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EGYPT, EMPIRE, AND THE GAELIC LITERARY IMAGINATION

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On 8 March 1801, a British expeditionary force – including the 42nd Black Watch, the 79th Cameron Highlanders, the 90th Perthshire Volunteers, and the 92nd Gordon Highlanders – stepped from their boats and onto the beaches of Abukir Bay in northern Egypt. Since Napoleon Bonaparte’s invasion of Egypt in July 1798, William Pitt’s government had been determined to remove the French threat to Britain’s trade routes in the Middle East and in the Indian Ocean.\(^1\) While fears of an Alexander the Great-inspired French decent into northern India were dismissed as implausible, the threat to British global power was sufficient to ensure the dispatch of a large expeditionary force to Egypt.\(^2\) Horatio Nelson’s decisive victory at the battle of the Nile in August 1798 ended the threat of French hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean but left the

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1 For an excellent analysis of Napoleon’s expedition, see J. Cole, *Napoleon’s Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007).
2 Senior British figures such as Henry Dundas were more concerned that a French invasion of the Middle East would provoke Mysore and other Indian states into an attack on East India Company possessions in South Asia, see E. Ingram (ed.), *Two Views of India: The Private Correspondence of Mr. Dundas and Lord Wellesley, 1798-1801* (Bath: Adams & Dart, 1970), 2-16; A. Aspinall and E. Anthony Smith (eds.), *English Historical Documents*, 10 vols. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1959), viii, 78.
French army, minus its illustrious commander (who fled to Europe after the failed siege of Acre in May 1799), in control of northern Egypt.

Sir Ralph Abercrombie’s army did not land unopposed. French artillery on the sand dunes above the beach caused havoc among the lines of redcoats coming ashore. After clearing the dunes at the point of the bayonet, the British army began its fourteen-mile march to Alexandria along a narrow isthmus of sand that separated Lake Abukir from the Mediterranean Sea. A successful assault on French positions at Mandora on 13 March brought Abercrombie’s force close to Alexandria where, at dawn on 21 March, it was counter-attacked by the Armée d’Orient under Jacques-François Menou. As the advancing French columns drove in the British outposts, a confused melee ensued in the darkness around the ruins of the Nicopolis, a large Roman ruin on the British right flank. For five hours, repeated French assaults on the ruins were beaten back and, when the ammunition ran out, both sides pelted each other with rocks. Finally, having failed to break through the British lines, the French withdrew to Alexandria, which was laid under siege and surrendered in September 1801.

The British victory in Egypt, while later overshadowed by subsequent victories in the Iberian Peninsula and at Waterloo, was a major turning point in the wars against revolutionary France.3 When news broke of the victory at Alexandria, leaders in both the House of Lords and the House of Commons – including the future William IV and the Prime Minister Henry Addington – gave speeches in the army’s honour.4 William Pitt read a letter before the Commons that “paid a just tribute to the brave men who shewed themselves a

4 *Bell’s Weekly Messenger*, no. 266 (24 May 1801), 163.
match for the flower of the French army – for the conquerors of Italy … never was there a moment when the steadiness and bravery of the British army was more fully evinced.”

This article presents an edition, translation, and analysis of a Scottish Gaelic song by the Reverend Seumas MacLagain [James McLagan] (1728-1805) about the battle of Alexandria. This text, which has not received any previous scholarly attention, is a rare illustration of an attempt of a member of the Gaelic intelligentsia to reframe Gaelic identity and history so as to reconcile them with the agenda of British imperialism. The spectacular contribution of Highland soldiers to the victory in Egypt was a crucial moment in re-examining the relationship between the Gàidhealtachd and the British state. Gaels, particularly those from the middling and upper sections of society, had been quick to recognize the political and economic benefits of an alignment with the Hanoverian regime and had turned to soldiering as an “imperial specialization” within the post-1746 British state. It fell to writers such as McLagan who, as the chaplain of the Black Watch from 1764 to 1788, was himself part of this imperial specialization, to give meaning to these new alignments and to explain them as entirely consistent with Gaelic imperatives, despite the on-going effects of internal colonization within the Gàidhealtachd. While there are many examples of Gaelic

5 *The Times*, no. 5112 (19 May 1801), 1.
6 A. Mackillop, More Fruitful than the Soil: Army, Empire, and the Scottish Highlands, 1715-1815 (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2000), 41-76.
songs that seek to explain the triumphs of Gaelic soldiers within the context of British expansion, none are as sophisticated or as intellectually rigorous as McLagan’s Òran d’an Chath-bhuidhinn Rioghaí Ghàidhealaich.

Gaelic engagements with the British Empire – and the largely uncritical celebration of the imperial enterprise that accompanied it – have received some attention. Wilson McLeod notes that military writings from the mid eighteenth to the mid twentieth centuries do form a distinctive literary chapter in the Gaelic corpus. He notes, however, that while it is “certainly not impossible to excavate … dissonant notes within the literary corpus, there is a risk that doing so may distort or misrepresent what is actually a very largely unvariegated body of work.”

Peter Mackay describes – with some justification – the Gaelic military songs of the period as broadly simplistic in their assumptions and literary styles.

