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Manfred Malzahn

Masters and Slaves in Scottish Fiction and Ideology
of the 1930s: James Leslie Mitchell's *Spartacus*
and William Bell's *Rip van Scotland*

The foundation of the National Party of Scotland in 1928 added new fuel to a debate about the desirability of a link between Scottish nationalism and socialist egalitarianism, a connection which was by then a well-established reality. The Scottish Home Rule Association, previously coexisting with the Scots National League and the Scottish National Movement, could still be called "non-political,"¹ if only in the sense that it sought to unite people from different ends of the political spectrum. However, as Keith Webb asserts, "its major strength emanated from socialist circles."² As for the new organization, Gordon Donaldson claims that it combined a clear-cut "left-wing bias"³ with an uncompromising pro-independence stance.

This twofold radicalization provides a sufficiently obvious explanation for the ensuing schisms of 1932 and 1942, the establishment of the Scottish Party and the Scottish Convention before and after a period of precarious unity under the banner of the Scottish National Party as founded in 1934. The evolution of twentieth-century Scottish nationalism as a political force thus bears an un-

¹Richard J. Finlay, *Independent and Free. Scottish Politics and the Origins of the Scottish National Party 1918-1945* (Edinburgh, 1994), p. 2.

²*The Growth of Nationalism in Scotland* (Harmondsworth, 1978), p. 66. Henceforth Webb.

³*Scotland: The Shaping of a Nation* (Nairn, repr. of 2nd rev. edn., 1993), p. 128.

canny resemblance to Scottish ecclesiastical history. Performed in hindsight, such a comparison of patterns could perhaps be written off as gratuitous, but a different assessment seems to be called for when it takes the form of a prediction. In view of the abovementioned facts, the following statement printed in 1930 sounds prophetic enough, and hence the underlying assumption becomes pretty hard to refute. One should note, nevertheless, that it makes the discussion of political principles in Scotland during a crucial period of European history appear as yet another expression of a fundamentally flawed national psyche:

The argumentativeness of the Scottish character is indeed one of its national traits. Hair-splitting, whether on religion or on politics, is become almost as national a pastime as golf.... this national penchant for dancing the Highland Fling on every point of argument simplified the problem of governing the sister kingdom for the English, especially during the interminable sectarian squabbles which still cram the pages of Scottish history.⁴

The treatise which this quote comes from is not among the best remembered documents of its time, but it is still worth looking at. This includes the cover, which sports a lion dormant on a Saltire pedestal, while a lion rampant appears above in a badge-shaped serrated bubble. The title *Rip van Scotland* completes the emblematic suggestion that like the protagonist of Washington Irving's story, Scotland is lost in dreaming the past, and will awake to a future which has been shaped by others.

In his diagnosis of an essentially backward orientation in the Scottish mind, William Bell cites literature as both reflecting and helping to perpetuate an all-pervasive kailyard mentality. But while the charge of propagating a sentimental-anachronistic cabbage-patch vision of Scotland is commonly leveled at authors such as James M. Barrie, William S. Crockett, and Ian Maclaren, denounced as exponents of a kailyard school of writing as early as 1895, Bell in the same breath cites names such as Scott and Stevenson. To him, all Scottish literature after Burns is evidence of the writers' complicity, or at least non-interference, with the reduction of Scotland to an English county of "Scotlandshire" (Bell, p. 18). From an English perspective, this is indeed how it could be perceived, as in D. H. Lawrence's 1928 novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, where the Scots-born heroine is endowed with an eminently non-Scottish view of British topography, counting Kensington, the Scotch hills and the Sussex downs as parts of her England." Bell, however, chooses to target Scottish and not English writers, and it is perhaps not too difficult to guess what he would have thought of James Leslie Mitchell's novel *Spartacus*, published three years after his own book. Bell's contempt for historical fiction is matched by scathing remarks about Scots whom he finds guilty of other forms

⁴William Bell, *Rip van Scotland* (London, 1930), pp. 14f. Henceforth Bell.

of escapism. Robert Louis Stevenson, for instance, “spent his exiled invalid life in playing the ‘sedulous ape’ with brigands and smugglers,”⁵ and Byron died while “fighting as a Scot for the independence of—Greece” (Bell, p. 12). Real and fictional exile, artistic and martial ventures merge into a Scottish pattern of behavior that constitutes a betrayal of patriotic loyalty. If Scotsmen emigrate, physically or imaginatively, they deprive their own country of energies that had better be applied at home. If they espouse the causes of others, they substitute them for their own national aspirations.

