THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE BRITISH “Patriot”: Civic Britain, c. 1545-1605

Arthur Williamson

In 1586 David Hume of Godscroft recorded (and no doubt embellished) a dialogue that he had with his patron Archibald Douglas, the 8th earl of Angus. Both men were about thirty, Hume the rising intellectual star of the Presbyterian movement, Angus its political powerhouse, by far the mightiest and the most committed of the radical lords. For several years Hume had served as Angus’ amanuensis, preceptor, companion. Together they had returned from exile in England shortly before, as part of a coup d’etat that overthrew the conservative regime of James Stewart, earl of Arran, and Patrick Adamson, archbishop of St. Andrews. The dialogue argued that it would not do simply to be restored to one’s estates and earlier status. For the “good patriot” bore a far greater responsibility: participating actively in political decisions, protecting liberty, promoting the “publick cause.” “Activeness” was required. One needed to restrain particular interests, personal preoccupations, and private passions, and direct oneself to common purposes and society as a whole. That responsibility, the dialogue further insisted, could extend to revolution – as in fact had just happened. “Tyrants will call a good patriot, a seditious fellow.”

Hume’s dialogue provides one of the earliest instances of the Anglophone neologism “patriot” used to describe a

* Arthur Williamson is Professor of History at California State University, Sacramento. His most recent book is Apocalypse Then: Prophecy and the Making of the Modern World (Greenwood-Praeger, 2008).
participant in either Scottish or English politics. The term itself, however, was far from new: it had appeared in print in Huguenot tracts at least from 1574, following the St. Bartholomew catastrophe. French Protestants appealed for reform in every sense and, in the wake of the massacres, to the common good that transcended the confessional divide. In 1575 for example Pierre Fabre made an impassioned appeal to “every good citizen and patriot” (*tout bon citoyen et patriote*) to take up arms and preserve France from impending destruction at the hands of the Catholic League and their Spanish allies. In less formal discourse than print, the French neologism, clearly a Protestant term, probably reached back a decade earlier to the outbreak of the wars of religion. By the mid 1570s the term had thoroughly permeated the political culture of the Low Countries and the language of the Dutch revolt. William of Orange, radical Calvinists, and anti-Spanish Catholic conservatives all at various points described themselves as “patriots” and embraced the civic vocabulary associated with it. Perhaps inevitably, the neologism and its attendant values became contested across the political spectrum: who were “good” patriots, who “false” ones? Crucially, in the Netherlands as in France, the “patriot” was at once a political and religious figure. Civic capacity carried soteriological meaning, social justice implied spiritual redemption, the virtuous citizen became conterminous with the illumined saint. As the Calvinist radical Pieter Beutterich succinctly phrased it in a tract tellingly titled *Le vray Patriot aux bons Patriots* (Brussels?, 1578), “Soyons Chrestiens, soyons bons Patriots.” The new civic vocabularies proved remarkably powerful, attracting quite varied perspectives. Both Protestants and Catholics at one time or another would attempt to co-opt the language in an effort to promote competing schemes of reform. Even such resolutely anti-civic figures as Catherine de’ Medici, Don John of Austria, and Elizabeth I found themselves compelled to adopt the term when confronting their heretical opponents or, in the case of
Elizabeth, foreign allies. But if “patriots” sought to realize an extraordinarily wide range of conflicting agendas, this figure mixed uneasily with hierarchy and traditional authority. “Le vray patriot” remained true to his origins (“en bon François”) as the “vray Huguenot.”

Elizabeth’s ambassador to France, Amias Paulet, her ambassadors to the Netherlands, Thomas Wilson and William Davison, adopted the term by mid 1577 clearly because it comprised the language of politics in the countries to which they had been sent and about which they reported. In December, for example, Davison observed that the conservative Catholic Duke of Aershot “hath not conteyned him self within the Lymitts of so good a patriot as he would be noted.” At the same time figures in the central government who dealt with these representatives abroad, most notably Francis Walsingham, also began using the neologism. Nevertheless, “the good patriot,” however sympathetic a figure from the English perspective, initially remained a French and Netherlander phenomenon. Elizabeth herself distinguished clearly between her subjects and Dutch patriots. Only in the 1580s did “patriot” become a way of describing British politics when, with Hume, we can see its integration into the vocabulary of British political culture.

