

REVIEW ESSAY: ELECTION 2007 – THE YEAR OF COURAGE?

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Gordon Brown, **Courage: Eight Portraits**, London: Bloomsbury, 2007, 288 pp, hb, £16.99, ISBN: 978-0747565321.

Michael Fry, **The Union: England, Scotland and the Treaty of 1707**, Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006, 342 pp, hb, £20, ISBN: 978-1841585161.

Douglas Watt, **The Price of Scotland: Darien, Union and the Wealth of Nations**, Edinburgh: Luath, 2007, 320 pp, hb, £25, ISBN: 978-1905222636.

Christopher A Whatley, **The Sots and the Union**, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, 352 pp, hb, £25, ISBN: 978-0748616855.

KING Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence
in't?

HAMLET No, no; they do but jest, poison in jest, no offence i'
th' world.

Shakespeare, **Hamlet**, I.ii. 229-31

The play was ca'd 'The Mousetrap' (no the wan that's running noo)
And sure enough, the king walked oot afore the scene was through.
So Hamlet's goat the proof that Claudius gied his da the dose,
The only problem being noo that Claudius knows he knows.
So while Hamlet tells his ma that her new husband's no a fit wan,
Uncle Claud pits oot a contract wi' the English King as hit-man.

Adam McNaughtan, 'Oor Hamlet'

I. CASTING THE ROLES

What play are we watching. or were we watching?

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Hamlet is a natural choice for political analysts or satirists (same thing, really, especially when the former fail to realise they are the latter). Adlai Stevenson was a popular casting in the title-role, Nelson Rockefeller another. **Macbeth** fuelled satirical fires, notably against Lyndon Johnson. Barbara Garson's **Macbird** (1967) set it up crudely but with some very palpable hits, e.g. LBJ's last lines:

My heart! my heart!
Now cracks a noble heart!

For maximum effectiveness loot several plays at once. Election 2007 exploits, expands and explodes innumerable possibilities along these lines: in Hamlet's own words, examples, gross as earth, exhort us. Gordon Brown gives simultaneous performances as Hamlet and Macbeth. Tony Blair is less classifiable: the most obvious parallel seems to be with Polonius when he acted the part of Caesar, which alas we are not shown by Shakespeare (and let us remember that Polonius's part was created for first production by a piping schoolboy). George W. Bush seems more obviously a Molière design – several, indeed, Tartuffe undoubtedly, *le bourgeois gentilhomme* in person, and any other assortment you please from the great range of quacks, monomaniacs, frauds, imbeciles and complacent morons left to us in the great works of the master known so happily to his finest Scots interpreter Ricky Fulton as 'Molly Eyre'. (Could not our new Festival director pursue the logic of his present US choices by recruiting Bush in 2009 to play the title role in Molly Eyre's **Don Juan**?)

To arrive at last at those officially in the election, a dramatised version of **Marmion** seems to enshrine Jack McConnell, save that the Flodden where he dies is a Scottish victory, and in place of Scott's original title-rolled anti-hero's last words

'Charge, Chester, charge! On, Stanley, on!'

a silent but no less heart-felt prayer for the immediate withdrawal of his gallant allies from 10 and 11 Downing Street were the loudest lay of this last Marmion. To Alex Salmond must go the accolade as 'Tam O'Shanter', complicated by the horror of the covens pursuing him when they realise he is sober: he can certainly claim a poetic conclusion no less hairsbreadth than the original. His Lordship Dr Joseph Devine, Bishop of Motherwell in the Roman obedience, performed a dual role of Puck and Bottom at their combined wits' end, squeezing his maledictions on the wrong eyelids in tones none but Titania

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would find beautiful. Mr Nicol Stephen (whom readers may need reminding captains the Scottish Liberal Democrats) invites casting as Cleopatra's brother Ptolemy (whom no doubt you have also forgotten); he plays a rather touching little part in Shaw's **Caesar and Cleopatra**, reciprocating her desire to have his head cut off with the addition:

I will, too, when I grow up.

Mr Stephen's passionate insistence that he would never, never, *never* enter a coalition with the Scottish Nationalists unless they drop even an attempt to legislate a referendum on independence, is a prime acknowledgement of family resemblance, apparently coupled with the belief that independence is so attractive to the Scottish people that the mere whiff of a referendum will send them lemming-like over the cliffs and under the waves where they will no longer hear the strident tones of Sir Menzies Campbell giving them their next orders. (It is in fact poor Ptolemy who is drowned while repudiating his sister.) And what part has Sir Ming? Shaw offers him the role of Lucius Septimius who slew Pompey the Great under the eyes of his wife and child, thus greatly easing Caesar's conquest. If we momentarily move Mr Salmond from Tam O'Shanter to Caesar (no very great metamorphosis when you also turn ghoulies into Gaulies) with the late, great Charles Kennedy as Pompey, it might be that Pompey's demise gave the final edge to Caesar in his exceedingly narrow victory. During the election the Scottish Liberal Democrats seemed to recognise Mr Kennedy's talents in rousing the blood of the convertible as better prospects than Sir Ming's. Remember Mr Kennedy's frequent preponderance eclipsing Sir Ming, in ScotLibDem election literature. It is nothing to do with ageist sneers at Sir Ming, whose close dagger-work shows no arthritic failure. But Mr Kennedy on form can set hearts aflame where Sir Ming sets heads a-nodding. The nods are frequently nods of firm approval for well-taken points. Yet for all of Liberal Democrat insistence on British indivisibility, they wisely fear that referendum. Westminster village may think the Liberal Democrats well rid of their lost leader. But Scotland really is a different country, and the Kennedy humanity sets heather on fire where Sir Ming must borrow a lighter before starting the tiniest flame. Even Sir Ming's concessions to English gentility in the evolution of his accent could induce all too many white corpuscles among the red.

But why, then, did King Ptolemy not do better than he did? Well, in political campaigning a popular leader can certainly rouse a crowd, but it is preferable for him to do so alive than dead. Mr Kennedy might inspire Mr Stephen's

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legions to much higher adrenalin than any other London-based Unionist party leader can hope to rouse a Scottish audience, but his presence on the battlefield haunted elation with emotion, and the emotion could turn to hard thoughts over the leader's demise. The Liberal Democrats are also acutely vulnerable to the charges of nastiness. The major Unionist parties are conceded some leeway in moral judgments from the public: Mrs Thatcher traded on images of big Bess and Boadicia, with a hidden acknowledgement among votaries that she was at least a good Goneril or a realistic Regan. Mr Blair talked about tough decisions born of necessity, in his case recalling Osborne's Luther embattled with constipation. Down in the native reservation, Mr Jack McConnell's maths-master manner was acknowledged as predictable if not pretty: Marmion is a villain, from the Scottish nationalist standpoint, but as villains go he might be conceded skill in the dirty work. (The SNP some years ago made spectacular fools of themselves with the slogan 'JOKE McCONNELL'. If Mr McConnell remains the maths master, he clearly squares a fine hypotenuse, whereas the slogan simply stank of lavatory graffiti from the village idiot at the back of the class.) But Liberal Democrats like to enjoy moral superiority, and Mr Kennedy's fate was no moral triumph. The smaller the party, the bigger the conscience. The Scottish National Party paid a bitter price in 1981 when it expelled the more courageous leaders of the 79 Group, Messrs Alex Salmond and Kenny MacAskill among them. Readmitted on technicalities, they rose to eminence in the public eye after their unsuccessful persecutors retired from the political desert they had made.