As regards the exodus of enterprising spirits, a not altogether dissimilar feeling, in spite of different political viewpoints, could be detected in Walter Scott’s journal of 5 April 1826, where he remarks “Pity Africa picks up so many brave men however.”⁶ But Bell’s embittered attack, the Preface of which, interestingly enough, was written in a place called Turville Heath near Henley-on-Thames, must be seen in relation to specific historical circumstances. World War I had been at least “ostensibly fought to defend the rights of small nations” (Webb, p. 67). As Christopher Harvie notes, at least one in five British dead on foreign battlefields was a Scot, but political power remained firmly entrenched at Westminster, and even more financial and economic power than before had come to drift southward.⁷

Cultivating and acting upon a North British sense of identity seemed to have fewer rewards in store for the future than it had done at the heyday of what William Bell calls “the English empire” (p. 32). To this, he seems to have an ambivalent attitude. Resentment of the role played by Scotland in the British hierarchy mixes with the proud acknowledgment of imperial greatness in passages such as this:

Modern Scots...have complacently purred at the thought that they have been “running things” for England since 1603; that they have helped to establish the Empire by sword, by ploughshare, and by shepherd’s crook;...and that the great world has benefited considerably whenever a Scot has taken his foot from off his native heath. Yet the fact remains that all this reflected glory, in the long run, has been to the detriment of their country. Their attitude has been like that of Nero fiddling while Rome burnt (p. 29).

⁵Bell, p. 10. The quote within the quote is taken from an essay called “Memories and Portraits,” in which Stevenson describes the development of his writing skills through imitating authors of different nationalities.

⁶David Hewitt, ed., *Scott on Himself: A Selection of the Autobiographical Writings of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh, 1981), p. 223.

⁷Christopher Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes. Scotland 1914-1980* (London, 1981), pp. 24ff. Jenny Wormald, ed. *The New History of Scotland*, Vol. 8.

The comparison which concludes this paragraph is a highly revealing one in the context of a treatise which describes the relationship between the English and the Scots as essentially one between masters and slaves. This image is fundamental to the whole argument, though the first term is used sparingly, and the second introduced by way of quotation. The authority thus involved is Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, who had turned from pragmatic pro-Unionist into leading anti-Union spokesman of the last Scottish Parliament. Post-1707 Scotland was “only fit for the slaves who sold it” (Bell, p. 33), Fletcher is supposed to have said as he rode away for Edinburgh, and the dictum fits so well into Bell’s picture that he does not seem to recognize its apocryphal ring.⁸ But the Roman simile is a sudden reversal of the author’s key image: all of a sudden, the Scots are identified with the rulers, and Scotland with the heart of an empire. This suggests that the stance behind his use of the master/slave image is not an egalitarian rejection of the concept of subservience, but rather the desire for a different distribution of roles.

It may be useful to remember that when Fletcher of Saltoun talked of “slaves,” the word had a very concrete contemporary reference beside its metaphorical uses. There were indeed real masters and slaves in the Empire, and if Scots were to be part of an imperial setup, then only a claim to Britishness might ensure a privileged position. Hence it is perhaps not surprising that “Rule Britannia” with its categorical assertion that “Britons never will be slaves” was written by Scotsman James Thomson “at the command of the Prince of Wales.”⁹ Ironically enough, while Thomson was implying the right of his fellow Scots to be sharers rather than subjects of English power, he was perhaps not exactly ingratiating himself to the most powerful. Frederick Louis, eldest son of the Hanoverian King George II, had fallen out of royal favor and been banished from court.¹⁰

Frederick’s younger brother, on the other hand, led the Hanoverian forces against the army of Charles Edward Stuart on the battlefield of Culloden in 1746, and earned himself the name of Butcher Cumberland. By that time, James Thomson’s Brito-patriotic anthem apparently had a Jacobite version “with modifications appropriate to their cause.”¹¹ But while Jacobites during the ’45 might invert the thrust of Thomson’s song, which was part of his efforts to proclaim a new, British identity for the Scots, post-Culloden Jacobite

⁸ See David Daiches, ed., *Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun: Selected Political Writings and Speeches* (Edinburgh, 1979), p. xli. Henceforth Fletcher.

