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Ian C. Walker

Scottish Nationalism in
The Weekly Magazine



The standpoint on nationalistic problems adopted by writers in the *Edinburgh Weekly Magazine*¹ provides an excellent illustration of the peculiarly contradictory sentiments about their country common among Scotsmen of the eighteenth century. On the one hand they were ashamed of their dialect speech; on the other they flew to the defence of their national identity when it was attacked by people like Johnson² and Wilkes. This phenomenon has already been commented on by others,³ and it falls within the present article merely to continue the description of the subject so far as it figures in the pages of the *Weekly Magazine*.

The problem of language may be considered first. Under this general term three separate factors must be distinguished, although they might often occur in conjunction: mispronunciation of English words, misuse of English words, and the use of purely dialect expressions. The *Weekly* did not lack contributors who wished to discard their linguistic inheritance; this point of view was expressed with some eloquence by "The Writer" from Avoch, in the number for 30th November 1775 (XXX, 294-95):

There is scarcely any language, ancient or modern, that excels the English. In its form and construction it is as simple as the Hebrew; in variety of expression as copious as the Greek; in force and energy as nervous as

the Latin. In no quality does it yield to the French, which is presently the most universal language in Europe, except in effeminate softness. It has been so much cultivated during this and the preceding century, that it hardly admits of any further refinement...but notwithstanding the state of perfection to which the English language has lately attained, its progress in Scotland is not so rapid as might be expected. The common people have still a barbarous stile of conversation, and even the better sort mix their discourse with innumerable Scotticisms. And as to literary composition, few men of ordinary education in this part of the island are capable of writing a letter which would bear a critical examination...It gives me great pleasure to hear that the magistrates of Inverness, where the English is spoken with as great propriety as in any place of Scotland, or perhaps of England, have lately considered the importance of this subject, and have established a school for the purpose of teaching English after the newest and best method...Nothing can have a more powerful tendency to eradicate provincial dialects, and to introduce uniformity of speech, than the erection of proper seminaries. Were these more numerous and under better regulations, the English language, assisted by its own intrinsic excellence, would soon supersede the Gaelic and the Scots; and if the use of the English language was more extensive, it would certainly contribute to the advantage of this kingdom, and strongly cement the union between the two nations. The most distant parts of Britain would then be mutually intelligible to each other, social intercourse would take place, and the inhabitants of the Highlands would drop their prepossessions and prejudices.

He was plainly enthusiastic about the versatility of English as an instrument of expression, and his argument appears to adopt the premise that because English is so good, Scots (and Gaelic) must therefore be inferior in all respects. Obviously he was not so much concerned about ease of communication throughout Scotland itself as ease of communication with England. One almost detects in his words the fear that, by talking in the vernacular, the Scots might become a laughing-stock to the English. Whatever happened to be associated with the common people must, in his view, be despised. On the other hand, as the Scottish National Dictionary amply demonstrates on every page, the language of a people is inseparably bound up with their whole life, their folklore, their social history,

their most heart-felt emotions. These considerations, however, carried no weight with "The Writer;" "English" and "education" may have been associated in his mind, but possibly his aims were also utilitarian--that the Scots should become as much like the English as possible so as to share in English prosperity.

A similar motive, to make his countrymen speak better English, and not just a personal interest in problems of language, may underlie the many articles contributed by "Scoto-Britannus," in which he discussed specific points of usage. Thus in Volume XIII characteristically Scottish lapses in expression were censured, e.g., illogical use of double negatives, incorrect substitution of "learn" for "teach" with an indirect object ("he learnt me Latin"), "mind" for "remember," and the use of "some" as an adverb of degree ("they were some weary"). Since so many examples were provided for inspection, one can see what he was doing, and extend to him the approbation which "The Writer's" generalisations might not merit. "Scoto-Britannus" was fighting against expressions that reveal slovenly or illogical thinking, not against dialect or regional pronunciation:

The reader will please to observe, that I take no notice here of any kind of provincial pronunciation, not only because it must be considered merely as an accidental ornament or defect, and not an essential part of language; but also because it is wholly beyond the power of anything else than example and habit to correct it. Neither do I think particular provincial words, if the meaning of these is precisely understood and properly applied, any material defect. The thing which I think most reprehensible, is an indifferent and inaccurate application of any term, or the using a standard word in a manner different from what it ought to be. (XIII, 4)

Two correspondents, one from Shetland, one from Aberdeen, became sufficiently interested in the problem of dialect to describe in some detail the regional variations found within Scotland itself (XVIII, 101-2; XIX, 40-1). Their observations reveal something of the psychological effects of using dialect speech, an effect possibly augmented, in the case of Scotland, by the narrow-minded parochialism of the common people. As the Shetland correspondent put it:

It is a matter of much surprise, that among all ranks of people, even those of good education, a rooted prejudice in favours of the particular dialect of their own country, and even parish, exists to a degree that blinds them to

the grossest absurdities in their own, and makes them condemn that of all dissenters as ridiculous and improper. This prejudice has several inconvenient tendencies; it lessens a stranger in our opinion merely on account of his accent...let his behaviour be ever so unexceptionable and his parts considerable, when his pronunciation agrees not with ours (as faulty perhaps), instead of attending to his sentiment, we ill-manneredly sneer at the uncouthness of his sounds.

Both came to the conclusion that English must be adopted, but not quite for the same reasons as "The Writer" had put forward. They were worried not about the psychological barrier that dialect might erect between England and Scotland, but by the possibility of such barriers existing between one district of Scotland and another. Some sort of neutral *lingua franca* was therefore necessary; even if not completely acceptable, English could not be sneered at as inferior. Others were, however, more pessimistic (and perhaps more realistic) about the possibility of Scots learning to speak English--"such persons as have been long accustomed to pronounce the Scottish dialect will find great difficulty ever to acquire the English language so perfectly as to be properly qualified for becoming teachers" (XV, 10). Attempts to influence the young did not hold out much hope of success, because the good would be undone as soon as the pupil went out into the street, where a superior manner of speech invited only mockery from other boys (XIV, 196).

And, on the other hand, one must mention the sentiments of those who wrote to defend their native language. First among these was "Henry Plain"⁴ from Aberdeen. On 9th January 1772 he proudly defended his own previous use of Scottish idioms against the criticism of another correspondent.:

Would it not therefore have been better for him [the other correspondent] to have said that he had remarked some faulty expressions, than that there were in the letter "many words and phrases which plainly indicate a *Scottish* pen? Does he imagine that the writer of these lines will ever be ashamed to acknowledge that he is a Scotsman? No, Sir, he is proud of the name; and although *his* pen can never reflect any honour upon his country, yet he is not ignorant that *Scottish pens* are the pride and glory of the *English* nation.

"Henry Plain" did not stop to mention examples; he only suggested that many Scotticisms had no adequate equivalents

in English. "Scoto-Britannus" took up this theme (XXI, 357-9) and attempted to demonstrate that certain Scots words could not be replaced in English without using a clumsy circumlocution. His examples, however, do little to strengthen his argument, since they are not very well chosen: *thir* (plural of "this"), *mae* ("more," of objects that can be numbered), *scale* ("to empty," of contents that can be numbered). What, it might be asked, is the objection to "these" which is, in any case, more easily pronounced than *thir*? Likewise, the other two can hardly be regarded as indispensable units of communication: the context usually makes it plain whether number or amount is signified. Rather more sentimentally, regret for the passing away of the Scots tongue was expressed in verse by Charles Keith (XXXIX, 112),⁵ who blamed Fashion as the cause, and consoled himself with the thought that the vernacular could still be heard in Aberdeen.

