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AS OTHERS SEE US: A VIEW FROM NORTHERN IRELAND

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There is a Wim Wenders' film with the title 'In weiter Ferne, so nah!'. The English translation is 'Faraway, So Close!'. To consider Scotland from across the North Channel is perhaps to reverse those terms and to see it close, so faraway. When one makes the short journey from Larne to Stranraer or, thanks to Easyjet, the even shorter journey from Belfast to Edinburgh, there is much that is familiar and much that is strange. Moreover, Wenders' film weaves together fantasy and reality and that is what most perspectives on a nation happen to be - mainly because a nation itself is both fantasy and reality. On the one hand, it is relatively simple to give an outsider's impression of Scotland insofar as one confines oneself to impressions alone. That might be of some interest but possibly only at the intellectual level of 'The Holiday Programme'. On the other hand, it is exceptionally difficult to provide insights of an intellectually stimulating, Melvyn Braggish, 'In Our Time', sort that would illuminate aspects of Scottishness not already visible to Scots themselves. This article starts at 'The Holiday Programme' level and tries to work its way up to the level of 'In Our Time'. Since an academic habit has developed of addressing the question of identity in the mode of autobiography and since the theme of this paper is 'how others see us' - the 'us' in this case being the Scots - it is perhaps not entirely inappropriate to indicate briefly some personal and enduring impressions of Scotland and Scottishness. The origin of these impressions was exclusively from the

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broadcast media and, to use Lord Reith's distinction, more in the mode of 'The Holiday Programme' (entertainment) than 'In Our Time' (education).

SCOTTISH IMPRESSIONS

In the 1960s, there was 'The White Heather Club' with the inimitable Andy Stewart, the equally inimitable Dixie Ingram and those female dancers who appeared both wholesome and erotic. A whole generation came to imagine thereby a quintessential Scottishness captured to the sound of Jimmy Shand and his accordion. There was 'Doctor Finlay's Casebook' whose portrayal of rural Scotland always left one feeling intensely claustrophobic (though this may have had a lot to do with the fact that it was shown in the evening of a traditionally claustrophobic Ulster Sunday). There was the great Stanley Baxter whose sketch on BBC language broadcasts of the day – 'Parliamo Glasgow' - poked as much fun at the peculiarities of received English as it did at the Glaswegian dialect. As a consequence, a generation of school kids learnt to snigger while 'rolling their Scottish rs'. And in anti-White Heather Club mode, who can forget Baxter on a cruiseboat on the river, looking disgustedly over the side and singing in the poshest of Scottish tones: 'Oh the Clyde, the Clyde, the wonderful Clyde God knows what goes out and comes in with the tide'. In the 1970s, Scotland was Billy Connolly. In the 1980s and 90s, it was Rab C Nesbitt and Jim Taggart. What all three came to show was a very different sort of Scotland exploring, one might suggest, what did go out and come in with the tide, the darker side of the Scottish character.

Admittedly, this is a very eclectic set of impressions. If one were to try to define Scottishness in their terms one would encounter justifiable ridicule. And yet they are revealing of certain superficial and contradictory impressions which outsiders do have of the Scots. They embrace the tartanry of the 'White Heather Club'; the traditional canniness of the rural characters in 'Dr Finlay's Casebook' as well as Finlay's own enlightened rationalism; the tortured accents, the cult of respectability and the aspirations of the Scottish middle class made fun of by Baxter; and the hard-man, drink-based culture captured by Connolly, Nesbitt and Taggart. Are they, indeed, all that different from the images the Scots sometimes have of themselves? Are they, for example, all that different from the voices conjured up by Donald Dewar in his speech at the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 when he spoke of the wild cry of the pipes; the speak of the Mearns; the discourse of Enlightenment; the shout of the welder on the Clyde; the battle cries of Bruce

and Wallace? Dewar's political objective was to invoke an inclusive set of rhetorical images striking an emotional chord with a large cross-section of his listeners. His choice, then, was far from accidental or random and it proves how fine is the dividing line between cliched impressions and official commemoration. But what does any of this really tell us about Scottishness?