I am, I fear, omitting one play from those performed in Election 2007: where do we cast the communications media, those grand voices of modernity and progress? We cast them back 2400 years: the definitive performers of the chorus in Aristophanes's **The Frogs** (tranzlated by David Barrett):

Brekeke-kex, ko-ax, ko-ax,
Ko-ax, ko-ax, ko-ax!
Oh we are the musical Frogs!
We live in the marshes and bogs!
Sweet, sweet is the hymn
That we sing as we swim,
And our voices are known
For their beautiful tone ...

The Scottish media, and the British media on Scotland, are little more than the complacent expectorators of the whims of their owners. As recently as thirty

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years ago, the **Scotsman** could claim pre-eminence in awakening Scottish self-realisation. Mr Andrew Neil reduced it to a miserable Tory tabloid, intent on befouling at every turn the Scottish parliament for which it had campaigned so long and so well. The readers, insulted by this obvious contempt for the beliefs they had shared with the paper, left it to rot on its brand-new State-of-the-Art dunghill. The media moguls' hatred for the parliament – for Mr Neil was hardly the man to let his prejudices stray far from the paymasters – duly won their Nemesis. Having belittled the parliament so incessantly, they prompted voters to seek rulers whose independence would give it greater stature. Whether or not voters wanted Scottish independence, they certainly wanted parliamentary leaders who would be independent. To see the miserable condition of supposed authorities leaping and bounding to whips cracked from London, it was not necessary to X-ray Mr McConnell's schoolroom severities or Mr Nicol Stephen's searchings for identity: you had simply to look at the media. And here the media effectively negated their own Unionist message. Complacent as sounded their brekeke-kex, conceited as smiled their ko-ax, they reeked of their minionship to Mr Rupert Murdoch, and his competitors, counterparts and clones.

And Mr Murdoch had made one bad mistake for Election 2007: he had made himself visible. Perhaps voters might have forgotten that Mr Blair had been the lapdog of Mr Murdoch well before he jumped to Mr Bush's 'Yo Blair', there being then no Mr Bush to snap it. But Mr Murdoch's minions had thrust his methods before the public eye and into the open court, in their efforts to destroy Mr Tommy Sheridan, and whatever the public might or might not conclude about Mr Sheridan it was once again crystal-clear that Mr Murdoch for his profit and pleasure financed pimps, prostitutes, liars and lawyers, some of them not even journalists. Rule by Murdoch showed itself up for what it was, and paid for the privilege. Understandably the public wanted some self-liberation, and the news that Mr Murdoch had taken Mr Salmond in dislike, and that his illiterate prints would now swirl their filth against the SNP, was the best gift he could have given that party. Many a critic of Mr Salmond was ready to love him for the enemies he had made. Mr Murdoch habitually claims effectiveness in moving the minds of the masses though little evidence exists that he can move anything save their groins. But for once he can make some show of credibility. He has finally moved minds – against himself, his henchmen and his lick-spittle political suitors.

And what of the broadcasting media? Mr Jeremy Paxman still keeps his turkey-crest high, and his brekeke-kex breaks loud and clear over the heads of

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innumerable political victims, but he committed hara-kari on Scotland in two cuts (a) in his dislike of the place and its natives, whether on their feet or under his, (b) in his complaint that Newsnight ought not have its Scottish fifteen minutes instead of leaving the despised Scots to listen to him. Mr Salmond took a cruel advantage of this in the last UK election by genially assuring Mr Paxman that they should get on splendidly since both of them wanted to emancipate England from Scotland, and Mr Paxman nearly choked on his own

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would support a war in Iraq if the US requested it, and however peculiar we may find it in Mr Blair to choose Mr Mandelson as a confidant, the authority is undeniable. It may not yet be the case that any UK premier must be a US yes-man, but Mr Blair knew his master, and possibly had reason to acknowledge that mastery for a very long time. Not only Mr bin Laden has profited in his earlier career by the financial generosity of the US government and hence ultimately, if ignorantly, of the US taxpayer. Mr Blair was in fact no great creator. The proportional voting system, so-termed, was a child of the Liberal Democrats who in the making of Scottish devolution as in the making of Scottish devolutionary government bore a well-photographed part. If we name Labour makers of devolution, we would include Messrs Michael Foot, Gordon Brown, John Smith, Donald Dewar: we would not include James Callaghan, at best malevolently neutral, and we certainly would not include Mr Blair, who would have been delighted to be shot of it and who in 1997 wallowed for a blissful moment in the belief Tory unpopularity would give him a purely cosmetic victory without commitment to the tissue of an issue. Alas the hapless Mr John Major dished that in his dying agony by appealing to the country at the top of his voice from Gretna Green to save the United Kingdom by voting against devolution and the voters of Scotland joyfully accepted his challenge, wiping out every Tory opponent of devolution standing for Parliament. Afterwards Labour spindoctors and some of their well-spun trumpeters claimed it as a Labour victory. I recall Ms Anne Maguire, the new victor at Stirling, doing so. But she was easily answered by asking whether she had been elected by votes for her, or by votes against Mr Michael Forsyth.