Walter Ruddiman's own views on the language problem are hard to determine. Certainly he published many pieces of Scottish verse, to the benefit of his country's literature. But could he be expected to condone Scotticisms in a prose article that aspired to English standards of correctness, in view of his declared intention to revise pieces that showed stylistic blemishes?⁶ Provincial expressions are hardly acceptable in the best English prose, unless they are technical or semi-technical words with no convenient equivalent. On the other hand something written for a provincial audience might include dialect words for the sake of their emotive appeal. Accordingly it is rather odd to find occasional Scotticisms creeping into articles with some literary pretensions, e.g., the word "coldrife" in a personal account by a young lady from Edinburgh, complaining that she was jilted by a student who lodged with her family. The context is quoted here to show how odd the word looks in its setting, where the simple story of disappointed love is dressed up in the language of romance:

...at length my long looked for Strephon arrived in town; but oh! Mr Printer, he did not, as I expected, fly on the wings of love, to ease my anxious heart, and load me with his endearing caresses; for the sun had finished one diurnal course, and had gained the meridian of another, before he made his appearance; but, what was more distressing to me, was that coldrife manner with which he addressed me...His usual ardour was changed into coldness. (XVI, 173)

Or again, in another place, it is a little surprising to read, "The story of Provost Crichton of Sanquhar, was also a most

nottour story in that town" (XVI, 74). We may wonder whether the editor's eye had overlooked these words. But one is certainly glad to see the epithet "half-merk" applied to runaway marriages (VII, 101-3), since so much of Scottish custom is embedded in the phrase; and in an article on sheep-breeding addressed to farmers in Scotland, nothing would have been gained and something lost if the editor had replaced "bield" with "shelter" (XXXIV, 328).

On most other aspects of nationalism, however, the *Weekly Magazine* presented a united front. Both editor and correspondents strove to maintain the independence of characteristically Scottish institutions, while at a more practical level many articles appeared showing how Scotland's economic position could be improved by the promotion of trade, manufactures and agriculture. Ruddiman's pride is obvious in the following remark made when presenting the week's news on 21st September 1769:

It is no less remarkable than true, that Scots officers fill the highest offices in both the armies and navies of almost all the powers of Europe; they are employed by Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Holland, the emperor, the Portuguese, the Republic of Venice etc. (V, 382)

Some of his correspondents demonstrated that Scots criminal law was more equitable than English, especially in the matter of juries: the majority verdict accepted in Scotland was considered clearly preferable to the forced show of unanimity demanded in England (VIII, 261-3; XVII, 47). The authority of an English Lord Chamberlain to censor new dramatic productions was resented as a "humbling and unmerited stigma...neither mentioned nor implied in any article of the union" (X, 360). Even the Scottish character was examined and found to be worth preserving from pernicious English influence:

There is a softness, a delicacy, a respect for virtue and religion, so natural to the character of a well-bred Scotsman, that his behaviour becomes awkward and intolerable, even to rusticity and barbarism, when, seduced by false shame, or pretended courage, he attempts to violate them. We are no more qualified to follow the English in the freedom of their manners, than in the profusion of their expenses. (X, 309)

There were those who still openly regretted the union with England (e.g., XIII, 81), and one correspondent attempted to show with the help of an extract that Scotland did have com-

merce before 1707, so that accounts of an increase in prosperity were exaggerated (XXXII, 138-40). In Volume XLVII there even appears an imaginary "Journal of Affairs in Scotland for 1850" describing how the Scots eventually won their freedom from England by means of a military campaign fought out in the Lowlands against an invading Southern army (pp. 72-77).

But the correspondent who did most for his country through the medium of the *Weekly Magazine* was not one to long for the past. This was David Loch, a man whose importance in eighteenth-century Scottish economic history has probably been under-estimated.⁷ His doctrine was simple--self-help--and his method equally simple--to say the same thing over and over again until his countrymen took his advice. Thirty-eight pieces from his pen, most of them originals, appeared in the *Weekly*, and the Magazine's proprietors were later responsible for publishing his collected papers.⁸ This man's tremendous energy and earnestness come across very well in passages such as the following:

My reputation as a merchant is well known. My thoughts as to the linen and woolen trade are not of yesterday. I was for several years a member of the Royal Burghs in their annual convention. I always spoke my mind as to the trade that I was satisfied was for the benefit of this country, which I was convinced was the woolen. I have heard many Don Quixote schemes at those meetings about the linen staple. I am very sorry that what I foretold concerning it has come to pass. (XXIV, 126-7)

Clearly not concerned to cultivate the niceties of periodical essay-writing, he likewise eschewed the use of literary pseudonyms. He signed every article boldly with his own name, and refused to answer any correspondent who did not do likewise (XXXI, 398).

