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**ENGLISH LITERATURE AND SCOTTISH UNIVERSITY  
REFORM: DAVID MASSON'S  
STATE OF LEARNING IN SCOTLAND**

*Jack M. Downs*

When David Masson was appointed to the Regius Chair of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University of Edinburgh in 1865, he brought an exceptionally broad range of qualifications for the post. Masson, the first editor of *Macmillan's Magazine*, was a prodigiously productive literary critic who published more than one hundred articles in *Macmillan's*, the *North British Review*, and a host of other journals. His long-form criticism included his 1859 volume, *British Novelists and their Styles*, which provided one of the Victorian era's most comprehensive critical treatments of the novel. Masson's earlier academic credentials included more than a decade teaching rhetoric and English literature at University College, London. In addition, Masson's social and professional circle in London had placed him in contact with many of the major figures in Victorian literary culture. Joanne Shattock's examination of Masson's professional network emphasizes Masson's friendship with Carlyle, and through Carlyle, Masson's connections with George Nickisson, G.H. Lewes, Douglas Jerrold, T.K. Hervey, George Lillie Craik, and Alexander Macmillan, all of whom had a significant impact on Masson's career as a critic and public essayist.<sup>1</sup> In *Victorians All*, Masson's daughter, Flora, recounts childhood memories of the Massons' London household, which was frequented by Thackeray, John Stuart Mill, Alexander Fraser, Coventry Patmore, Herbert Spencer, Alexander Bain, and Tennyson.<sup>2</sup> Masson, then, was not only a productive critic and a

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<sup>1</sup> Joanne Shattock, "Professional Networking, Masculine and Feminine," *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 44: 2 (2011): 128-40.

<sup>2</sup> Flora Masson, *Victorians All* (London: W. & R. Chambers, 1931), 7-63.

pioneering professor of English literature, he was also exceptionally well-connected.

Masson's background encapsulates the blurring liminalities among notions of Scottish, English, and British cultural identities which emerged throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Scotland, resulting in what Robert Crawford identifies as "a general difficulty about how one might preserve a Scottish identity while ... adopting English linguistic mores."<sup>3</sup> For nineteenth-century Scottish academics like Masson, this difficulty was exacerbated by attempts to reform the Scottish universities and bring them closer to the English or Oxbridge model; George Elder Davie argues the politics of these reform efforts directly impacted the decision to offer Masson the Regius Chair at Edinburgh.<sup>4</sup> The goals of these university reform efforts were clouded by the increasing tension over the position of Scottish cultural identity within an expanding and Anglo-centric sense of Britishness.

Through a survey of nineteenth-century Scottish university reform efforts and an examination of two of Masson's early lectures as Regius Professor at the University of Edinburgh, I hope to position Masson's argument for the place of distinctively Scottish literature and education within the effort to reform the Scottish universities during the late Victorian period. Masson's ruminations on the place and function of late nineteenth-century Scottish higher education and English studies within both Scottish and British cultural contexts reflect the dual nature of his training and experience and illustrate some larger issues confronting nineteenth-century Scottish universities as they attempted to retain their distinctive cultural heritage while asserting their relevance within the broader context of late-Victorian Britain.

### **Early English Studies in the Scottish Academy**

During the past twenty years, there has been an increasing acknowledgement of the importance of Scottish universities in the development of academic English studies. Thomas P. Miller, Winifred Bryan Horner, Robert Crawford, and a host of others—many of them rhetoric scholars—have argued for the undeniable and clear presence of Scottish approaches to teaching English language and literature in the

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>4</sup> George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964), 247.

earliest courses in English which appeared in the new London colleges (King's and University College) and the Scottish universities in the first half of the nineteenth century. Robert Crawford goes so far as to argue that "English Literature as a university subject is a Scottish invention,"<sup>5</sup> an opinion supported by Linda Ferreira-Buckley, who observes that "the first professors (of English and related subjects) in England modeled their curriculums on Scottish university education."<sup>6</sup> Miller is similarly unequivocal in his assessment of the Scottish influence on university English studies, stating, "the Scots were the first to introduce formal studies of English literature, composition, and rhetoric into the university curriculum."<sup>7</sup> Among scholars of rhetoric and Scottish literature, there is no doubt: English studies in the nineteenth-century British academy developed in large part out of a strong tradition of rhetorical training and discipline in the Scottish universities.

