, the even weaker Slav middle classes realized that 'progress' would in itself only fasten German and Italian fetters upon their land and people more firmly. And so on.

This 'dilemma' is indeed the characteristic product of capitalism's uneven development. One might call it the 'nationalism-producing' dilemma. Given the premise of uneven growth, and the resultant impact of the more upon the less advanced, the dilemma is automatically transmitted outwards and onwards in this way. The result, nationalism, is basically no less necessary. Nationalism, unlike nationality or ethnic variety, cannot be considered a 'natural' phenomenon. But of course it remains true that, as Gellner says, under these specific historical circumstances (those of a whole era in which we are still living) 'nationalism does become a natural phenomenon, one flowing fairly inescapably from the general situation'.

The Role of Intellectuals

Equally naturally, nationalism was from the outset a 'bourgeois' phenomenon in the sense indicated. But two farther qualifications are needed here, to understand the mechanism at work. The first concerns the intelligentsia, and the second concerns the masses whose emergence into history was—behind and beneath the more visible 'rise of the bourgeoisie'—the truly decisive factor in the transformation we are dealing with. 'The intelligentsia do, indeed, play a definitive part in the rise of nationalist movements—everywhere', remarks Anthony Smith.¹⁰ In his history of the 'dual revolution' and its impact Eric Hobsbawm is more specific: the motor rôle is provided by 'The lesser landowners or gentry and the emergence of a national middle and even lower-middle class in numerous countries, the spokesmen for both being largely professional intellectuals . . . (above all) . . . the *educated* classes . . . the educational progress of large numbers of "new men" into areas hitherto occupied by a small élite. The progress of schools and universities measures that of nationalism, just as schools and especially universities become its most conspicuous champions.'¹¹ The dilemma of under-development becomes 'nationalism' only when it is (so to speak) refracted into a given society, perceived in a certain way, and then acted upon. And the medium through which this occurs is invariably, in the first place, an intelligentsia—functioning, of course, as the most conscious and awakened part of the middle classes.

Nationalism and the Masses

But if the intellectuals are all-important in one sense (spreading nationalism from the top downwards as it were), it is the masses—the ultimate recipients of the new message—that are all-important in

another. As a matter of fact, they determine a lot of what the ‘message’ is. Why this is can easily be seen, on the basis of the foregoing remarks.

These new middle classes, awakening to the grim dilemmas of backwardness, are confronted by a double challenge. They have (usually) to get rid of an anachronistic *ancien régime* as well as to beat ‘progress’ into a shape that suits their own needs and class ambitions. They can only attempt this by radical political and social mobilization, by arousing and harnessing the latent energies of their own societies. But this means, by mobilizing people. People is all they have got: this is the essence of the under-development dilemma itself.

Consequently, the national or would-be national middle class is always compelled to ‘turn to the people’. It is this compulsion that really determines the new political complex (‘nationalism’) which comes forth. For what are the implications of turning to the people, in this sense? First of all, speaking their language (or, over most of Europe, what had hitherto been viewed as their ‘brutish dialects’). Secondly, taking a kindlier view of their general ‘culture’, that *ensemble* of customs and notions, pagan and religious, which the Enlightenment had relegated to the museum (if not to the dust-bin). Thirdly—and most decisively, when one looks at the process generally—coming to terms with the enormous and still irreconcilable *diversity* of popular and peasant life.

It is, of course, this primordial political compulsion which points the way to an understanding of the dominant contradiction of the era. Why did the spread of capitalism, as a rational and universal ordering of society, lead so remorselessly to extreme fragmentation, to the exaggeration of ethnic-cultural differences, and so to the *dementia* of ‘chauvinism’ and war? Because that diffusion contained within itself (as it still does) the hopeless antagonism of its own unevenness, and a consequent imperialism; the latter forces mobilization against it, even on the part of those most anxious to catch up and imitate; such mobilization can only

proceed, in practice, via a popular mass still located culturally upon a far anterior level of development, upon the level of feudal or pre-feudal peasant or 'folk' life. That is, upon a level of (almost literally) 'pre-historic' diversity in language, ethnic characteristics, social habits, and so on. This ancient and (in a more acceptable sense of the term) 'natural' force imposes its own constraints upon the whole process, lending to it from the outset precisely that archaic and yet necessary colour, that *primaeval*-seeming or instinctive aspect which marks it so unmistakably.

If one now relates these two central features of the bourgeois dilemma to one another, what is the consequence? One perceives at once the true nerve of political nationalism. It is constituted by a distinctive relationship between the intelligentsia (acting for its class) and the people. There is no time here to explore this interesting general theme in detail. For our purposes it is sufficient to note the name, and some of the implications, of the relationship in question. Political nationalism of the classic sort was not necessarily democratic by nature, or revolutionary in a social sense (notoriously it could be inspired by fear of Jacobinism, as well as by Jacobinism). But it *was* necessarily 'populist' by nature. The political and social variables to be observed in its development are anchored in this constant, which steadily expressed the class machinery of the process.

Thus, we can add to the 'external' (or geo-political) co-ordinates of nationalism mentioned above, a set of 'internal' or social-class coordinates. The former showed us the 'tidal wave' of modernization (or bourgeois society) transforming one area after another, and soliciting the rise of nationalist awareness and movements. The latter shows us something of the mechanism behind the 'rise': the bourgeois and intellectual populism which, in existing conditions of backwardness where the masses are beginning to enter history and political existence for the first time, is ineluctably driven towards ethnic particularism.

Nationalism's forced 'mobilization' is fundamentally conditioned, at least in the first instance, by its own mass basis.

But then, we are in a manner of speaking still living in this 'first instance'. Nationalism arose after the French and Industrial Revolutions, at the very beginning of the 19th century. But the *anciens régimes* which the new nationalist middle classes had to get rid of in Central and Eastern Europe lasted for more than a century after that. Absolutism was far more tenacious than most bourgeois intellectuals admitted. It learned to borrow from the new world elements of technology and populism, to help it survive. Even when killed at last by the First World War and the 1917 revolutions, its ruinous mass of unresolved 'national questions' and fractured states was enough to poison history for another generation. And, of course, while this inheritance has become steadily less important in post-Second World War Europe, the expanding waves of extra-European nationalism are sufficient to hold us all still in this universe of discourse.