Although his occupation was that of a merchant in Leith, articles showing detailed knowledge came from his pen on such subjects as wool production, herring fisheries, agriculture and inland navigation. The advice he offered in a period of economic depression round about 1773 was that Scotsmen could help their country by buying and using native products, for example wearing garments of wool and linen, even if such things appeared less fashionable than those made of imported materials. The support of influential bodies of people was enlisted, including the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the nobility and gentry, the Convention of Royal Burghs ("all we have left of a Parliament"), until it became a point of patriotic honour to appear dressed in clothes of Scottish manufac-

ture (XXXIII, 112).

Early in 1776 the House of Commons rejected a Scots Militia Bill. Their action was considered an insult to Scotland, and expressions of unbridled nationalism appeared in the *Weekly*; it was even proposed that the Union should be dissolved (XXXII, 32). At this juncture Loch harnessed national feeling to further his schemes, pleading that his countrymen should express their resentment not by violence or political action, but by economic endeavor. "Let our flocks of fine wooled sheep be our militia," he wrote (XXXII, 47). In sheep-farming he exposed as wasteful and unnecessary the strange practice of tarring the fleece to prevent it from becoming verminous and protect the sheep from winter cold--the difficulties of scouring such wool can scarcely be imagined (XXXII, 304; XXXVII, 18). Writing on fisheries, he gave warm support to the idea of exporting salted herring from Scotland to European countries, and on inland navigation he proposed the construction of waterways where the Crinan and Caledonian Canals now run (XXXV, 239-40). Grateful appreciation of his efforts was expressed by many other correspondents in the Magazine, and in a more official form by his appointment in 1776 as Inspector-General of woollen manufactures in Scotland under the Trustees for Fisheries, Manufactures and Improvements, a position that enabled him to pursue his tours of investigation all round Scotland with greater authority. To keep the balance, however, it is worth recording that at least one reader objected to having the *Weekly* flooded with patriotic articles written in such an excessively earnest tone:

Some address you on purpose to exhibit their political abilities, while others amaze you with extensive learning; another set bawl out for the good of their country, and continually hollow in your ears, *Loch, Herring and Wool*.
(XLIII, 110)

Another writer on nationalist subjects who has not hitherto been recognised as a *Weekly Magazine* contributor was the Earl of Buchan. Several of his letters and speeches were reprinted with his own name attached, but his one authenticated original contribution appeared over the pseudonym "Britannicus," and identification is due to the editor (25th January 1781, LI, 79-80). Beginning with the words "Men of England, Scotland, Ireland, the Colonies, Brethren and Fellow Citizens," it represents the last phase of patriotic sentiment in the *Weekly Magazine*. Under the threat of war with the European maritime powers, the Scots thought of themselves first as Britons, and became less conscious of the differences between themselves

and the English. This address of the Earl reveals the same characteristic tone as is found in his reprinted pieces: use of rhetoric, allusiveness, a somewhat haughty aloofness and conscious superiority, coupled with smouldering resentment at not having been appointed to a post of political importance. Most of these things are represented in the peroration:

Think not, my brethren, that this address is the emanation of zeal brought about by the largesses of a selfish minister. It comes from a man whose rank is too illustrious, his fortune, by prudence, too independent, and his heart, by nature, too honest to permit him to be the tool of party or of power.

He seeks not for public office, he receives no emoluments from Government, he has been suffered to languish in obscurity, if his spirit would have suffered him to languish. He had once the hopes and ambition of guiding, with the state pilot, the helm of public affairs; that time is past. It is past never to return. He will go to the silent grave, in all probability, unplaced, unpensioned, unribboned, unpromoted in honour. But he will be carried to it, he hopes, with honour, with the regret of an honest circle, and certainly with the reputation of having loved his country.

