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FOR “THE PROSPERITY OF SCOTLAND”: MEDIATING NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE *SCOTS MAGAZINE*, 1739-1749

Alex Benchimol

In a recent article on the Scottish version of the *Tatler*, Hamish Mathison observes: “From the first, the newspaper press in Scotland and commentators upon it associated the printing of newspapers with the status and self-understanding of the nation itself.”¹ Mathison illustrates this by referring to the print factionalism identified by James Watson, proprietor of the *Edinburgh Gazette* and *Edinburgh Courant*, and its national political equivalent noted by George Chalmers, an early historian of the Scottish periodical press. Mathison’s insights on the close relationship between an intensely self-reflexive periodical print culture in early eighteenth-century Scotland and the nation’s wider aspirations for a distinctive cultural identity in the wake of the Union settlement are joined by important new work from Leith Davis, Warren McDougall and Stephen W. Brown that frame Watson’s multifarious role in encouraging the Scottish publishing market to take an active part in the country’s struggle for autonomy. Davis argues that his pioneering *Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems* (1706-11) “uses the imaginative space of the miscellany to bring readers of different tastes and interests together to promote the cause of Scotland at a time during which the nation’s very existence was under threat,” and sees the *Collection* as promoting “Scottish independence through encouraging readers to recognize the uniqueness of Scottish identity.”³ McDougall makes a complementary case for Watson’s influential efforts to promote

¹ Hamish Mathison, “Robert Hepburn and the *Edinburgh Tatler*: a study in an early British periodical,” *Media History* 11 (2005): 147-61 (p. 149).

³ Leith Davis, “Imagining the Miscellaneous Nation: James Watson’s *Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems*,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 35.3 (2011): 60-80 (pp. 61, 65).

and improve Scottish printing after the Union that he so vigorously opposed. "Watson's connecting of print, improvement and the Scottish identity set the tone for the century," he argues.⁴ Brown and McDougall note that "Watson's ambitions for improvement were as much an expression of nationalistic pride as a commercial strategy," and, with the open border after the Union threatening the fragile state of the Scottish publishing market, a new form of print patriotism was called for. They argue that "it was Watson's commitment to making print a site for sustaining Scottish identity against the subsuming threat of Britishness that set the tone for the history of the book in eighteenth-century Scotland."⁵

Significantly for the argument of the present essay, Brown and McDougall explicitly link Watson's print nationalism with the patriotic aims for national improvement articulated by the conductors of the *Scots Magazine*.⁶ Indeed, this important recent scholarly formation engaging with eighteenth-century Scottish publishing history, splendidly manifested in the 2012 publication of volume 2 of *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland: Enlightenment and Expansion, 1707-1800*, edited jointly by Brown and McDougall, provides a provocative context for the present effort to map how the *Scots Magazine*, in its first decade of existence, gave tangible expression to a post-1707 national public sphere devoted to material and cultural improvement through the widespread dissemination of knowledge, using periodical print as both physical emblem and medium to project a new form of national cultural identity, embodied in the closing lines of the preface to the magazine's first volume in 1739, which declared "for as our labours, so are our wishes employed on the PROSPERITY OF SCOTLAND."⁷

Indeed, during its first decade of publication the *Scots Magazine* serves as an early historical example of how the nation's distinctive cultural institutions have "played a powerful role in sustaining and even in part defining our contemporary sense of Scotland and 'Scottishness,'"

⁴ Warren McDougall, "Developing a Marketplace for Books: Edinburgh," in *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland: Volume 2: Enlightenment and Expansion 1707-1800*, eds. Stephen W. Brown and Warren McDougall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2012), 118-31 (p. 118).

⁵ Stephen W. Brown and Warren McDougall, "Introduction," in *Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland*, 1-22 (pp. 8, 9).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷ "Preface," *Scots Magazine* 1 (January 1739): i-iv (p. iv).

as the late Scottish legal philosopher Neil MacCormick put it in his 1999 study *Questioning Sovereignty*. He continues, “One form of nationalism in Scotland for long argued that the defence and nurturing of such institutions was the most desirable way of upholding Scotland’s position as a contemporary nation embedded in a larger state (and some would say more comprehensive nation).”⁸ At a time when the ideological tensions within this tradition of Scottish civic nationalism are being sharply tested by the shifting parameters of the nation’s twenty-first century constitutional debate,⁹ it may be worth revisiting how the nascent national press of the mid-eighteenth century first represented Scotland as a distinctive national cultural entity within the Union. To illustrate this, the present essay will focus on how the *Scots Magazine* projected Scottish material and cultural improvement as a compelling national narrative to its readers, a narrative often self-reflexively embodied in the pages of the periodical itself. This emphasis on periodical self-representation will focus particular attention to a selection of prefaces introducing (and indeed, reviewing) the annual volumes from 1739—the year of the magazine’s founding amidst a severe economic recession—to 1749, three years following the national trauma visited by the Jacobite Rebellion, when the conductors sought to rearticulate a compelling narrative of national progress nearly two generations after Union. As well as, in the words of the preface to the 1747 volume of the magazine, “drawing together the most remarkable transactions of each year in a

⁸ Neil MacCormick, *Questioning Sovereignty: Law, State, and Nation in the European Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 184.