Let me now point out some important implications of this model of nationalism, before going on to consider the Scottish case. Its main virtue is a simple one. It enables us to decide upon a materialist, rather than an 'idealist' explanation of the phenomenon. In the question of nationalism, this philosophical point is critical. This is so, because of the very character of the phenomenon. Quite obviously, nationalism is invariably characterized by a high degree of political and ideological voluntarism. Simply because it *is* forced mass-mobilization in a position of relative helplessness (or 'under-development'), certain subjective factors play a prominent part in it. It is, in its immediate nature, idealistic. It always imagines an ideal 'people' (propped up by folklore studies, antiquarianism, or some surrogate for these) and it always searches urgently for vital inner, untapped springs of energy both in the individual and the mass. Such idealism is inseparable both from its creative historical function and its typical delusions. Consequently a generally

idealist mode of explanation has always been tempting for it. It lends itself rather to a Hegelian and romantic style of theorizing, than to a rationalist or Marxist one. This is one reason why Marxism has so often made heavy weather of it in the past.¹²

The Nation and Romanticism

I pointed out earlier, indeed, that theories about nationalism have been overwhelmingly influenced by nationalism, as the prevailing universe of discourse. This is really the same point. For they have been overwhelmingly influenced in the sense of idealism—whether their bias is itself pro-nationalist, or anti-nationalist.¹³ The question is, then, which can explain which? It is a fact that while idealist explanations of the phenomenon in terms of consciousness or *Zeitgeist* (however acute their observation may be, notably in German writers like Meinecke) never account for the material dynamic incorporated in the situation, a materialist explanation can perfectly well account for all the most ‘ideal’ and cultural or ideological symptoms of nationalism (even at their most berserk). Start from the premise of capitalism’s uneven development and its real class articulation, and one can come to grasp the point even of chauvinist lunacy, the ‘irrational’ elements which have played a significant role in nationalism’s unfolding from the outset to the end. Start from the lunacy itself and one will end there, after a number of gyrations—still believing, for instance, that (in Hegelian fashion) material development exists to serve the Idea of ‘spiritual development’.

Perhaps this can be put in another way. The politico-cultural necessities of nationalism, as I outlined them briefly above, entail an intimate link between nationalist politics and *romanticism*. Romanticism was the cultural mode of the nationalist dynamic, the cultural ‘language’ which alone made possible the formation of the new inter-class communities

required by it. In that context, all romanticism's well-known features—the search for inwardness, the trust in feeling or instinct, the attitude to 'nature', the cult of the particular and mistrust of the 'abstract', etc—make sense. But if one continues to adopt that language, then it becomes impossible to get back to the structural necessities which determined it historically. And of course, we *do* largely speak the language, for the same reason that we are still living in a world of nationalism.

Lastly let me point out an important limitation of the analysis. So far I have been concerned with the earlier or formative stages of nationalism. That is, with the nationalism which was originally (however much it has duplicated itself in later developments) that of Europe between 1800 and 1870. This is—for reasons which I hope will be clear—what primarily concerns us in approaching the Scottish case-history. But it is certainly true that after 1870, with the Franco-Prussian war and the birth of Imperialism (with a large 'I'), there occurred farther sea-changes in nationalist development. These were related, in their external co-ordinates, to a new kind of great-power struggle for backward lands; and as regards their internal co-ordinates, to the quite different class-struggle provoked by the existence of large proletariats within the metropolitan centres themselves. I have no room here to consider this later phase so closely, but it is important to refer to it at least. Not only has it deeply influenced the development of Scotland (like everywhere else in the world). Also, where I have stated that we still live in a climate of nationalism, it would, of course, be more accurate to say we still inhabit the universe of late nationalism: that is, nationalism as modified by the successive, and decisive, mass experiences of imperialism and total war.

Scotland's Absent Nationalism

Let us now turn to Scotland. How exactly are we to set it over against this general model? I pointed out to begin with the very surprising fact which confronts anyone trying to do this: that is, that for virtually the whole century of nationalism's classical development there is no object of comparison at all. Between 1800 and 1870 for example, the dates just referred to, there simply *was* no Scottish nationalist movement of the usual sort.

It still may not be quite understood how disconcerting this absence is. To get it into perspective, one should compare certain aspects of Scotland's situation just prior to the age of nationalism with those of other European minor nationalities. With (e.g.) the Slav nationalities, Greece, Ireland, or Poland. In any such comparison, Scotland appears not as notably defective but, on the contrary, as almost uniquely *well* equipped for the nationalist battles ahead.

Nobody could, for example, claim that Scotland was a *geschichtsloses Volk*.¹⁴ It had only recently ceased being a wholly independent state. The century or so that had elapsed since 1707 is a fairly insignificant time-interval by the criteria which soon became common under nationalism. Many new 'nations' had to think away millennia of oblivion, and invent almost entirely fictitious pasts.¹⁵ Whereas the Scots not only remembered a reality of independence, they had actually preserved most of their own religious, cultural, and legal institutions intact. Their political state had gone, but their civil society was still there—still there and, in the later 18th century, thriving as never before. Most of backward, would-be nationalist Europe had neither the one nor the other.

Within this civil society Scotland also had at least two of the indispensable prerequisites for successful nationalism. It had a dynamic middle class, a 'rising' bourgeoisie if ever there was one. And (above all)

it had an intelligentsia. In fact, it had one of the most distinguished intellectual classes in the Europe of that time, a class whose achievements and fame far outshone that of any other minor nationality. Given the key importance of the intelligentsia in early formulations of the romantic populism associated with 'nation-building', this was clearly a formidable advantage—at least in appearance.

As far as folklore and popular traditions went, Scotland was (needless to say) as well furnished for the struggle as anywhere else. Better than most, perhaps, since—as everybody knew then and knows now—one element in those traditions was an ancient, rankling hostility to the English, founded upon centuries of past conflict. These old conflicts gave Scotland a cast of national heroes and martyrs, popular tales and legends of oppression and resistance, as good as anything in *Mittel-Europa*. True, the Scots did not have a really separate majority language. But any comparative survey will show that, however important language becomes as a distinguishing mark in the subsequent advance of nationalism, it is rarely of primary importance in precipitating the movement. It is heavy artillery, but not the cause of the battle.

And in any case, the Scots had far heavier artillery to hand. They had—to consider only one thing—the enormously important factor of a clear religious difference. The Scottish Reformation had been a wholly different affair from the English one, and had given rise to a distinct social and popular ethos rooted in distinct institutions. There is no need to stress the potential of this factor in nationality-struggles today, looking across to Ireland (even in situations where both sides speak the same language). More important, and more generally, there was no doubt at the beginning of the 19th century—just as there is no doubt today—that 'Scotland' was a distinct entity of some kind, felt to be such both by the people living in it and by all travellers who ventured into it from outside. It had (as it still has) a different 'social ethic', in George Elder Davie's phrase. Analysis of the complex elements going into such a

product, the recognizable and felt identity of a nationality-unit (whether state or province), may be difficult. But usually the fact is plain enough. And this is what counts most, as the potential fuel of nationalist struggle.