If the term migrated across the channel during those years, the civic ideas it came to represent had loomed prominently in the British kingdoms for decades. Moreover, and centrally, this issue of thought derived from a specifically pan-British context and continued to address what were perceived as common concerns, ultimately a joint undertaking. Although Hume’s dialogue spoke to the situation in Scotland, it grew directly out of conflict that had just taken place both north and south of the border. The patriot was a distinctly British figure, and one seen as bearing still further implications for all Europe. Scottish civic identity enjoined both political and spiritual solidarity with England.
This circumstance should not surprise us. For the language of the citizen first arises in the British Isles during the 1540s within contexts of English-Scottish and English-Irish interaction. As Dale Hoak has persuasively argued, the notion of the “monarchical republic,” a parliamentary kingdom populated with articulate decision-taking citizens living under the rule of self-made law, surfaced prominently with the Anglo-Scottish war known today as the Rough Wooing. William Cecil and Thomas Smith, he shows, proved the key figures, envisioning a civic “empire” embracing both Scots and Englishmen. To be sure, Cecil and Smith were wedded reflexively to the superiority of the English crown. Yet they, and especially Cecil, also found themselves committed to the equality implied by Protestant solidarity. Stephen Alford has described these conflicted views within Cecil’s thought as “rather schizophrenic” and even as “Orwellian.” By far the most significant writing at this extraordinarily fecund “Edwardian moment” was Smith’s An Epistle or exhortacion, to vnitie and peace (1548). Translated into Latin and German, published in Johann Sleiden’s history of the Reformation, the Epistle became the touchstone for nearly all Scottish unionist literature between 1558 (Knox’s First Blast of the Trumpet) and 1605 (Hume’s De unione insulae Britannicae).

From Ireland three years earlier Edward Walshe had adopted the same voice, urging “the zele that nature hathe in me kendled towarde my countreye.” Civic responsibility was crucial, for active citizens were “the very soule of their countreye,” the “anima patrie.” Those individuals who look simply to their own interests “lyc lurkynge at home lyke unprofitable ye [yea] rather unnaturall and bestlye people.” They ignored the public good and committed themselves to “the stinkynge and bestlye voluptuousnes of the body.” “What inhumayne, yea rather what bestlye instyncte shuld rule in vs yf we shulde haue no affectyon of loue risyng in our hartes to our natiue countrey.” Walshe insisted that “among al transitory thinges we are principally bounde to our natiue...
countreye.” Actually, he had nothing to say about the (non-transitory) next life. Instead, he denounced scholasticism, “these sarcastical prestes” with their obscene wealth, and “soch [that] haue not receaued reuacion of the respect that our sauiour Jesus christ had to ye commonweale.”

Political life bore spiritual perhaps even soteriological meaning for Walshe (as it did for Cecil and Smith), and consequently religion validated this world. Walshe celebrated the “noble church and congregacion of England and Ireland,” and, revealingly, spoke of salvation as “a resurrection of the dede.” For the Anglo-Irish “congregation” redemption occurred here.

From the outset, then, the “citizen” shaped British identity without attaching itself exclusively to the discourse for any specific realm. A polity in the making, one invented rather than one simply redefined, seems to have invited activist notions of the political self more than reaffirmations of preordained tradition. Just such thinking acquired central importance during the upheavals of that revolutionary decade 1558-1568 when the Reformation shook to its foundations the traditional order in northwestern Europe. At that volatile juncture when government authority was twice successfully overthrown as in Scotland, or radically contested as in France, or drastically de-stabilized as in England, or violently rejected as in the Low Countries, direct action became inescapable and ways of imagining it now seemed immediate, cogent, urgent. John Knox, Christopher Goodman, and their associates not only demanded revolution, but a British revolution, and were personally immersed within a thoroughly British environment. The First Blast, it is now recognized, comprises less a treatise against female governance than a treatise on Anglo-Scottish union. Similarly, the great rejoinder to Knox, John Aylmer’s An Harborawe for Faithfull and Trewe Subiectes... (Strasbourg?, 1559), also did not primarily concern itself with female rulers. Aylmer may have discounted Knox’s British frame, but he
also enjoined parliamentary governance and the centrality of civic action. These values assumed tangible shape throughout Scotland during the 1559-60 revolution. They manifested themselves in the shires, at the Reformation parliament, and with the revolutionary forces, led by the Lords of the “Congregation” – a spiritual term that replaced “church” with “community.”