⁹ For key articulations of competing policy positions in the recent Scottish constitutional debate, see The Scottish Government, *Choosing Scotland’s Future: A National Conversation: Independence and Responsibility in the Modern World* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Executive, 2007); and Commission on Scottish Devolution, *Serving Scotland Better: Scotland and the United Kingdom in the 21st Century* (Edinburgh: Her Majesty’s Government, 2009). For influential explications and critiques of Scotland’s recent constitutional identity, see Murray Pittock, *The Road to Independence?: Scotland Since the Sixties* (London: Reaktion, 2008), 155–83; Colin Kidd, *Union and Unionism: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 1–38, 257–99; James Mitchell, “Review of *Union and Unionism: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500–2000*, by Colin Kidd,” *Scottish Historical Review* 89 (2010): 113–14; Neil Walker, “Scottish Nationalism For and Against the Union State: The Vision of Neil MacCormick,” *University of Edinburgh School of Law Working Paper No. 2011/25* (Edinburgh University, 2011).

general summary at the beginning of the year following,”¹⁰ these strategic paratextual documents also provide fascinating and valuable snapshots of the changing material and ideological imperatives in Scotland’s periodical public sphere, often juxtaposing thrusting national cultural aspiration with provincial diffidence in a complex articulation of what Mathison calls the “anxieties of a post-Union Scottish literary identity.”¹¹ The recent work by Davis, Brown, and McDougall on the contested ideological origins of the eighteenth-century Scottish press, including the inheritance that leading literary projects like the *Scots Magazine* owe to the nationalist cultural project of Watson in particular, only serve to amplify, I would argue, these “anxieties of a post-Union Scottish literary identity.”¹²

The aims of the *Scots Magazine* at its founding help us to locate a wider struggle in the mid-eighteenth century Scottish public sphere manifested in the material pressures for cultural assimilation heading north from Britain’s great metropolis, and the local patriotic desire to assert the cultural autonomy of the nation some thirty years after the Union settlement.¹³ As Mathison has demonstrated with Robert Hepburn’s Edinburgh version of the *Tatler* in 1711, the fledgling Scottish periodical market needed to acknowledge “the affective gap ... between London and Edinburgh” in order to carve out a distinctive position from which to “comment meaningfully on Scottish manners.”¹⁴ He argues that an epistolary appeal by Hepburn, through the persona of Donald MacStaff, for his metropolitan cousin Isaac Bickerstaff at Sir Richard Steele’s London *Tatler* “to take account of Edinburgh manners,” “cleverly uses MacStaff’s address to combine the cultural imperatives of the paper with an acknowledgement that it will have to deal too with the realities of Scotland’s new status as a “Northern Part” of a larger post-1707 political

¹⁰ “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 9 (January 1747): iii-iv (p. iii).

¹¹ Mathison, 150.

¹² See Brown and McDougall, 8-10; McDougall, “Developing a Marketplace for Books,” 118-19; Stephen W. Brown, “Newspapers and Magazines,” in *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland*, 353-68 (pp. 353-55, 359-60, 364-68); and Davis, 61-66, 71-73.

¹³ For an extended discussion of this complex dynamic of cultural assimilation and assertion in the early and mid-eighteenth century national public sphere in Scotland, see Alex Benchimol, “Periodicals and Public Culture,” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism*, ed. Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2011), 84-99 (pp. 87-95).

¹⁴ Mathison, 151.

project.”¹⁵

This desire to adapt a dominant London-based periodical genre in order to “comment meaningfully on Scottish manners” also animated the alliance of booksellers and printers behind the Edinburgh-based *Scots Magazine*—Alexander Brymer, William Sands, James Cochran and Alexander Murray—who clearly recognised that the thriving model of Edward Cave’s *Gentleman’s Magazine* and its immediate imitator, the *London Magazine*, had created an opportunity for a Scottish version of the metropolitan miscellany.¹⁶ The conductors write in their first preface to the 1739 volume that the “demand for these *Magazines* being considerable in this kingdom, and our distance from the place of their publication rendering their contents stale before they came to hand, several persons were put upon endeavouring to remove these inconveniences by supplying their place with a production of our own.”¹⁷ The motivation of the new Scottish magazine’s publishers to establish a rival to the London-based miscellanies can also be viewed, as Brown has argued, as the continuation of efforts, going back to James Watson’s various projects of print nationalism after the Union settlement, to establish “the demand for a local paper that reflected Edinburgh’s political, social and cultural life alongside the obligatory digest of foreign news derived from the London and Amsterdam press.”¹⁸ Despite, as Robert Eliot has observed in a 1950 article on “The Early *Scots Magazine*,” being “In plan, in content, and in method ... admittedly patterned after the recently successful *Gentleman’s Magazine* and the

¹⁵ Ibid., 150, 151.

¹⁶ W. J. Couper’s pioneering study of the early Edinburgh press notes how the firm of Murray & Cochran occupied premises within Craig’s Close in the city, the same close which James Watson used for his publishing activities earlier in the century. See W. J. Couper, *The Edinburgh Periodical Press: Being a Bibliographical Account of the Newspapers, Journals, and Magazines issued in Edinburgh from the Earliest Times to 1800*, 2 vols (Stirling: Eneas Mackay, 1908), 1:34-35.

¹⁷ “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 1 (January 1739): i. The conductors were following in the footsteps of earlier native periodical efforts like James McEuen’s *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, to, in Stephen Brown’s words, “guarantee the most immediate intelligence of international affairs” through Edinburgh’s port contacts to Europe, thus providing an alternative to the London papers for the nation’s coverage of overseas news events. See Brown, “Newspapers and Magazines,” 354. See also Couper, *Edinburgh Periodical Press*, 2:19-23.

¹⁸ Brown, “Newspapers and Magazines,” 353-54.

London Magazine,” what Eliot calls “the dependent character” of the new Scottish publication “was somewhat mitigated by the editors’ encouragement of native contributions.” However, Eliot concludes: “So small and of so little consequence ... were the early contributions made by Scottish writers that the *Scots Magazine* may be said to have achieved its success largely as a parasite on London publications.”¹⁹ This characterization underestimates the complex intellectual modernity of the *Scots Magazine* as an emblematic example of a nascent national press in Scotland devoted to re-calibrating the country’s cultural identity in periodical form. Indeed, as Eliot himself acknowledges, the focus of the magazine remained “always on the historical and the political; literature, and culture generally, was not ignored, but it was the history of the times that the editors were chiefly interested in.”²⁰ This emphasis on contemporary affairs and national history, and Scotland’s place within them, was a recurring theme in the magazine during its first decade, and a natural consequence of its hopes to both promote and report on the nation’s material and cultural development in a British and European context.²¹

I

The periodical’s first preface introduces national improvement as an overriding thematic narrative, highlighting Scotland’s complex socio-cultural positionality in 1739. The conductors present this as a case of promoting Scotland’s national interest in the political alliance with its larger and richer partner, writing that “surely the *interest of Scotland*, abstractedly consider’d, is worthy of our most watchful attention.” They argue that at a time “while many are so variously engaged to promote the *particular* interest of the more Southern part of this island, it is at least laudable, if it be not necessary, to pay some separate regard to the welfare and prosperity of a country that has been the scene of actions the memory whereof will ever bloom while Fame exists.”²²

The preface is at pains to emphasize that the periodical’s Scottish perspective will help the nation to recover some of its lost national pride,

¹⁹ Robert C. Eliot, “The Early *Scots Magazine*,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 11 (1950): 189-96 (pp. 189, 190).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

²¹ An excellent account of the magazine’s early development can be found in Couper, vol. 2, 71-76.