The uncritical celebration of British victories also lends these songs a crude and uninspiring triumphalism that sits uneasily with modern sensibilities. The most that can often be said of these songs is that the celebration of the Highland regiments helped create a hybrid and often contradictory Gaelic identity. Figures such as Coinneach MacCoinnich and Iain MacFhearchair, for example, deployed a fetishized image of the

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martial Highlander in order to unsettle the very forces that imperial integration was instrumental in creating.\textsuperscript{10}

This article stresses the importance of variations within these songs in negotiating and expressing sophisticated Gaelic identities. As a major contributor to Gaelic military song, it is essential to investigate McLagan’s work on its own terms. McLagan’s crucial role as a collector of Gaelic songs and manuscripts – referred to by Derick Thomson as “McLagan’s great achievement” – tends to overshadow his contributions as an original writer.\textsuperscript{11} As a distinctive contribution to the Gaelic military corpus, however, his song deserves greater attention. How did McLagan deploy this important event to make sense of a Gaelic role in British imperialism? What do its specificities say about the colonized adoption of imperial narratives and cultural morays – Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridization and colonial mimicry?

This analysis of McLagan’s text furthers such investigation. It reveals the devices that were used to celebrate Gaelic contributions to British military endeavours. Beyond this, however, McLagan’s song reveals that Gaelic engagement with British imperialism was far from superficial. While largely unexamined in modern historiography, the victory in


Egypt was used to draw the Gaelic literary imagination into a pan-British centred celebration of the imperial world. Egypt was the link between eighteenth-century Gaelic Scotland and the troubling embrace of British imperialism by Gaels that was rarely challenged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

There are two sources for this text. It first appeared anonymously in the Stewart Collection of 1804. It appeared again seven decades later in An Gàidheal and it is clear that the two primary texts both derive from the same original source because they contain all of the same verses in the same order. Differences between them are slight and reflect differing interpretations of handwriting, or emendations of it (e.g., line 102: miosgain / mioscam) or minor emendations to improve the text (e.g., line 43 ghleusda / bheumnach). The song was reprinted by Alexander MacLean Sinclair in 1892 but his text differs, sometimes considerably, from the other two and should be considered to be derivative of them. Sinclair is known to have emended texts for aesthetic, political or moral reasons and expresses explicitly his dissatisfaction with the poet’s skills: “We suspect however that his command of words was somewhat limited. His composition is somewhat stiff; it contains too many contractions. It lacks the regular flow that one would like to find in poetry.” This was no doubt Sinclair’s

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12 A. and D. Stewart, Cochruneachta taoghta de shaotair nam Bard Gaelach, 2 vols. (Duneidin, 1804), ii, 470-78.
13 An Gàidheal, vol. 5, issue 52 (April 1876), 113-5. The text printed in An Gàidheal includes a number of glosses and neologisms in Gaelic. It is not clear whether these glosses were taken from McLagan’s manuscript or are the product of the contributor’s analysis. We have included these glosses at the end of the song.
rationale for rewriting the text, as he would have approved of its militaristic vision of Gaels in the imperial order.\textsuperscript{15}

The song does not appear in John MacKechnie’s index of the McLagan Collection, but it is reasonable to lend credence to the attribution to McLagan given in \textit{An Gàidheal}.\textsuperscript{16}

The anonymous contributor tells us that he or she has worked from an original manuscript:

Rinneadh an t-òran seo leis an Urramach Seumas MacLagain an dèidh Cath na h-Éipheite ’s a’ bhliadhna 1801. Bha an t-ùghdar fhéin ’na mhinistear-feachd do’n Fhreiceadan Dhubh agus air a chunntadh ’na dheagh sgoilear Gàidhlig. Tha an t-òran air a chur sios an-seo mar a sgriobh e fhéin e agus gheibh sinn ann samhladh air a’ mhodh air an robh e am beachd gum bu chòir ar seann chàin a litreachadh.

This song was composed by the Rev. James McLagan after the Battle of Egypt in the year 1801. The author himself was a chaplain for the Black Watch and considered to be an excellent Gaelic scholar. The song is given here as he himself wrote it down and we can get an example of the way in which he believed our ancient language should be spelled.

Besides the attribution in \textit{An Gàidheal}, a number of other features of this song strengthen the claim that McLagan is the author: dialectical features of the text are consistent with a

\textsuperscript{15} M. Linkletter, “‘Bhiodh e masladh mearachdan a chur an clò’: A. MacLean Sinclair the Editor,” \textit{Scottish Gaelic Studies} 28 (2011): 211-25.

Perthshire Gaelic speaker, such as the loss or shortening of second syllables (e.g., line 8 Gàidh’l); the literary and historical allusions suggest an author with high level of education in both English and Gaelic; and the style and metre are similar to those of a song written by McLagan to the same regiment when they departed for the Seven Years’ War. An analysis of the text is given below followed by the original text and a translation of the song (noting variants in the two source texts).

**Egypt and Gaelic Scotland**

The contributions of Highland soldiers to the victory in Egypt were widely recognized in the aftermath of the campaign. The 90th and 92nd Foot had led the advance at Mandora on 13 March and were awarded a battle honour in recognition of their services. The 42nd Foot bore the brunt of the French assault on 21 March. Initially held in reserve, the regiment took position beside the Nicopolis, where they were exposed to repeated infantry assaults and incessant fire from French skirmishers and artillery. Near the end of the battle, the regiment was also subjected to a desperate cavalry charge that broke through the exhausted soldiers and almost broke their resolve. The *Black Watch* alone sustained a quarter of all British casualties. It was little surprise that when commissioned to do a statute of the fallen Abercrombie for St Paul’s Cathedral in London, Richard Westmacott placed him in the arms of a soldier of the *Black Watch*.