The application of rhetorical theory to the analysis of vernacular literary works had a long tradition in the Scottish universities, and the institutionalization of what came to be narrowly classified as "literature" as a subject worthy of university study took place in Scottish university rhetoric courses throughout the eighteenth century. Neil Rhodes argues for a direct line of descent from courses in rhetoric, to courses in "belles lettres," to courses in English literature, taught in the Scottish universities by John Stevenson, Adam Smith, Robert Watson, and Hugh Blair, the last of whom was appointed to the first Regius Chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh in 1762.<sup>8</sup> Through the efforts of W.E. Aytoun during his appointment to the position, the Regius Chair at Edinburgh became, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the Regius Chair in Rhetoric and English Literature, a name change which codified the nature of the position.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Crawford, "Introduction," in Crawford, ed., *The Scottish Invention of English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Linda Ferreira-Buckley, "'Scotch Knowledge' and the Formation of Rhetorical Studies in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century England," in *Scottish Rhetoric and its Influences*, ed. Lynee Lewis Gaillet (Mahwah, NJ: Hermagoras Press, 1998), 163.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas P. Miller, *The Formation of College English: Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the British Cultural Provinces* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 144.

<sup>8</sup> Neil Rhodes, "From Rhetoric to Criticism," in Crawford, 27-30.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Crawford, "Scottish Literature and English Studies," in Crawford, 226.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this increasing emphasis in Scottish universities on developing a systematic critical approach to analyzing literary discourse underscored Scotland's shifting cultural position within the United Kingdom after the Act of Union in 1707. One consequence of the Act of Union on Scottish culture was the solidification of English as the language of political, religious, economic, and cultural power. The importance of learning correct English and understanding English culture was no small matter. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg assert that "in the eighteenth century, it could be worth one's favor at court, success on the stage, appointment at the university, or preferment in the church to speak a dialect regarded as low, rustic, comical, or even altogether incomprehensible."<sup>10</sup> Miller argues that the subsequent rise of informal English study societies in Scotland was simply a response to this new reality: "Scots created such societies to study English for the same reason that the English studied Latin and the Latins studied Greek: it was the language with prestige and power" (Miller 145). Miller further asserts that eighteenth-century Scots like Smith, Blair, and George Campbell "defined eloquence and taste" (Miller 146) for Scottish provincial audiences eager to gain access to the dominant cultural power of English language and literature. But such projects came with a personal price: as Miller observes, "cultural provincials internalized a cosmopolitan sensibility that may have enabled them to advance in British society, but certainly dislocated them from the idioms and traditions of their own society" (Miller 146).

Nevertheless, the eighteenth century saw a concerted and ongoing effort throughout the Scottish universities to teach correct English—both written and oral—while promoting the development of critical approaches which allowed the proper valuation and appreciation of works written in English. In contrast to the Oxford and Cambridge examination requirements, with their heavy focus on translation and composition in the classical languages, the Scottish emphasis on rhetoric and the production of effective written English discourse permeated virtually every facet of Scottish university education. In *The Democratic Intellect*, Davie argues that by the early nineteenth century "the essay was ... the chief means of testing the students' powers in all subjects" (Davie 17).

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<sup>10</sup> Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, "Introduction to Enlightenment Rhetoric," in *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2001), 802.

As Linda Ferreira-Buckley suggests, the Scottish approach to rhetorical and literary studies was foundational in the establishment of English as a university discipline both in the Scottish universities of the eighteenth century and in the new London universities of the nineteenth (Ferreira-Buckley 163-175). Training in rhetoric, literary analysis, and composition was firmly associated with Scottish education throughout Britain and constituted a long-standing, essential, and defining feature of Scottish university education as the nineteenth-century university reform movement gathered momentum.