²² “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 1 (January 1739): ii.

despite the geographical distance from the metropolis driving so much of its material and cultural transformation, as well as the scale of the developmental challenges facing the Northern part of the island. The conductors write:

For, though in many things calculated for the good of *Great Britain*, *Scotland* is little more than nominally consider'd; her distance from the seat of monarchy, instead of dispiriting, should prompt her sons to compensate that misfortune by their extraordinary zeal in her service, to shew themselves equal to the present disadvantage of their situation; and, by an earnest exertion of their talents, revive that universal esteem which SCOTLAND so justly acquir'd amongst her neighbours by the valour and learning of our ancestors.²³

National improvement, despite “the present disadvantage” Scotland finds itself in, is to be the animating ideological imperative driving the magazine in the next decade. Brown and McDougall have observed that the preface here follows in a tradition of print patriotism initiated by James Watson from earlier in the century, witnessed in the conductors’ desire to encourage a distinctively Scottish cultural identity for its readers through their hope that “the *Caledonian* Muse might not be restrain’d by want of a publick Echo to her song.”²⁴ Indeed, the fledging journal’s Scottish features are cannily presented as emblems of patriotic commitment to its primary readership, a concern—the conductors imply—that heroically risks commercial failure in their local generic deviations from the leading metropolitan magazines, when, as the booksellers and printers behind the enterprise were surely aware, the magazine’s Scottish aspects also function as an astute form of cultural branding in an increasingly crowded periodical market of the 1730s.²⁵

We have so constantly preferred the pleasure of our readers to any low considerations of our own interest [they write], “that we cannot but hope any variation from those of *England*, which may at first be dislik’d merely for being a variation, will readily be approv’d upon a strict comparison.”²⁶

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. See Brown and McDougall, 9-10.

²⁵ Brown observes that the Magazine’s “patriotic mandate followed [William] Cheyne whose *Thistle* had emphasised its Scottishness, in title and motto – *nemo me impune lacessit* (‘no one attacks me with impunity’).” See Stephen W. Brown, “Newspapers and Magazines,” 364.

²⁶ “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 1 (January 1739): iii.

The preface concludes with a clear reminder of the collective nature of this new Scottish cultural endeavor, overlapping the interests and efforts of its proprietors with those of the Scottish public they have pledged to serve in its pages:

And we must own, that the chearful help we have received from most parts of this kingdom, gives yet further hopes of success, as it proves that the real intention of The SCOTS MAGAZINE is agreeable to those upon whose favour it must principally, if not entirely, depend.

The last sentence of the preface amplifies this deliberate doubling of periodical and national interest in *The Scots Magazine's* agenda, appealing to its Scottish readers for suggestions to improvement in the journal's design, while at the same time pledging its print efforts to the service of the wider material improvement of the nation:

We shall only add, that as our study is to instruct and entertain in such manner as is most agreeable to our readers, we shall chearfully comply with any hints given for the improvement of our design; and beg leave to repeat it again, that before every thing else, whatever concerns the interest of this kingdom, shall always be preferred; for as our labours, so are our wishes employed on the PROSPERITY OF SCOTLAND.²⁷

This appeal by the conductors of the new magazine for their readers to take an active part in the shaping of the periodical's agenda follows in a distinguished Scottish print tradition of "national collectivity" initiated by the publisher James Watson, as Leith Davis notes of a similar call from his *Edinburgh Courant* for literary contributions to improve his *Choice Collection*: "For Watson, establishing a Scottish national literary corpus involves a collective agreement between printer and reader."²⁸

The emphasis on Scotland's material and cultural improvement in the *Scots Magazine* is most clearly reflected in the "Domestic Occurrences" section of the inaugural issue, from its report on the progress of the construction of Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary, whose Board of twenty directors is made up of representatives from the city's professional classes, including two professors of medicine from Edinburgh University, alongside the Lord Provost, representatives from the Faculty of Advocates, as well as the Deacon-convener of the trades of Edinburgh.²⁹ The Board stands as an example of Edinburgh's emergent bourgeois

²⁷ Ibid., iv.

²⁸ Davis, 71.

²⁹ "Domestick Occurrences," *Scots Magazine* 1 (January 1739): 39-43 (p. 40).

public sphere that the new periodical seeks to both publicize in its pages and target as a locally influential readership³⁰—a public sphere, as Nicholas Phillipson reminds us in his recent biography of Adam Smith, that brings together leaders from Scotland’s autonomous civic institutions in an “elite culture dedicated to improvement and to providing local elites with a distinctive political identity.”³¹ This featured report on the construction of the Infirmary is complemented by a detailed assessment of damage wrought by what the magazine describes as a “most violent hurricane” to some of the capital’s most symbolically resonant buildings, including Edinburgh Castle, the Parliament building and St. Giles Cathedral, reminding its readers of the vulnerability of Edinburgh’s physical infrastructure and giving added impetus to the project of national material improvement championed in its pages.³² We should recall, after all, that the magazine was launched during a period of national economic crisis in Scotland, prompted by a series of harvest failures from 1738 until 1741 when, according to the economic historian Philipp Rössner in a recent article, the economy suffered from “extreme price rises for foodstuffs” with “grain prices rising faster and to higher levels than meat prices; extreme contractions in agrarian and industrial output; significant increases in mortality in some parishes; declining real wages and employment; and a net reduction in capital.”³³ These economic indicators underscored the material challenges facing Scotland in its attempts to

³⁰ This emergent and increasingly influential bourgeois public sphere is nicely emblemized in the figure of the leading bookseller and civic leader Gavin Hamilton, who, as depicted in an article by Warren McDougall, played a key role in Edinburgh’s drive for material and cultural improvement, through, in particular, his activities on the Town Council, manager of the Edinburgh Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Sciences, Manufactures and Agriculture, and as Treasurer of the Royal Infirmary. See Warren McDougall, “Gavin Hamilton, Bookseller in Edinburgh,” *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 1 (1978): 1-19 (p. 3).