St. Augustine once wrote that he knew something when he did not have to speak of it. When he had to speak of it he realised that he did not know it. This seems an appropriate starting point for serious reflection on something as tricky as Scottish national identity - if, indeed, such a thing actually exists. Perhaps one should start by distinguishing two simple levels of understanding. These two levels are the distinctive and the representative. This is not a very original differentiation but it remains quite useful. The distinctive and the representative need not be mutually exclusive but it is often the case that what is distinctive of Scotland may not necessarily be representative, for example the wearing of the kilt, and what is representative may not necessarily be distinctive, for example high levels of heart disease. Doing justice to both what is distinctive and what is representative of modern Scotland is a difficult enterprise. A general rule of thumb would be that popular images of Scotland held by those outside Scotland almost entirely fall into the category of the distinctive. It is worth exploring this a little further.

THE DISTINCTIVE

Since 1997 the British Council (currently chaired by the Scot, Baroness Helena Kennedy) has been surveying opinion under the **Through Other Eyes** project. The object of this project has been to measure how the world sees the United Kingdom, and it complemented that concern to 're-brand Britain' which informed the first years of the New Labour Government. There are now two completed surveys and it is not particularly surprising, perhaps, how Scotland is seen through other eyes. The consistent identifiers for Scotland happen to be: kilts, the Highlands, whisky, bagpipes and the climate (which is thought to be synonymous with cold and rain). There are, however, certain regional differences. For Eastern Europeans, Scotland above all means the kilt. On the other hand, this is the case for only 1% of Indians, which is rather surprising given the imperial military connections between Scotland and the sub-continent. For the Brazilians it means whisky. For the Turks it means bagpipes. For the Germans it means the Highlands. Interestingly, given the nostalgia for the auld alliance, the French record one

of the highest percentages of 'don't knows' and 'not stated' but tend to link Scotland with whisky (which, if I remember correctly from my youthful reading of Francoise Sagan's novels, means not drunkenness but sophistication). Everyone seems to be agreed that the Scots are friendlier than the English. One Argentinian volunteered the response that 'the Scottish are really nice, but it is hard to understand them' (British Council 1999, 2000). Since much of the work of the British Council is language teaching, perhaps Baroness Kennedy should be encouraged to resurrect those old Stanley Baxter clips of Parliamo Glasgow.

One interesting difference between the 1999 and 2000 surveys is the declining significance of 'Braveheart' in the popular imagination of Scotland. However, the reason would appear to be that China (which took 'Braveheart' to its own heart) was included in 1999. The reason for the popularity of 'Braveheart' was political rather than cultural. The Chinese Government was conducting an anti-British propaganda campaign at the time and Mel Gibson slaughtering the English in the name of Scottish freedom was obviously popular. The enduring tartanry of Scotland's international image is quite striking given the remarkable vibrancy of its contemporary popular, urban culture. 'Braveheart', in other words, is the marker rather than 'Trainspotting'. Sometimes, of course, Scotland's distinctive qualities may be correctly identified, but fundamentally misunderstood. Football is one of them. I remember being on holiday in Malta and finding what was called The Scotsman's Bar. Sure enough, the actual bar did look as if it had been transported from one of the better social clubs in the Central Belt. Unfortunately for all this attempted authenticity, on one of the walls there hung a Rangers shirt and right beside it, equally honoured, was a Celtic shirt. A very exceptional Scotsman's Bar indeed and, one imagines, only for export.

NORTHERN IRELAND AND SCOTLAND

The mistake made by the owners of The Scotsman's Bar is not the sort of identity error that could possibly be made in Northern Ireland. Religion, nationalism and footballing allegiance coincide to make the Celtic and Rangers shirts the most definite markers of political identity as a short visit to Belfast will confirm. One would assume that the connections between Scotland and Northern Ireland would transcend the cliches of the distinctive. One could make an obvious list of associations. On any Saturday during the football season, for example, about 2000 supporters from Northern Ireland