### **Reforming the Scottish Universities**

The Scottish emphasis on rhetoric as a tool for literary production and analysis was part of the larger character of the Scottish universities as democratic, egalitarian, and dynamic institutions providing a flexible education in moral philosophy and first principles, primarily for students aspiring to careers in the church, the law, or medicine.<sup>11</sup> Enrollment practices in the Scottish universities were relatively open and democratic, at least compared to their southern counterparts. Scottish universities were, according to Graeme Morton, “open, if not universal” and provided “opportunity for anyone of any class, if they had the ability, to aspire to further or higher education” (Morton 185). This Scottish tradition of openness impacted enrollment, and Morton claims that by 1872, the ratio of university attendance was five times higher in Scotland than in England (Morton 186). The character of the Scottish approach to higher education supported both liberal and practical values, a stance embraced by all levels of Scottish society.<sup>12</sup> Davie’s claims as to the true extent of the democratic and open character of the Scottish universities have been questioned by R.D. Anderson, who characterizes Davie’s history of the Scottish university tradition as “eloquent,” and even “historically sound,” while nonetheless calling it “strongly idealist” and “somewhat ahistorical.”<sup>13</sup> Anderson agrees that Anglicization played a role in nineteenth-century Scottish university reform efforts, and he mostly agrees that, throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,

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<sup>11</sup> Davie xi-xx; Graeme Morton, *Ourselves and Others: Scotland 1832 – 1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 186.

<sup>12</sup> *Oxford Companion to Scottish History*, ed. Michael Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 612.

<sup>13</sup> R.D. Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland: Schools and Universities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), 25.

access to higher education in Scotland was more democratic than in England at the same time. However, Anderson contextualizes the longstanding belief in a peculiarly democratic Scottish educational system as a cultural myth which has become an ingrained element in “the Scottish sense of nationhood and . . . the image which others have formed of the Scots” (Anderson 1).

Yet even when the democratic myth of the Scottish universities is challenged, there is little doubt that the Oxbridge universities of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were far more socially exclusive than their northern neighbors, with a curriculum that demanded mastery of Greek and Latin and emphasized specialization in mathematics and the sciences. Davie suggests that the differences between the Scottish and English universities extended beyond the philosophical and curricular to a question of effectiveness. In Davie's account, the Scottish universities at the outset of the nineteenth century represented a “well-ordered progressive system of ... education ... as compared with the stagnant and ill-ordered state of affairs in the South” (Davie xv). Morton observes that John Stuart Mill considered an English university education mostly useless (Morton 186), and Mill's criticism was hardly an isolated opinion. Linda Ferreira-Buckley asserts that the founders of University College, London “consciously created the university to satisfy needs unmet by Oxford and Cambridge” and that the Scottish universities served as model institutions for the curricular structure of University College, especially regarding rhetorical and literary training (Ferreira-Buckley 165).

Despite the independent, democratic reputation of the Scottish universities and with little regard for relative educational effectiveness, early nineteenth-century reform efforts to bring the Scottish universities into line with their English counterparts were often presented as a practical responses to help Scottish students compete in an Anglo-centric professional world (*Oxford Companion* 613), and especially, in the latter nineteenth century, to prepare them for competitive examinations for the top civil service and government posts throughout the British empire (Morton 186). Scottish-trained educators at the time, however, also believed the narrowly classical education championed by the Oxbridge universities was a detriment to students' post-university success (Ferreira-Buckley 164-5) and G.E. Davie characterizes these reform efforts as masking a more overt English cultural imperialism (Davie 4-6). Davie argues the egalitarian nature of the Scottish university system, coupled with its broad curricular emphasis on philosophy and general knowledge, encouraged innovation, creative thinking, and economic growth; Davie

thus views nineteenth-century Scottish universities as “the chief forum of resistance to southern encroachment” (Davie 4). Furthermore, Davie asserts reforming the Scottish universities to better coordinate with the English university model negatively impacted Scotland’s “one great economic advantage” (Davie 4) over England: the Scottish educational model. In Davie’s treatment, the issue of university reform tended to be cultural and national, rather than strictly political (Davie 40). Anderson, however, asserts that the broad and general nature of Scottish university education was a problem, and that there was very little depth in any one subject area (Anderson 32). In addition, the Scottish tradition of openness impacted the actual completion of university degrees: because courses were open to any student who could pay the course fees, many course attendees were simply interested Scots who had neither the time nor intention to complete a full university degree (Anderson 34).