³¹ Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (London: Penguin, 2011), 78. Phillipson has discussed the complex make-up of Scotland’s elite form of post-1707 civic virtue in an earlier essay: see Nicholas Phillipson, “The Scottish Enlightenment,” in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), 19-40 (pp. 27-8, 32-4).

³² “Domestick Occurrences,” 40-41.

³³ Philipp Robinson Rössner, “The 1738–41 Harvest Crisis in Scotland,” *Scottish Historical Review* 90 (2011): 27–63 (p. 31).

become a modern commercial nation to rival its southern neighbour, providing a wider context to the *Scots Magazine's* agenda for improvement in its first decade of publication.

The magazine's agenda for Scotland's national improvement through economic development also featured in its publicizing of the activities of the Dublin Society for Improving Husbandry, Manufactures, and other useful Arts, as noted in Davis McElroy's pioneering 1969 study of Scottish associational culture, *Scotland's Age of Improvement*.³⁴ In "A Letter relating to Trade in Scotland," as it was titled in the August 1739 issue, an English correspondent announces the salutary example to Scotland of this Irish society founded in 1731, an early model for Edinburgh's Society for Encouraging Arts, Sciences, Manufactures and Agriculture. The writer suggests that

the *generous proceedings* of the DUBLIN SOCIETY, established without any view beside that of *serving their country*, by INSTRUCTING and ASSISTING the natives in the improvement of the different parts of their country to the purposes *most capable of rewarding their industry*, have set YOUR COUNTRYMEN *an example well worthy their imitation*.³⁵

By publishing such a direct invitation to exchange organized intelligence with civic improvement initiatives in Dublin, the conductors of the *Scots Magazine*, from its editorial base in Edinburgh, remind their readers of the value of autonomous initiatives for national improvement far away from England's great metropolis, and the active role the new periodical can play in realizing Scotland's economic and cultural potential.

Indeed, using the periodical as a means of publicizing proposals for national reform became a key aspect of its journalistic mission in the mid eighteenth-century Scottish public sphere. In the conclusion of the preface to the 1741 volume, the conductors declare that

one other valuable use our *Magazine* is of, in that it furnishes Gentlemen a means of *communicating to the publick any discoveries they make in arts or sciences, or whatever may contribute either to the utility or entertainment of mankind*.³⁶

Reflecting the dire economic circumstances of the nation during these

³⁴ Davis D. McElroy, *Scotland's Age of Improvement: A Survey of Eighteenth-Century Literary Clubs and Societies* (Pullman: Washington State Univ. Press, 1969), 52.

³⁵ "To the author of the SCOTS MAGAZINE: A Letter relating to Trade in SCOTLAND," *Scots Magazine* 1 (August 1739): 361-62 (pp. 361-2).

³⁶ "Preface," *Scots Magazine* 3 (January 1741): iii-iv (p. iv).

years, a detailed proposal for poor relief and labour exchange was featured in the December 1740 issue from an Edinburgh correspondent signing as “A Lover of Mankind.” In this letter directed to the “author of the *Scots Magazine*,” subsequently published as a pamphlet entitled *Some Regulations with regard to the Begging Poor; And A Scheme for Providing Employment for Labourers of all Kinds*,³⁷ the correspondent lays out a scheme for classifying the poor, infirm and jobless in each district of the nation—rural and urban—with regard to physical health and capacity for employment. Most interestingly, the correspondent proposes the *Scots Magazine* serve as a “kind of publick market-place, where employers and labourers might as it were meet together monthly” to negotiate terms of employment and payment. The correspondent concludes his letter with a plea that his project

be communicated to proper persons,” requesting that copies of the letter be sent to “their Lordships, also to the Barons of Exchequer, the Magistrates of *Edinburgh* and other boroughs, Justices of Peace, Nobility, Gentry, Clergy, the Trustees for encouraging Manufactures, the Society for improving Agriculture, &c.”³⁸

The conductors published a reply to the letter in the same issue, stating that

Agreeable to the above hint, we published the Gentleman’s letter a few days after it came to hand, inscribed to the Lords or Session, Barons of Exchequer, Magistrates, Justices of Peace, &c. to whom we lent copies.

Recognizing the key role of the magazine as a suitably frugal vehicle for civil society initiatives, they add:

Whatever resolution any city, parish, or society, take with regard to this proposal, shall, if we be favoured with a copy of it, be inserted in our *Magazine*; which, however, we intreat may be concisely written, the great variety we give in small bounds obliging us to be very frugal in point of room.

The conductors then go on to detail how their magazine can be employed as “the scene of action” for the scheme, with an offer of both free and reduced terms for the advertising of labour on the covers of the

³⁷ See “A Lover of Mankind,” *Some regulations with regard to the begging poor: And a scheme for providing employment for labourers of all kinds; in a letter to the author of the Scots magazine: humbly presented, in obedience to the request of the unknown writer* (Edinburgh: s.n., 1741).