No individual in the sixteenth century developed a fuller or more radical formulation of the political citizen than did George Buchanan. Unlike Knox, Aylmer, and even his friend Goodman, Buchanan did not look to juridical directives, constitutional mandates, or the obligations of “office” for political activity. Despite his extensive knowledge of civil law, and his occasional appeal to it, Buchanan’s vision derived from a passionate engagement with Italian civic humanism and Stoic moralism – the last informing both his politics and his physics. For Buchanan, neither biblical strictures nor custom carried great relevance. He vigorously applied Erasmian linguistic and historical analysis to scripture and thereby so thoroughly contextualized the sacred text as to make it all but irrelevant to the present. The good book, it seems, spoke to its historical moment rather than to the sixteenth century. Its real relevance derived from its poetry – most notably the psalms – rather than its politics, and accordingly Buchanan rarely references the Hebrew commonwealth. At the same time Buchanan, a true revolutionary, was acutely sensitive to the tyranny of custom. The danger in popular politics lay not in the people’s unbridled radicalism but in their blinkered conservatism. Further, Buchanan evinced no interest whatever in any constitutional “balance” between the one, the few, and the many – a decision-taking framework that shaped so much classical and Renaissance political theory. Even the directives of civil law offered only limited guidance, for what made law legitimate, what made it law, arose from its being self-imposed. Again and again, throughout much of his adult life,
Buchanan enjoins monarchs to “leave the reins loose”: the citizens themselves would uphold the law.\textsuperscript{16} For Buchanan political capacity and public life comprised innate qualities inherent within human beings – “a light divinely shed upon our minds.” In fact this divine quality suffused the cosmic order, totally informing the structure of the universe. As he indicated in his “Genethliacon” (Celebration) for the new-born James VI (1566), the young prince would “study the force that rules the heavenly bodies,/ And whether or not nature directs their course by an impulse of its own.” Buchanan envisions here a Stoic reality permeated by Reason. In the next lines he added enigmatically, “Then he will begin to know himself by the study of Greek philosophy,/ If indeed it can really be said to lay bare the truth in this regard.” Buchanan appears to be rejecting or at least questioning the mind-body dualism central to Platonic and Aristotelian thought (as well as to so much of the Western Christian tradition). Buchanan then proceeds to suggest that eventually the future king “will form himself by the help of the heavenly Muses.” “He will learn from them self-control.”\textsuperscript{17} Literature (rather than Greek philosophy) would connect him with the logic of the cosmos.

The Stoic order was radically universalist, and its implications, for Buchanan, meant radical equality. Citizenship, that morally demanding repression of private passions for an utter commitment to the public good, did not derive from birth, blood, title, office, or property. Civic capability lay inherent within each person. The force of universal reason thus opened the way for large numbers of people, if not everyone, to realize themselves as political beings – and thereby achieve their human potential. For Buchanan this was, or came close to, the meaning of redemption. Not only did popular sovereignty become an inescapable conclusion, so too did high levels of popular participation. To be sure, like virtually all sixteenth-century political theorists, Buchanan evinced serious distrust of the
“imperita multitudo” who “struggled laboriously for the bare necessities of life” and needed to be more concerned about survival than society. Yet Buchanan also believed that even these people, so apparently removed from politics and so irremediably remote from public policy, were not ill-willed and might be swayed “by the force of reason.” What Buchanan clearly imagined was an aristocratic republic where a virtuous elite governed by persuasion rather than through authority or coercion.

As with so many of his contemporaries, the republics of classical antiquity served as his exemplars and defined his understanding of politics. Accordingly, Buchanan promoted the Roman republic against its degenerate imperial successor, pouring contempt on the emperors, arrogant Lords of “Ausonia.” Codrus, the legendary Athenian who sacrificed himself for the commonwealth, was an archetypal hero; Caesar, who sacrificed the republic for his own aggrandizement, provided the anti-type, Buchanan’s arch-villain. Brutus, the good citizen, brought down this would-be tyrant in an act of civic virtue; even his daggers were “pious.” Buchanan emerges a committed participant within the Brutus cult of late Renaissance Italy. Yet the Athenian polis, not the Roman res publica, provided his model: first in his poetry and then in his great dialogue, the De jure regni apud Scotos (written 1567, published 1579), Buchanan sought to conflate the Scottish “Congregation” with the Athenian ekklēsia – the latter being the assembly of all the adult males in Athens. The “Lords,” civic-minded aristocrats, guided the nation through open debate and public life. In this way Buchanan framed and laid a philosophical foundation for the extraordinary direct action that had occurred in 1559-60, while at the same time justifying the overthrow of Mary Stewart, events that might at last realize the promise of the earlier upheaval.

Despite its title Buchanan’s dialogue was anything but simply “apud Scotos.” It did not seek to discover (much less celebrate) Scottish identity. Quite the reverse, it looked to
universal principles and sought to locate Scotland within a larger European world. Even more, Buchanan did not derive the argument in the dialogue from his reading of the Scottish past, but drew on the Scottish experience to argue his long-formulated principles. Further, Buchanan had adopted a distinctly Anglo-Scottish orientation at least after his return to Scotland in late 1561. Long before he broke with the House of Guise and its agent on the Scottish throne (apparently sometime during 1565), Buchanan hoped quite specifically for a Protestant British order. As he indicated in verses to the eminent English civil lawyer and educator Walter Haddon, a political rapprochement between the two “goddesses” – Mary and Elizabeth – offered “the blessed advantages of the Golden Age.” By their power peace would dwell “in the fields of Britain,/ Faith in the cities, equity in the courts, piety in the temples,/ As ungodly error is sent hence, far off from these shores.” From the beginning the Reformation had always proven a pan-British project – English intervention had saved the 1559-60 revolution; it would do so again in the civil war that followed on the 1567 revolution – and idealism rather than mere pragmatism had consistently informed it.