will be attending the home games of the Old Firm. There are 800 Orange Lodges in Scotland claiming a membership of 50,000 all having fraternal relations, symbolised by the Lily and the Thistle, with brethren in Northern Ireland. The **Daily Record** and the **Sunday Post** are available in most newsagents in Northern Ireland (mainly, one suspects, for the football reports). Moreover, there are currently 137 pipe bands in Northern Ireland affiliated to the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association and not all of their members are Protestant. Eleven Scottish country dancing classes, most of them in Greater Belfast and North Down, attract an older membership, while highland dancing, run alongside a flourishing Irish dance tradition, attracts younger Protestants as well Catholics. There has been, of course, a steady traffic of undergraduates to Scottish universities, though it is not as great as people in Northern Ireland sometimes assume. In 2000-1, of just over 11,500 Northern Irish entrants to university, 1419 went to Scottish colleges and 2200 went to university in England. Northern Irish students believe that the Scots are 'like us' and that going to Scotland is 'unproblematical', and one supposes the implication is that the English are not so like us and that going to England is rather more problematical (Osborne 2001). Contemporary interest in Scottish culture (or what is taken to be Scottish culture) is sometimes thought to be a mainly Protestant affair. Politically, this may be true, for example the current interest in Ulster-Scots as a counterweight to Gaelic-Irish. However, Catholic families are just as likely, given the history of emigration, to have intimate connections with Scotland.

One might assume, then, that people in Northern Ireland are knowledgeable about most things Scottish. Yet one wonders. Just as republicans and loyalists appropriate for their own purposes the cause of the Palestinians and Israelis, so too is Scotland appropriated by nationalism and unionism. At the level of identity politics, Scotland, for many unionists, is what Ulster would be like if it weren't for the IRA. For many nationalists, Scotland is congenial because it is anti-English, will break the Union and so usher in the day of Irish unity. In both cases, this is the ideological equivalent of kilts, bagpipes and whisky, aspects of Scottish experience abstracted from a complicated context and fitted into a distinctively local frame of reference. As Graham Walker put it in the title of his book, the relationship between Northern Ireland and Scotland remains one of Intimate Strangers and intimacy does not necessarily mean comprehension (1995).

THE REPRESENTATIVE

On the other hand, it is the task of academics and researchers to explore what is representative in Scottish life. Their job is to worry professionally about the identities of others and to make intelligible the fragments of public opinion and the dynamics of political change in Scotland. And what is representative is often more interesting than what is distinctive because often it can be more surprising. For instance, the work of David McCrone, Michael Keating, William Miller, James Mitchell, James Kellas, Lindsay Paterson and others has tried to capture the paradoxes and complexities of modern Scotland in ways that stimulate and provoke reflection on its character. What is of equal importance has been the creation of a tradition of serious enquiry in which schools of thought may contest for primacy (Kellas 2002, pp. 152-4). The Scotland which emerges from this important academic work is certainly not a Scotland of cliches.

One discovers that the Scots are different in voting behaviour from the English but not all that different, if at all, in social and cultural attitudes (Worcester 2001); that it is less Labour strength which has allowed it to dominate recent Scottish politics than Conservative weakness (Hassan, 2002); that the Scots increasingly feel themselves to be more Scottish than British but that it is difficult to measure just how much more Scottish than British they are or to be certain what this means politically (Miller 1998); that the liberal consensus about a 'new politics' in Scotland is not really a consensus at all especially at local government level (Bonney 2002; Davidson 2000); that the Europeanism of Scottish politics is not so exceptional as we once assumed. Attitudes of MSPs are not so different from those of MPs. Indeed, it is the SNP which appears to be most frequently divided on European matters (Baker, Randall and Seawright 2002); that nationalism does not necessarily mean voting for the SNP and does not necessarily mean a desire for independence (Bond and Rosie 2002).

It is a complex Scotland which emerge from these reflections. We should not think otherwise, though often people do. In other words, it is the surprising, ever changing, and fascinating multi-dimensionality of Scotland which is representative and not the neat stereotypes of what is thought to be distinctive - not, it must be said, even niceness. Reason, of course, always pushes towards some containment, if not resolution, of contrasts and so it is reasonable to ask: are there some things distinctively representative or,

indeed, representatively distinctive of Scotland today? As an outsider, one may make the following observations.

OBSERVATIONS ON SCOTLAND

The Scottish debate on devolution was defined, in the main, by an admirable rationalism. I am conscious that this may also be the snare of a cultural stereotype that speaks in the reasoned tones of David Hume. Nevertheless, its rationalism may be compared with the debate in Northern Ireland, which has been defined by bad faith, suspicion, bitterness and either unnecessary pessimism or ill-founded optimism. Or the debate in Wales, insofar as a public debate did take place, which was characterised by a peculiar brew of passionate apathy. Or the response to devolution in England which, with certain exceptions, has been mainly one of indifference sometimes modulated by shallow invective. The exceptional moderation and reasonableness of the Scottish debate was captured in Joyce McMillan's term: 'quiet nationalism' (1996). It was all the more remarkable given the Major Government's disparagement of the work of the Constitutional Convention at the same time as the Prime Minister's own civil servants were engaged in secret talks with the IRA. That such double standards did not provoke public disorder is a measure of the civic responsibility of those conducting the Scottish debate. That civic responsibility is possibly a consequence of the second observation.