Early nineteenth-century university reform efforts found expression in the report of the 1826 Royal Commission. The Scottish tradition of accessible and widespread elementary education resulted in a far more literate and well-educated population in comparison with England (Morton 2). Davie observes that Scottish education was a point of pride and a source of international renown for Scotland, and there was a broad sentiment across the country that radical reform was largely unnecessary (Davie 27-8). Nevertheless, the commission was mostly in favor of a large-scale and invasive reform effort intended to eviscerate the emphases on moral philosophy and general principles which were the hallmark of Scottish education. The commissioners sympathized with pro-reform arguments which contended the Scottish system’s early and open admissions (with many university student beginning at just 14 or 15), coupled with a submersion into philosophy without a thorough grounding in the classics, hindered the later success of students when they began to specialize (Davie 26-40). The primary goal of the 1826 commission, though, was not driven so much by overt English cultural imperialism as by a desire “to make the [Scottish] universities more systematic and efficient educational institutions” (Anderson 48). In the end, however, the outcry in Scotland against the more radical reform proposals doomed the legislation in parliament, and the Scottish university system was left mostly alone for the following three decades.

The next concerted effort to reform the Scottish university system came in 1858. While Davie asserts that the impact of the 1858 Scottish Universities Act was disastrous for Scottish identity and cultural history (Davie 70), there were pressing and urgent reasons to move forward with

university reform efforts in the 1850s. The end of religious tests for admission to Oxford and Cambridge opened the Oxbridge universities and their substantial endowments to dissenting and Catholic students, a move which impacted enrollment by eliminating one of the major attractions for non-Scottish students to attend the Scottish universities (Anderson 64). Furthermore, the civil service tests were heavily weighted in the favor of Oxford and Cambridge graduates, and the poor performance of Scottish graduates on the civil service exams prompted something of a minor crisis of Scottish self-confidence.

The 1858 legislation seemed, on the surface, to be largely innocuous in its primary attention to administrative structure. The Act organized the Aberdeen colleges (Marischal and King's) into a single University of Aberdeen and revised the structure of governance and faculty appointments at Glasgow, St Andrews, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh. The Act, however, contained two elements with the potential to make radical and more fundamental changes to the Scottish university system. First, control of the universities was removed from local governing bodies to a group of commissioners for the Scottish Universities drawn largely from the Scottish peerage and the Scottish legal system.<sup>14</sup> While the commissioners were primarily Scottish and somewhat sympathetic—especially in comparison to the Royal Commission of 1826—to concerns about the unnecessary Anglicization of the Scottish universities, the centralization of university control in the hands of a committee with strong political and economic connections to England was viewed in some circles—and was certainly characterized by Davie—as a threat to Scottish democratic and egalitarian ideals. Second, the Act made provision for the establishment of a “National University for *Scotland*” (emphasis original) to which the four ancient universities of Scotland could, if they chose, abdicate all their powers to administer exams and award degrees, “and ... become colleges, one or more ... of the said National University” (Universities Act c. 17). While the Act clearly states that such a move to incorporate the Scottish universities into one National University would be purely voluntary (and could only happen if a National University was established), the removal of local control, combined with the explicit, state-sanctioned proposal for federation, fostered continuing uncertainty in the years after 1858.