Buchanan pursued these objectives in conjunction with a number of English figures, among the most notable being the diplomat Thomas Randolph and the diplomat and poet Daniel Rogers. By 1572 if not earlier all these individuals, including Buchanan, looked to Francis Walsingham, Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, and Philip Sidney for leadership, sponsorship, and protection. Between that year and his death in 1582 Buchanan has been rightly portrayed as a member of the “Sidney Circle” which promoted a programme of reform that embraced politics, religion, and literature – all of which were perceived as integral to one another. If Buchanan’s views were significantly more radical than those of most of his English (and Scottish) associates, they nevertheless shared a core agenda: civic society, Calvinist faith, neo-Latin or classically-
inspired literary forms. Specifically that meant defending the Scottish Revolution against Mary Stewart, defeating the Anjou match with Elizabeth, promoting the patriot cause in France and the Low Countries, confronting, if possible defeating, clerical hierarchy, and, crucially, achieving Reformation throughout the British Isles.

That it was the case Buchanan served as a major intellect within the Walsingham-Leicester-Sidney complex is simply unassailable. But so saying misses the densities of specifically British reform. At the other end of the Protestant intellectual spectrum, John Knox consistently maintained that the Reformation “constituted a ‘British’ rather than a specifically Scottish phenomenon.”25 Christopher Goodman, Buchanan’s friend but Knox’s close associate, very nearly persuaded Knox to join him in his mission to Ireland in 1566. Goodman’s long career depended on Walsingham-Leicester-Sidney. Radical politics in any of the three kingdoms altogether defies the national identities that became commonplace with the early nineteenth century.

The high point for the civic vision occurred during the decade running from 1578 to 1588, precisely the moment that the neologism “patriot” enters the Anglophone vocabulary, just the moment when Anglo-Scottish interaction and agitation was at its most intensive. It is no accident that the De jure regni saw print at Edinburgh and London in 1579-80. Between 1580 and 1585 Scotland experienced a series of coups and counter-coups which brought to power alternately reforming and conservative regimes. Walsingham-Leicester-Sidney were heavily and continuously involved in these conflicts which need to be seen as part of an ongoing British struggle. The key Scottish figure was Archibald Douglas, earl of Angus: not only had he become one of the most powerful lords in Scotland, he was also the most committed to Presbyterianism and reform. During his first exile in 1581 Angus was well received by Leicester and Walsingham. Although no intellectual, Angus apparently grew close Philip
Sidney, a man of the same age and “like disposition,” and who shared with him an early version of the *Old Arcadia*.\(^{26}\) It is hard to imagine anyone more fully integrated into the “Sidney Circle” – especially in light of Sidney’s aversion to print and exceptionally private and protective regard for his writings. Yet whatever personal affinity actually existed between them, Angus was vitally important, for he embodied the best hope for Scotland. Subsequently, Angus began studying classical and biblical texts, as well as having his associate and friend, Hume of Godscroft, “read to him Latine authors of all sorts, both historians and others.”\(^{27}\) Just as Buchanan had read Livy to Mary Stewart to prepare her for virtuous rulership, so Hume groomed his patron for leadership in a radical Scotland.

The failed coup of spring 1584 brought more than Angus and his immediate associates into England. A significant element from the aristocracy fled and were joined by a large slice of the Scottish intelligentsia as well – among them Andrew Melville, James Melville, and David Hume. That year also witnessed the most serious challenge to Elizabeth and her bishops that the English puritan movement ever mounted. The Scots both participated in the English confrontation and at the same time found support and encouragement from English reformers and well-placed members of the English political elite. Revolution in England joined with revolution in Scotland. During that year, probably more than ever before, Englishmen and Scots saw themselves as part of a common cause. The funeral for the exiled Scottish minister James Lawson in October is emblematic: the event drew hundreds of mourners in an extraordinary demonstration of Anglo-Scottish solidarity.\(^{28}\) The struggle for reform has traditionally been characterized as mainly concerned with church government and its underlying theology.\(^{29}\) But that seriously misreads that movement’s intellectual breadth. Anglo-Scottish radicals clearly envisioned a multi-dimensional reform agenda – as they had done more or
less consistently since the 1540s–one that involved citizenship and literature as well as spirituality. To be sure, this tissue of thought had become more articulate and far more commonplace than earlier. Moreover, at this juncture it displayed an unprecedented level of Anglo-Scottish cultural interpenetration and thereby possessed a genuinely British character.

In August 1584 the minister James Melville drafted a tract outlining the woeful situation in Scotland and a reform programme to transform it. Melville had no doubt as to the causes of the kingdom’s problems. Outstandingly, they arose because “the nobilitie neglect and cast off their publict calling.” They lived “as privat men” at home on their estates simply enjoying themselves or, worse, oppressing their neighbours and playing the “bangsters.” Corrupted by courtiers and in turn corrupting public office-holders, they lived like “beasts.”

Melville is unlikely to have read Walshe, but we hear Walshe’s voice unmistakably, in what we can only call the British civic tradition.