So why, in circumstances like these, was nationalism to be conspicuous only by its absence in Scotland? This question is interesting enough. But it is time to note that behind it there lies another, much more important in any general perspective, and even more fascinating. If, in a European land so strikingly marked out for nationalism, nationalism failed to materialize, then it can only be because the *real* precipitating factors of the nationalist response were not there. And one may therefore hope to discern, through this extraordinary ‘negative example’, precisely what these factors were. To understand why Scotland did *not* ‘go nationalist’ at the usual time and in the usual way is, in my opinion, to understand a great deal about European nationalism in general. I hope the claim does not sound too large (or even nationalist). But, as well as understanding Scotland better in relation to the general European model discussed above, one may also understand Europe better by focusing upon Scotland.

Three Kinds of Nation

To assist us in focusing on what is relevant, let me recall a basic point in the crudely materialist schema adopted previously. I suggested there that nationalism is in essence one kind of response to an enforced dilemma of ‘under-development’. What we must do now is define the latter term more concretely, in relation to Europe at the critical period in question—that is, during the original formation of nationalism. European countries at the beginning of the 19th century can for this purpose conveniently be assigned to one or other of three categories. Firstly, there are the original, ‘historic’ nation-states, the lands formed

relatively early into relatively homogeneous entities, usually by absolute monarchy: England, France, Spain and Portugal, Sweden, Holland. Naturally, this category includes the 'leaders', the two revolutionary nations whose impact was to be so great, as well as a number of formerly important ones which had now (for many different reasons) dropped out of the race. Then (secondly) there are the lands which have to try and catch up, under the impact of revolution: the German-speaking states, Italy, the Hapsburg domains, the Balkans, the countries of Tsardom, Ireland, Scandinavia apart from Sweden. These account for by far the greater part of Europe geographically, and in terms of population. They were all to attempt to redeem themselves through some form of nationalism, sooner or later: they were all (one might say) forced through the nationalist hoop.

Finally—thirdly—one needs another category. The two main groups of bourgeois-revolutionary lands and 'under-developed' hinterland are easily classified at this point in time. But what about the countries which either had caught up, or were about to catch up? The countries on the move out of barbarism into culture, those on or near the point of (in today's terminology) 'take-off'? Surely, in an age which thought so generally and confidently about progress of this sort, there were some examples of it?

This third group is a very odd one. It had, in fact, only one member. There was to be only one example of a land which—so to speak—'made it' before the onset of the new age of nationalism. The European Enlightenment had an immense general effect upon culture and society; but it had only one particular success-story, outside the great revolutionary centres. Only one society was in fact able to advance, more or less according to its precepts, from feudal and theological squalor to the stage of bourgeois civil society, polite culture, and so on. Only one land crossed the great divide *before* the whole condition of European

politics and culture was decisively and permanently altered by the great awakening of nationalist consciousness.

North Britain

It was of course our own country, Scotland, which enjoyed (or suffered) this solitary fate. The intelligentsia at least had few doubts about what had happened. ‘The memory of our ancient state is not so much obliterated, but that, by comparing the past with the present, we may clearly see the superior advantages we now enjoy, and readily discern from what source they flow’, ran the Preface to No 1 of the original *Edinburgh Review* (1755). ‘The communication of trade has awakened industry; the equal administration of laws produced good manners . . . and a disposition to every species of improvement in the minds of a people naturally active and intelligent. If countries have their ages with respect to improvement, North Britain may be considered as in a state of early youth, guided and supported by the more mature strength of her kindred country’.

A prodigy among the nations, indeed. It had progressed from fortified castles and witch-burning to Edinburgh New Town and Adam Smith, in only a generation or so. We cannot turn aside here to consider the reasons for this extraordinary success. Ordinarily it is no more than a sort of punch-bag in the old contest between nationalists and anti-nationalists: the former hold that Edinburgh’s greatness sprang forth (like all true patriot flora) from indigenous sources, while the Unionists attribute it to the beneficent effects of 1707. It may be worth noting, however, that North Britain’s intellectuals themselves normally thought of another factor as relevant. As the *Edinburgh Review* article mentioned above put it: ‘What the Revolution had begun, the Union rendered more compleat’. It was by no means the fact of union which had counted, but

the fact that this unification had enabled the Scots to benefit from the great *revolution* in the neighbour kingdom. As the great Enlightenment historian William Robertson said, the 1707 agreement had 'admitted the Scott]ish commons to a participation of all the privileges which the English had purchased at the expence of so much blood'.¹⁶ That is, the Scottish bourgeoisie had been able to exploit (by alliance) some of the consequences of the English bourgeois revolution. After the black, the unspeakable 17th century, Robertson notes, it was 1688 which marked the real dawn in Scotland.

But many other factors were involved too, clearly. The character of Scottish absolutism, for example, the feudalism which 'collapsed as a vehicle for unity, and became instead the vehicle of faction', in T. C. Smout's words.¹⁷ The character of the Scottish Reformation and its inheritance. I doubt if even the stoniest of Unionist stalwarts would deny that part of Scotland's 18th-century 'improvement' was due to her own powers, and the retention of a large degree of institutional autonomy. But what matters most in the context of this discussion is that Scotland's situation was almost certainly unique. It was the only land which stood in *this* relationship to the *first* great national-scale bourgeois revolution: that is, to a revolutionary process which, because it was the first, proceeded both slowly and empirically, and therefore permitted in the course of its development things which were quite unthinkable later on. There was, there could not be, any situation like Scotland's within the enormously accelerated drive of 19th-century development. By then, the new international competitiveness and political culture's new mass basis alike prohibited gentlemanly accords like 1707.¹⁸

We know at any rate that the success-story was never repeated quite like this anywhere else. There were a number of other zones of Europe where it clearly could have been, and would have been if 'development' had gone on in the Enlightenment, rather than the nationalist, sense. Belgium and the Rhineland, for example, or Piedmont. In the earlier phases of the

French Revolution these areas were indeed inducted for 'improvement' into the ambit of the French Revolution, the Universal Republic. But as events quickly showed, this pattern could no longer be repeated.

Enlightenment and the Highlands

The most remarkable comment upon Scotland's precocious improvement was provided by Scottish culture itself, during the Golden Age. The country not only 'made it', in the generation before the great change (i.e. the generation between the failure of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, and 1789)—it also produced the general formula for 'making it'. That is, it contributed proportionately far more than anywhere else in Europe to the development of social science. And it did so in the distinctive form of what was in essence a study of 'development': a study of the 'mechanics of transition', or how society in general can be expected to progress out of barbarism into refinement. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers were capable of this astonishing feat because, obviously, they had actually experienced much of the startling process they were trying to describe. Not only that: the old 'barbaric' world was still there, close about them. The author of Scotland's sociological masterpiece, the *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), had been brought up in the Highlands.¹⁹

Scotland's progress was all the more striking because there was this one large part of it which did not 'improve' at all. Scotland beyond the Highland line remained 'under-developed'. This fissure through Scottish society had been left by the failure of later feudalism; now it was, if anything, aggravated by the swift rise of Lowland culture in the 18th century. A 'gulf' was formed which resembles in many ways the gulf that opened across Europe as a whole—that is, the very gap I tried to describe previously, the development-gap with all its accompanying dilemmas

and ambiguities. Highland Scotland, like most of Ireland, was in effect a part of Central or Eastern Europe in the West. Therefore it was bound to have a distinct development from the 'successful' civil society south of it. It had, as everyone knows, a distinct history of just this sort—one which painfully resembles the history of Ireland or many of the weaker peoples of *Mitteleuropa*, far more closely than it does that of the Scottish industrial belt. The Highlands were to suffer the fate characteristic of many countries and regions which generated nationalist movements in order to resist. But (here unlike Ireland) Highland society did not possess the prerequisites for *nationalist* resistance. Its position was too marginal, its social structure was too archaic, and too much of its life had been actually destroyed in the terrible reaction to 1745.