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<sup>14</sup> Universities (Scotland) Act, 1858, 21 Vict. c. 13

Masson's 1865 appointment to the Regius Chair followed in the wake of the reforms initiated by the 1858 universities act. Although the commission findings and the 1858 reforms expressed some awareness of the disinctive Scottish tradition, the 1858 Act is sometimes identified as a watershed moment in Scottish history in which these ideals were contained, if not entirely eradicated (Davie 70). Yet the Scottish universities were in need of reform, and the 1858 legislation provided crucial and necessary authority for a "temporary executive commission" to revise and standardize the Scottish universities' curriculum and degree requirements (Anderson 64-9). In the event, they made only one curricular change applicable across all Scottish universities (Anderson, 70). Partly due to the influence and popularity of William Edmondstoune Aytoun, Masson's predecessor in the Regius Chair at Edinburgh, but partly because of its role in the new Civil Service competitions, in 1861 the commission recommended the inclusion of English literature as a required university subject, formally acknowledging English-language literary studies as central to Scottish university education.<sup>15</sup>

Masson's appointment reflected these various currents. While Masson's Scottish university training and professional success and experience in the English press ideally suited him for the Regius Chair at Edinburgh, Davie suggests that the Scottish tradition of university training in literary analysis and criticism, especially as expressed in *Blackwoods* or the *Edinburgh Review*, was "very much resented in literary and academic circles in the South" (Davie 61). Masson was thus presented with an exceptionally difficult task: as a Scot with a state-sponsored position in a Scottish university, Masson found it necessary to champion the cause of Scottish education (and Scottish literary traditions, particularly) while simultaneously developing a pro-British heuristic for teaching and theorizing English literature. These efforts are clearly evident in two early lectures delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 1865 and 1866.

### Masson's Inaugural Address

The fact that Masson was a professor of English literature in a Scottish university was of immediate concern when he began his tenure as the Regius Chair of Rhetoric and English Literature. Irvine and Gravlee assert that his

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<sup>15</sup> Winifred Bryan Horner, *Nineteenth-Century Scottish Rhetoric: The American Connection* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press), 10, 66.

initial tasks in this new position were to establish the relationship of rhetoric, a traditional area of study in Scottish universities, with English literature, to define the perimeters and components of these studies as he perceived them, and to argue for the yields to be gained from studying such subjects.<sup>16</sup>

In his inaugural address, Masson begins by limiting the study of literature to those texts which conform to De Quincey's definition of "books of Power."<sup>17</sup> He develops his methodology for studying and teaching "literature as a fine art" around a historical appreciation of genres and modes of literary discourse (Masson, "Inaugural"). Masson's methodology is driven by rhetorical concerns derived from the work of eighteenth-century Scottish *belles lettres* rhetoricians like Smith and Blair, still central to the curricula at Edinburgh and the other Scottish universities through into the nineteenth century. Masson argues that the systematic study of literature should include "a theory of style" as its primary emphasis. Briefly mentioning grammar as "the science of what is merely correct," he passes on to rhetoric, which in Masson's formulation is a foundational and analytic discipline descended from the *belles lettres* approach to rhetorical and literary study which had emerged at the University of Edinburgh in the previous century:

It is for Rhetoric to move on into such more subtle inquiries as these – What constitutes clearness or easy intelligibility in words & their combinations into sentences? What constitutes good taste or expression or the reverse? & wherein lie the secrets of those higher qualities of style which move us with the feeling of artistic beauty, or majesty, or richness? (Masson, *Inaugural*)

This attention to style is driven by questions of perspicuity, taste, and sublimity (Masson, *Inaugural*), the same concerns which occupied Masson's eighteenth-century predecessors in the Scottish universities.<sup>18</sup> Masson thus establishes the connections between his course in rhetoric and English literature and the extensive Scottish university tradition of rhetorical training and literary study.

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<sup>16</sup> James R. Irvine and G. Jack Gravlee, "Notes and Documents: Masson's Inaugural Lecture," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 14, (1979): 239-40.

<sup>17</sup> David Masson, "Inaugural Lecture," 14 November 1865. MS Dk. 4.28, Edinburgh University Library.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Warnick, *The Sixth Canon: Belletristic Rhetorical Theory and its French Antecedents* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 43-136.