Andrew Melville, James’ uncle and mentor, had gone still further. In the wake of the St. Bartholomew massacres, he looked to another Brutus to strike down Catherine de’ Medici, Charles IX, and the entire tyrannous House of Valois: “Tarquinii de stirpe truces cum terra tyrannos/ Tot ferat, acri unus pectore ubi Brutus est?” [When the earth produces so many savage tyrants from the stock of Tarquin, where is a Brutus with a courageous heart?]. Steven Reid has observed that “acri” carries the additional meaning of “sharp” or “with an edge.” The “pious daggers” of Buchanan’s Brutus have resurfaced with Melville. Melville had long developed a friendship with the older scholar-poet and would see his great history of Scotland (Rerum Scoticarum Historia) through the press during the last year of Buchanan’s life.

Later Melville, portrayed by many as Buchanan’s heir and successor, would begin – though only just begin – a British epic that envisioned a united Britain defending the
liberties of the world against the Hapsburg universal empire and papal tyranny. In a great many respects this project drew together the central themes of Buchanan’s thought. If radical civisme and reformed religion seemed to merge within a British frame, so too did poetry. The Anglo-Irish Edmund Spenser repeatedly and famously celebrated Walsingham as a latter-day Maecenas. Far less well known is David Hume’s similar celebration of the English statesman. Walsingham, Hume proclaimed in Latin verses, was a “Devotee of the muses and of genuine piety.” “The Muses and religion are dear to you.” Walsingham had proven the “patronus” of both. We may never know what poetry the Secretary had supported or might support that prompted Hume’s applause. But it is manifestly clear that poetry and piety, civilization and sincere religion, came inextricably bound up with one another. The civic, the sacred, and learning would be achieved together.

In the end the English movement met with rebuff, while its Scottish counterpart eventually found its way to tenuous power. Angus-Hume-Melville (now joined by John Maitland of Thirlestane) succeeded where Leicester-Walsingham-Sidney could not. In part, Elizabeth supported the former to secure Scotland in the deepening and exceedingly dangerous war with the Iberian colossus. In part, the Angus group subsequently seems to have persuaded James VI that their colleagues south of the border offered him the surest route to the English crown. A very uneasy alliance resulted that did indeed lead to reform and also to the beginnings of a cultural flowering. In a way this is surprising because the Scottish “patriots” were on the whole more radical than their southern confreres. The looming, even iconic, figure of Buchanan inevitably played better at home than abroad, even for Scots who found it hard to agree with his views. Only the most radical Englishmen rallied to the De jure regni and fully endorsed it. After all, Scotland, unlike England, had experienced two revolutions. Perhaps it is no
accident then that the earliest use of “patriot” within British politics seems to have been Scottish rather than English.

The Decline of the British Patriot

It has become something of a commonplace to observe that a new authoritarianism gained the upper hand throughout much of Western Europe during the 1590s, as the Counter-Reformation penetrated the textures of European culture, as hierarchy and headship assumed growing persuasiveness. Henri IV, Elizabeth, and James VI increasingly adopted an imperial voice and looked to the Roman Emperors rather than to the world of the polis that the empire had supplanted. Royal majesty and reason of state found themselves reinforced by a new humanism associated with such continental thinkers as Francesco Guicciardini, Michel de Montaigne, and Justus Lipsius. These figures refashioned Stoic attitudes in ways that altogether rejected political activism and validated private withdrawal, intimacy, domestic values, and skeptical detachment. Ciceronian civisme declined into Tacitean cynicism. The Geneva Bible of 1560 with its non-hierarchical “congregations” rather than “churches” and an apparatus replete with reference to Antichrist–so appropriate to that radical decade–eventually was replaced by the neutered King James version of 1611. At the early 17th-century “British” court Lancelot Andrewes preached “moderation,” for who could be so bold as to know the mind of God and enter his secret counsels? “Moderation,” however, did not mean toleration in the least. Its purpose was to foreclose debate, restrict calls for reform, and thereby limit public space.36

The fading of civic ideals inherently qualified and marginalized the “patriot” and the “citizen.” Charlotte Wells has shown that France in the 1590s witnessed a falling off in the use of both terms. When “citoyen” does occur, it becomes a mere synonym for “sujet.” Even before Henri’s conversion, Catholic supporters projected him as a ruler “who by auncient prophesies is called to be the Monarch of the world.”
The great men of the realm, hitherto his enemies, would become his protected servants.\textsuperscript{37} Absolutism was the future.

Much the same pattern occurred in contemporaneous England. It was as “the humble servant of all true Patriottes” that William Cornwallis welcomed James’ accession, and Cornwallis went on to appeal to “all honest spirits and good common-wealths-men” to join him in supporting the new king. His fellow countrymen needed to recognize “our duties to the Common-wealth.” “To bring private drifts to the publique busines, is an impietie of the highest nature.” Buchanan could only have agreed. And yet Cornwallis never for a moment doubted “the absolute power of the Prince.” The creation of the new Britain would lie entirely in his hands.\textsuperscript{38} His virtue, independence, and judgment embodied and manifested the virtue of his subjects. The civic act involved no more than recognizing the civic capacity of the prince. Subject and citizen had become one.