³⁸ “To the author of the SCOTS MAGAZINE: Regulations anent the Begging Poor, &c,” *Scots Magazine* 2 (December 1740): 565-67 (p. 567).

periodical,³⁹ concluding with a call for other readers to follow the correspondent's lead in "presenting to the publick with whatever they think of service to mankind, or discoveries in arts or sciences."⁴⁰

In a letter published the following month, in the January 1741 issue, this call was heeded with a very different kind of public proposal. "From the impartiality of your conduct hitherto, in giving every one a hearing," writes a correspondent signing as "J. F.," "I expect you will let the following arguments, for a play-house, and the few other diversions of this city, have a place in your *Magazine*." The writer makes a spirited and humorous case for a civic theatre in Edinburgh, pleading, during a period of economic gloom: "It is beyond all question, that diversions at sometimes are absolutely necessary for every one of the species; and certainly the publick, or those we partake of in a society, are on many occasions the preferable." The two primary reasons the correspondent lists for the enterprise poke a gentle finger at the contemporary national self-image. Firstly, he writes, "We are more troubled with spleen and melancholy than any other people on earth." And secondly, "Our religion is plainer, it has much less pomp and ceremony than that of most of our neighbours." Finally, he writes that there are good political reasons for another playhouse, as restrictions on popular theatrical diversions "would naturally tend to increase the melancholy of the people, and consequently multiply murmurs at the administration."⁴¹

³⁹ This offer to advertise employment opportunities on the magazine's covers reminds us of the significance of the role of the original blue paper wrappers that issues were presented with, often overlooked because of the dearth of surviving intact single copies of eighteenth-century periodicals in research libraries. A recent essay by Stephen Brown highlights the importance of these lost paratextual items, in particular how "they provide fascinating insights into the ways in which publishers promoted their periodicals and attempted to attract new readers beyond their initial subscribers." See Stephen W. Brown, "Wrapping the News: The *Historical Register* and the Uses of Blue Paper Covers on Eighteenth-Century Magazines," *Journal of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society* 1 (2006): 48-70 (p. 51). Brown also notes, however, that from "its establishment in 1739 until the early 1750s, surviving single issues of the *Scots Magazine* seem to indicate that the publishers did little with the blue wrappers during these years" (60).

⁴⁰ "A Scheme for employing Labourers," *Scots Magazine* 2 (December 1740): 568 (p. 568).

⁴¹ "To the author of the SCOTS MAGAZINE: A Defence of Publick Diversions," *Scots Magazine* 3 (January 1741): 27 (p. 27).

II

Throughout the early and mid-1740s the magazine's self-appointed mission as a periodical of national record was tested by a number of social and political challenges, including pressing social welfare issues in the Kirk, a popular evangelical movement in the West of Scotland, and the political crisis of the Jacobite Rebellion. In the preface to the 1746 volume, the *Scots Magazine* presents itself as a trusted guardian of the intellectual integrity of the nation's public sphere, responding to these landmark Scottish events with a local sensitivity and understanding absent from English periodical rivals. The conductors write: "One inducement to the publishing of a *Magazine* at *Edinburgh* was, that a more compleat history of SCOTS AFFAIRS might be given, than was to be found in any of the collections made in *England*; where our laws and customs are not generally well understood, nor what relates peculiarly to this part of the kingdom, properly attended to."⁴²

Recent events in the country had justified the practical need for a national periodical press in Scotland, and the magazine's conductors cite its role in facilitating debate around a complex social welfare issue in the Scottish Church as a case in point.⁴³ "When a *provision for the widows and orphans of Ministers* was in agitation, the sentiments of different persons were, by it [the magazine], more easily and extensively made known, than otherwise they would probably have been," they write. In its pages "objections were started, answers made to them, and amendments offered to the original plan," and some key innovations, like the "taxing of marriages ... was first proposed in our *Magazine*."⁴⁴ This claim was borne out in a letter published in the October 1743 issue, where the correspondent provides a detailed account of how his Glasgow club uses the *Scots Magazine* as the primary stimulus to their deliberations, with praise for how "the bulk of our club were highly pleased to find the author of the *Scots Magazine* give great attention to a subject in which most of the people in *Scotland* are more nearly or more remotely concerned," with explicit reference to "warm debate in our club" around

⁴² "Preface," *Scots Magazine* 8 (January 1746): iii-iv (p. iii).

⁴³ Perhaps the announcement of a periodical rival, the short-lived *British Magazine*, was another source for the conductors' defence of their journal's utility in the Scottish public sphere. See Couper, vol. 2, 75.

⁴⁴ "Preface," *Scots Magazine* 8 (January 1746): iii.

the magazine's correspondence on the marriage tax proposals.⁴⁵

In addition to facilitating key institutional debates around welfare issues in the Kirk, the magazine also provided sustained reporting on—as well as channelling primary discussion about—the evangelical revival centred in Cambuslang during the early 1740s. The “remarkable appearance at Cambuslang and other places, within these few years, claimed our notice, as indeed for some time they very much ingrossed the publick conversation,” the preface relates.⁴⁶ The so-called “Cambuslang Wark,” a major popular religious reaction to repeated harvest failures in the West of Scotland, became a key Scottish expression of the first of the Great Awakenings, with significant theological and social implications for the national Kirk establishment, reflected in extracts published in the magazine from a pamphlet by an Edinburgh minister attacking the unorthodox evangelism at the centre of the movement, and an interrogation of the revival's campaign for charitable collections by a Glasgow correspondent.⁴⁷ The conductors of the magazine argue that “a more distinct account of the facts, with a more clear and impartial view of the disputes relating to that affair, is to be found in this collection, than any where else; several of which, but for it, might have been soon entirely

⁴⁵ “To the author of the SCOTS MAGAZINE: A dispute concerning the Ministers Scheme,” *Scots Magazine* 5 (October 1743): 472-74 (p. 473). For examples of related articles to this debate, see [William Grant], “OVERTURE and SCHEME for providing a YEARLY ANNUITY to Widows of Ministers of the established Church of Scotland,” *Scots Magazine* 4 (May 1742): 221-23; “To the author of the SCOTS MAGAZINE: Amendments to the Ministers widows Scheme,” *Scots Magazine* 4 (September 1742): 405-8; “Abstract of a pamphlet, intituled, The scheme for providing an annuity to Ministers widows [p. 221-7] examined, and a better proposed,” *Scots Magazine*, 4 (October 1742): 465-69; and “The particulars in which the scheme for making provision for the widows and children of Ministers,” *Scots Magazine* 5 (July 1743): 321-23. On the significance of the October 1743 Glasgow letter published in the *Scots Magazine*, see John Dwyer, *The Age of the Passions: An Interpretation of Adam Smith and Scottish Enlightenment Culture* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 1998), 113.