When the regiment returned to Britain in 1802, they were awarded numerous honours. They paraded in Edinburgh and received new colours bearing their battle honours along

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with permission to emblazon an Egyptian Sphinx on their crests and badges. For those who sought to promote the Gaelic contribution to the British military, a conspicuous Highland role in the victory in Egypt was useful. The Highland Society of London struck a medal to commemorate the campaign that they intended to award to all ranks of the Black Watch. Designed by Benjamin West, the medal bore the bust of Abercrombie on one side and an image of a Highland soldier on the other with the date of the battle and the inscription: “Na Fir a choisin Buaidh ’san Ephait [These are the Men who gained Victory in Egypt].” Controversy arose when the Black Watch refused to accept the medal, “considering it to be solely the prerogative of [His] Majesty to confer such a mark of distinction on Military Men,” though the regiment later accepted a silver vase from the Society that was presented to them in 1817.

A number of Gaels turned their attentions to the victory and McLagan’s song was only one among a number of texts that expounded on Gaelic martial triumphs. Perhaps the most famous of these was a song written by Alasdair MacFhionghain who, as an enlisted man in the 92nd Foot, fought in Egypt and was severely wounded at the battle of Alexandria. MacFhionghain’s “Oran air don Bhàrd a dhol air

22 MacFhionghain was so severely wounded that he was almost interred in a mass grave before a friend realized he was still breathing, see R. Black (ed.), An Lasair: An Anthology of Eighteenth-Century Scottish Gaelic Verse (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 522.
Egypt, Empire, and the Gaelic Literary Imagination

"Tìr san Eiphit" described coming ashore at Abukir Bay on 8 March 1801 and is, in terms of linguistic skill and accomplishment, a superior piece of work to McLagan’s. MacFhionghain freely acknowledged his skills as a Gaelic poet but his work is told from the perspective of an infantryman, complete with vivid descriptions of the noise, the smoke, and the piercing wounds of musket ball and bayonet. Fashioned from the same cloth as clan panegyrics of old, it is an impression of a battle experienced personally and lacks the historic and political motifs deployed so freely by McLagan.\(^{23}\)

A similar argument can be made about MacFhionghain’s other military song, “Blàr na h-Òlaind,” describing the Anglo-Russian victory at Alkmaar over the forces of the Batavian Republic in 1799. This song is aligned with an older panegyric model that praises the martial valour of clan leaders. Six of the opening seven stanzas praise generals Ralph Abercrombie and John Moore and the colonels of the Gordon and Cameron Highlanders, George Gordon, Marquis of Huntley, and Alan Cameron of Erracht, who are variously described as “an leòghann colgarra gun ghealtachd [the fierce lion without cowardice]” or “An darag dhìleas dharaich ud, Nach d’fhàg san linn seo samhail da [That faithful tree of oaken wood, who has left no likeness in this age].”\(^{24}\)

There is some overlap in the use of words and phrases between MacFhionghain’s and McLagan’s work – the descriptions of


“bhrataichean (banners)” and emphasis on savage hand-to-hand combat – but these are very different pieces of work.

Ailein Dall Dùghallach also turned his attention to the battle. As the hired poet of Alasdair Randalson Macdonnell of Glengarry, Dùghallach was no stranger to military praise poetry and composed songs celebrating his patron’s role as colonel of the Glengarry Fencibles. Like McLagan, Dùghallach composed a song in celebration of the Black Watch and its role in the battle of Alexandria. Dùghallach lacks the intimate connection with the Black Watch possessed by McLagan but his “Òran do ’n Reisimeid Duibh” borrows heavily from clan histories by outlining the great historic successes of the regiment. Dùghallach recounts their elevation as a numbered regiment in the armies of the British state and their acclaimed role at the battle of Fontenoy in 1745. He also places some emphasis on their presentation to a young George III. This song does contain some references to wider political and historic contexts and to the regiment’s place “A rinn an onoir a sheasamh / Do Rìgh Bhreatann a’s Éirinn [Who defended their honour / For the King of Britain and Ireland]” while also suggesting a desire “A bhi ’n deagh rùn do Rìgh Shasunn [To be in the good graces of the King of England].”

Many of these references, however, are incorporated within a traditional model of Gaelic praise poetry focusing on

25 Dùghallach also made passing reference to Egypt in several other songs about military officers, see “Oran do ’n Choirneal Mac-Ic-Alasdair Ghlinne-Garradh air dha bhì gu tinn” and “Oran do ’n Mhaidseir Seumas Domhnullach, ann an Reisemeid Mhic Coinnich, Tainisteir Glinne-garradh” in A. Dughalach, Orain, Marbhrrann, agus Duanagan, Ghaidhealach (Inverness, 1829), 84, 89-96, 117.
26 Ibid., 91-2.
27 Ibid., 89, 93.
the personal attributes of powerful men. The Duke of York, the commander of allied forces in Holland in 1799, is portrayed as a paternal clan leader: 

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’S beag an t-iongadh bho thoiseach, / An Diùchd O’ York a ’thoirt spéis doibh; / ’S tha ’mhór chairdeas a’ nochadh, / Gu bheil toirt aige fèin doibh [It is little wonder / From the beginning the Duke of York was fond of them / His overwhelming kindness being shown / That he gives his own import to them].”
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According to Ruairidh Maciver, Dùghallach’s song “shows a tendency toward traditional forms of address” and there is an emphasis on Gaelic mythologies. Dùghallach, for example, implies that the Gaels are returning home to Egypt (an origin myth that is discussed below): 

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Mòr-euchdan nan Gaidheal / ’Dhol a dh’èiteach gu fhearainn / A’ beil pairt do shliochd a dhaimh [Great achievements of the Gael / Going to occupy that land / In which are part of their kin]” while also comparing the Black Watch to the Fenians of old. When placed alongside other songs that reference the French and British invasions of Egypt – Sergeant Alexander Forbes’ lament for Donald Macleod of Geanies or James Shaw’s “Oran do Bhonipart” or Donald Macdonald’s song of the same name – it is clear that the campaign had a far greater impact on the Gaelic literary imagination than has previously been acknowledged.