When Masson turns from methodology to the particular subject matter of English literature, he makes a subtle but significant distinction. The literature itself is geographically and historically British, belonging to the whole of the British Isles (Masson, *Inaugural*); however, the primary language of that literature is English. This distinction is the first indication of how Masson will navigate the thorny question of teaching English literature in a Scottish university. The difficulty is elided through recourse to the concept of British—rather than English—literature, allowing Masson a certain degree of freedom in defining the scope and purpose of the course. Masson’s history of literature in the British Isles praises the rich, but mostly lost tradition of pre-Roman Celtic literature and passes swiftly over Anglo-Saxon literature to arrive at a complex understanding of “English” literature which includes the full linguistic sweep of Celtic, Roman British, Anglo-Saxon, and Norman influences (Masson, *Inaugural*). Masson then begins a rapid-fire recitation of the “great ones” of British literature, with Chaucer leading the way and proceeding down through literary history to the Victorian period (Masson, *Inaugural*).

In this way, Masson positions the subject of English literature as the study of a cumulative literature derived from and built upon the complete range of literary and linguistic influences which converged in the British Isles across the centuries. Masson thus demonstrates a concern for “British unionism” that had influenced appointments to Scottish universities for more than a century (Crawford, “Introduction” 5). Masson also seems to voice a conflation that still exists within many departments of English literature at universities around the world: English literature *is* British literature; or more accurately, English is the language of British literature. Masson’s formulation of British literature also subtly underscores the centrality of Englishness as the cultural heuristic for examining any British literature in a university setting.

### ***The State of Learning in Scotland***

Masson addresses the question of Scottish literature and education more directly in his opening academic lecture from the following year (1866), published in pamphlet form as *The State of Learning in Scotland*.<sup>19</sup> Here, he once again outlines the purpose of the course as an introduction to

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<sup>19</sup> David Masson, *The State of Learning in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1866); copy in Johns Hopkins University Library Special Collections (L11.A v.12 c.1).

rhetorical principles and their application to a general theory of literature within the framework of a history of English language and literature. In addition, Masson now proposes to deliver “practical instruction” in English composition (Masson, *State*, 1-2). Masson’s primary purpose in the lecture is to assess the current state of Scottish education and articulate a particularly Scottish approach to teaching and learning literature within a British and Anglo-centric context. Here, Masson’s deferential elision of English and British literature from his inaugural address of the previous year is replaced by defense of a distinctly Scottish literature within the larger construct of British literature, and an attendant appreciation for the place of Scottish education within the British nation.

In the context of university reform and the 1858 reform legislation, Masson’s opening section, discussing the ideas of the late eighteenth-century Scottish antiquarian John Pinkerton, might seem somewhat quixotic or tangential. Pinkerton virulently opposed the romanticization of Highland and Celtic culture and openly derided the enthusiasm for Celtic culture engendered by works such as James MacPherson’s Ossian poems. Robert Crawford identifies Pinkerton’s obsessive opposition to Celtic culture as an attempt “to prove that the Celts were degenerate Gothic aborigines.”<sup>20</sup> Masson acknowledges Pinkerton’s overt cultural biases, pointing out that “anti-Celtic mania vitiated from the first the results of a great deal of his best research” (Masson, *State* 3).

Masson’s selection of Pinkerton as a starting point for exploring the history and nature of Scottish university education is, however, strategic. First, Pinkerton’s biography echoes Masson’s own to a certain extent: like Masson, Pinkerton was Scottish-born and educated; like Masson, his original career path—in law, rather than the church—was abandoned to devote his life and energy to academic and literary pursuits, particularly as an historian. And like Masson, Pinkerton left Scotland for London in order to pursue his literary ambitions.<sup>21</sup> Unlike Masson, though, Pinkerton never returned to Scotland. Second, and more significantly, Pinkerton’s aggressive support for English language, literature, and culture provided Masson with a foil for his discussion of Scottish literature and education. Despite his occasionally excellent work as an historian and antiquarian, Pinkerton’s views on Celtic racial inferiority

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books: A History of Scottish Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 372.

