REVIEW

Jørgen Sevaldsen and Jens Rahbek Rasmussen (eds),
*The State of the Union: Scotland 1707-2007, Angles on the
English-Speaking World, Vol. 7*. Copenhagen: Museum
Tusculanum Press, 2007. Pp. 155.
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‘Tensions in 1707; strains in 2007; stresses in the years between.’¹ Thus begins the editorial comment of *The Herald* published on 16 January 2007, the 300th anniversary of the passing of the Act of Union by the Scottish Parliament - a timely reminder of the need to re-evaluate and reflect on the nature of the Anglo-Scottish relationship. *The State of the Union: Scotland 1707-2007*, a special issue of *Angles on the English-Speaking World*,² attempts to accomplish this. Comprised of eight essays and an introduction, the collection offers multidisciplinary perspectives; contributors include distinguished scholars from Scotland and abroad.

The editors’ introduction does well to draw attention to the changes in post-devolution Scotland and the interest the Scottish Parliament triggered in matters relating to the Union. Despite Scotland’s role as junior partner, it did well out of it, particularly through the imperial partnership that the Union facilitated. It was only in the post-war period that Scottish support for the Union decreased. With declining job opportunities and post-war economic decline, the national question moved to the fore and explains the growing success of the Scottish Nationalist Party from the 1960s. From the 1990s, the focus shifted to Europe with nationalist rhetoric in particular postulating the idea of independence within a Europe of regions.

David McCrone has written much on Scottish identity and the Scottish nation and seeks to provide a window into

these two important matters in the first chapter. He hopes to capture the character of the Scottish state, nation and society, provocatively asking whether Scotland actually exists. By exploring familiar Scottish cultural markers such as language and values, McCrone concludes that there are no objective markers of difference between Scotland and England. Instead, it is possible to attest the development of a Scottish frame of reference through which structures are refracted to make Scotland more distinct.

Shifting the focus from a sociological to a historical perspective, Steve Murdoch and J.R. Young trace the three Anglo-Scottish unions of 1603, 1654 and 1707 and explore how these were received. The authors explain that people were keen to show their support for the 1603 Union by expressing a single British identity, although caveats such as 'Anglo-British' or 'Scoto-British' were maintained. This early development of multiple loyalties is noticeable and contrasts with Colley's argument.³ The 1654 Union by contrast only had a short life-span of 6 years and was a forced union. This prevented the development of an underlying cultural fabric that could have fostered a positive reception. The majority of Scots, however, accepted the Union of 1707 on the basis that it safeguarded the Kirk. It again fostered the possibility of dual identities as Briton and Scot.

The following three essays by Paul Ward, Henrik Halkier and Robert C. Thomson deal with matters of 20th century political history. Ward looks at unionism and Scottishness, drawing our attention to the decline of the Conservatives and the negative implications of Thatcherism. The latter is equally important in Halkier's contribution which investigates the relationship between Edinburgh and London prior to devolution. Based on an empirical case study of the Scottish Development Agency (SDA), Halkier shows that the SDA retained a significant degree of influence over regional policy matters. Thomson's essay moves us back to the 1960s, and looks at the development of the Scottish nationalist movement. Although strengthened by

the discovery of North Sea Oil, the movement did not gather enough support prior to the 1979 referendum. The 'Scottish cringe' had retained a firm grip which was only loosened in the 1980s to be eventually replaced by a confident assertion of consensus.

In the three remaining essays G.D. Caie traces the history of Scots which emerged as a language of the elite; Karina Westermann explores Alasdair Gray's work and his influence on Scottish writers; and Charles Lock, in an essay with a rather slim source-base, shifts the focus back the question of identity by asking what it means to be the holder of a British passport

So what is the state of the Union of 1707? As with many edited volumes, the quality of the papers varies. Murdoch and Young's contribution is well written and presented and the most valuable for Scottish historians. A significant drawback, however, is the editors' failure to coordinate the efforts of the authors or to highlight the connecting themes, which would have been useful in view of the diverse time periods, topics and disciplines involved. This neglect takes away much of the work's force, leaving the essays free-floating. By revealing the possible scope and multi-faceted perspectives that can be explored and by providing a platform for new ideas, the special issue of *Angles* does hold some value, but would have benefited greatly from more editorial rigour.

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¹ *The Herald*, 'Can the Union survive?' (editorial comment), 16 January 2007

(http://www.theherald.co.uk/search/display.var.1124365.0.can_the_union_survive.php).

² An annual periodical produced by the English Department at the University of Copenhagen.

³ L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).