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29 Dughalach, Orain, Marbhrrannan, agus Duanagan, Ghaidhealach, 92.
31 Dughalach, Orain, Marbhrrannan, agus Duanagan, Ghaidhealach, 89-91
Nevertheless, many of these songs were constructed within traditional forms of praise poetry, which allowed them to celebrate Gaelic martial valour without seeing Highland service in the British military as inconsistent or contradictory. They were less driven by contemporary and imperial politics than McLagan’s song outlined below.

McLagan’s Gaelic context

Óran d’ an Chath-bhuidhinn Rioghal Ghàidhealaich is not immune from the influence of the panegyric code. It is a product of McLagan’s deep engagement with Gaelic tradition. Writers like McLagan could – and did – draw on traditional motifs of the warrior hero to sustain a narrative of Gaelic martial triumph and smooth the transition to the celebration of imperial campaigns. McLagan emphasized the moral imperative of Gaelic violence, both in terms of the loyalty of the Gael toward their leaders (dileas) and the righteousness of the cause in checking the barbarities of Britain’s enemies (Lines 140-1). The personal and collective costs of this moral imperative only served to strengthen the righteousness of Gaelic actions in Egypt (Line 8). This violence, as well as being morally justified, could be explained through precedent and tradition as the Black Watch took their rightful place alongside the Gaels of old, though McLagan’s selection of historical narratives in the song do require further explanation (see below).

The importance of strength (neart) and winning renown (cliù), both crucial motifs of the panegyric code, are also explained, mostly explicitly in the first stanza where McLagan notes that death was no barrier to the renown won by the

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“laochraidh gharg [fierce battalion].” McLagan’s imposition of himself into the song in the final stanza completes the cycle by reminding the Gael of the renown bestowed on young warriors by the community’s poets, decrepit and frail as they are (Line 166). Other aspects of the code – divine kingship (Line 163); the kind hand of fate (Lines 105-8); and the denunciation of Gaelic enemies (Lines 17-24) – are all embedded within the text.

Nevertheless, McLagan also deployed rhetorical strategies that must be understood as more specific to the challenges of integrating the Gael into imperial triumphs. Conspicuous loyalty to the monarchy is a recurring theme of the song but it is deployed specifically on Line 55 to make sense of previous Jacobitism, noted as prior “gòraich [foolishness/folly].” For those trying to make sense of shifting loyalties, Jacobitism became a usable past that proved Gaelic allegiance to monarchy at a time when the American and French revolutions were calling such loyalties into question. The very loyalties that had alienated Gaels from the Hanoverians in the early eighteenth century could, by the late eighteenth century, be used to demonstrate the inherent reliability of the Highland warrior. During the American Revolution more than two decades earlier, McLagan himself had written from New York to a scholar in Glasgow contrasting Jacobitism with the aims of the American revolutionaries: “We sometimes, at least some of us, mistook the right king, but we were always friends to Kings and monarchy in general, the American rebellion, on the other hand is entirely selfish and void of every spark of generosity that ever graced the human

33 See also Lines 45-7 and 114.
nature.”35 Conspicuous loyalty to the crown served to clear the record of Jacobite improprieties and added lustre to an emerging narrative of Gaelic loyalism.

The nature of this loyalty, however, was also changing. If earlier songs in the panegyric tradition had emphasized what was cóir [proper], ceart [just], or dligheach [obligatory] about loyalty to the rightful king, McLagan displayed no reticence in outlining the benefits of loyalty to both the crown and the Gael. McLagan’s song emphasized that the heroic traits of the Gael were a useful asset to the state (Lines 140-1). In return, the Gael could find security under a benevolent monarch. In Line 144, McLagan speaks of the importance of a good king as the guarantor of the law and constitution in a manner that echoes the earlier pro-Hanoverian songs of Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir.36 The loyal Gael also gained the respect of George III, unabashedly proclaimed as “Is aithne d’ ur deagh rìgh sibh / Is d’a theaghlach rìomhach suairc’ [your excellent king and his illustrious, civilised family]” (Lines 109-10). Such respect could be converted into material reward, as suggested in the following line where McLagan explains that those who pursue victory will never lack “inbhe [rank].”37 The acquisition of

37 The taking of material rewards from a state that was responsible for the ill-treatment of its Gaelic subjects is the theme of another military song from the McLagan Collection dated to 1784, the year after the mutiny of the 77th Foot (Atholl Highlanders) in Portsmouth, see McLagan Collection, MS Gen 1042, f. 174, University of Glasgow.
status through military service is an important theme of McLagan’s work but this specific phrase might have had a double meaning to Highland officers who held their military rank from the crown on the basis of being able to entice enlistments from among their tenantry.

The potential audience may help make sense of the other appeal to monarchy in the song. According to McLagan, the king stood in opposition to greed, miserliness, and the forcible removal of the Gael from their lands. The military advantages that the Clearances gave to Napoleon – by depleting Britain’s reserves of manpower – are also outlined (Lines 145-52). Placed in the context of mass Highland emigration, however, McLagan’s audience may have been able to interpret this in a number of ways. At the time of composition, Highland leaders were engaged in an effort to convince parliament to halt the flow of Gaelic migrants across the Atlantic. The resulting Passenger Vessels Act (1803) – which used humanitarian arguments about conditions aboard transports to raise the price of passage – was a tool of the landlords designed to ensure that estates retained their human capital despite deteriorating socio-economic conditions. The idea that George III supported these efforts in order to retain Gaelic manpower for the fight against Napoleon may well have pleased pro-military landlords and recruiters in the same way that it appealed to poorer Gaels who were bearing the brunt of socio-economic change.