The poet and playwright Ben Jonson further illustrates this reconfiguring of the patriot and its consequent demise. Long mistakenly thought to be one the first English-speakers to use the term, Jonson in fact transforms and negates the meaning it had possessed both for the continent and for the Anglophone world during most of the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{39} In his prominent drama, \textit{Sejanus His Fall} (first performed 1603, printed 1605), good citizens during the rule of the tyrant Tiberius agree that a virtuous, civic-minded emperor would be ideal, obviating any need for the “old liberty” of the republic.

\begin{quote}
We could not think that state for which to change, \\
Although the aim were our old liberty: \\
The ghosts of those that fell for that, would grieve \\
Their bodies lived not, now, to serve: \\
Men are deceived, who think there can be thrall \\
Beneath a virtuous prince. Wished liberty \\
Ne’er lovelier looks, than under such a crown. \\
(I.ii.403-409)
\end{quote}
No Brutus need apply. In this world a revamped patriot emerges, a passive rather than an active figure, one who withdraws from the fray of public life. Arruntius asks the elderly “patriot” Lepidus how he navigated the dangers of political life: “What are thy arts, good patriot, teach them to me,/ That have preserved thy hairs to this white dye,/ And kept so reverend and so dear a head/ Safe on his comely shoulders?” The answer is disengagement, in language remarkably like that of Lipsius: “Arts, Arruntius? None, but the plain and passive fortitude,/ To suffer and be silent.../ ...live at home,/ With my own thoughts, and innocence about me,/ ...these are my arts” (IV.v.290-298). A passive patriot could only have struck the previous century as a contradiction in terms.

These newly re-imagined patriots could hardly stimulate a developed sense of solidarity with other such patriots, especially with ones from abroad. Still less would this figure be likely to share a highly articulated cause to promote a programme of reform. Mocking the Scots became relatively commonplace with Jonson, in *Eastward Ho* (1605), *The Isle of Gulls* (1606), the “Scottish mines” play (1608), *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), and apparently *The Isle of Dogs* (1597), comedies that drew complaint from Hume and, earlier still, from the Edinburgh city government as well. Tension of this sort is simply unimaginable among the patriots of the 1580s.

But probably nowhere did these two conflicting notions of the civic compete more directly than in Scotland. There the two key figures were none other than Hume of Godscroft and King James himself. When James ended his shaky alliance with the Presbyterians in December 1596, he turned on his erstwhile allies in part by firing off a series of tracts that upheld the underlying hierarchical order in nature, an order that withstood all mutation, flux, contingency, and certainly all political revolution: the *Daemonologie* (1597), the *True Lawe of Free Monarchies* (1598), and the *Basilikon Doron*
(1599). But other ideas were also in play. In 1596, facing the prospect of a second Armada attack, the king had warned his subjects that the Spaniards had been able to enslave the Amerindians because the aborigines had preferred their own “particular” to the common good. This line of thought resurfaced in the Basilikon Doron where he warned his young son Henry that a legitimate prince, one of blood and tradition, was precisely the opposite of an uncouth usurper. The new prince (James drew on a partial translation of Machiavelli’s Il Principe that William Fowler had made for him) will invert “all good lawes to serve only his private affections.” “He will make vp his own hande vpon the ruines of the Republicke.” Herein lay the very essence of tyranny. His son’s rule needed to do just the opposite: it should repress particular interests and partiality, and instead “shine” forth virtue to the country “as was scene by the vertuous liues of the olde Romaines.”

James’ civic vocabulary reinforced royal authority. For the prince embodied the citizen, his subjects realizing their virtue through his. Civic Scotland and thereafter civic Britain would have but one citizen.

Hume’s De unione insulae Britannicae (1605) comprised the patriotic riposte to the Basilikon Doron. In it he spoke with the voice of the activist citizen as imagined in the previous century. “I don’t want to avoid an opportunity for contributing to the public good.”

Neither should I worry too much about who I am or, as a private citizen with no official functions in the commonwealth, what I can reasonably contribute...Nor does our country despise any citizen’s service. And this is a shared responsibility and a rare thing in the annals of history.

Precisely this appeal to shared interests and the public good underwrote the first section of Hume’s two-part treatise which argued for the necessity of a complete union of both peoples.
By creating a British identity in place of Scottish and English ones, a number of decisive advantages would occur. English domination and Scottish provincialization would be avoided (as seemed all but inevitable within a simple regnal union), for as Britons there could only be a single social purpose rather than competing ones. For Scots it was the best “prescription” available. Further, civic society would enable people to achieve the highest form of association and thereby realize their full humanity. Britain would bring peace, security, civilization, and – as he indicated in the second part – potentially shift the struggle against Spain and the papacy.