⁴⁶ “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 8 (January 1746): iii.

⁴⁷ See “Extract of a pamphlet intituled, A warning against countenancing the ministrations of Mr George Whitefield, written by Mr Adam Gib, Minister of the Associate congregation at Edinburgh,” *Scots Magazine* 4 (July 1742): 304-10; and “To the author of the SCOTS MAGAZINE: Remarks on Mr. Whitefield's Collections,” *Scots Magazine* 4 (October 1742): 459-64.

lost.”⁴⁸ This singular coverage included correspondence published in its pages involving leading players in the revival, including from the charismatic Methodist preacher at the centre of the movement, George Whitefield.⁴⁹

Perhaps the *Scots Magazine*'s most spirited defence of its national journalistic expertise is reserved for the periodical's coverage of what it calls “the late rebellion.” “On that account, at the beginning, and during the continuance of it, we often intreated all lovers of truth, to lend their assistance, for enabling us to give a full and exact detail of every memorable circumstance,” the conductors write in the preface.⁵⁰ Making a strong claim as a national chronicler of record for what it would refer to in the preface to the 1748 volume as a “civil war” in Scotland,⁵¹ the magazine emphasizes the periodical's role as a conduit for intelligence from “persons of all persuasions,” arguing that, by so doing, “we confined ourselves for the most part to bare facts, seldom presuming to make any observations or reflexions, and avoiding bitter language as much as possible.”⁵² “In some sort to gratify the curiosity of our readers, as well as enable them to judge for themselves, we usually gave the accounts published by the rebels, as well as those by the King's troops,” the conductors write.⁵³ “Such impartiality we supposed to be all that the most judicious of the vanquished party would expect, nor could we reasonably doubt of its being agreeable to the most generous of the victors.” On this issue they conclude, “We flatter ourselves, that our

⁴⁸ “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 8 (January 1746): iii.

⁴⁹ For an example, see [George Whitefield], “A letter from Mr Whitefield to Mr Willison, dated at Cambuslang, Aug. 17,” *Scots Magazine* 4 (October 1742): 455-56.

⁵⁰ “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 8 (January 1746): iii.

⁵¹ “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 10 (January 1748): iii-iv (iii).

⁵² “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 8 (January 1746): iii-iv.

⁵³ For examples of this, see “To the author of the SCOTS MAGAZINE: The Petition of Prestonpans, &c.,” *Scots Magazine* 7 (November 1745): 521; “Defence of the conduct of Gen. Cope at the battle of Preston,” *Scots Magazine* 7 (December 1745): 570-72; “The Addresses of Edinburgh and the County of York,” *Scots Magazine* 7 (September 1745): 426; [J. Murray], “Charles Prince of Wales, &c. Regent of Scotland, England, France, and Ireland, and the dominions thereunto belonging,” *Scots Magazine* 8 (January 1746): 31-46; “Account of the Battle of Culloden, with remarks on the dispositions of the armies,” *Scots Magazine* 8 (May 1746): 215-19; and “A Particular Account of the Surrender of the Town of Stirling,” *Scots Magazine* 8 (February 1746): 72-74.

history of the rebellion is pretty free of remarkable blunders, because we have received very few rectifications, though we hope that no lover of truth would refuse us such a favour.” Suggesting, finally, that the “increase of demand for our *Magazines* which contain that history, is another evidence to the same purpose.”⁵⁴ Indeed, a key early history of the Rebellion published in 1755 in Aberdeen was based on extracts published in the *Scots Magazine*.⁵⁵ *The History of the Rebellion in 1745 and 1746* was reviewed in the first issue of the *Edinburgh Review*, where John Jardine concluded that “the authors have no where in this performance distinguished themselves by any ‘party zeal’ in behalf of the present government, or against the Jacobites; and that ’tis in this sense they may be properly said to have done ‘strict justice to both,’” giving some credence to the magazine’s claims for impartiality in its reporting on the recent conflict.⁵⁶

In the wake of the recent rebellion and the role played by the *Scots Magazine* in transmitting its principal events and debates, the conductors frame the preface to the 1747 volume as an explicit defence of the distinctive Scottish mission of the periodical and the national public sphere it seeks to serve. The first part of the preface details the role of the magazine in establishing a reliable print forum for interpreting the exceptional events of the past two years, highlighting its unique civic value in a Scottish context:

Tho’ the rebellion was quite extinguished long before the beginning of 1747, it produced consequences so interesting to *Scotland*, that a *Magazine* calculated for this part of the united kingdom could not well be without accounts of them; and one containing such, drawn up in a tolerably full and exact manner, must deserve to be read by every *Scotsman*.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 8 (January 1746): iv.

⁵⁵ See *The History of the Rebellion in 1745 and 1746, extracted from the Scots Magazine: with an Appendix, containing an Account of the Trials of the Rebels; the Pretender and his Son’s Declarations* (Aberdeen: F. Douglas and W. Murray, 1755).

⁵⁶ [John Jardine], “History of the Rebellion 1745 and 1746,” *Edinburgh Review* 1 (1755): 27-9 (29). W. J. Couper notes that the *Scots Magazine* “did not conceal its hostility to Prince Charlie’s attempt, although the Pretender was magnanimous enough to authorise the firm to carry on their work even when he was at Holyrood.” See Couper, vol. 2, 74-75.

⁵⁷ “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 9 (January 1747): iii.