⁹Ivor H. Evans, ed., *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (London, 1980), p. 961.

¹⁰Magnus Magnusson, ed., *Chambers Biographical Dictionary* (Edinburgh, 1990), p. 545.

¹¹Brewer’s Dictionary, p. 961; I have so far been unable to find the altered text.

sentiment could apparently very well be reconciled with the spirit of his exhortation to Britannia. The following lines indicate a path to such a synthesis in terms of historical reference:¹²

In the garb of old Gaul, and the first of old Rome,
From the hearth-cover'd mountains of Scotia we come,
Where the Romans endeavour'd our country to gain,
But our ancestors fought, and they fought not in vain.

William Donaldson dates these words in the mid-1760s, and reads them as indicative of a "revolution in political perspective" (Donaldson, p. 71). The incarnation of Scotland is not Scotia, but the figure of the Highland warrior, a male counterpart to the female Britannia devised by the Romans. This warrior, moreover, is a defender of "British Liberties," and thus the champion of such a de-Romanized incarnation of Britain as had already appeared in James Henrisoun's pro-Unionist *Exhortacion to the Scottes* of 1547.¹³ Now the Highlander, as one who has successfully resisted Roman occupation, emerges as the new bearer of "the fire of old Rome." Likewise, he has appropriated "the garb of old Gaul" from his colonized Celtic brethren, who dwell on what James Thomson called "Gallia's humbled coast."¹⁴ The highly questionable contention that "Scotland was never conquered by force of arms (Bell, p. 28) thus appears as a cornerstone of both nationalist and unionist ideology, with poetic myth continuing to obscure historical truth, as it is indicated in the gentle satire of Walter Scott's *The Antiquary*.¹⁵

History, however, is what people remember: Scotland was sold, but France was vanquished, and thus, despite a brief blossoming of "The Tree of Liberty" (to use Robert Burns's phrase), it was destined to remain the epitome of despotism—the "haughty Gaul" of his 1795 song "The Dumfries Volunteers." By then, Scottish soldiers were once again giving vent to their independent, proud and warlike spirit outside of Britain, and alongside the English.

¹²William Donaldson, *The Jacobite Song: Political Myth and National Identity* (Aberdeen, 1988), p. 71. Henceforth Donaldson.

¹³See Roger A. Mason, "The Scottish Reformation and the Origins of Anglo-British Imperialism," in his *Scots and Britons: Scottish Political Thought and the Union of 1603* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 171ff.

¹⁴From "Summer," published in 1727, in his poetic cycle *The Seasons*; cf. *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, p. 457.

¹⁵See Christopher Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics 1707-1994* (London, 1994), pp. 7f. Henceforth Harvie.

Robert Fergusson might see as “Scotia’s sons” or personify as “Caledon”¹⁶ those whom Thomson had called Britannia’s “Caledonian sons,”¹⁷ but in view of the facts, these subtle terminological distinctions seem of little importance. In any case, Scots fighting against the French and other Catholic nations could at least no longer be accused of marching in “the vanguard of popery and slavery” (Donaldson, p. 71), as it had appeared to Whigs contemplating Charles Edward Stewart’s Highland host.

The association between Rome, Catholicism and slavery was stock-in-trade of Whig history, which could incorporate past efforts at preserving Scottish independence, even against the English, as adding up to “a major contribution to British liberty.”¹⁸ But the metaphorical uses of the word slavery in ideological discourse had also created an obstacle to a literal use, as a name for that very real slavery which made many eighteenth-century Englishmen and quite a few Scotsmen exceedingly rich. The effect can be perceived even prior to this, as for instance in the first of two “Discourses on Scotland” by Fletcher of Saltoun, who holds that nearly all European nations who keep standing armies in peacetime “have become slaves,”¹⁹ while complaining that Scotland is not getting a fair share in the African trade.²⁰ As to equality at home, Harvie notes that Fletcher’s “scheme for the economic revival of Scotland involved reinforcing serfdom” (Harvie, p. 8).