We must also consider audience when assessing the broader purpose of the song. As chaplain of the regiment, McLagan was a critical link between the military and the Gaelic community. His songs were not simply the work of an individual poet but were intended to offer a medium through which the community could interpret broader events.

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McLagan’s focus on the rewards of service can be seen as an effort to ensure the continuing supply of Highland manpower to the king’s armies at a time when the Highland population seemed incapable of sustaining the regiments already formed. \(^{39}\) Correspondence between McLagan and Lord John Murray, colonel of the 42 \(^{nd}\) Foot until 1787, reveals that Murray wanted to publish McLagan’s earlier songs in both Gaelic and English as a recruiting tool. \(^{40}\) McLagan’s 1756 song for the regiment when it departed for America was published in the *Gillies Collection* in 1786 though this did not prove to be the immediate fate of the Egypt song. \(^{41}\)

Both songs feature allusions to sexual rewards for Highland soldiers upon their return and can be read as an enticement to young Gaels. Lines 157-60 are clear that the soldiers can expect sexual rewards from the “òigh[ean] [maidens]” when they return. There is a strong parallel here with the earlier song where McLagan describes the tender maidens and the promises of sexual attention on their return. In that earlier iteration, he tells the soldiers: “Mas fios do mhaighdinnibh rùn maighdinn / Leibh gun aom gun aindeoin [As maidens know another’s wish / You will make them yield willingly]” and that the lasses would not refuse a “fhìor-laoch [true warrior].” \(^{42}\) In fact, McLagan’s song shares a number of motifs and themes with his earlier song. The style and metre are very similar and there are some similarities of language.

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\(^{39}\) By the Napoleonic Wars, many “Highland” regiments were majority non-Scottish, to say nothing of Gaelic-speakers who had become a decreasing (if occasionally sizable) minority, see T.M. Devine, *To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland’s Global Diaspora, 1750–2010* (London: Penguin, 2012), 219.


\(^{41}\) J. Gillies (ed.), *Sean Dain, agus orain Ghaidhealach* (Perth, 1786), 113-7.

\(^{42}\) Newton, *We’re Indians Sure Enough*, 123-4, 26.
Allusions to the natural world and the correlation between the power of nature and the power of the weapons used by the Highlanders (Lines 33-40) are also clear in both cases.

But some important differences can be identified. McLagan’s use of the term “Coillteach [forest people]” to refer to the Gael (Line 83) stands in contrast to his use of the same term to describe Native Americans allied to France during the Seven Years’ War. The use of the term Coillteach demonstrates a remarkable change of attitudes regarding civility and savagery. Maclagan himself probably coined the ethnonym as a calque on “savage” – despite a long tradition of celebratory tree symbolism in Gaelic – in order to have a term to describe the Indigenous enemies of the British Empire. In 1756, this no doubt helped distance the Gael from Anglophone insinuations that they were Britain’s equivalent of France’s “savages.” By 1803, however, it is reclaimed as a term to describe the Gaels themselves. Rather than engaging in racial distancing so as to align Gaels with their fellow Britons as evident in earlier texts, McLagan seems to be highlighting the Gaels’ presumed rustic characteristics, which were claimed to give them special advantages as warriors. This shift reflects an early form of Highlandism as Scottish elites began to distance themselves from the cultural hegemony of England safe in the

43 Gillies (ed.), Sean Dain, 114.
knowledge that their inclusion in the “civilized” imperial order was secure. It adds further weight to the notion that Highlandism was not simply the grotesque manipulation of Highland symbols by Lowland elites but something that was also – probably first – generated within the Gàidhealtachd.

McLagan’s navigation of tradition themes and pan-British considerations is nowhere more interesting than in his foregrounding of political and historical themes. Stanzas Ten to Fourteen place the actions of the Black Watch along a continuum of resistance of foreign oppression. The Black Watch are the heirs of the Gauls who resisted first Julius Caesar and the Franks (Line 79). There is little here that is unusual. McLagan echoes the contemporary antiquarian understanding of the Gaels as a branch of the continental Celts whose territory had been slowly encroached upon by Germanic invaders, a view he expressed in letters to other collectors of Gaelic manuscripts.46

What is more unusual is McLagan’s endorsement of a Japhetic and Gomeric lineage for the Celts in the following stanza. As a member of the Gaelic literati, McLagan would have been well aware of the long tradition of a Milesian line of descent for the Gaels. This origin myth centred on the ancestral figure of Míl Espáine (Soldier of Hispania) from whom the Milesians derived their name. According to the legends complied in the Lebor Gabála Érenn (The Book of the Taking of Ireland), the Milesians had come to Ireland from the Iberian Peninsula and had divided the realm between themselves and the previous inhabitants, the Tuatha Dé Danann, who were driven to the Otherworld. This story held the advantage of being mutually intelligible to both Scottish and Irish elites and