<sup>21</sup> Trevor Royle, *The Mainstream Companion to Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1993), 246.

and his propensity for gratuitous plagiarism made him even in his lifetime a figure of some controversy and contempt (Royle 246). In choosing Pinkerton as the mouthpiece for contemporary criticism of the Scottish intellectual tradition, Masson situates the Anglo-centric prejudice against Scottish education and literature, not as progressive and reformist, but as a product of discredited assumptions promoted by controversial individuals like Pinkerton.

Masson quotes Pinkerton at some length, highlighting Pinkerton's contention that the "national character" of Scotland is antithetical to sustaining great thinkers (Masson, *State* 4-6). He includes an extensive excerpt from Pinkerton's 1789 *Enquiry into the Early History of Scotland* in which Pinkerton had asserted that the Scots are a people replete with genius, but deficient in sustained excellence in "erudition" (Masson, *State* 5). Pinkerton's point about education in Scotland is clear: "while Scotland has produced many *ingenious* writers, it is impossible to condescend upon one who ... can even bear the appellation of *learned*" (Masson, *State* 5). The defects of Scottish education and learning are attributed by Pinkerton to the geographic remoteness of the nation and a general temperament within the Scottish population that is characterized as too impatient ever to produce a thinker and writer equal to Bacon, Newton, Shakespeare, or Milton (Masson, *State* 5-6).

Such an opening statement seems intended by Masson to draw his audience's attention to the Anglo-centric perception of Scotland and Scottish education within the United Kingdom. As Davie repeatedly observes, proponents for an Anglicized approach to Scottish university reform frequently criticized the Scottish preference for moral philosophy as the foundational university discipline as a defect which limited students' ability to specialize. For supporters of an Anglo-centric approach to Scottish university reform, the breadth of Scottish education was perceived to come at the expense of a narrow depth and specialization which reformers viewed as an essential component for success within contemporary British economic and cultural contexts (Davie 5-9; 28-33; 44; 62-3).

While Masson was no Scottish nationalist—and might be quite accurately described as pro-British and Unionist—he was committed to the project of advancing Scottish education, and particularly the Scottish tradition of literary studies, within a construct of "Britishness." Robert Crawford argues that "Britishness" was in fact a Scottish, rather than English concept, given shape and meaning by Scottish intellectuals in the eighteenth century (Crawford, *Devolving* 45-110). In his study of the

eighteenth-century development of the English studies, Thomas Miller echoes Clive and Bailyn by referring to Scotland as a "British cultural province," while Cairns Craig positions Scottish literature after the Act of Union as a "peripheral."<sup>22</sup> While Liam Connell cautions that attempts to apply a postcolonial lens to contemporary readings of Scottish literary culture are problematic because of the continued slippage between textual and political notions of postcolonialism, the marginalization of Scottish language and literature within the United Kingdom after the Act of Union is difficult to ignore.<sup>23</sup> Craig's definition of a peripheral literature provides some illumination of Masson's critical stance and places Scottish literature in uneasy contact with the history of English literature, with the dominant culture crediting itself with "all significant achievements in the periphery that can be accommodated without too great a stress" (Craig 19).

Masson, as a Scot who had successfully navigated the difficult currents of London literary culture as an editor, critic, and professor at University College, understood these concerns. In response, he argues that the contributions of Scottish writers deserve a place within the larger linear history of British literature (Masson, *State* 7; 11). His argument, in fact, is simultaneously both conservative and radical. On the surface, Masson's argument seems driven by British cultural imperialism through his insistence that the history of the literature produced in the British Isles is a homogenous, identifiably continuous, progressive, and cohesive literary tradition which extends seamlessly across history and beyond former national boundaries. Such a conceptualization of literary history seems motivated by the kind of conservative pro-union nationalism which figured so prominently in the selection of Scottish university chairs during the preceding century. But Masson's overt British nationalism is mitigated by his insistence that the sweep of British literary history is only complete when Scottish contributions are fully considered.

It might seem that Masson is simply characterizing Scottish literature as peripheral in the sense developed by Cairns Craig, where a peripheral

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<sup>22</sup> Miller 1-29; John Clive and Bernard Bailyn, "England's Cultural Provinces: Scotland and America," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 11:2 (April, 1954): 200-2013; Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), 11-30.