If this general analysis is right, then Scotland's precocious and prenationalist development must clearly be reckoned the true 'uniqueness' of its modern history. In European perspective, this emerges as much more striking than anything else. Nationalists always perorate at length upon the unique charms and mission of their object, I know: this is part of the structure of the nationalist thought-world. So is the fact that, seen from a distance, these ineffable missions resemble one another like a box of eggs. One has to be careful, consequently, before presenting a new candidate for the stakes. But I am comforted in doing so by one thought. This is that my emphasis upon the Enlightenment has never in fact (to the best of my knowledge) figured in such nationalist incantations in the past. On the contrary—for reasons that may be clearer below—if Scottish nationalists have ever been really united on one thing, it is their constant execration and denunciation of Enlightenment culture. In short, the real uniqueness of modern Scotland is the one thing which does *not* (and indeed *cannot*) be admitted into nationalist rhetoric.

There is logic behind this, of course. The same logic which drives one to the following thought: it simply cannot be the case that there

is *no* connection between Scottish society's fulminating advance before 1800, and that society's subsequent failure to produce a nationalism of its own. There must, surely, be some relation between these two remarkable, peculiarly Scottish achievements. Let me now go on to suggest what it may consist in.

There are two questions which cannot help dominating much of the cultural debate upon nationalism in Scotland. One we have looked at already: it is the problem of how and why the Scots emerged, so suddenly, from backwardness to rise to the peaks of the Edinburgh Golden Age. The other is how and why—and almost as suddenly—this florescence ended in the earlier decades of the 19th century. So that, as far as the national culture is concerned—runs one typical complaint—“The historian is left calling Victorian culture in Scotland “strangely rootless” . . . We have to recognize that there did not emerge along with modern Scotland a mature, “all-round” literature . . . In the mid-19th century the Scottish literary tradition paused; from 1825 to 1880 there is next to nothing worth attention’.²⁰ And, one might add, not much worth attention from 1880 to 1920 either.

It is inconceivable that the profoundest causes of this dramatic fall did not lie in Scottish society's general evolution. Yet where are these causes to be located? For, as Craig says, ‘modern Scotland’—industrial Scotland, the economic Scotland of the Glasgow–Edinburgh–Dundee axis—continued *its* startling progress unabated. In his history T. C. Smout situates the beginning of the movement towards take-off in mid-century, after the ‘Forty-five: ‘The ice began to break. Slow and unspectacular at first, the process of change then began to accelerate in the 1760s, until by the outbreak of the American War in 1775 practically all classes in Scottish society were conscious of a momentum which was carrying them towards a richer society . . .’²¹ The momentum continued until by 1830 the country had ‘come over a watershed’. ‘In 1828 J. B. Neilson's application of the hot-blast process to smelting the blackband ironstone

of the Central Belt gave the Scottish economy the cue for its next major advance . . . it led to the birth of Scottish heavy industry with the swelling boom in iron towns and engineering in the 1830s and 1840s and the gigantic construction of shipyards on Clydeside in the last quarter of the century.’²²

Thus, the economic ‘structure’ continued its forward march, across the developmental watershed and beyond, breeding new generations of Scottish entrepreneurs and a new and vast Scottish working class. But certain vital parts of the ‘superstructure’, far from sharing in this momentum, simply collapsed. On *that* level Scotland abruptly reverted to being a province again: a different sort of province, naturally, prosperous and imperial rather than theoretic and backward, but still (unmistakably) a very provincial *sort* of province. How is one to explain this remarkable disparity of development?

Let me relate it, first, to two other notable absences on the Scottish scene. One has already been several times referred to, since it is the main subject I am concerned with: that is, the absence of political nationalism. The other very striking absence is that of what one might call a developed or mature cultural romanticism. It is indeed the lack of this that constitutes the rootlessness, the ‘void’ which cultural and literary historians so deplore.

I know that this may be thought a paradoxical assertion. We are all aware of the great significance of both Scotland and Sir Walter Scott in the general mythology of European romanticism. And we are also conscious of the importance in Scotland itself of a kind of pervasive, second-rate, sentimental slop associated with tartan, nostalgia, Bonnie Prince Charlie, Dr Finlay, and so on. Yet I would hold that both these phenomena are misleading, in different ways; and that the existence of neither of them is inconsistent with the absence I am referring to.

Sir Walter Scott: Valedictory Realist

First of all Scott. In his essay on Scott in *The Historical Novel* (1962), Lukács points out that ‘it is completely wrong to see Scott as a Romantic writer, unless one wishes to extend the concept of Romanticism to embrace all great literature in the first third of the 19th century’. Indeed, what Scott expresses himself—in spite of the great importance of his historical themes for later romantic literature—is rather ‘a renunciation of Romanticism, a conquest of Romanticism, a higher development of the realist literary traditions of the Enlightenment’. Thus, to describe Scott as a ‘romantic’ is akin to describing Marx as a ‘Marxist’: he undeniably gave rise to a great deal of this European ‘ism’, but was not himself part of it. He was not, for example, a ‘Romantic’ in the sense that his compatriot Thomas Carlyle was, in the next generation (even Carlyle’s misunderstanding and denigration of Scott are typically romantic).²³

Scott’s imaginative world arose from the same ‘deeply felt experience of the contrast between two societies’ mentioned above. That is, it belonged to the literary tradition of Scotland, as well as that of the Enlightenment in general. He brought to this an enormously heightened sense of the reality and values of the ‘backward’ or pre-bourgeois past—a sense which is, of course, characteristic of the whole period of awakening nationalism. But the typical course of his own imagination is never consonant with what was to be the general tendency of that period. It ran precisely counter to that tendency. As Lukács observes, it continued to run upon the lines of what he calls Enlightenment ‘realism’.

For Scott, the purpose of his unmatched evocation of a national past is never to revive it: that is, never to resuscitate it as part of political or social mobilization in the present, by a mythical emphasis upon continuity between (heroic) past and present. On the contrary: his essential point is always that the past really is gone, beyond recall. The heart may regret this, but never the head. As Scott’s biographer J. G.