46 McLagan to Stewart, 1 Sept. 1800, GD/We/5/15, Dundee City Archives [DCA]. This idea can clearly be seen in Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s introduction to Ais-Eiridh na Sean Chánoin Albannaich (Edinburgh, 1752), vi-vii.
centred language as a primary identifier of race. It posited that the Gaelic language could be traced to the Milesians via Fénius Farsaid, one of the creators of the Tower of Babel and a prince of Scythia, from whom the Milesians and their language were ultimately descended. The Milesian story, while sometimes manipulated by Tudor propagandists to justify genocidal English expansion, retained a central place in Gaelic scholarship well into the eighteenth century.\footnote{M. Newton, \textit{Warriors of the Word: The World of the Scottish Highlanders} (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2009), 56. See also F. Gillespie, “Míl Espáine and the Links Between Ireland and Spain” in \textit{Librarians, Poets, and Scholars: a Festschrift for Dónall Ó Luanaigh}, ed. F.M. Larkin (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 270-81; A. Hadfield, “Briton and Scythian: Tudor representations of Irish origins,” \textit{Irish Historical Studies} 28 (1993): 390-5.}

The Japhet and Gomer origin stories were, by contrast, common throughout the English-speaking world and beyond. According to many medieval and early modern national histories, Europeans had descended from Noah through his son Japhet and his grandson Gomer. The exact details changed across time and place but it was common to associate the Welsh with the Gomeric line, the Gaels of Scotland and Ireland with Gomer’s brother, Magog, and the Germanic or Teutonic peoples with Ashkenaz, a son of Gomer. Writers in the late eighteenth century, such as Edward Gibbon, were challenging this formulation, decrying the “antiquarians of profound learning and easy faith” who had embraced the myth in the name of patriotism and religious fervor in the seventeenth century, but it still had its defenders even among the elites of the Scottish Enlightenment.\footnote{C. Kidd, \textit{British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10, 50, 61.}
Two points of great significance are apparent. First, the Japhet myth lacked the firm ethnic and racial barriers of later nineteenth century. In asserting that all occupiers of the Atlantic Archipelago were descended from Japhet, early modern theorists imagined Teutons and Celts as kindred peoples in a way that became impossible in a post-Biblical era of scientific racism. Defenders of this idea, figures such as James Parsons (the Dublin-educated English physician) and Francis Hutchinson (the English-born Bishop of Down and Connor), often straddled the ethnic divisions of the Atlantic Archipelago and found common cause in a widely shared orthodox belief that the peoples of the islands descended from the same line.\textsuperscript{49} In foregrounding the Japhet myth – rather than that of the Milesians – McLagan was situating himself within a frame of reference that emphasized ancestral unity among the Germans and Celts over linguistic disunity. That McLagan chose to neglect the Milesian myth in favor of a Gomeric one is especially significant given the role of Scota in the Milesian version. Scota, from whom the Scots reputedly derived their name, was said to have been the daughter of an Egyptian pharaoh who had married the son of Fénius Farsaid and whose grandson, Goídel Glas was the creator of the Gaelic language.\textsuperscript{50} 

\textsuperscript{49} There had been efforts to link the Milesians to the Japhet myth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries though the results were often “rather messy” since it was also necessary for the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland to claim the high antiquity of the peoples whom the Tuatha Dé Danaan and Milesians had displaced, see Kidd, \textit{British Identities Before Nationalism}, 65.

\textsuperscript{50} For versions that were used for Scottish origin myths, most famously (but not first or exclusively) by John de Fordun, see D. Broun, \textit{Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain: From the Picts to Alexander III} (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 215-68.
That McLagan rejected such an obvious link to Egypt is fascinating.

Second, by embracing a specifically Gomeric line, McLagan was consciously placing himself within a paradigm that emphasized an affinity with other Britons. The Gomeric line allowed an unambiguous rejection of Jacobite origin myths promoted by figures such as Thomas Innes that focused on the Scottish royal line. It also distanced him from a Milesian myth that was beginning to lose credibility under the weight of intellectual investigation. Ultimately, it gave him an origin myth that had much greater credibility in the Anglophone world and offered him a secure base from which to celebrate the triumphs of the Gael within a unified British context.

There is, of course, some ambiguity in McLagan’s treatment of the Gael within the British Isles. He aligns himself firmly (at times) with a pan-Gaelic context through frequent references to the Fian. The term “cothrom [na] Féinne” is used on Line 17 to mean a “fair fight” while there are further allusions to the Fian on Line 67. McLagan’s comparison with Oisean on Line 167 is particularly apt given McLagan’s long involvement with the transcription of Ossian oral literature and his engagement with the Ossianic debate. McLagan had corresponded with James Macpherson in the early 1760s and provided the Badenoch man with around thirteen poems from

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51 T. Innes, A Critical Essay on the Ancient Inhabitants of the Northern Parts of Britain or Scotland (Edinburgh, 1885 [1729]).
52 Kidd, British Identities Before Nationalism, 68-70.
53 Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir’s “Oran do Rèisimeid Bhràghaid-Albann,” which was nearly contemporary to McLagan’s song, portrayed the volunteers of the Breadalbane Fencibles as “A shliochd nam Fianntan [Fian descendants],” see Maciver, “A’ Moladh na Rèiseamaid,” 62.
his own collections.\textsuperscript{54} Frequent references to the Fian may have also been an acknowledgement of the Irishmen who often constituted large percentages of infantry regiments.\textsuperscript{55} Three regiments from the Irish establishment – the 18\textsuperscript{th} Royal Irish, the 89\textsuperscript{th} Princess Victorian’s, and the 2/27\textsuperscript{th} Inniskilling regiments – also served alongside the Highlanders during the battle.