Hume was able to publish the first part of the De unione because it so powerfully urged the creation of a complete union and a new British identity. Even if its underlying assumptions differed drastically from the king’s, its visible thrust seemed to serve royal purposes. Not so the second part: there Hume outlined the institutions that would create a Britain of citizens. These included a British parliament (possibly meeting at York), regional councils, shared offices, equal representation on a British Council, a system of honors that rewarded British public service (replacing the Order of the Garter), as well as symbols, prayers, and ceremonies that promoted a British sense of self. Crucially, there would be a British national church based on the Scottish model. Above all, the creation of Britain itself would be a joint undertaking and thus a genuinely British project. At the heart of all these proposals lay a commitment to high levels of public participation – all of which manifested the central values of the sixteenth-century patriots. As in the previous century, the new order was expected to generate a political, spiritual, and cultural flowering.

Part two ran directly and dramatically counter to the king’s purposes and could not be printed – its publication blocked even in France. At issue were two competing notions of British identity, one that provided dynastic solidarity, the other offering civic solidarity. Both were
founded on conflicting notions of authority, and in time dispute about them increasingly assumed a specifically religious character. In the event, the immediate future lay with King James. We can perceive a dispirited and at times desperate attitude on the part of the Presbyterians. Melville’s letters look to the long haul rather than short term success; at one point he closes a letter to Hume with a reworking of the frequent play on his name: “Plus fellis, quam mellis” (rather gall than honey). If his crackling poetry amused many at home and on the continent, prompting replies from outraged conservatives that in some cases went on for decades, the cause faced unremitting decline. The De unione represents the last major statement of the patriots’ British vision. The patriot would resurface during the 1620s and again spectacularly and enduringly after the late 1630s. But the decline of the British patriot at the turn of the century brought with it the decline of the British enterprise and the prospect of union, the decline of Britain itself.
Notes


2 In the face of the crisis, Fabre insisted, religion ceased to be the point, confessional difference had become irrelevant; rather the issue concerned the survival of French society:

Bref, il est maintenant question du droit public, et de la laisser perdre, ou de le retenir, et non pas de la verité de nostre fo y et doctrine. Or c’est chose qu’il nous faut et tous autres bons patriotes defendre, non pas par une simple patience et complainte, mais en resistant par armes ... [In sum, it is today a question of the public law, and whether we will let it be lost or whether we will retain it, and not about the truth of our faith and doctrine. Now this is a thing which is incumbent on us and all other good patriots to defend, not by mere suffering and protestation, but by resisting through arms.]

Fabre, Traite duquel on peut apprendre en quel cas il est permis à l’homme Chrestien de porter les arms... (n.p., 1576), 21, 36-7. A similar point was made in Discours politiques des diverses puissances establies de Dieu (1574). This line of thought receives developed treatment in A. H. Williamson, Scotland and the European Social Imagination, ch. 1 (forthcoming).

3 *Vray Patriot*, sig. B3v.


5 National Archives [NA]: SP83/4/1.

6 NA: SP84/17/1 (Instructions to Henry Killigrew and Robert Beale, 1 August 1587). Elizabeth spoke of “l’amour qu’austrefois porté à la generalité, composte d’un grand nombre de bons patriotes la defense et preservation des quels ne nous a este en moindre recommandation que celle de noz propres sujets.” See also Elizabeth to Lord Buckhurst, 15 April 1587 [NA: SP84/14/76; Elizabeth to Buckhurst, 1/17 May (reprinted in Hajo Brugmans, ed., Correspondentie van Robert Dudley Graaf van Leicester...1585-1588 3 vols. (Utrecht, 1931) 2:264; Instructions to William Davison, 2 August 1577 [NA: SP83/2/3].


9 Walshe, The office and duty in fighting for our country (London, 1545), sigs. A5r, B8r, B6v, A6v, B1v.

10 Walshe, sigs. B3r, B4v, B5v.

11 Walshe, sigs. B8v, C2v.

12 A. H. Williamson, Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI [hereafter SNC] (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1979), 11-12. A close reading of the First Blast not only reveals it to be a unionist tract, as is now widely recognized, but also that it replicates the central arguments of the Epistle. Knox’s deep English connections are well known. Goodman, we will recall, taught at St. Andrews and directly shaped Scottish intellectual life.

13 Williamson, SNC, pp. 9-10, 15-6, and more recently Hoak, “Cecil and Smith,” 41.

14 For the shires, see for example M. Sanderson, Ayrshire and the Reformation (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997).

Europe (Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwar Publishing, 1994), 97-117; Buchanan, 
A Dialogue on the Law of Kingship among the Scots: a Critical Edition and 
Translation of George Buchanan’s “De Jure Regni apud Scotos Dialogus” [hereafter 
Buchanan, Dialogue], ed. & trans. R.A. Mason and M.S. Smith (Aldershot: 
Ashgate, 2004), xlvii-xlvi; A.H. Williamson, “George Buchanan and the 

16 E.g., “Ad Henricum VIII, Angliae Regem” (To Henry VIII, king of 
England); “Genethlacia Jacobi Sexti Regis Scotorum” (Celebration of the 
Birth of James VI, King of Scots), in P. J. McGinnis and A. H. 
Williamson, eds., George Buchanan The Political Poetry [hereafter Buchanan, 
ll. 39-40; 154-62, at ll. 45-51. Buchanan’s views remained strikingly 
consistent from the 1530s through the 1560s and beyond.