<sup>23</sup> Liam Connell, "Modes of Marginality: Scottish Literature and the Uses of Postcolonial Theory," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 23, nos. 1 & 2 (2003): 41-53.

literature is absorbed and legitimized by a dominant literature. Masson, in fact, seems to legitimize the work of Scottish literary figures like Barbour, Dunbar, Lindsay, Burns, and Scott through their placement within the forward progress of an Anglo-centric British literary history. Craig claims that such an approach has the effect of “reduc[ing] specifically Scottish traditions to local colour,” leaving Scottish writers in a position in which “they can only find significance by acquiring a place within ... English literature” (Craig 14-15). If Masson were justifying the literary merit of these Scottish authors solely through their place within the British literary canon, Craig’s definition of the peripheral might fit Masson’s position.

Instead, however, Masson makes a nuanced argument in the other direction: Scottish literary contributions are essential and foundational to any sense of a complete, uninterrupted narrative of British literary history. The inclusion of Scottish literature, in other words, legitimizes the concept of a truly British literature. Masson does not disguise this point, stating that Scottish writers were the most “worthy to rank as men of genius” in the time between Chaucer and Spenser (Masson, *State* 7), implying that there are gaps in the continuum of *English* literary history which can only be filled through an understanding of a truly inclusive sense of *British* literary history. Masson implicitly argues that the genius of these Scottish writers is not legitimized through their inclusion within the British canon; instead, the British canon is only legitimate if it makes room for Scottish literature.

Masson then applies this reasoning to the larger question of Scottish education, even allowing that some of Pinkerton’s observations about geography and cultural temperament might have merit (Masson, *State* 11-15). Yet Masson turns these criticisms to the advantage of Scottish education: like Davie, Masson identifies the kind of critical thinking fostered by philosophical education and training in literary analysis and composition as qualities that set Scottish education apart from the English system (Masson, *State* 15-19). These qualities, Masson argues, allow for powerful original thought and innovation unlikely to develop elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Scottish education, in other words, is crucial to the continuing development of a complete British cultural identity (Masson, *State* 19). Masson, in fact, argues that certain aspects of the Scottish educational tradition should be diffused throughout British culture, primarily through the study of languages and literatures. As Davie observes, a persistent criticism of the Scottish university system in the nineteenth century focused on its lack of attention to classical

languages (Davie 3-25). Masson responds to such criticisms by arguing the classics should hold an important place in a university education, but only alongside the study of contemporary languages and literatures like English, French, and German (Masson, *State* 21). Masson's course in rhetoric and English literature at Edinburgh and similar courses at the other Scottish universities are thus situated as quintessentially Scottish educational experiences which establish a framework and organizational structure for the acquisition of future knowledge (Masson, *State* 26).

In the end, Masson defends Scottish education and the Scottish approach to language and literature by positioning them as foundational and essential components in an evolving British cultural identity. Masson argues forcefully for the full integration of Scottish education into the intellectual production of the British state, while highlighting the crucial presence of a distinctly Scottish influence in all fields of scholarly endeavor during the previous two centuries (Masson, *State* 15-25). Masson's attempt to navigate this cultural duality produces a theory of Scottish education and literature which simultaneously attempts to resist English cultural assimilation while creating space for Scottish literature and education within the continuum of British literary history.

Masson's deft management of the difficult position of distinctly Scottish cultural contributions to the nineteenth century's developing sense of an Anglocentric British identity is worth reconsidering. As Robert Crawford has observed, Scottish literature has rarely been taught in universities as a distinct national literature and is most often "institutionally marginal" (Crawford, *Scotland's Books* 4). But from his high-profile position as Regius professor in Edinburgh, Masson saw the institution as a tool whereby the national literature and educational values of Scotland might continue as distinct entities within the Anglocentric British cultural reality of the Victorian academy. Masson's defense of Scotland's literature and learning thus provides valuable insight as contemporary departments of English around the world continue to recognize and revise their own Anglocentric approaches to literary studies.

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