Few contributors were hardy enough to assert that the Scots excelled other nations in the arts. One correspondent, indeed, ranked Thomson with Virgil (IX, 261-3), but the claim is too exaggerated to be taken very seriously. An essay on music in Volume IX (pp. 273-4) places Scottish, Irish and Welsh compositions above the Italian, and even attempts to distinguish between the airs of northern and southern Scotland. "The northern is generally martial, for the most part melancholy...the southern is pastoral and amorous..." But this choice is to be understood with reference to the aesthetic theory assumed in the essay. The purpose of art, we are told, is to imitate the passions. Thus a "history" painting is more worthy than a Dutch interior, and the music of the Celts, because it has pathos, is more desirable than contemporary Italian compositions which are merely harmonious sound.

There exists, however, a reprint, which, in the circumstances, is possibly more valuable than an original could be (XX, 144-5). The author, calling himself "Hermes," is, from internal evidence, an Englishman. He reproves his countrymen for making fun of the Scots on account of their speech; there is little need for that, he maintains, since the English cannot even speak their own language and Scotland has eclipsed

England in culture:

The astonishing increase of luxury and dissipation, for some years past, has not only banished education and learning from this city, but sent genius and taste a begging to the barren hills of Scotland. What a shame it is for England...to be eclipsed in almost every branch of literature, by men who formerly were remarkable for nothing but war and ferocity! To see a Home and a Robertson unequalled in history, a Wedderburn unrivalled in oratory, a Mansfield in law; the city of Edinburgh resorted to from every corner of his majesty's dominions as the seat of taste and learning....And these are the men you ridicule, my friends; these are the people you endeavour to laugh to scorn for their *ignorance of your language*.

The extraordinary political career of John Wilkes received much attention throughout the first ten volumes. Most of the notice he attracted was unsympathetic: often he became the target for satire, and even the references to him in the otherwise fairly impartial news section display a hostile bias. But unfortunately nearly all these anti-Wilkes pieces are reprints, usually from English publications, and the *Weekly Magazine* editor's attitude is hard to determine, except perhaps in so far as he may have exercised some principle of selection in deciding which articles to reprint. He does appear to commit himself fairly decisively in a verse address "To the Readers of the *Weekly Magazine*" at the end of Volume VI:

Doubtless I'm fond of popular applause,
 Tho' not like Wilkes, by spurning king and laws;
 Nor arrogantly claim, nor meanly sue,
 My Lords, my Commons, my Electors you.

But too much importance should not be attached to these lines taken out of context: the whole address is one of Ruddiman's least distinguished verse compositions, both in style and content. He seems to be reciting what was the right thing to say, expressing conventional attitudes so as to offend nobody. The review of "A North Briton Extraordinary; written by a Young Scotsman, now a Volunteer in the Corsican Service" which appeared on 2nd March 1769 (III, 277-80) probably represents Ruddiman's own sentiments, and shows that, in Scotland, feeling against Wilkes was inspired at least as much by nationalism as by any fear that he represented a threat to the law and order

of established government:

This spirited performance merits the perusal of every Scotsman who has the seeds of honour or independence in his breast. The author not only retorts, with coolness and temper, that torrent of slander and abuse so liberally bestowed on the Scots nation in general by the KING'S BENCH HERO; but by a series of arguments, deduced from incontestable facts, refutes the gross calumnies and false aspersions thrown out against the inhabitants of North-Britain, by a writer of the worst heart and worst principles....