Feudal serfdom had disappeared in fourteenth-century Scotland, and the partial resurrection of a system of unfree labor in the seventeenth century seems a curious anachronism. Historians might well take it as a sign of social retrogression after the Union of Crowns, although Scottish miners, while still legally serfs in the late eighteenth century, seem to have enjoyed higher living

¹⁶Quoted in Patrick Mennetau, “Robert Fergusson’s contribution to the definition of a Scottish cultural identity,” in *Proceedings of the Scottish Workshop of the...European Society for the Study of English* (Grenoble, 1994), p. 43.

¹⁷“Summer,” l. 558; cf. Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford, 1992), p. 49.

¹⁸Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689-c.1830* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 76.

¹⁹“Two discourses Concerning the Affairs of Scotland. Written in the Year 1698,” Fletcher, p. 35.

²⁰This may be compared to the rhetoric of liberty in colonial North America, where Peter Kolchin regards the indictment of British “slavery” by slave-holding Patriots as a conscious hyperbole: “clearly Patriots did not believe that they were slaves in the same sense their own chattels were,” *American Slavery 1619-1877* (Harmondsworth, 1995), p. 76.

standards than their English counterparts.²¹ Even free industrial workers, however, could be subjected to severe corporal punishment by their employers (Devine, p. 237), and moreover, the victims of the transatlantic slave trade were mostly, but by no means exclusively, black Africans. The motto "Britons never shall be slaves" takes on quite a new significance when viewed against the following account by Norman Easton:

For a hundred years, starting with the original covenanters defeated at Dunbar in 1650, the trade in human bodies was an established part of Scottish commercial life.... a succession of white 'bonded servants'—the judicially dispatched, the kid-napped vagrant, the unattended child—were shipped to the plantations by our guid Scots merchants.²²

Easton also quotes a Reverend Professor Douglas Kelly, talking without any apparent Christian pangs of conscience, about the enslavement of fellow men. Here is the English translation of the Reverend's Gaelic reminiscences:

The Kellys had more slaves than anyone else in Moore county. Cotton pickers. We lost three hundred of them after the Civil War. They spoke Gaelic.²³

In Scottish literature, I find only two reflections of such matters which I can remember. One is in Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, where slavery looms merely as a threat to David Balfour. The empathy with the Senegalese speaker of Robert Burns's "The Slave's Lament" is put into perspective by the fact that the author nearly ended up as an overseer of slaves in the West Indies, where not a few of his countrymen were similarly employed. It is thus surely pardonable to suggest that in searching material for a full-scale literary treatment of slavery, James Leslie Mitchell would not really have needed to go to the Mediterranean, nor the length of two thousand years back in time. Reflecting on the genesis of *Spartacus* as the product of Mitchell's historical and social consciousness and conscience, one should note that it is not dealing with the darker aspect of Scottish history, but that it targets the darker side of ancient

²¹T. M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison, eds., *People and Society in Scotland: A Social History of Modern Scotland*. 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1988), I, 198. Henceforth Devine.

²²"The Empire That Never Was," in Brian Filling and Susan Stuart, eds., *The End of a Regime? An Anthology: Scottish-South African Writing Against Apartheid* (Aberdeen, 1991), p. 264.

²³*Ibid.* It is likely, though, that these Gaelic-speaking slaves were not of Scottish origin, but Africans who had learned the native language of their masters. See Angus Calder, *Revolutionary Empire. The Rise of the English-Speaking Empires from the Fifteenth Century to the 1780s* (London, 1981), p. 733.