It was the late Stanley Gebler Davies who once said of (Southern) Irish nationalism that it is not so much hostile to things English as it is to things British. If one were to accept that (contentious) claim then one might argue that the Scots are not so much hostile to things British as they are resistant, nowadays at least, to things English. This, I think, has given a distinctive flavour to expressions of Scottish nationality and, more significantly, has influenced the character of Scottish nationalism. That may be changing, but it seems that the subtleties of Scottish nationality probably owe a lot to the sympathy still felt for British institutions, a sympathy not necessarily contradicted by devolution, by a Scottish cultural renaissance or even by feeling more Scottish than British.

However, two new anxieties (or rather two old anxieties in new form) can be detected in the devolved Scotland. The first is the anxiety of parochiality. This anxiety may not be as strong as it once was but it certainly has not disappeared. It represents a common cultural dread of narrowness and smallmindedness, a dread of being forever behind the game. If this is an

anxiety which is defined mainly by its inwardness, there is a certain irony that the measure of anxiety is explicitly outward, namely the political fashions of metropolitan London. There is a further irony in that this Scottish anxiety rarely features in metropolitan comment. As Hassan and Warhurst have shown, most English commentary tends to be impressed by the achievements of Scottish devolution. That commentary exhibits, depending on taste, grudging admiration, sullen resentment at a perceived Scottish advantage or the elevation of Edinburgh as an example for England (2002, pp. 5-6). By contrast, the inwardness of the anxiety is to be found in the disappointment of some popular expectations about what politics can actually deliver or popular disillusion about what politicians can actually do. These disaffections have fed extensive criticism in the Scottish media and those disaffections have also been encouraged by this extensive criticism. The tone is overwhelmingly one of self-doubt about the devolutionary enterprise.

The second anxiety is the anxiety of influence. This anxiety is understandable in a devolved system which has defined itself self-consciously in terms of the 'new'. But if the anxiety of parochiality is defined by its inwardness, the anxiety of influence is defined by its outwardness. Here the metropolitan fixation is (again) explicit and is found in the concern that the activity of the Scottish Parliament and the formulation of Scottish policy should not be a reflection of larger Westminster priorities. The anxiety of influence is more assertive than the first anxiety, wishing always to make the most of the differences of style and substance between Edinburgh and London. If there is less anxiety about the influence of Europe that appears to have just as much to do with a parochial fixation on London as it has to do with a cosmopolitan embrace of Brussels. The tone is frequently one of self-confidence, and this is the tone which superficial metropolitan commentaries - noted above and often pursuing their own agendas - take to be the only measure of contemporary public culture in Scotland. The tension between the self-confident outwardness encouraged by the anxiety of influence and the self-doubting inwardness encouraged by the anxiety of parochiality accounts for much of the character of the present debate. Insofar as this tension is acknowledged - and it has been acknowledged by the more subtle commentators - then the honesty of the intellectual play between them can lead to admirable political consequences, not the least of which is the possible emancipation from both anxieties (Paterson, 2002).

However, there is a tendency which is less admirable which can be put in the most provocative manner possible. One sometimes has the feeling that there

is a danger of the Scots becoming the new English. What does this mean? The one thing that the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish used to share was a common irritation at the apparent smugness of the English about their identity and a chafing at their condescension, real or imagined, towards our own. Since 1999, can one detect a shift in attitude which has promoted a certain disposition amongst some Scots? A disposition to be equally smug and condescending? Partially. There are two inter-related aspects to this disposition.

First, there is what some would identify as the positive, post-devolutionary sense of Scottish identity (though it would be difficult to convince others that the Scots ever did lack what Anthony Powell once called 'self-advertisement and self-esteem'). The other side of self-esteem, however, is self-satisfaction. The self-satisfied Scot, secure in identity and assured of world-historical significance would be just as irritating as the English equivalent. This is what the historian (and Scot) John Campbell called the infuriatingly 'chipper' style of Scottishness he detected in the work of Tom Nairn (2000, p. 31). And this chipper style is invariably an inverted expression of the anxiety of parochiality.