In the second half of the preface the conductors draw their readers' attention to the wider value of their periodical as a national paper of record. "We esteem it a great honour to be the servants of our country," they assert, "and it gives us a sensible pleasure when we can in the least contribute to the instruction or entertainment of Scotsmen." Striking a remarkable tone of print patriotism in the context an increasingly cosmopolitan literary public sphere, the conductors suggest that the past success of their periodical demonstrates clear evidence of the desire for a dedicated national press in Scotland, devoted to Scottish affairs:

Whatever freedoms some people may use with the general character of our countrymen, as if they preferred foreign to home productions, we can from pretty long experience declare that the contrary appears to be fact; and are so fully satisfied of the above being an unjust aspersion, that should we be so unfortunate as lose any of that friendly countenance which has been shown us, we would impute it to some failure in ourselves, or to the greater abilities and more diligent application of another, if such should offer his service in our way; either of which would be a sufficient reason for discontinuing the favourable reception we have hitherto met with.⁵⁸

This revealing passage, with its mixture of sincerity and anxiety—its faith in both the civic mission and commercial potential of a national Scottish periodical press juxtaposed with the conductors' fears of failing to live up to its demands—reflects the crucial material and cultural significance attributed to print expressions of national identity after the manifest failure of recent political forms of nationalism, embodied in the defeated Jacobite cause from a year earlier.

In the prefaces to the 1748 and 1749 volumes, the conductors embrace the theme of national material improvement, and the magazine's role in this postwar enterprise, through its encouragement of what it calls "learning, industry, and benevolence" in Scotland.⁵⁹ The preface to the 1748 volume opens:

The wars, foreign and domestick, which have ingrossed so much of our attention, being now at an end, this remarkable change in the face of publick affairs, will, we hope, afford us greater room for as useful, and more amiable entertainment.

⁵⁸ Ibid., iv.

⁵⁹ "Preface," *Scots Magazine* 10 (January 1748): iii. On the postwar focus of the 1748 preface, cf. Dwyer, *The Age of the Passions*, as in n. 45 above, 114.

The magazine observes that:

the generality of our readers will be glad to turn away their eyes from the horrid spectacles MARS has so long afforded, and fix them upon the more inviting scenes now offered us by MINERVA; and that our countrymen will return with joy to the culture of her peaceful arts, so much worthier the attention of the human mind, and which alone can deliver and secure us from ignorance, idleness, and party-spirit, more formidable than foreign foes.

In place of the geopolitical entanglements and civil strife of the 1740s, the magazine seeks to embed a new narrative of national material and cultural improvement, anticipating the aims of prominent mid eighteenth-century Edinburgh intellectual associations like the Select Society. The conductors write:

Let SCOTSMEN now shew themselves truly patriots, and endeavour to supply to their country the want of a court, and the absence of so many of her greatest sons, by promoting, with all their interest and influence, her agriculture, manufactures, and commerce, those plentiful sources of publick and private wealth.

This agenda emphasises trade as a principal vehicle for national prosperity, with the conductors arguing

advantages accruing from extensive *trade*, are in themselves so obvious, have been so often exhibited, and so visibly exemplified, particularly in our sister-nation, that it is no wonder if some parts of our country have already been animated with a laudable emulation: and it is to be hoped, that this spirit, diffusing itself by degrees through the whole, may come in time to render SCOTLAND as distinguished in the mercantile, as she is in the martial and learned world.⁶⁰

Such an agenda gives a national periodical like the *Scots Magazine* a central role to play in its fulfilment, with the print combination of international news reports, parliamentary summaries, domestic affairs coverage, and the civic forum of its letter pages uniquely suited to both promoting an ideology of civic development throughout Scotland, as well as providing essential intelligence to Scottish merchants, manufacturers and investors, at home and abroad.

Perhaps most striking, the preface to the 1748 volume presents the magazine itself as a physical embodiment of the cultural and material improvement it seeks to encourage in Scotland, with the very print used in its pages emblematic of the manufacturing potential of the country.

⁶⁰ "Preface," *Scots Magazine* 10 (January 1748): iii.

Lamenting the literary advantages enjoyed by England over Scotland through the southern nation's more developed printing infrastructure, the conductors write:

The kind of encouragement however given to our *Magazine*, as it does us a great deal of honour, so it has also done some small service to our country. For thereby its proprietors have been enabled to encourage, not only the labours of CALEDONIAN pens, but the mechanical manufactures of SCOTSMEN, particularly that curious one of *type-founding*, an art but lately known in *Scotland*. Nor can it fail of giving pleasure to every SCOTSMAN, to see our *Magazine*, which has these two years past been printed on SCOTS types, vie in beauty, as well as correctness, with any work of the same kind produced by the ENGLISH press.⁶¹

This passage is significant in its explicit material linking of the manufacturing and cultural dimensions of Scotland's wider agenda for national improvement, while also bringing together printing and literary activity as complementary aspects of the nation's emergent identity. In this enterprise the conductors were demonstrating their allegiance to a form of print patriotism first demonstrated by the influential publisher James Watson in the decade after Union in a pair of related publishing projects where material and cultural improvement are embodied in the skill, professionalism and innovation printers could provide to the nation. Leith Davis has described Watson's notion of print patriotism in an important recent article:

Good printing, he suggests, will keep good authors in "our Native Country." In the "*Publisher's* PREFACE to the PRINTERS in *Scotland*," then, as in the *Choice Collection*, "printing" and "the Honour of the Nation" are intimately connected. In the former, it is the printer's accuracy that is important; in the *Collection*, it is his ability to compile a miscellaneous sampling of representative texts to appeal to the interests of Scottish readers and channel them into concern for the nation.⁶²

As well as embodying the spirit of national improvement in the country, the preface to the 1748 volume makes the case for the generic advantages of a distinctive national press, based in Scotland, against those of what it

⁶¹ Ibid., iv.