Lockhart puts it, quite forcibly, his idea of nationalism was like his idea of witchcraft: 'He delighted in letting his fancy run wild about ghosts and witches and horoscopes . . . (but) . . . no man would have been more certain to give juries sound direction in estimating the pretended evidence of supernatural occurrences of any sort; and I believe, in like manner, that had any anti-English faction, civil or religious, sprung up in his own time in Scotland, he would have done more than other living man could have hoped to do, for putting it down'.²⁴ For all its splendour, his panorama of the Scottish past is valedictory in nature. When he returns to the present—in the *persona* of his typical prosaic hero-figure—the head is in charge. It speaks the language of Tory Unionism and 'progress': the real interests of contemporary Scotland diverge from those of the auld sang.

But in nationalist Europe the entire purpose of romantic historicism was different. The whole point of cultural nationalism there *was* the mythical resuscitation of the past, to serve present and future ends. There, people learned the auld sangs in order to add new verses. Naturally, Scott was read and translated in those countries according to this spirit—and as we know, his contribution to the new rising tide of national romanticism was a great one. It was great everywhere but in his own nation. In his own national context, he pronounced, in effect, a great elegy. But the point of an elegy is that it *can* only be uttered once. Afterwards it may be echoed, but not really added to.

Consequently, Sir Walter's towering presence during the vital decades of the early 19th century is not only consistent with the absence of a subsequent romantic-national culture: to a large extent, it explains that absence. The very nature of his achievement—whether seen in terms of his own politics, or in terms of his typical plots and characters—cut off such a future from its own natural source of inspiration. It cut off the future from the past, the head from the 'heart' (as romanticism now conceived this entity). As for the second phenomenon I referred to,

popular or *Kitsch* Scotland, this is certainly a sort of ‘romanticism’. And it is certainly important, and not to be dismissed with a shudder as most nationalist intellectuals tend to do. I shall have more to say about the great tartan monster below. For the moment, however, I think it is enough to point out that he is a sub-cultural creature rather than a performer in the elevated spheres we are concerned with. Whisky labels, the *Sunday Post*, Andy Stewart, the Scott Monument, the inebriate football patriots of International night: no-one will fail to compose his own lengthy list or discern its weighty role in the land. But this is a popular sub-romanticism, and not the vital national culture whose absence is so often lamented after Scott.

What we have therefore is the relatively sudden disintegration of a great national culture; an absence of political and cultural nationalism; and an absence of any genuine, developing romanticism, of the kind which was to typify 19th-century cultural life. The three negative phenomena are, surely, closely connected. In fact, they are different facets of the same mutation. And if we now set this change over against the general explanatory model sketched out previously, we can begin to see what it consisted in.

If one views it as a disparity of development, as between the ongoing economic structure and a suddenly and inexplicably collapsed ‘superstructure’, then the answer is contained in the very terms in which the problem is posed. That is, it is overwhelmingly likely that the cultural decline occurred *because* of the material development itself. Because Scotland had already advanced so far, so fast—to the watershed of development and beyond—it simply did not need the kind of cultural development we are concerned with. It had overleapt what was to be (over the greater part of Europe) the next ‘natural’ phase of development. Its previous astonishing precocity led it, quite logically, to what appears as an equally singular ‘retardation’ or incompleteness in the period which followed. This can only have happened because, at

bottom, certain material levers were inoperative in the Scottish case; and they were inoperative during the usual formative era of romantic nationalism because they had already performed their function and produced their effect earlier, in the quite different culture-world of the 18th century.

The Absent Intelligentsia

We have some clues as to how this actually worked. Normally nationalism arose out of a novel dilemma of under-development; but it did so through a quite specific mechanism, involving first the intelligentsia, then wider strata of the middle classes, then the masses. The process has been admirably described by Hroch in his comparative inquiry. Initially the property of a relatively tiny intellectual élite (usually reacting to the impact of the French Revolution), nationalism passed through 'phase A' into 'phase B' (approximately 1815–48) where it was generally diffused among the growing bourgeoisie. It was in the course of this prolonged process that the new cultural language of romanticism and the new credo of liberal nationalism were worked out. But even so 1848 was still mainly a 'revolution of the intellectuals' (in Namier's phrase), and failed as such. It was only later that it turned into a mass movement proper ('phase C') with some roots in new working-class and peasant parties, and wide popular appeal. Thus, while the new *Weltanschauung* was (as we noticed) inherently populist in outlook, it took a long time to get to the people: that is, to the mystic source whence, in nationalist myth, it is supposed to spring.

Transfer this picture to the Scottish case: there was no real, material dilemma of under-development; hence the intelligentsia did not perceive it, and develop its perception in the normal way—it did *not* have to 'turn to the people' and try to mobilize first the middle strata then the masses

for the struggle; hence there was no call to create a new inter-class 'community' of the sort invoked by nationalism, and no objective need for the cultural instrument which permitted this—'romanticism'; hence the intelligentsia in Scotland (its previous eminence notwithstanding) was deprived of the *normal* function of an intellectual class in the new, nationalist, European world.

But—it may be objected here—even given that this was so, and that the underlying situation decreed a different politico-cultural fate for the Scots, why did it have to take the sad form of this *collapse* into provinciality, this bewildering descent from great heights into the cultural 'desert' of modern Scotland? Why could the Enlightenment not have continued there in some form, in a separate but still 'national' development? This is another of those questions whose very formulation guides one towards an answer. It was, of course, *impossible* for any such development to take place. Impossible because no one intellectual class can ever follow such a separate path in Europe. Once the general intellectual and cultural climate had altered in the decisive way mentioned, in consort with the unfolding of nationalism, it has altered for everybody.

This was by no means just a question of fashion, or the fact that intellectuals heed what goes on abroad. Nationalism was a general, and a structural state of the whole body politic. Although it was born in the 'fringe' lands under the impact of modernity, its subsequent impact transformed everyone—including the 'source' countries of the bourgeois revolution themselves, France and England. The new, enormous, growing weight of masses in motion broke down the old hierarchies everywhere and forced more or less similar cultural adaptations everywhere. In this violent process of action and reaction, no one part of the wider area concerned could 'escape' nationalism and its culture. It had either to evolve its own nationalist-type culture, or succumb to someone else's (becoming thereby 'provincialized').

Against the Fall

Under these new conditions, what in fact happened to the great Scots intelligentsia? As an intellectual class it belonged, with all its virtues, *entirely* to the pre-1789 universe. Both its patrician social character and its rationalist world-view were parts of that older, more stable, hierarchical world where the masses had scarcely begun to exist politically. Claims have been made for its 'democratic' intellect. 'Democratic' in the deeper sense which now became central it emphatically was not. It was pre-Jacobin, pre-populist, pre-romantic; and as a consequence, wholly pre-nationalist. In the drastically different geological epoch which now supervened, it could survive only for a short time, in somewhat fossil-like fashion. The sad tale is all there, in Lord Cockburn's *Memorials*. 'We had wonderfully few proper Jacobins,' he comments wryly upon the Scottish élite's wholesale slide into reaction, 'but if Scotch Jacobinism did not exist, Scotch Toryism did, and with a vengeance. This party engrossed almost the whole wealth, and rank, and public office, of the country, and at least three-fourths of the population.'²⁵ Sir Walter himself was, of course, in the front rank, battling (literally) to the death against the 1832 Reform Bill.