And the Church of Scotland in 1990 had seen to it that no future Labour Leader such as Mr Blair could wriggle out of the commitment to a Scottish Parliament since the constitutional convention it had established in the Tory teeth nailed Labour to a far more radical devolutionary settlement than had ever been offered in the 1970s. To call Mr Blair its creator is like accusing Little Red Riding-Hood of creating the wolf: all Mr Blair knew when he found devolution in the Labour Party bed was that it wore garments formerly the property of an unwanted elderly relative to whom he was obliged to pay a dutiful visit. Mr Mark Douglas-Home might well attribute creativity in devolution more aptly to his uncle the late Sir Alec, who in 1979 promised the Scottish voters that if they rejected Labour's devolution the Tories would give them a stronger form of it. Mr Blair in 1997 reaped the rewards due to Mr John Smith, who might very well have bettered the Labour total had he lived. Recent history continues to be badly served down to the third Blair election, when Labour voters were actually assured – and the assurance was necessary – that if

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the by now most unpopular Mr Blair were elected he would soon make way for a successor who would almost certainly be Mr Brown. The current media brekeke-kexing that Mr Brown will be an unelected Prime Minister simply indulges the dislike of Mr Brown held by their masters: the votes electing Labour party MPs at the last UK General Election were for the most part for a Brown premiership, and were expected to be so, to judge by the elimination of Mr Blair from the propaganda of so many Labour candidates, especially in Scotland.¹

The Scottish elections of 2007 were also a matter raising historical accuracy, but in this case with headers into the remoter past. We were in the three-hundredth year of the Anglo-Scottish Union, and the government in Holyrood, perpetually obliged to piggy-back the government in London, assured us that the Union was a Good Thing. (For a time the scene became eerily reminiscent of Irish politics in my youth where so much in the 1940s and 1950s still depended on the view candidates took of the Treaty of 1921 which had dissolved the Union of Britain and Ireland while substituting that of Britain and Northern Ireland.) Some good history books appeared, and some rather dubious television and exhibition presentations. For instance the National Portrait Gallery featured a series of pictures of persons supposedly for or against the Union rotating so that various portions of their (facial) anatomies were successively on display, Gordon Brown being the most conspicuous recent Unionist with no present-day anti-Unionist contemporary visible: the reasons for such caution may be surmised. The thing became somewhat absurd by the hurling of several Stuarts into the anti-Union camp, even those living long before the union of parliaments but sitting firmly on what they intended as a union of thrones. Jacobites did kick up hostility to the Union or seek to profit

¹ *As to UK unelected premiers, James Callaghan (Labour: April 1976 – April 1979), Sir Alec Douglas-Home (Tory: October 1963 – October 1964), Neville Chamberlain (Tory: May 1937 – May 1940), A.J. Balfour (Tory: July 1902 – December 1905), and Archibald Primrose, 5th Earl of Rosebery (Liberal: March 1894 – June 1895) were never elected at all, all save Chamberlain being defeated in the ensuing general election. Unelected for more than a year after becoming Prime Minister were: Winston Churchill (Tory: May 1940 – June 1945), David Lloyd George (Coalition Liberal: December 1916 – December 1918), H.H. Asquith (Liberal: April 1908 – January 1910), all, save Churchill, winning the ensuing general election. John, 1st Earl Russell (Liberal), Edward Stanley 14th Earl of Derby (Tory) and Benjamin Disraeli (Tory) were successive Prime Ministers from October 1865 to November 1968 without facing a general election. We need hardly go back before them.*

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by it between 1705 and 1715, but in showing three different pictures of Bonnie Prince Charlie (who no doubt from time to time looked into mirrors and saw three images of himself) the exhibition was guilty of plural voting, and even there not very accurately. Whatever tactical agitation Jacobites might foment or join they could only win by controlling England, which otherwise would simply displace any briefly successful Stuart reconqueror of Scotland or Ireland. Bonnie Prince Charlie in the '45 had neither the desire nor the density to content himself and his father with Scotland. Had he reached London, and had his cousin George II fled back to Hanover, Charlie might well have received and accepted an offer from the surviving Hanoverians to turn Protestant, reign, forget his father and the dissolution of the Union he had proclaimed, and junk the Highlanders. In fact he turned Protestant a few years later, in an illusory expectation as to his surviving prospects. The Stuarts had to have *some* Union, whether by parliamentary subordination (as with Ireland) or other forms of London control. Establishment of the Stuarts in Scotland as a French base in the War of the Spanish Succession (the main fear inducing the Union of 1707) would have given the English trouble, but a resultant French victory in the war would probably have led to English losses of Gibraltar, Acadia, St Kitts, Newfoundland, Minorca, the Spanish slave trade – and the English colonies on the American continent – in exchange for leaving the Scots and their Stuarts to English mercy, resulting in far less attractive forms of Union to shackle Scotland to England in the hallowed cause of English security. It would be consistent with French sacrifice of their Scots allies time after time in fourteenth, fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Given English military superiority, a surviving separate Scottish identity was even less likely than an Irish one, after 1688-9. Michael Fry's **The Union** informs its readers that

In the British Isles, Irish aspirations had been quashed. The end of an independent Scotland can be seen as part of the same process of strategic consolidation by the great powers. The difference was that the Scots had been able to negotiate it. Among small nations they were exceptional, and lucky. (p. 299)

What degree of independence pre-Union Scotland actually possessed is a nice point, and Oliver Cromwell would have had a word or two to discourage Mr Fry's thesis (contestants are invited to supply the words Cromwell would have chosen, first three correct solutions opened gaining a year's subscription to **Scottish Affairs**; the editor's decision – unlike the Union – is final). But both Mr Fry and, rather more austere, Professor Christopher Whatley, in **The**

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Scots and the Union, make a good case for showing that there was some independence of mind at work among the Scottish politicians, and that Burns's 'parcel of rogues' requires (as an exciseman would well know) a more thorough itemisation of contents. The eighteenth century mingled idealism and corruption in individual human anatomies more exactly than almost any other time in human history, and the Anglo-Scottish Union made a bold beginning. Professor Whatley has gone to fascinating pains to demonstrate this, and Mr Fry largely concurs, but the proposition is really self-evident. One can no more ignore ideology than self-interest, as Michael Foot proved so well in his masterly **The Pen and the Sword** on Swift's role in the fall of Marlborough, but a few short years after the Union. Ironically, as Douglas Watt shows in **The Price of Union**, self-enrichment (over Darien) had supplied an idealism whose failure eased the way to the 'realism of incorporating union' (p. 254). And it is important that Marlborough, 'the greatest subject in Christendom', was still in the field of war in 1707, and that behind all the musings of unionists and anti-unionists was their awareness of that. He was in his way in the dangerous tradition of Wallenstein and Cromwell, and such masters of armies could very quickly look like masters of kingdoms.

In some ways the latest historians seem a little old-fashioned, as do their more obvious critics. The venality or otherwise of the Laird of Cockpen in 1707 kept patriotism in well-stirred indignation in Burns's day, but it has less to do with the future of the Union than its defenders imagine. Irish nationalist historiography got very worked up about the unquestionable corruption in the passing of the Irish Act of Union in 1800, regardless of the Irish Parliament thus dissolved having barred its doors to the Catholic majority, and the institution itself 'independent' to the extent of having to be bought by successive Lords Lieutenant sent over from London. Scottish nationalists in Election 2007 sought votes with very little reference to the Union of 1707. Any objections to the Union were all too well articulated by Mr Blair's defence of the Pavlovian Bush-licking in Iraq, or by Mr Brown's assurance that Scotland needed the Union and the Union needed an independent nuclear deterrent operable by permission of the United States. Hence the cascade of Unionist oratory and the supportive brekeke-kexing simply drove the lesson home more brutally; each ululation against Union-breakers and hosanna for the Union's glory simply won the answer What Price Glory? And with Trident and Iraq spiralling the cost, Scots were the readier to keep Glory to themselves, saving many a bawbee thereby. Mr Brown continues to insist that the Scots in Election 2007 did not vote against the Union: perhaps not, but they certainly voted

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against the price-tag he puts on it. As Professor Whatley would point out, idealism coexists with pragmatism. Iraq is 2007's Darien.