Rome in an attempt, so Ian Campbell suggests, to express anger at contemporary social evils:

Art galleries of pleasantly innocuous antiquity did little to damp that anger, and the historical reading he did for *Spartacus* intensified it. A view of the past which allowed for aesthetic satisfaction in the achievements of Greece and Rome, without making room for the dripping crosses of the Appian Way, was plainly not for him.²⁴

The location of the target in the past as well as in another country appears to fit quite neatly into Bell's escapist scheme. The specific choice of time and place can furthermore be linked to the Whiggish nexus between slavery and Rome. To write about slaves instead of glorious Roman citizens was the choice of a mind influenced by left-wing politics as well as by a kind of religion which could hardly be said to favor any idealized picture of Rome, not even of a Rome before the advent of Popes and Cardinals. Mitchell came to reject religion as "no more fundamental to the human character than cancer is fundamental to the human brain,"²⁵ but after all, this rejection grew, as Angus Calder puts it, out of his first-hand experience of Scottish Calvinism as "the most intellectual and least ingratiating variant of Christianity."²⁶

The Calvinist background to *Spartacus* may be best understood in reference to the antonym of the word slave, and its use in religious doctrine. God, says Hugh Binning in his eleventh sermon on "The Common Principles of the Christian Religion," is the "absolute master of all," and "a master must have fear."²⁷ To Covenanters, there was nothing wrong with the idea of absolute mastery as long as it was that of God himself. In practice, this meant the mastery of the true faith, and consequently of the true believers. Democratic egalitarianism was thus restricted to those who belonged to a community defined by a common belief, and this restriction made it a tool of religious absolutism rather than of liberty. Mitchell expresses the consequences through a Classical metaphor:

Until well towards the nineties of the last century the officials of the Scots priesthood were the real rules of the Scots scene, they were Spartan ephors, largely

²⁴Introduction to James Leslie Mitchell, *Spartacus*, ed. Ian Campbell (Edinburgh, 1999), p. xi. Henceforth *Spartacus*.

²⁵Lewis Grassie Gibbon, "Religion," in *A Scots Hairst, Essays and Short Stories*, ed. Ian S. Munro (London, 1967), p. 157. Henceforth Religion.

²⁶"A Mania for Self-Reliance: Lewis Grassie Gibbon's Scots Quair," in *Revolving Culture: Notes from the Scottish Republic* (London, 1994), p. 142.

²⁷David Reid, ed., *The Party-Coloured Mind: Prose Relating to the Conflict of Church and State in Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1982), p. 99.

elected by the people and keeping the people under a rigorous rule (Religion, p. 161).

In the monarchy of Sparta as well as in the republic of Rome, the institution of slavery ensured a still more drastic form of men's domination over others, and provided a stark contrast to enlightened constitutional principles. In *Spartacus*, Mitchell emphasizes the fundamental inequality on which the Roman state is based by consistently referring to the Romans as "the Masters." The slaves, on the other hand, are presented as a motley mixture of conquered and colonized nations, whose mutual antipathy and distrust jeopardizes their unity as a social class. This is one of two factors which make it impossible to transform the uprising from a revolt into a revolution. The other one is not a divisive, but a unifying element in the uprising: the "kingship of slaves" (*Spartacus*, p. 52) can be no more than precisely that because it is built on hatred and revenge. The copy of Plato's *Republic* which is part of the campaign baggage is destined to remain ideological ballast, rather than function as the blueprint for a concrete utopia.

The national resentment which perpetually endangers international class solidarity in *Spartacus's* party is illustrated in a form that draws on ostensibly ageless national stereotypes, but places them in a two-tiered historical context. The portrayals, for instance, of the Germans as the most standoffish, xenophobic and incalculable faction clearly has its referent in Mitchell's own twentieth-century world. In the novel, their leader Gannicus only grudgingly employs his "undoubted bravery" in serving under non-Teutonic leadership because "he hated the Masters more than he hated either Crixus or Spartacus" (*Spartacus*, p. 64), Gaul and Thracian respectively. The equally haughty Jew Gershom ben Sanballat is a model of loyalty, but his allegiance is to Spartacus as an individual, not to the common cause.

Gibbon's translation of a particularly Scottish debate into characters and images of Roman antiquity is perhaps most clearly evident in the figure of the solitary Pharisee. Gershom's fighting spirit and his contempt for the ungodly make him a fit companion for such Covenanters as created, for instance, by Walter Scott, with a mixture of authorial respect and disgust that is not altogether alien to Gibbon's stance. Another Scottish topos is represented by the Iberian Titul, forever invoking the lost martial and poetic glory of "the vanished Western Isle" (*Spartacus*, p. 8). A Scottish reference emerges by association of the sunken isle of Atlantis with the submerged ancient culture of Scotland's own West, an operation whereby the "mad" Iberian is linked with Celtic Twilightism.