Elsewhere in Europe this suicide of former élites did not matter. They were displaced by what Eric Hobsbawm called the 'large numbers of "new men"', who *were* educated into nationalism and the other new rules of populist politics. These new men were awakened into radical dissatisfaction with their fate, and had the sense that without great collective efforts things would not improve much for them in a foreseeable future. They tended to come (as Hroch observes) from 'regions of intermediate social change'—from small towns and rural zones whose old life had been undermined, but for whom industry and urbanization were still remote (and dubious) realities.²⁶ Out of such regions there arose a new and broader intelligentsia to take the place of

the old: modern, romantic, populist, more mobile, mainly petit-bourgeois in background.

But—precisely—in Scotland it did not. No new intellectual class at once national in scope and basically disgruntled at its life-prospects arose, because the Scottish petty bourgeoisie had little reason to be discontented. In the overwhelming rush of the Scottish industrial revolution, even the regions of intermediate social change were quickly sucked in. Hence no new ‘intelligentsia’ in the relevant sense developed, turning to the people to try and fight a way out of its intolerable dilemma. Hence Hroch’s phases ‘A’ and ‘B’ were alike absent in Scottish development: there was, there could be, no nationalism or its associated romantic culture fully present in that development. There could only be the ‘void’.

This kind of analysis will stick in a number of throats for two reasons: it is materialist in content, and rather complicated in form. How simple the old nationalist theory of the Fall appears, in contrast! It can be compressed into one word: treachery! The old Edinburgh élite was guilty of the (Romantic) original sin: cutting themselves off from the people. Second only to ‘community’ in this value-vocabulary is the unpleasant term ‘roots’. The Enlightenment intelligentsia sold out its birthright—its roots in the Scottish national-popular community—for the sake of its pottage of tedious abstractions.²⁷ Sir James Steuart may be forgiven, as he happened to be a Jacobite. The rest were cosmopolitan *vendus* to a man: they may have invented social science, but their attitude towards Scotticisms was unpardonable. It was this wilful rootlessness that started the rot. ‘The cultural sell-out of Scottish standards . . . the failure of Scotland’s political and cultural leaders to be their Scottish selves has created the intellectual and cultural void which is at the centre of Scottish affairs,’ states Duncan Glen in *Whither Scotland?* (1971). As for David Hume and that band: ‘We should give the opposite answers to those of the great philosopher who failed to rise above the attitudes of his time.

Since then, however, we have had two hundred years of the Scottish waste of the potential of the Scottish people and we should surely have learned the correct answers by now...'

The simple idealism and voluntarism of this diagnosis should need no further stressing. It amounts to saying, *if only* the intellectuals had behaved differently, then our national history might have left its banks, and changed its course. It is not explanation, but retrospective necromancy. But it has as a consequence that the Scottish Enlightenment (as I pointed out above) recedes into a curious limbo of non-recognition, in the nationalist perspective. That is, the country's one moment of genuine historical importance, its sole claim to imperishable fame, literally does not count in the saga of the Scottish national Self. The triumph of Reason produced a wasteland void, as still thriving Romantic clichés would have us believe: not for the first or last time, the nationalist and the romantic 'theories' are really one.

The Reformation as Scapegoat

Lest it be thought that I am treating romanticism too cursorily, and dismissing its view of Scotland too lightly, I shall turn briefly to the most influential study of this kind. Edwin Muir's *Scott and Scotland* appeared in 1936, and has never been reissued. This is a pity, and rather surprising, for it is a book which has reappeared in other people's books and articles ever since. The copies in the Scottish National Library and the Edinburgh City Library must be particularly well-thumbed. No-one who has spent any time in the archives of literary nationalism can have failed to notice how often Muir is quoted, nearly always with approval.

How did he diagnose what happened to Scotland in the time of Scott? Muir is impressed particularly by what he calls 'a curious emptiness'

behind Scott's imaginative richness. The void is already there, as it were, within the work of the Wizard of the North. What caused it? It reflects the fact that Sir Walter lived in 'a country which was neither a nation nor a province and had, instead of a centre, a blank, an Edinburgh, in the middle of it . . . Scott, in other words, lived in a community which was not a community, and set himself to carry on a tradition which was not a tradition . . . (and) . . . his work was an exact reflection of his predicament'. Scott's predicament was, of course, also one 'for the Scottish people as a whole . . . for only a people can create a literature'. England, by contrast, is 'an organic society' with a genuine centre and true *Volksgemeinschaft*. The English author has something to sink his roots into, while his Scottish colleague cannot 'root himself deliberately in Scotland' since there *is* no soil—no 'organic community to round off his conceptions', and not even any real wish for such a society (i.e. no real nationalism).

The mainspring of this, as of all similar arguments, is that it bestows eternal validity, or 'natural' status, upon certain categories of 19th century culture and politics. It is true that all 19th-century nation-states, and societies which aspired to this status through nationalism, had to foster what one may (although somewhat metaphorically) call 'organic community'. That is, for the specific motives mentioned previously their middle classes invented a type of inter-class culture, employing romantic culture and ideology. It is true also that Scotland was structurally unable to adapt to an age in which these categories and motives became the norm. What is not true—though it is the crux of Muir's position—is that this represented some sort of metaphysical disaster which one must despair over.

Muir then goes on to trace (again in very characteristic terms) the dimensions of both disaster and despair. One learns, with some surprise, that the trouble started in the middle ages. The Enlightenment and capitalism are only late symptoms; it was in fact the Reformation which 'truly signaled the beginning of Scotland's decline as a civilized nation'.

The last of 'coherent civilization' in Scotland was at the court of James IV (early 16th century). The metaphysical ailment of the Scots, a split between heart and head, began shortly thereafter, that '... simple irresponsible feeling side by side with arid intellect ... for which Gregory Smith found the name of "the Caledonian Antisyzygy"'.²⁸ So, after the Catholic 'organic community' had ended there was no hope, and Scotland was simply preparing itself for 'the peculiarly brutal form which the Industrial Revolution took in Scotland, where its chief agents are only conceivable as thoughtless or perverted children'.