III. THE IRISH ANSWER

If the historians, whatever their intent, have made a good case for reading their books for their own sake, they showed a little too much modern relevance for Ireland, if not for Scotland. Mr Fry's 'Irish aspirations had been quashed' carefully avoids the other Irish aspirations which had been fulfilled (in Derry, Aghrim, Enniskillen and the Boyne): the Irish Presbyterians would have liked a Scottish solution, but at least the Papists were out of power. Later, he loses what footing he has (p. 309):

the fiscal power of the English state would surely have been deployed during the eighteenth century to keep a nominally independent but penniless government in Edinburgh under control, just as actually happened with a nominally independent government in Dublin. [Agreed, except that the Irish government in eighteenth-century Dublin was run by English officials at the top, the Lord Lieutenant and the Chief Secretary not even being resident until the century's last quarter: but Mr Fry evidently cannot distinguish between 'government' and 'parliament'.] That Irish government [he really does mean 'parliament'] started to exploit its nominal powers from 1781 [it only got them in 1782-3] in an effort to make something real of them. The English would not in the long run stand for it. When the Irish at length revolted, they were crushed. The net result only impelled Ireland in turn towards full Union with Great Britain in 1801.

Mr Fry apparently thinks that what he calls the Irish 'government' was the same as the Catholics in arms in Wexford in 1798 or the Presbyterians in arms in Antrim and Down the same year, and that these again were the same as the 'Ireland' impelled 'towards full Union'. We are in the realm of three-card-trick history: and if he does thus in the green tree, what will he do in the Scots?

It might be thought difficult for Professor Whatley to match this, but he does:

[After the enactment of the Anglo-Scottish Union] there was considerable jealousy among the Anglican ascendancy in Ireland – 'the injured lady' – that the untrustworthy Scots had managed to secure the prize that the Irish had wanted and felt they better deserved, closer union with England and

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representation in the imperial Parliament. This was the second time – the first was under Cromwell – the Scots had got the union with England that Ireland had wanted. (p. 14)

One would have thought poor Cromwell had been bedevilled sufficiently by the Irish without Dr Whatley adding fresh counts in his damnation. Cromwell declared a union with Ireland as much as with Scotland, when it came to inviting their alleged representatives to his Parliament. The ‘Anglican ascendancy’ were in fairly free fall in Cromwell’s day. As for 1707, we are back to Mr Fry’s find-the-lady antics. Who or what was the ‘Ireland’ who wanted union with England in Cromwell’s and Anne’s days? The Roman Catholic majority? The de-episcopised Anglicans under (very much under) Cromwell? The disenfranchised Presbyterians under Anne? And is this the logic by which Professor Whatley wants us to buy his Scotland? No doubt it is not, but it should remind us that confusion on Ireland is no credential for Scottish expertise. During Election 2007 Mr Gordon Brown announced – either as threat or promise to the electorate – that he could not, if Prime Minister of the UK, work with Mr Alex Salmond, since Mr Salmond is committed to the break up of the Union. Yet Mr Brown uttered these words with his breath still hot from embraces with Mr Martin McGuinness. Does he take Mr McGuinness to be a Unionist? Or is Mr McGuinness immunised by what might appear to be his best-known methods of objection to the Union – viz. killing and maiming as many of Her Majesty’s subjects as came within range of his bombs, guns, gelignite, and other apparatus for the causing of grievous bodily harm? In Mr Brown’s anxiety to succeed Mr Blair, does he assume that the only critics of Unionism he can tolerate are those whose respect for human life is on the same level as that of President Bush? Or has he eliminated Northern Ireland from his Britain?

Scottish history becomes so much clearer by a glance at Ireland. It would well become Mr Brown to arise and hail Scottish Nationalism as blessed in its intransigent rejection of violence, thus saving their common country the horrors of Irish history: he can combine such intelligent sentiments with implacable devotion to the Union Jack, the Queen’s Person, the fortunes of Fulham or West Ham, the sound of Mr John Major cycling through warm beer, or any other phenomena of Britishness that take his fancy. But Election 2007 produced more sinister comparative data from Ireland. The collapse of Roman Catholic practice in Ireland is one of the most revolutionary developments of that country during the last fifty years (it is less conspicuous in Northern Ireland, although Sinn Féin from time to time finds it insufficiently trendy).

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The main cause is probably the folly of the Roman Catholic clergy in times past in relying on social conformity rather than on human respect as the best way of keeping the faithful faithful. But a major irritant was the propensity of Their Graces, Lordships and Reverences to victimise parties and persons in public or in private who were deemed insufficiently deferential. This broke out in Election 2007 when the Irish-descended Bishop of Motherwell and the Italian-descended Bishop of Paisley denounced the Green party, Dr Devine of Motherwell in a letter to Catholics of his diocese using language whose venom recalled the vocabulary of Karl Marx when his boils were most painful and his Socialist rivals most visible. What the Greens had done was to allow some starry-eyed impossibilist (as Lenin would say) to time-bomb the party manifesto by expressing intent to 'move towards the integration of state-funded religious schools into the non-denominational system'. In practical terms, this was less likely to be fulfilled or to be set on foot than an enactment of Prohibition for Scotland. Its passage almost certainly resulted from the Greens being afraid of being thought unprogressive, more or less the way a schoolboy breaks a school regulation for fear of being thought a cissy. The Greens are in politics to awaken the rest of us to the dangers of ecological brigandage and suicide in which most of their fellow-politicians have been wallowing, and their duty is clearly to keep as effective in this cause as can be managed, which they will not do by irrelevant pipe-dreams about non-denominational religious education and other oxymorons. Cardinal Keith O'Brien has thrown himself whole-heartedly into the struggle for climate responsibility and has stressed Catholics' religious duty to regard preservation of the Earth as a sacred trust given us by God; the Cardinal sees the earth as a form of Christ's own body such as he had given us in the Eucharist for our devotion. The argument is a splendid one, from the Greens' standpoint, and no better way could be found of bringing their ecological duties home to Catholics. And yes, the obvious channel through which such doctrines can best reach the vital next generation is through Catholic schools. But however silly the Greens may have been in letting the fear of being called cissies bully them into philosophical nonsense and electoral lunacy, the party remains the front line of ecological defence against whom the backslidings of other parties can be measured and shamed. Their lordships of Motherwell and Paisley, combined with the ferocious language of the **Scottish Catholic Observer** about hidden agendas, masks torn from the faces of creeping secularism, etc etc, played their part in reducing the Cardinal's best ecological allies to a mere two from their former seven, with MSPs of outstanding quality among the victims, such as the award-winning playwright Chris Ballance and the Rector of Edinburgh University Mark Ballard. It is indeed difficult to judge whether the Bishops or the Greens

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showed the greater folly, for which later generations may pay grim penalties in falling church attendance and in falling ecological responsibility.