Such readings, of course, explore only one among many levels of literary meaning in Mitchell's novel. It would be totally wrong to treat *Spartacus* as a kind of heavy-handed allegory or roman à clef, but it is a piece of writing whose interpretation would not be complete without reference to Scottish national mythology. Yet another viable way of making such a connection is

reading the chronology of Spartacus' revolt in terms of the progress and failure of the Jacobite rising of 1745. Spartacus' army marches towards Rome as Charles Edward Stuart's did towards London, only to turn back when the ultimate victory seems within easy reach. In *Spartacus*, it is the generalissimo himself who orders the retreat because of an instinctive and unexpected realization:

And the Thracian looked round at his halted host, at the men near by him, by his horse's bridle, at their poor, starved, frightened, lustful faces, their hanging mouths and their wound-scarred limbs—and back again at the City—and back again at his legions: and something like an icy hand seized on his heart. These to conquer the City that was unconquered? (*Spartacus*, p. 140).

The bruised and battered minds and bodies of slaves can produce acts of bravery, but not a brave new world. The fall of Rome, “the legendary city of the Masters” (*Spartacus*, pp. 139-140), would after all be the fall of a civilization, however blighted. In his introduction to the 1990 re-edition of *Spartacus*, Ian Campbell stresses Mitchell's diffusionist views of history, based on the critique of all civilization as a fall from the freedom and independence of a pre-historical Golden Age (*Spartacus*, p. x). This, though, is only one side of a dialectic which, in Mitchell's novel, yields more of a Marxist than a diffusionist picture: enslavement at Roman hands contains the seeds of liberation. By mastering the language of the masters, the slaves have acquired the means to organize across the linguistic borders within which they were born. Those who have learned to read can furthermore use the Greco-Roman literary heritage as a source of programmatic ideals, while the Free Legion attempts to literally defeat Rome with its own weapons.

But if civilization itself entails slavery, the revolt of semi-civilized slaves is going to look even less like a Sunday School picnic, and its success is bound to throw the world into a more barbarous state than before. In this light, the scruples of Mitchell's Spartacus appear as an inverse vindication of Roman conquests, having been cruel but necessary steps in the process of man's alienation from his natural state of being, a process irrevocably begun in the transition from blessed primitive to half-civilized and hence barbaric savage under the yoke of kings and priests. In “Religion,” Gibbon claims that Spanish conquistadors saved Mexicans from atrocious religious practices that would eventually have led to their mutation into a sub-species of humanity.²⁸ Then he goes on to bring the point home to Scotland in a hardly less provocative fashion:

²⁸As to the Darwinian roots of the notion of sub-species, see Christopher Fyfe, “Using Race as an Instrument of Policy: A Historical View,” *Race and Class*, 36/2 (1994), 73.

The same might be said of the Scots. Left alone and uninvasioned, they might have passed entirely beyond the orbit of the normally human but for the coming of the Industrial Revolution. This brought Scotland its slums and its Glasgow, its great wens of ironworks and collieries upon the open face of the countryside; but its final efflorescence broke the power of the church and released the Scot to a strange and terrible and lovely world, the world of science and scepticism and high belief and free valour—emerging into the sunlight of history from a ghoulish cañon (Religion, p. 162).

One might be tempted to argue that skepticism came or rather returned with the Enlightenment, or that it did not influence Scots in any larger numbers until long after industrialization, but that would be nit-picking on a scale inadequate to Mitchell's potent polemics. The important point is that Mitchell as well as Marx saw the Industrial Revolution as the precondition of an ultimate change for the better through a second Enlightenment, this time of the masses rather than of an elite. To the historical novelist, this meant that he could find no more than imperfect foreshadowings of a better future in the utopian ideals and struggles of bygone days. If Charles Edward's crusade for a second Stuart restoration was an anachronism in that it sought to re-establish an outdated monarchic ideology, then Spartacus's revolt was anachronistic in that it sought to abolish slavery before it had outlived its usefulness.