A markedly oneiric element has crept into the argument somehow, and one wants to rub one's eyes. Can anybody really think this? Not only somebody, but most literary nationalists: it should not be imagined that this position represents a personal vagary of the author. It does have a bizarre dream-logic to it. Muir himself took his pessimism so seriously that not even nationalism seemed a solution to him. But broadly speaking the dream in question is that of romantic nationalism, and the logic is as follows: modern Scottish society does not fit it, and one has to explain why; since the idea-world (roots, organs, and all) is all right, and has unchallengeable status, it has to be Scotland which is wrong; therefore Scottish society and history are monstrously misshapen in some way, blighted by an Original Sin; therefore one should look further back for whatever led to the frightful Enlightenment ('arid intellect', etc) and the Industrial Revolution; the Reformation is the obvious candidate, so before that things were pretty sound (a safe hypothesis, given the extent of knowledge about the 15th century in modern Scotland).²⁹

Start with Idealism and you end up embracing the Scarlet Woman of Rome. I do not wish to dwell longer on this paradox now (though I shall need to refer to it again below). The aura of madness surrounding it is surely plain enough. Farther exploration of the oddities of nationalist ideology in Scotland had better wait until we come to the formation of the nationalist movement itself, in this century. Before I get to this, some

more remarks have to be made about the consequences of the Scottish inability to generate a nationalism in the last century.

The Emigre Intelligentsia

I suggested above that Scotland can be seen as a 'negative image' of general European nationalist development, and one which tells us much about that development. There is a sense in which it tells us more than any 'positive' example could: for, of course, in all actual case-histories of nationalism general and highly specific factors are fused together almost inextricably. Whereas in Scotland, where so many particular factors favoured nationalism so powerfully, it is easier to detect (simply by its absence) what the basic causative mechanism must have been. It is in this sense that one may argue that Scotland furnishes a remarkable confirmation of the materialist conception of development and nationalism outlined previously.

But so far the argument has been couched in over-negative terms. We have seen why the development of bourgeois society in Scotland did *not* decree a form of nationalism, and the various 'absences' which followed from this peculiar evolutionary twist. The Scottish bourgeoisie was *not* compelled to frame its own pseudo-organic 'community' of culture, in order to channel popular energies behind its separate interest. Hence there was no serious romanticism as a continuing 'tradition', and the indigenous intellectual class became in a curious sense 'unemployed' or functionless upon its home terrain. The new Scottish working class, in its turn, was deprived of the normal type of 19th-century cultural 'nationalization': that is, such popular-national culture as there was (vulgar Scottishism, or tartantry) was necessarily unrelated to a higher romantic-national and intellectual culture.

One of the most striking single consequences of this overall pattern was massive intellectual emigration. The 19th century also witnessed great working-class and peasant emigration, of course, but these were common to England and Ireland as well. The Scottish cultural outflow was distinctive, although it had much in common with similar trends in Ireland and the Italian south. The reasons for it are clear enough. The country was well provided with educational institutions and its higher culture did not vanish overnight. However, it certainly changed direction, and assumed a markedly different pattern. Its achievements in the century that followed were to be largely in the areas of natural science, technology and medicine—not in the old 18th century ones of social science, philosophy, and general culture. And of course it was what happened to the latter that is most related to the problem of nationalism, and concerns us here. It is in *this* crucial zone that one may speak of ‘unemployment’, and hence of the forced emigration of the sort of intellectual who elsewhere in Europe was forging a national or nationalist culture.

After the time of Sir Walter Scott, wrote the Victorian critic J. H. Robertson, ‘... we lost the culture-force of a local literary atmosphere; and defect superinduces defect, till it becomes almost a matter of course that our best men, unless tethered by professorships, go south’.³⁰ In his *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People* the contemporary critic David Craig makes a similar point: ‘During the 19th century the country was emptied of the *majority* of its notable literary talents—men who, if they had stayed, might have thought to mediate their wisdom through the rendering of specifically Scottish experience. Of the leading British “sages” of the time an astonishingly high proportion were of Scottish extraction—the Mills, Macaulay, Carlyle, Ruskin, Gladstone’.³¹ This last is an especially characteristic judgment, with its suggestion of retrospective voluntarism: *if only* the émigrés had chosen to stay at home, then it might all have been different. The point was that in reality

they had no such 'choice': 'specifically Scottish experience' in the sense relevant here would have been a product of culture, not its natural, pre-existent basis—and since Scottish society did not demand the formation of that culture, there *was* no 'experience' and nothing to be said. This phase of the country's history demonstrates, with exceptional vividness, both the social nature and the material basis of 'culture' in the usual intellectuals' sense. It may look as if it could have simply come 'out of people's heads', by free choice; in reality it could not.

There is no time here to say more about the fascinating history of the émigrés and their impact upon the neighbour kingdom. But in a broad sense there is no doubt what happened: unable, for the structural reasons described, to fulfil the 'standard' 19th-century function of elaborating a romantic-national culture for their own people, they applied themselves with vigour to the unfortunate southerners. Our former intelligentsia lost its cohesion and unitary function (its nature *as* an élite) and the individual members poured their formidable energies into the authentically 'organic community' centred on London. There, they played a very large part in formulating the new national and imperial culture-community. We must all be at times painfully aware of how England to this day languishes under the 'tradition' created by the Carlyle-Ruskin school of mystification, as well as the brilliant political inheritance nurtured by Keir Hardie and J. Ramsay MacDonald.

In one way this can be considered a typical form of 'provincialization' which went on in all the greater nation-states. Everywhere hungry and ambitious intellectuals were drawn out of their hinterlands and into the cultural service of their respective capitals. If there was a significant difference here, it lay surely in the higher level and stronger base from which the Scots started. These enabled them, perhaps, to make a contribution at once more important and more distinctive in character. They did not come from a province of an *ancien régime*, but from an

advanced quasi-nation with a high (if now anachronistic) culture of its own, and so had a head-start on other backwoodsmen.

To be concluded.

Endnotes

¹ Originally published as T. Nairn, 'Scotland and Europe', *New Left Review*, 83/1 (1974), 57-82. (<https://newleftreview.org/issues/i83/articles/tom-nairn-scotland-and-europe>)

² 'L'internationalisation des rapports capitalistes et l'état-nation', *Les Temps Modernes*, 319 (1973), 1492-93.

³ *Les Temps Modernes*, 324-326 (August-September 1973).

⁴ Vallecchi, Florence 1973.

⁵ This paper was originally presented at a post-graduate seminar of the Glasgow University's Department of Politics, held in Helensburgh in October 1973. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the students of the Department who asked me to speak there. As printed here it still largely consists of notes for a talk, with only minor changes and the addition of some quotations and references. Only the concluding section is mainly new, and has been influenced by working on the preparation of the International Conference on Minorities, due to be held in Trieste from 27 to 31 May 1974. This will be the largest forum so far for the expression and consideration of minority problems in Europe, including those of repressed or resurgent nationality.

⁶ M. Hroch, *Die Vorkämpfer der nationalen Bewegung bei den kleinen Völkern Europas* (Prague: 1968), a study of the formation and early stages of nationalism in Bohemia, Slovakia, Norway, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania and Flanders.