It is important to distinguish the West of Scotland Bishops' moves from the Cardinal's post-Election attack on further legislation for the facilitation of abortion. It is open to any Catholic who believes that Catholic education no longer needs Catholic schools to say so. But it is impossible to see how any Catholic can equate membership of the Christian faith with support for the murder of unborn children, the Holy Innocents of our time. The Cardinal questioned whether Catholic legislators in favour of more abortion, or opposing the restriction of weeks of baby growth during which abortion is legally permissible, could in conscience receive Holy Communion. This did not mean that such persons should be refused the Eucharist (which could land Eucharistic minister or priest before a secular court on charges of defamation, an appalling eventuality for so sacred a rite).² It simply pointed out what such a vote meant, a separation from fellow-worshippers devoted to the sanctity of human life and hence also opposed to capital punishment, ownership of nuclear weapons, traffic in arms, etc. As to a Roman Catholic MP's (or MSP's) duty to vote in accordance with the wishes of constituents, the point is nonsense. Every Roman Catholic and every other kind of Christian had a duty to vote against Nazi legislation dishonouring, impoverishing, or endangering Jews, however few of them did it, and however many of their constituents may have favoured such legislation. John Fitzgerald Kennedy's **Profiles in Courage** (1956) saluted former members of the U.S. Senate who hazarded their political futures by votes against the wishes of their constituents, and Edmund Burke made the supreme case for such conduct at his defeat for re-election at Bristol in 1780: his support for Catholic emancipation was one of the reasons why the voters rejected him.

² *In the 1880s the Irish courts were plagued by a mad lady named Miss Anthony, ultimately institutionalised, who sued everybody and everything on the smallest provocation. At one point she sued her parish priest for passing her over at the Communion rail on the ground that this was tantamount to slander implying that she was not of respectable life. She won her case, though possibly by the capitulation of the priest before the matter reached the jury-box. But it is clear that a Scottish verdict of defamation would be even more possible than an Irish verdict of conduct tantamount to slander, and the spectacle of a civil action with spiritual objects of reverence polluted by legal enquiry, is distasteful to any Roman or other Catholic.*

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Are we in for religious, even ethno-religious, pressure on politicians? Are politicians to face increased tribal demands, perhaps with no such ethical justification as anti-abortion? It seems likely. The Muslims swung massively against the war in Iraq during the last Scottish election. The Catholics in the West of Scotland may have silently responded with a yearning to crack whips as painful and powerful, and some of their intellectuals and artists (the names are obvious) refurbish the totem that the Irish Catholics are the Most Oppressed People Everywhere. A little electoral blood maketh good the heart of chauvinist Man. But these things, however pleasing to the voter ego, are much easier in negative than positive terms. The Christian Peoples' Alliance, embodying favoured party status *chez* the **Scottish Catholic Observer**, identified themselves with many of the Greens' favoured political views, and having won 0.7% of the vote, explained that the Greens, whom their allies had so badly damaged, 'showed that there was still a place for small parties at Holyrood', and Green coalition talks with the SNP after the elections indicated 'just what role CPA could yet play in Scottish politics'. This intent to displace as well as devour the Greens is as yet little more than self-indulgence, but at any future elections Greens will be well advised to confine comments to schools of whales when they hear the s-word. It was notable at hustings where there was an obvious Catholic presence that Mr Colin Fox, then (but not now) MSP, played the schools issue for the Scottish Socialists with great finesse. Mr Mark Ballard, for the Greens, stood on the burning deck with dignity, and doom. Mr Fox was of course obliged to agree, opposition to faith schools being far more SSP stock-in-trade than that of the suicidal Greens, but he led up to his party's views by touching sympathy for the sufferings of the Catholics in self-sacrifice to build schools for their children in the nineteenth century: if he perforce had also to stand on the burning deck, he supplied himself with a very wet suit. His party would be wiped out, all the more justly for having given evidence for the Murdoch press in the libel action taken and won by their leader and benefactor Mr Tommy Sheridan. But Mr Fox's sensitivity to the ethnic vote, his confident manner untroubled by previous problematic performances in public – and even his care for the interests of Murdoch – give him a curious similarity to certain major figures in the present-day Labour party. Who knows among whom he may make his resurrection?

Mr Sheridan's new friends in Solidarity obviously differed from his former party comrades such as Mr Colin Fox who testified for Mr Murdoch and his merry men against the man on whose coat-tails they had reached Holyrood in 2003, and it was clear that the voters, like the jury in that case, much preferred Mr Sheridan. But rejection of his old friends carried with it doubts about his

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new: Tommy Sheridan is a magnificent crowd leader, arguably the most impressive Scottish speaker against the war in Iraq and the hero of resistance to the poll-tax. The public may with good reason decide that he is a more trustworthy guardian of the truth than Mr Murdoch: but it is now basic to his case that he showed very bad judgment in his choice of friends, so the new might seem almost as questionable as the old. It was the Parnell split all over again (except that Parnell was guilty of cohabitation with a married woman and the jury pronounced Mr Sheridan more trustworthy than his opponents): both sides were bound to lose, and socialist nationalism for Scotland was torn to pieces between the rivals, just as democratic and non-violent nationalism was poisoned in the Ireland of 1891-1916. But unlike the Irish Catholics a hundred years earlier the Scots can find another home for their nationalism and (somewhat strictly rationed) socialism.

The Scottish National Party benefited, where the Liberals of the 1890s were implicated in the destruction of Parnell, and the Tories of the day were at last definite enemies of Home Rule. So the voters who had rewarded Mr Sheridan for his thrilling oratory, his rare courage, and his elegant *chutzpah* could turn to a leader in Alex Salmond possessing more elegant and politic versions of the same qualities. Mr Sheridan hardly helped himself by his new allies who promptly put his cause in alliance with the Iran and North Korean governments. These naturally invite sympathy as possible targets from new Bush-Blair adventures (was Mr Blair hoping for a nice war against Iran to keep him in 10 Downing Street? and thus responded to the release of Iran's British prisoners with vitriolic charges that Iran was responsible for the deaths of the British soldiers in Iraq, no more credibly than ever). But sympathy against illegal Anglo-American aggression is a long way from alliance, and Mr Sheridan's platform-sharing with Mr George Galloway put him alongside Saddam Hussein's valued acquaintance. However much Mr Blair had delicately insinuated that the critics of his war (or the bits of it that Mr Bush doled out to him) were Saddam-ites, public opposition to the war overwhelmingly prided itself on dislike of Saddam, a much more consistent antipathy than the US and UK governments had shown over the previous quarter-century. And so in the end Mr Sheridan fell, while far closer to re-election than his enemies and allies.