17 Buchanan, Dialogue, pp. lvii-lxii; 16-19; Buchanan, Poetry, 160-63, at ll., 
104-110.

18 R. A. Mason, “People Power? George Buchanan on Resistance and the 
Common Man,” in R. von Friedeberg, ed., Widerstandskraft in der frühen 
Neuzzeit...Forschung im deutsch-britischen Vergleich, 1488-1688 (Berlin, 2001), 
163-81; David Hume, The British Union: A Critical Edition and Translation of 
David Hume of Godscroft’s “De Unione Insularum Britannicarum” [hereafter Hume, 
British Union], edited and translated by P.J. McGinnis and A.H. 
Williamson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 4; Buchanan, Dialogue, l, lx, and 
passim.

19 Buchanan, Poetry, 84-90, 158, and passim; D. J. Gordon, “Gianotti, 
Michelangelo and the Cult of Brutus,” in D. J. Gordon (ed.), Fûtz Saxe, 
Eternal City: Roman Images in the Modern World (Chapel Hill: University of 
North Carolina Press, 1987), 54-5; M. Piccolomini, The Brutus Revival: 
Parricide and Tyrannicide during the Renaissance (Carbondale: Southern Illinois 
University Press, 1991), 38, 63-5; N. S. Baker, “Writing the Wrongs of the 
Past: Vengeance, Humanism, and the Assassination of Alessandro 


21 See Buchanan, Dialogue, xxxvii.

22 Buchanan, Poetry, 150-53.

23 Buchanan laid out his idea of kingship to Randolph in a poem probably 
from the earlier 1560s. Buchanan, Poetry, 148-9.

24 J. E. Phillips, “George Buchanan and the Sidney Circle,” in Huntington 
30 Cald. 4:150-57, at 155.
32 Buchanan, Poetry, 31-40, 276-81, 284-97; Hume, British Union, 9-19.

Ad Franciscum Walsinghamum
Musarum cultor, verae pietatis amator:
Præsidium, portus, dulce patrocinium.
Quid tibi te, et tanta dignum pietate precemur?
Quae fuerint meritis consona vota tuis?

........
Ad Eundem

Quis te non patrio colat, atque obseruet amore,
Cui gratiae Musae, grataque religio?
Certe ego ni patrio colam, et te amplectar amore,
Dum tibi erunt Musae charaque religio.
Tune me nec dignum fatear sacrisue camaenis;
Nec qui sincera religione fruar.

[Is there anyone to whom the Muses and religion are dear, / That does not honor you and respect you with the same love he would have for a father (or patron)? / Surely unless I shall honor you and embrace you with the affection due a father, / Considering that the Muses and religion are dear to you, / Then let confess myself unworthy the sacred verse, / Nor let me enjoy sincere religion.]

Spenser’s comments on Walsingham’s support of poetry occur in his dedicatory letter to the Faerie Queene (1590) and in “The Rvines of Time,” ll. 435-41 (1591).

34 As Hume advised James, “Those that Reformation are the strength of that countrey, and certainly the wisest in it, of greatest power by the peoples favoure, and credit in Parliament, and everywhere ... Gaine these, gaine that countrey.” Hume, History, 427. Also see SNC, 135.

35 There exists an enormous literature seeking to show that although Sidney and his associates may have sought limited monarchy and public culture, they were not republicans. B. Worden, The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney’s “Arcadia” and Elizabethan Politics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); D. Shuger, “Castigating Livy: The Rape of Lucretia and the Old Arcadia, in Renaissance Quarterly 51 (1998), 526-48. Buchanan recognized the potential tyranny and injustice that could result from an inflexible application of the law. But, as R. A. Mason points out, unlike Plato and Aristotle – and in marked contrast to Sidney’s Old Arcadia – “the authority of the law over the king had to be absolute and complete.” (Buchanan, Dialogue, p. liii) Writing in the 1590s the author of The State of Christendom (clearly an adherent of the earl of Essex and now thought to be Anthony Bacon) would not reject Buchanan completely, yet felt the Scot gave “too great Authority unto Subjects.” “And because Countries have flourished, and may still flourish without a king, shall therefore every country reject their king, when they dislike their kings?” (The State of Christendom [London, 1657], 202)


Perhaps revealingly, Jonson early on tried to dissociate himself from his work on city pageantry and his civic texts in favor of court masques. T. Hill, “Representing the awefull authoritie of soveraigne Majestie”: Monarchs and Mayors in Anthony Munday’s *The Triumphes of Re-united Britannia,* in Burgess et al, eds., *Accession of James I*, 15-33, at 18, also 27.


Ibid., 142-211, 224-255.

This remarkable text would only see print (and translation) as late as 2002.
The Rise and Decline of the British “Patriot”