⁷ There is no room to discuss this further. The reader will find useful surveys of nationalist theory in Aira Kemiläinen, *Nationalism: Problems Concerning the Word, the Concept and Classification* (London: 1964), and in Anthony D.

Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: 1971). One attempt to relate older theories of nationalism to contemporary developments is P. Fougeyrollas, *Pour une France Fédérale: vers l'unité européenne par la révolution régionale* (Paris: 1968), especially Part I, Chapters 1 and 2.

⁸ 'Nationalism' in the volume *Thought and Change* (London: 1964), the most important and influential recent study in English.

⁹ *The Idea of Progress* (London: 1968), p. 46.

¹⁰ Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, p. 83.

¹¹ E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848* (London: 1962), pp. 133–5.

¹² I cannot refrain here from citing a criticism of the author made by the Scottish nationalist writer John Herdman, in his contribution to Duncan Glen's *Whither Scotland?* He castigates my unduly material conception of the purpose of development (in an earlier essay called 'Three Dreams of Scottish Nationalism', *New Left Review* no. 49, May-June 1968, reprinted in Karl Miller's *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland*, 1970) and observes that: 'To my mind both these (material) purposes are secondary and subservient to the mobilizing of populations for *spiritual* development. I dislike the word but cannot think of a better one . . .' (p. 109). And what does such spiritual development counter? The unacceptable face of 'progress', as shown in 'a nation which has become the very embodiment of anti-civilization, of an amorphous mass culture which is ignoble, ugly and debased'. This is England of course. But it might equally well be France, as once seen by German nationalists; Germany, as once seen by Pan Slavism; America, as now seen by half the world; the ussr, as seen by the Chinese . . . and so on. By contrast Scotland's spiritual solution is (again very characteristically) 'the difficult assumption of a cultural independence which will give a new dynamic to the country' (Duncan Glen, op. cit., p. 22).

¹³ Naturally, the anti-nationalist bias tends to be somewhat more revealing; yet this is to say little. The most interesting strain of bourgeois anti-nationalism is the conservative one deriving from Lord Acton's essay on 'Nationality' (1862, reprinted in *Essays*, ed. G. Himmelfarb, 1949). But really very little has been added to it since, as one may see by consulting, e.g. Professor E. Kedourie's Actonian volume *Nationalism* (London: 1960). It is significant in this connection

that the first sensible progress in nationalism-theory was made after the First World War by scholars in America who had established a sufficient distance from Europe (the Hayes and Kohn schools). While with few exceptions further serious contributions have been made via the study of Third World 'development' since the Second World War, especially by sociologists. All three stances (social conservatism, the vantage point of an—at that time—less nationalist USA, and Third Worldism) have permitted varying degrees of psychic detachment from the core of the nationalist thought-world.

¹⁴ The outstanding study of the problem of 'historyless peoples' from a Marxist point of view is R. Rosdolsky, *Friedrich Engels und das Problem der 'Geschichtslosen Völker'*,

¹⁵ Beginning with modern Greece, that first model and inspiration of nationalist revolts throughout Europe. There the gap between present realities and past history was so enormous that the new intellectuals had to create the new myths *de toutes pièces*. As one (notably pro-Greek) author says: 'Those who spoke the Greek language . . . had no notion of classical Greece or of the Hellenistic civilization of Roman times . . . The classical ruins were quite unintelligible to early modern Greeks . . . From Roman times the Greeks had called themselves "Romans" and continued to do so up to and during the War of Independence'. D. Dakin, *The Greek Struggle for Independence 1821-1833* (London: 1973), pp. 11–22.

¹⁶ W. Robertson, *History of Scotland*, 1803, in *Works* 1817. vol. 3, pp. 188–200.

¹⁷ T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People 1560-1830* (1969), p. 33.

¹⁸ Even more to the point perhaps, one need only think of the period just before 1707—that is, the period of the Scottish bourgeoisie's last attempt at separate and competitive development through the colonization of Darien. This was destroyed largely through English pressures. Can anyone imagine that under 19th-century conditions this *débâcle* would have been forgiven and realistically forgotten? On the contrary, it would have been turned into a compelling popular reason for still more aggressive separate (i.e. nationalist) development. As things were, in the prenationalist age this tailor-made nationalist tragedy led straight to the 1707 Union.

¹⁹ As the editor of the recent Edinburgh edition of the *Essay* states: ‘Adam Ferguson was a Highlander . . . and undoubtedly behind the *Essay* lies a deeply felt experience of the contrast between these two societies, and the question: what happens to man in the progress of society? Ferguson knew intimately, and from the inside, the two civilizations . . . which divided 18th-century Scotland: the *Gemeinschaft* of the clan, the *Gesellschaft* of the “progressive”, commercial Lowlands’. Duncan Forbes, ‘Introduction’, pp. xxxviii-xxxix, 1966 edition.

²⁰ D. Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People, 1680-1830* (Edinburgh: 1961), pp. 13–14, 273.

²¹ T. C. Smout, op. cit., p. 226.

²² Ibid., pp. 484–5.

²³ Lukács’ essay is also reprinted in *Scott’s Mind and Art*, ed. Jeffares, Edinburgh 1969. Thomas Carlyle’s influential essay on Scott appeared in the *London and Westminster Review* (1838) and is partly reprinted in *Scott: the Critical Heritage*, ed. J. Hayden, (London: 1970).

²⁴ J. G. Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1837–8) (Everyman’s abridged edition: 1906), p. 653.

²⁵ *Memorials of His Time*, by Lord Cockburn (1856) (abridged edition: 1946), pp. 64–5.

²⁶ Hroch, op. cit., pp. 160–1; see also E. J. Hobsbawm, ‘Nationalism’, in *Imagination and Precision in the Social Sciences* (London: 1972), p. 399.

²⁷ An interesting recent example of this was provided by the nationalist Stephen Maxwell, in censuring some favourable remarks I had made about the Scottish Enlightenment in *Scottish International* (April 1973). Replying in the following issue of the review he condemned their ‘intellectualism’ as ‘a symptom of the schizophrenia in Scottish culture that eventually issued in the “kailyard” and was partly responsible for obstructing an adequate radical response in Scotland to the problems of 19th-century industrialism . . .’ Exactly: the 18th century is to blame for everything, even my own lamentable views!

²⁸ This curious bacillus can be traced back to G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919). It explodes unpronounceably in the

archives of literary nationalism quite often after that—e.g. MacDiarmid: ‘The Caledonian Antisyzygy . . . may be awaiting the exhaustion of the whole civilization of which English literature is a typical product in order to achieve its effective synthesis in a succeeding and very different civilization’ (*Albyn*, 1927, p. 34).

²⁹ Edwin Muir, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–4, 73–5.

³⁰ J. H. Robertson, *Criticisms* Vol. II (1885) p. 67.

³¹ Craig, *op. cit.* p. 276.