McLagan also displays a venomous hostility to the Teutons and the Goths, despite his endorsement of the Gomeric line. In his editorial comments on the song, Sinclair is no doubt correct when he states that, “The Goths referred to are Dr. Johnson and Pinkerton, especially the latter.”\textsuperscript{56} McLagan’s rancor runs deep in Lines 97 to 104. In the late 1780s, John Pinkerton had published two texts in which he had outlined the case that the Picts were a branch of the Teutonic Goths and that the Gaels, like all Celtic races, were an inferior species of mankind.\textsuperscript{57} Here, McLagan blames Johnson’s high-handed Anglophilia and Pinkerton’s racialized Celtophobia for turning many Britons against the Gael without any justifiable reason.

McLagan also portrays the Black Watch as a bulwark against “Teutonaich thàin’ ’nur coir, A chuid a chiud le seòltachd [Teutons who impinged on you with cunning, bit by bit].” The

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Sinclair} Sinclair, \textit{Gaelic Bards}, 242.
\bibitem{Pinkerton} J. Pinkerton, \textit{Dissertation on the Origins and Progress of the Scythians or Goths} (Edinburgh, 1787); J. Pinkerton, \textit{Enquiry into the History of Scotland preceding the reign of Malcolm III} (Edinburgh, 1789).
\end{thebibliography}
image of Gaels being driven to the margins by the advances of the Teutons places the Highland soldier within a “Celtic Fringe” construct of the British Isles.

Nevertheless, the ambiguities of the song are precisely what gave McLagan the ability to play with certain narrative aspects of the historical record, particularly with regard to Celtic resistance to the Teutons and imperial Rome. The argument that the Highland regiments constituted a bulwark against the latest in a long line of foreign oppressors of the Gael is something that McLagan had thought about in other contexts. Six months before the battle of Alexandria, he had penned a letter to his brother-in-law, John Stuart of Luss, in which he had compared the threat of Napoleon to the invasions of Scotland under Edward I and Oliver Cromwell. McLagan was careful to resolve any inconsistency that might arise in a comparison of an English invasion of Scotland to a French invasion of Britain. Both risked the destruction of Scotland’s history and culture, argued McLagan, suggesting that Gaelic cultural identity could be made to work within shifting political alignments.\footnote{McLagan to Stewart, 1 Sept. 1800, GD/We/5/15, DCA.}

The motif of freedom-loving Caledonians fighting off the Romans (Line 85) was a common one in Anglophone literature but it could also carry connotations of Protestant resistance to Catholic hegemony.\footnote{Newton, \textit{Seanchaidh na Coille}, 108.} The virulent anti-Catholicism of British national identity in this era would have made sense to a minister of the Church of Scotland – especially in the aftermath of French support for the Irish rebellion of 1798 – while also smoothing Gaelic inclusion into a united Protestant history.

\textbf{McLagan’s British context}

What are we to make of McLagan’s varied deployment of historical examples that were laced with contemporary
meanings? Certainly, for McLagan, political histories could be written and re-written without ever obscuring the importance of the Gael from the history of Britain and Europe. He is not so much inconsistent as adaptive and develops a historical argument that could engage without alienating a variety of Gaelic perspectives. But there is also a strong element of mimicry in play, whereby a colonized people adopts the attitudes of the colonizer. They do so to assert a presence in colonial society that would otherwise leave them bereft of the ability to challenge the Anglophone narrative. In so doing, they often normalize and underpin the dominant narrative by offering proof of the merits of the “civilizing mission” among so-called savage peoples. McLagan is part of this process as he simultaneously incorporates and disassociates the Gael from a narrative that celebrates Britain’s resistance to revolutionary France.

The themes of incorporation and disassociation – exemplified by the use of the term Coillteach – make it critically important to place McLagan’s work within a wider British paradigm. It must be considered as the work of an author whose writings were intended to support the counter-revolutionary ethos of the British state and its loyalists. McLagan was familiar with the specifics of the battle. The reference to Alexander Stewart as the leader of the energetic


61 For discussions of Gaelic Scotland and postcolonial theory, see S. Stroh, Uneasy Subjects: Postcolonialism and Scottish Gaelic Poetry (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011); C. Krause, “Gaelic Scotland – A Postcolonial Site?” eSharp 6 (Autumn 2005) [http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_41178_en.pdf].
Gaels (Line 129) is remarkably specific, given that Stewart had only taken command of the regiment two weeks previously when James Stewart was wounded during the landing at Abukir Bay. At the same time, McLagan adjusted his account to remain fixated on the triumph of British arms. The French commander Menou did order his cavalry into the melee around the Necropolis but, while McLagan states that this set the Gaels in motion among other valorous Britons (Lines 31-2), eyewitnesses noted that the “shock” of the French charge was “irresistible” and that those Highlanders who were able to resist the charge found themselves “fighting on his own ground, regardless of how he was supported … while strength or life remained.”

The French cavalry were eventually driven back but with a high cost. Most interesting is McLagan’s choice of words to describe the attacking French and their battle flag. Lines 9-32 describe the 42nd Foot’s bitter fight with the 21st légere demi-brigade, whose nickname “The Invincibles” is used by McLagan and was widely used in accounts of the battle and by the British press. The term gained widespread popularity when it became attached to a rancorous dispute over who had captured the standard of the 21st légere demi-brigade – Sergeant Sinclair of the 42nd foot or Private Lütz of the Minorca or Queen’s Own German Regiment. The press quickly took the side of the 42nd Foot and a large panorama of the battle by the stage-artist Robert Ker Porter displayed the 42nd Foot’s triumph to adoring crowns in London and Dublin. Some writers, however, were not entirely willing to engage in another celebration of Scottish valour. William Cobbett stoked the flames of controversy by suggesting that Lütz, a “friendless … foreigner,” had been neglected in a fit of British patriotism.

and Highlandism. In response, the Highland Society of London conducted an investigation and declared that Lütz had taken the standard from the wounded Sinclair rather than from the French. Ironically, the dispute greatly upset the officers of 42nd Foot who found the Society’s quibbling over the regiment’s honour to be distasteful and a disservice to the professional reputation of the army as a whole, including the foreign and émigré regiments.