The real historical importance of both Charles Edward Stuart's and Spartacus' endeavors lies in myth-making, the creation of a legend which is taking shape even while the events are taking place. The dream of a better world is reflected in a messianic image of the leader, an image which Mitchell's novel links to the idea of man's unfallen state before historical time. Rumor, he says, had it

That the Thracian savage who led the slaves was himself no Thracian, but a tribesman of remoter people, strayed southwards and captured from the Golden Age (*Spartacus*, p. 59).

The redemption of civilization must originate on the fringes of the civilized world; this notion is opposed to Marx's theory of the world revolution as beginning in the most developed countries, and it constitutes a specifically Scottish version of diffusionist thought. The political alliance with the masters and the nevertheless peripheral role of Scotland in post-Union Britain could not but lead radical thinkers to postulate an ideological alliance with the oppressed on a global scale.

Spartacus is thus a kindred figure to the black lad "frae yont Nyanga" who "dings the fell gallows o' the burghers doon" in Hamish Henderson's 1949 poem "Freedom Come All Ye."²⁹ Titul, the man from the western periphery of

²⁹Quoted in Harvie, p. 16.

roman power and the spiritual inhabitant of a mythical dreamland still further removed in space and time, is chosen as leader by the black African slaves in Spartacus' army (*Spartacus*, p. 9). As a League of Enslaved Nations, the periphery comes to haunt the center: this vision, in Mitchell's novel, combines utopian hopes with nightmarish horrors. A different kind of nightmare scenario is painted by William Bell, who sees other nations joining the English masters in adding the cultural extinction of the Scots to the enslavement of Scotland:

When the last authentic Scot dies, the post-mortem will probably reveal that he failed to survive the 'successful' operation for English blood-transfusion. His bones will be laid to a fitful rest in the nearest Episcopalian cemetery. The grave will doubtless be dug by a Polish sexton wielding a Sheffield pick and shovel. The hearse will be a French automobile; the tombstone of Italian marble subscribed for by exiled Anglicized patriots in the Caledonian Clubs of the English Empire. The burial-service will be conducted by a Roman Catholic priest. A grateful English Parliament will send a Welsh M. P. in kilts as the last mark of respect from the Mother of Parliaments. The obituary notice will be written by the Americanized pen of a publicity expert—the Jewish bailiffs meanwhile being in possession of the slum-tenement of the dear-departed (Bell, pp. 15-16).

This is quite a neatly-written piece of satire, but it makes it all too easy to understand how Mitchell could recognize "large elements of Fascism" (Religion, p. 170) within the Scottish nationalist movement. The particular deviousness of Bell's argument lies in his externalization of religious and ethnic groups that are part of Scottish society. The fact that he reserves reference to Jews for a final flourish puts his version of nationalism in line with the kind of doctrine which was soon to turn into bloody reality in others parts of the world. There is also fictional evidence which suggests that similar things could have happened in 1930s Scotland, too. In George Blake's novel *The Shipbuilders*, for instance, "middle-men and Jews and pimps" and "even Hindus"³⁰ appear as the agents behind industrial decline, or as scavengers among the ruins of the Scottish economy. From the image of the English masters as presented by Bell, it seems but a small step to theories of a global Jewish syndicate, while the masters of industry, as long as they are *Volksgenossen*, are grouped with the oppressed rather than the oppressors.

Mitchell's fictional Jew, however, is one of the slave community, and furthermore, in the context of a Scottish novel, he stands as a twofold embodiment of constituents of Scottish reality, Scottish Jews as well as such Christians whose creed smacks of the Old Testament much more than of the New. The transfer of the Covenanting spirit to a Jewish character is part of an artistic structure which rearranges fragments of the Scottish identity in a foreign and

³⁰George Blake, *The Shipbuilders* (London, 1935), p. 319.

multinational context. Mitchell's vision is thus fundamentally internationalist; to Bell, internationalism was clearly a dirty word, and multiculturalism would have been an even dirtier one. Ultimately, his rejection of the past as a point of reference for the Scottish national consciousness thus appears as an attempt to deny the multicultural genesis and nature of Scottish nationhood in favor of a view of the Scots as a pure and monolithic race. Post-devolutionary Scotland will hopefully be able to distinguish between the Mitchells and the Bells of the twenty-first century, and to keep the latter in their place.

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