Second, there is a tendency to reverse the old relationship and to take laughing pity on poor old England. In the new world of identity politics, in the new devolved United Kingdom, how very tempting it is to indulge in a distinctive form of Scottish Schadenfreude. 'Pity the poor old English', is the current invitation. 'They built an Empire, they secured the Union, and in the process they lost the run of themselves. Now they don't know who they are'. That really is Schadenfreude for you - from the Celtic fringe to the Anglian fringe. It is an attitude hard to resist. It might be better if it were resisted. This disposition is detectable in nationalist argument but not only in nationalist argument. It is a disposition found prominently in the work of Tom Nairn and, given the influence which Nairn's writings still exert on the new political generation in Scotland, it is a disposition which, in varying forms, has spread its influence through the body politic. The disposition to indulge invective against 'the Westminster system' is really a sign of the anxiety of influence. This was the essence of J. G. A. Pocock's recent devastating critique in the **New Left Review** of Nairn's 'Gaberlunzie' politics (2001).

Moreover, Nairn has often used Robert Musil's account of the decay of the Habsburg Empire in his trilogy **The Man Without Qualities** as a metaphor for the decay of the Union and a corresponding resurgence of Scottishness.

There is, though, one line in Musil's **The Man Without Qualitie**s to which Nairn does not refer and which is possibly more appropriate to political circumstances today. The most progressive state of all Musil defines as that in which one is 'negatively free, constantly aware of the inadequate grounds for one's own existence'. That is a view of political and cultural identity which is incompatible with smugness, with condescension or with the populist flattery that emanates from the 'new Englishness'. Indeed, an editorial on Scottishness in the Summer 1993 edition of **Scottish Affairs** came to more or less the same conclusion. It argued that it was important to accept that 'Scotland is full of contradictions' for 'that might be a sign of some cultural maturity' (Paterson 1993, p. 4). One of Scotland's traditions is surely a tradition of dissent and one expects there to be a modern-day Jenny Geddes to fling a metaphorical stool at political complacency of the chipper variety. The new politics of inclusiveness, consensus and accountability which Scotland's politicians are trying to fashion should find space for it. It might even be called Unionism!

CONCLUSION

It is the duty of Scottish intellectuals to secure and to defend that maturity, based on a recognition of complexity, which Paterson identified. Especially for those outside Scotland it is important that a journal like **Scottish Affairs** continues to explore the country's contradictions, to clarify what is distinctive about them and to identify what is representative. It is an important window on change. Scotland never was nor ever will be, what Sir Walter Scott feared, 'an inferior species of Northumberland'. The contrast between the situation in Scotland and the politics of English regionalism could not be starker. It is an exciting enterprise to think through what sort of species it really is becoming. The future of the rest of us in the United Kingdom is bound up with the answer Scots give to that question. Which brings this article to a concluding, if tentative, remark which would have been the subject of another paper. It will be left undeveloped and only briefly stated as a possibility.

Perhaps the way for Scotland to address adequately the anxieties of parochiality and influence which disturb and sometimes distort its political consciousness is not to quest exclusively after the new but also to recover the old. At this point, the Scottish-Ulster connection asserts a claim and perhaps this will be interpreted as special pleading. So be it. However, it may be worth recalling, as the Union changes its shape, the social contract thinking of that Scottish covenanting tradition which tried to reconcile popular power

with constitutional (sovereign) authority, making, as one writer has put it 'a *de facto* assertion of popular sovereignty under the guise of *jure divino* propositions' (Miller, 1978, p. 40). That, as I have argued elsewhere, may not be all that different from the spirit of the Constitutional Convention and may be just the sort of understanding now required to make sense of the new United Kingdom (Aughey 2001). Scottish thinking has no need to suffer the anxiety of parochiality for it can now influence a revitalised Britishness.

For Burns 'Freedom and Whisky gang thegither'. Who would disgree? It must remain an earnest cry and prayer that freedom and self-criticism also go together - not only that others may see the Scots more clearly but that the Scots can see themselves more clearly as well.

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