There remains the ugly possibility that those voters who voted only for party, and ignored the ballot-listings of local MSP candidates, may have been taken as having thus spoiled their votes. If so, Mr Sheridan might have squeezed in under a juster and clearer lay-out and count. His prospects of political

resurrection are still good, but it is he whom the voters want, not his friends or enemies. Ms Margo MacDonald proved impressively in the election that a vigorous, vocal independent nationalist and socialist can win re-election, although her vote was well down from its 2003 totals. She had better be a little quieter in her hostility to her former party, the SNP (for causes that all of them would do well to keep obscure). Party splits were not popular in Election 2007. Remember Parnell.

IV. THE FALLEN ANGELS OF MONS

Scottish devolution was never going to kill Scottish nationalism, a truth whose confirmation was assured by Labour's former shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, George (now Lord) Robertson (of the Kailyard) saying it would. (His term as Secretary-General of NATO must likewise have brought its servile status home to that institution.) But it was reasonable to assume Scottish devolution might content the Scots. Here the growth of Scottish nationalism does not parallel that of Irish Home Rule a century earlier. Home Rule, especially in its Parnell years, steadily advanced from rural mountain constituencies to those of the rural plains, then moving to urban where Dublin and Belfast would hold out most intransigently for Unionism, Protestant Ulster also maintaining its rural strongholds.³ Religion powered the Irish irresistible force and immovable mass, but no such logic dictates the Scottish nationalist advance, the urban vote oscillating between nationalism and unionism in Dundee from the early 1970s with temporary victories in Motherwell (1945), Hamilton (1967), and Glasgow Govan (1973, thereafter on and off), thereafter on and off. Nationalist surges in Scottish history have been less driven by Scottish events as by Scottish translations of British events. It was always likely that England would drive Scotland towards independence rather than Scotland going there of its own volition. Harold Wilson's crude replacement of

³ *In one respect the SNP closely resembles the party of Parnell. There is a strong resemblance to aspects of Parnell in Mr Alex Salmond ('but not Kitty', as Mr Salmond wickedly commented on such a parallel), and in courage, humour, international sense, charisma, strategic mastery, these are obvious enough. But their application during Election 2007 resulted in Mr Salmond, far in advance of his party improvement in votes, winning Gordon in an astonishing swing. Parnell did the same thing in standing for Cork city in 1880 when it was generally assumed he had no chance of breaching the urban bastion (he was in fact nominated by Cork Tories trying to split the nationalist vote).*

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Labour idealism by Labour self-interest elected Winifred Ewing in Hamilton. Margaret Thatcher's polarisation of Britain between S.E. England and the rest made red-hot devolutionists of the Scots, not nationalists but radiating much hotter devolutionism than the Blair boys and babes wanted (George (Lord) Foulkes's embarrassment in finding crowd enthusiasm (ignited by Mick McGahey) at a pre-referendum meeting he chaired is a vivid memory from 1997). Today Scottish nationalism can thank Mr Blair for its latest resurgence.

But Election 2007, as the SNP made very clear, was not a repudiation of England or a denial of Britain so much as a demand for independence from the USA. Mr Blair's wretched contrivances to clothe his elbow-jerk servility to the Bush administration with some appearance of being induced by independent decisions, by British conclusions, and/or by national interests little by little saw them thin, fray, tear and fall apart, leaving the emperor's nudity repulsively obvious. Even Mr Blair himself was reduced to clutching an equally transparent jockstrap in his final insistence that whatever he had done, he had been sincere about it: and in a sense we may leave him his jockstrap to the extent of acknowledging its sincere devotion to the US dollar, as no doubt (he hopes) his post-Premier career on the US lecture-circuit will demonstrate. What enlivened Election 2007 was Mr Blair's insistence not only on modelling the emperor's new clothes, but in constantly giving them and himself Scottish exposure. Well might Mr Alex Salmond offer to pay his rail-fare (keeping the party green) as frequently as possible. Mrs Thatcher lowered the Tory vote in Scotland in the 1980s with every visit. Mr Blair was her disciple in this as in so much else, adding his little all to her work. She relied largely on the appeal of the school snob and that of the school bully. He deepened those with an oil-spill of complacency which went well beyond anything Thatcher could pump from her vitals. The spectacle of the Prime Minister patronising Scottish voters with assurances that they must not allow their proof he was a liar to question their dependence on his judgment, was in its way worthy of the Turner prize. Well might the cause of Anglo-Scottish Union beg for protection from its friends.

The pre-election pollsters came up with bright conclusions that the war in Iraq, the ownership of Trident etc were no more unpopular in Scotland than in England, and so Scottish politics ought not to be different. These things ignored psephological realities. Scotland has remained almost wholly immune from the toxic boils mushrooming on the English body politic, such as UKIP, the BNP, the 'Cameron effect', etc. England may exhibit resentment of immigration but Scotland needs immigrants. The dawn raids on asylum

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seekers' homes in Scotland, carried out by the imbecile inhumanity of the English Home Office, wove deeper internationalist textures into the Scottish nationalist fabric, as was made triumphantly clear by the SNP's production of the first Asian MSP, Mr Bashir Ahmad, heading the Glasgow list candidates. The dawn raids made issues of reserved matters, and drove home to voters that another contrast was deepening between England and Scotland: the Scots were prepared to fight harder for the retention of civil liberties than were the English. They also seemed angrier about the use of Scottish soil as stopovers for flights of kidnappers and victims to torturers' havens. The retention of Scotland as a harbour for weapons of mass destruction and a transport arena for traffic in nuclear waste gave an interest to even more reserved matters, whose morality was now under heavy fire from the leaders of all major Christian faiths in Scotland. The very warp and woof of Unionism, its military tradition, arose to haunt it as more and more Scots paid the price for the failure of Scotland's American rulers and their British sidekicks to think out operations in Iraq beyond their initial wild offensive in defiance of Dr Hans Blix and his search for the causes of war which no longer existed. The body bags made the reserved matter of warfare into Scottish domestic tragedy. And the supreme irony for Labour is that it had been nurtured on the milk of such ideology of protest as was now fattening the SNP. Abel was Cain's brother, and breasts they had sucked the same, to plagiarise from Gerard Manley Hopkins. And Abel, unlike the sources of his profoundest anger, was not dead. Down the decades Labour had told itself the SNP was the spawn of primeval, couthie (or uncouthie), racist, proto-Fascist, pro-Nazi, corrupt, bigoted, religious sectarian crypto-Toryism, and in its heart it knew its sources were Scottish Labour's own, from R.B. Cunninghame-Graham to CND. It does depend, of course, on what kind of Scot a Labour politician is: the variety that can sink birthplace in Fettes, and Fettes in England is scarcely troubled by uneasy stirrings of unwanted kin, so that to Mr Blair Mr Salmond was simply the most devastating critic of his Iraq policy to be found among other party leaders; the variety that England still insists on calling Scots has no such balm in Gilead, and Mr Brown knows that Mr Salmond's voice is all too like those whence his own beliefs sprang, that Mr Salmond indeed can understand him better than the English princes of New Labour can.