⁶² Davis, 72. Watson's project of national cultural improvement through printing innovation, thus "making print a site for sustaining Scottish identity" in a post-1707 Scotland, as Brown and McDougall have put it, is discussed in their joint introduction to volume 2 of *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland*, 8-10.

calls “the *English monthly collections*,” arguing that the magazine, by “having the benefit of those collections themselves” and “being adapted more peculiarly to this part of the united kingdom, may reasonably be expected to excel them all in whatever relates to SCOTLAND.”⁶³

This last point is amplified in the preface to the 1749 volume, where the periodical is projected as an essential cultural counterpart to Scotland’s post-1707 national institutions. The conductors argue that the country’s unique developmental needs require a distinctive national periodical press to both articulate and publicize them:

As each society is more nearly concerned in their own affairs than in those of others, it would therefore be proper to have a regular publication of this nature in every nation. The knowledge of what affects the being and happiness of one state, may be but matter of amusement to the people of another. And tho’ SCOTLAND is but a part of the kingdom of G. BRITAIN; yet as our laws and church-government are different from those of ENGLAND, and as each of the countries requires its peculiar improvements, and has its own branches of trade and manufacture, a SCOTS MAGAZINE, tolerably well managed, must be instructive and entertaining to SCOTS MEN.

This remarkable defence of the cultural integrity of a Scottish national press emphasizes the benefit of being headquartered in the Scottish capital, and thus uniquely placed to report on—and facilitate debate within—the institutions of Scotland’s national public sphere:

Its being published in the capital, where the Supreme courts civil and ecclesiastical hold their sessions, and where the other national affairs relating to this country are usually transacted, must give it some singular advantages.⁶⁴

The editorial benefit of being centred in Scotland’s capital was borne out only a few years later, when the magazine acted as a key journalistic outlet for highly consequential debates within the General Assembly of 1752 around issues of elite Church patronage and the theological autonomy of local presbyteries, carried out by leading intellectuals of the Moderate and Popular parties.⁶⁵

⁶³ “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 10 (January 1748): iv.

⁶⁴ “Preface,” *Scots Magazine* 11 (January 1749): iii-iv (iii).

⁶⁵ See “Reasons of dissent from the judgment and resolution of the commission, March 11. 1752, resolving to inflict no censure on the presbytery of Dunfermline for their disobedience in relation to the settlement of Inverkeithing. [154.],” *Scots Magazine* 14 (April 1752): 191-7; and “An abstract of the Answers to the Reasons of Dissent from the sentence of the commission, March 11. 1752; drawn

When reflecting on the material and cultural progress of Scotland in the half century since Union, the editors of the first *Edinburgh Review* famously contend in their preface that “No literary improvements can be carried far, where the means of communication are defective.” They argue, with evident pride, that “this obstacle has, of late, been entirely removed; and the reputation of the Scotch press is not confined to this country alone.”⁶⁶ The impetus of national improvement reflected in their elite intellectual review was very much an outgrowth of the activities of the Select Society, which sought to demonstrate how Scotland was contributing to the greater well being of the Union through scientific and literary innovations incubated in those national cultural institutions given autonomy by the 1707 settlement. As the editors of the *Edinburgh Review* explicitly acknowledge above, however, without a national press to publicize and encourage Scotland’s material and cultural development, such improving activities must remain largely confined to an influential but limited coterie of professionals in Edinburgh’s liberal public sphere, an observation borne out in the very pages of the *Scots Magazine*, which published in its March 1757 issue the list of questions debated by the sister society to the Select, the Edinburgh Society for Encouraging Arts, Sciences, Manufactures, and Agriculture in Scotland.⁶⁷ Indeed, the short life of the first *Edinburgh Review*, folding after only its second issue, when compared to the long establishment and practical utility of the *Scots Magazine*, reminds us that an improving national periodical press succeeds by establishing a stable and reliable print forum for those key debates and issues most immediately relevant to the material needs of Scotland’s civil society.⁶⁸ If, as John Dwyer has argued, moral discourse

up by the committee appointed for that purpose [155.], and dated May 16,” *Scots Magazine* 14 (May 1752): 229-38. In a 1978 article on the influential Scottish bookseller Gavin Hamilton, Warren McDougall has demonstrated how serving the nation’s institutions based in the capital could benefit a publisher, noting that Hamilton and John Balfour’s involvement in disseminating the Moderate manifesto, and their role as Printers to the University of Edinburgh, helped to solidify their hold on the Scottish publishing market in the 1750s; see McDougall, “Gavin Hamilton, Bookseller in Edinburgh,” as in n. 30 above, 14-15.

⁶⁶ “Preface,” *Edinburgh Review* 1 (1755): i-iv (iii).

⁶⁷ McElroy, 52; see “PREMIUMS by the EDINBURGH Society for the year 1757,” *Scots Magazine* 19 (March 1757): 160-64.

⁶⁸ The publishers of the *Edinburgh Review*, Gavin Hamilton and John Balfour, came out with another short-lived periodical, the *Edinburgh Chronicle*, in 1759, that sought to emulate both the wide-ranging Scottish remit of the *Scots Magazine*

facilitated the definition and evaluation of “improvement” in Enlightenment Scotland,⁶⁹ then the *Scots Magazine*, during its first decade of publication, demonstrates how the nation could re-shape its collective cultural identity through the medium of “guid black prent,” becoming both an emblem of—and vehicle for—the “PROSPERITY OF SCOTLAND” in the mid eighteenth century, as well as giving essential material shape to the distinctive Scottish public sphere nurtured in its pages.⁷⁰

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and the *Review*’s rigorous critical engagement with contemporary Scottish literary production. Stephen Brown argues that “Hamilton and Balfour’s newspaper continued their review’s mandate, emphasising local and national affairs, while vigorously engaging the emerging literary culture.” “Noble as their ambition was,” writes Brown, “their expectation that profits could be derived exclusively from a national subscription proved premature.” See Brown, “Newspapers and Magazines,” 360. Cf. also Warren McDougall, “Hamilton, Balfour, and Neill’s *Edinburgh Chronicle*,” *Scottish Book Collector* 2 (1991): 24-28; and Couper, *Edinburgh Periodical Press*, as in n. 16 above, 2:99-103.

⁶⁹ John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987), 30.

⁷⁰ I would like to express my thanks to Tony Jarrells and Patrick Scott for their encouragement in the preparation of this essay, and to *SSL*’s anonymous reviewer for very helpful comments and suggestions.