The editor's political loyalties are even more openly declared in the notes he wrote introducing to his readers the Letters of Junius (4th January 1770, VII, 21; 1st March 1770, VII, 277), especially the Letter to the Right Honourable LORD M[ANSFIELD]D (29th November 1770, X, 270):

We have lately had a fresh specimen of the virulence of the writers on the side of opposition. That arch incendiary Junius, after reviling the most dignified names in the kingdom, and, in a manner, storming the throne itself, has at last made an attack on one, whose reputation is, perhaps, the most unsullied and irreproachable of the age; ...whose character in general, as a man, a subject and a lawyer, has hitherto baffled all the efforts of malice, and has never once been impeached except by this scurrilous writer and his compatriot Wilkes....

It should be remembered that Lord Mansfield was a Scot: thus nationalism is represented here, as well as loyalty to the crown.

Walter Ruddiman, however, was no out-and-out nationalist: he tended to support the Establishment, probably fearing revolution because it spelt for him only anarchy and consequent human misery. His own words speak best on this, in the manner with which he introduced a poem on 31st August 1780 (XLIX, 245-6):

The following poem contains a description of the situation of a Scots gentleman who had been obliged to leave his country for rebellion against our present happy government. It points out the fatal consequences of such treasonable attempts....

Much that C. Lennart Carlson has stated in the last chapter

of his book on the *Gentleman's Magazine*⁹ might be considered true also of the *Weekly Magazine*, comprehensiveness, mediocre English verse, a preponderance of scientific articles in the later stages. But the Scottish magazine cannot be said to have shared the *Gentleman's* general complacency and contentment with the *status quo*. The difference lies in the spirit of nationalism, initiated by Ruddiman himself, but manfully aided by prose correspondents such as Anderson and Loch, and by a first-rate Scottish poet (Fergusson) to whom, as M. P. McDiarmid¹⁰ is at pains to show, Burns's debt was great. Ruddiman's brand of nationalism was not the sentimental or belligerent kind, but concerned with the peaceful economic betterment of his country in the face of social and geographical difficulties. He did not intend his miscellany to be primarily of a literary nature, and many of the articles it carried would, in a later age, have been found only in specialist journals of agriculture. If the element of nationalism were removed, the *Weekly Magazine* would not be found superior to other productions of its time, and would be no more than another eighteenth-century relic.

In retrospect, it is possible to trace that national feeling was highest in the earlier part of the *Weekly Magazine* era, largely fanned into flame by the attacks of Wilkes and Johnson. From about 1778 it was submerged in more broadly British sentiment under the pressure of foreign danger, sentiment that found expression in a crop of crudely jingoist songs, anti-French, anti-Spanish, even anti-American. The proportion of irresponsible and inflammatory articles is, however, small, and patriotism found a more worthy outlet in the schemes of men like Loch. Even during the earlier period of wounded feelings, the Scots asserted they were not the rebels or Jacobites that Wilkes would have them, but loyal subjects of the British king, and longed for the day when ill-founded English prejudices against them would disappear.

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NOTES

¹ *The Weekly Magazine or Edinburgh Amusement*, published by Walter Ruddiman (nephew of Ruddiman the grammarian) and his son Thomas, 60 vols. (Edinburgh, 1768-84).

² Cf. the present writer's article, "Dr. Johnson and *The Weekly Magazine*," *Review of English Studies*, XIX (1968), 14-24.

³ E.g., D. Daiches, *The Paradox of Scottish Culture* (Oxford, 1964); D. Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830* (London, 1961). The problem is, however, complex, and deserves further study.

⁴ James Anderson, LL.D., 1739-1808, agriculturist and prolific periodical writer. See article in *DNB*.

⁵ Published anonymously. Identified by M. P. McDiarmid, *The Poems of Robert Fergusson* (Edinburgh & London, 1954), I, 175.

⁶ "Notes to Correspondents," e.g., 31st March, 1774, XXIV, 32.

⁷ His name is mentioned in the bibliography only of the standard work, H. Hamilton, *An Economic History of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1963).

⁸ David Loch, *Essays on the Trade, Commerce, Manufactures and Fisheries of Scotland*, 3 vols. Printed by Walter and Thomas Ruddiman (Edinburgh, 1778-1779).

⁹ C. Lennart Carlson, *The First Magazine* (Providence, R.I., 1938).

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, *passim*.