But there is a Tory form of Scottish nationalism, and it is alive and well in the Tory party. It bathed John Buchan, as Professor Christopher Harvie (newly-elected SNP-MSP) would remind us. It energised Robert Louis Stevenson, it lay at the heart of Walter Scott, names Tories cite to show they know some literate Scots were Tories. A few had read them. Lord James Douglas-

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Hamilton, who retired on the eve of Election 2007 but was till then the leading historian in the Scottish Parliament, married Buchan's granddaughter and was something of a Buchan hero, apart from being much more polite than most of them: his courtesy won its reward – he was of course martyred in 1997 when Scottish Tory MPs became extinct, but in 1992 his votes went up in Edinburgh West when all other Tory votes fell. 'Lord Jim'll fix it' (a weird unintentional amalgamation of Joseph Conrad and TV populism, both irrelevant to Lord James) was the widespread local verdict on a very good constituency MP, a quality all too often ignored in judgments before and after election, but less often ignored by voters. One of the benefits of the list system is that it tells voters how good some runners-up would have been, if elected, since it elects them in some cases despite personal contests, e.g. Gavin Brown (Tory, MSP (list)) placed fourth in Edinburgh South voter preference. We need not expect it from Mr Gavin Brown who might be described (by Mr Jack McConnell, perhaps?) as the square of the Cameron factor: and it certainly is not neo-Jacobite, but Scottish Toryism is beginning to sprout thin shoots of Stevenson-Buchan Scotticism. In particular the Tory leader, Annabel Goldie MSP, has a genius for the Buchan Tory touch of talking common sense and letting people remember afterwards she happens to be a Tory: she also has a splendid sense of humour, and performs as though doubling the parts of Lady Bracknell and Miss Prism in **The Importance of Being Earnest**. But however polished the performance, she is exceptionally genuine, and hence some of the more Philistine Westminster Tories proclaimed she ought to be dumped for some Cameron clone. Master Cameron is not an idiot, however much his cosmeticians find it desirable that he should behave like one, and, however little he knows of the Tory past, he can see that fresh games of Musical Headmaster would be lunatic for Scottish Toryism, which has risen from its grave and removed the stake through its heart with excruciating pains. The fate of Mr David McLetchie was no more than Nemesis, in view of his part in the execution of Mr Henry MacLeish: a regicide king will never have a secure neck. But it is fair to Mr McLetchie to say that while his heart (if any) has 'taxi' inscribed on it, he took office as party leader when his party was less in need of taxis than of a taxidermist. Nevertheless Mr McLetchie is the type of solicitor who leaves his clients chiefly concerned about the size of his bill, while Ms Goldie is the type of solicitor who leaves them most concerned at the danger that the judge may lack her insights. Master Cameron's rapid dismissal of her aspirant assassins was wise enough, but her party ought to be in no need and in no desire for Westminster verdicts. His descents from the Westminster clouds were at best a reminder that Goldies are rarities.

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And here was the theme of Election 2007. The specific effect of Cameron was to show intelligent support of Ms Goldie, but the ‘Cameron effect’ was to scatter Westminster grease paint over a party whose leader took office magnificently calling herself ‘an old war horse’ where the Cameron transport is car at back, bicycle up front, photographers on the side, and why doesn’t Lord Tebbit want him to be on his bike? She sought to keep the election a Scottish one, but was ultimately obliged to climb to the battlefield in the skies where the great gods hurled themselves into one-sided combat on the Union of 1707. Could one imagine an **Iliad** where Achilles was telling his mother Thetis he was weaned, and Aeneas was asking *his* mother Aphrodite why she could not find some nice boy to play with, and Odysseus was assuring Pallas Athene that they were not trying out new disguises today, and Agamemnon and Priam were begging Hera and Zeus to stop polluting humanity. Messrs McConnell and Stephen, no less than Ms Goldie, would have been secretly delighted to intone such orisons, but no, relentlessly, their allies floated down, as intransigent as they were ignorant. Mr Gordon Brown surely had the claim of some knowledge of Scotland (without Sir Ming’s dreadful problem of the corpse of a predecessor who knew more) but he must needs turn himself into a sheep from **Animal Farm** and proceed through the country baa-ing ‘Union good! Se-e-e-paration ba-a-ad!’ Messrs Salmond and McConnell were perfectly ready to engage in mutual economic insults, which they did in sufficient profusion to leave indignant economists complaining that both were wrong and the contest would have to be left to voter perceptions of credibility. Since any true economist knows that all other economists are wrong, their verdict was hardly news, but the leading disputants were fairly engaged in a relevant contest. Westminster has become so infectiously the art of the irrelevant that the latter-day gods bespoke an election on the Union while the SNP realised the election was about what almost all elections are about, viz. should the existing government be thrown out because it has been in too long? As for the cause of its demise, the SNP had its leading issue handed to it on a plate: that whatever its merits, the McConnell administration was no more than the child of the embittered nuptials of the Brown-Blairs and would get an ASBO if let out alone after dark. Mr McConnell, like Scotland, was entitled to self-respect in the defence of his own patch, and he was in the end overwhelmed by his Rt Hon. allies who persisted in announcing that this was Mons and they were the angels. That the angels were simultaneously at war with one another, and with their fellow-Unionist Cameron, meant that the entire mess threw itself on Scottish soil to writhe before voter eyes as Exhibit A in favour of Mr Salmond’s case.

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And it is thus that the most noticeable verdict on the election in Scotland from voters who had not voted SNP was satisfaction that there would be a change from Labour political plurality, since for pure reasons of public health fifty years was long enough. There was also recognition that the Scottish Parliament was only able to prove itself purely devolved if Westminster was forced to stop thinking of it as a Labour party local office. As it happens, Mr Salmond's skills as an economist, his courage in opposing what he sees as unjust wars, his international antennae, give him the rudiments of the statesmanship which the office of First Minister has lacked since Donald Dewar: Mr Salmond's readiness to quote Donald Dewar with genuine affection has proved as good a measure for his own stature as is needed. But what has been evident since the election is the metamorphosis of his opponents in party leadership, Ms Goldie setting up the hilarious Gus Khan performance by Mr Salmond as its first formal assertion, she giving an imploding po-face in gorgeous imitation of Westminster Tory Front Bench male pomposities, he imitating a dying swan in the last throes of heartbreak or at least heartburn, both of them turning Mr Blair's boorishness in refusing to congratulate the new First Minister into a football for comedy. When Holyrood is laughing at Westminster, we are all beginning to grow up. And when it emerged that Mr Blair's making whoopee on his world tour at the taxpayer's expense meant bypassing Holyrood's legal jurisdiction, all four party leaders thundered their indignation. Mr Salmond is bringing it home how much they all have the common interest of letting Holyrood prove itself an elected chamber rather than a branch office, and as they asserted their Unionist insistence on the Scottish Parliament's rights Ms Goldie became Churchillian, Mr Stephen won maturity, Mr McConnell walked tall. In fact we may see a new Mr McConnell if he has well and truly thrown away his Westminster messenger uniform, and it will be one the more welcome because the more himself.

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Whether the fallen angels of Mons can rediscover themselves is a nice, though probably largely inconclusive question. Mr Blair has probably no self to discover, Mr Cameron is prohibited from any activity which might distinguish him from Mr Blair. But, with very little sign of it in his pre-Premier posturing, Mr Gordon Brown has rediscovered himself in print, if not in voice. It is Mr Brown's miserable fate to accept his inheritance from Mr Blair with the requirement that he don protective clothing and vocabulary to make him look and sound like Mr Blair lest alarm bells ring, Mr Alastair Campbell recalls his

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four-letter codes, and Captain Scarlett hurls him into some English Guantanamo. But in writing a book Mr Brown goes where Mr Blair cannot, since the book is not about its author.

It is excellent news that the London **Times** (R. Murdoch prop.) and the **Sunday Times** (R. Murdoch prop.) have handled Gordon Brown's wonderful book **Courage** very savagely. Anthony Trollope's **The Way We Live Now** (1875), not the least of whose comforts is to show how similar the way *we* live now, speaks of a prop. having the book of an author he wishes to crush, crushed: 'the greatness of Mr Alf consisted in this, that he always had a Mr Jones or two ready to do his work for him.' **The Times**'s Mr Jones (aka Mr Matthew Parris) called it Manichean, a big word for Mr Parris, but a natural outgrowth of fuzzy memories of history of Calvinism and apposite (albeit irrelevant) because Mr Brown's father was a minister of the Church of Scotland. He also complained that the eight essays (on Edith Cavell, Martin Luther King, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Raoul Wallenberg, Robert F. Kennedy, Cecily Saunders, Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi) did not include Gandhi: the omission is curious, since Gandhi is quoted *a propos* three of the eight – possibly an omission because Gordon Brown's inferiority complex as to his own British credentials hinted it was better to exclude one whose courage was best demonstrated against Britain – though for a Murdoch Jones to deplore the absence of Gandhi is like Belial deploring insufficient allusion to Christ. **The Sunday Times**'s Mr Jones (aka Mr Simon Jenkins) complained the book had no 'Englishmen' – Edith Cavell and Cicely Saunders being Englishwomen does not count. One of the Mr Joneses said that the eight were not up against really brutal enemies, thus throwing an interesting light on the Murdoch view of Hitler. But other critics had justly hailed the book as what it is – a beautiful, inspirational, genuine set of sermons. It thus shows itself the worthy child of the Revd John Brown's son, just as its essays on women probably reflect something of Gordon Brown's mother. It is absolutely anti-Manichean: it studies courage, explicitly from its author's initial perspective of it in childhood, and it shows that true courage has no evil equal (however hard it might be for Mr Murdoch to admit it). Of course it raises its questions about Mr Brown's courage (and one of the Mr Joneses raised that). Mr Brown makes not the slightest self-intrusion save as a learner, a listener, and an admirer. Mr Brown knows it is a case he has yet to answer. He showed terrific courage as a student leader against whom the legal resources of the university and state were thrown – but the list of other books in **Courage** does not even mention his **Red Paper on Scotland** which gave the case for devolution its feet in the Labour party. Many who knew him then would have said that if a fortune-teller

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prophesied that Mr Brown or Robin Cook would resign from senior cabinet office against an illegal war, Mr Brown was the idealist who would, Mr Cook the opportunist who would not. How wrong we were. Yet Mr Brown cannot really have approved the war on Iraq: his defence of it sounded less garrulous than Calvin Coolidge accepting gruel, and if he had wanted it, he would have shown he did. He gave his belated and grudging ‘yes’ as he does all the wrong things, for the good of the party. He even said what Alistair Campbell told him, at one point, which his parents would not have liked him to do. Mr Campbell’s achievement was to ensure that Blair Britain sounded as much like Nixon America as possible, and now he is forced to censor the very diaries where he had wished proudly to testify to the linguistic achievements of Mr Blair and his other pupils.

Mr Brown may have soiled himself with these creatures, but **Courage** shows that the brave boy of the 1970s is still there, buried deep. Perhaps the crucial essay from Mr Brown’s point of view (though all are work of which Scotland may be proud) is that on Robert Kennedy. Here alone a case against Mr Brown’s hero-worship exists, and it maybe made for almost all of Kennedy’s career. To me, Robert Kennedy was simply a ruthless, abrasive, self-interested embodiment of ambition for self and family at everyone else’s expense. (So argued Garson in **Macbird**.) I would concede that Gordon Brown has brought it home that there is another case, asserting that the generosity and far-sightedness of RFK’s last months was not simply massive candidature to lead the Left as the most convenient way to challenge his personal enemy Lyndon Johnson, but that Kennedy genuinely did seek to alter politics to include its usual rejects among social, economic and ethnic groups. But behind that it seems to me there is a desperate cry from Gordon Brown to believe that he, too, is more than a self-seeking politician, that he does want to eradicate poverty, that he has become Blair without being Blair, if possible. His Blairity was painfully evident in following his precursor’s post-Election boorishness to the Scottish Parliament’s First Minister, and even when he stumbled congratulations, coupling them with an insistence two-thirds of the people of Scotland had voted against independence, which in fact had been an issue only in the minds of the Olympians and angels battling in the clouds. But Mr Salmond announced their talk was constructive and that they looked forward to working together for the betterment of Scotland, where Mr Blair passes from the scene as the despised laughing-stock of his birthplace. It now rests for Mr Brown to learn magnanimity – which includes generosity as well as wisdom – from his admirable exemplars, headed by Nelson Mandela and his gospel of reconciliation. Mr Salmond, after all, has never oppressed Mr Brown: his crime

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in Mr Brown's eyes is that he has sought to save Mr Brown from Blairity and bring him back to what Mr Brown's pages show he can still be.

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