What is most revealing about this dispute, however, is that it puts McLagan firmly within a pan-British narrative of the battle. There was, in fact, no French regiment nicknamed “The Invincibles” in Egypt. Napoleon had described the troops that had crossed the bridge at Lodi in 1796 as “cette colonne invincible [this invincible column]” but there is no evidence of the title in French sources. In the 7 February 1802 edition of

63 *Cobbett’s Annual Register … from July to December 1802* (London, 1810), 546-71.


65 The captured standard was of the 3rd battalion of the 21st légere demi-brigade, which had fought in Italy but most of the formation had fought in the Rhine campaign of 1796, perhaps offering some rationale for McLagan’s brief mention of the Rhine on Line 40. If McLagan was making reference to the French regiment’s history, it displays a remarkable understanding of the 42nd Foot’s opponents at Alexandria. It may equally be the case that McLagan was attempting to remove the stain of defeat suffered by British forces in the invasion of Holland in 1799 though the army had not crossed the Rhine or the Waal during that campaign.
the French government’s official newspaper, *Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel*, it was reported that the British press had invented the term to add luster to the victory. McLagan’s use of the term “Invincibles” and his description of the standard as the “infamous banner” shows his awareness of pan-British debates over the battle and puts the song firmly within a Continental dispute between Germans, Frenchmen, Britons, and Gaels.66

**Conclusion**

McLagan’s *Òran d’an Chath-bhuidhinn Rioghalt Ghàidhealaithe* is a highly valuable illustration of an early attempt by a member of the Gaelic intelligentsia to reconcile Gaelic identity with support for British imperialism and the war against revolutionary France. The song not only evidences Gaelic efforts – in a Gaelic medium – to acculturate to an Anglophone narrative, it reveals the complicated and often ambiguous devices that were used to celebrate Gaelic contributions to British military endeavors. While many songs in the Gaelic military corpus made use of generic stock motifs and formulaic narratives, there was space for intellectuals like McLagan to ruminate on the meaning of Britain and the place of the Gael within a British military and imperial system. McLagan’s song is a cultural and historical narrative aimed at making sense of a problematic situation in a way that other military texts are not. It deserves closer attention for this reason.

There is no doubt that Gaelic heroism was central to McLagan’s process. If Britain’s overseas expansion promoted Gaelic heroism, it could be embraced without damaging the

66 For British uses of the term, see A. Anderson, *A Journal of the Forces ... in the Mediterranean and Egypt* (London, 1802), 355; *The Royal Standard and Loyal Political Register*, no. 7 (18 Feb. 1804), 111.
cultural identify of Gaelic Scotland. There was little inconsistency here and, it might be argued, that McLagan is prefiguring the unionist nationalism of the mid nineteenth century. Despite historiographical focus on Anglo-Scottish elites, the people most affected by the advance of a domineering Anglophone narrative were, unsurprisingly, first to respond to its challenges. And as McLagan’s song makes clear, they did this long before the appropriation of Highlandism by Scotland’s urban and literary elites. McLagan’s deep engagement with pan-British arguments and motifs was not, therefore, inconsequential. His Egypt song not only prefigures the politicization of Gaelic and Anglo-Scottish literature that was to follow, it points to a positive acknowledgement of imperial Britain that was rarely challenged – despite vigorous protests against the effects of internal colonialism in the region itself – late into the twentieth century.67

While largely unmentioned in analysis of Gaelic Scotland, the victory in Egypt was a crucial moment that was used by McLagan and others to draw the Gaelic literary imagination into a British sphere more completely than any previous event. Egypt was the missing link between the subjugation of the Gàidhealtachd in the eighteenth century and the troubling embrace of Britain’s “imperial mission” by Gaels in the nineteenth century. McLagan was not alone in this endeavor. Ailein Dall Dùghallach, Alastair MacFhionghain, and the Highland Society of London all celebrated the Gaelic role in the success in Egypt. But none were as politically profound and none had greater meaning than James McLagan.

The Song

67 McLeod, “Gaelic Poetry and the British Military Enterprise,” 61-76; Meek, Caran an t-Saoghal, 304-17.
'S an ochd ceud deug is bliadhna
'S am beuc na siantan àrd'
Tha gaoth an ear, air sgiathaibh,
Toirt sgeòil an Iar gun chàird;

Far aon tha cliûiteach is cianail
Gun thuit mór-thriath ’s an àr
D’ ar slòigh gun thuit na ciadan
Fa leth, laich fhial nan Gàidh’l.

Ma thuit, cha b’ ann gun deagh chliù
A dh’eug an laochraidh gharg;
Gun d’ aithnich rogh’ nan Saor-fhear\(^{68}\)
Gur garbh an gleus ’nam fearg:
Dhio-làraich iad gu léir-sgrios
Do-cheannsaich\(^{69}\) threu ’s an t-sealg

Is chuir am bratach bheudach
Mar chuimhn’ an euchd da ’n Alb’.

Is cha b’e cothrom Fèinne
A fhuair na tràin ’s a’ bhlàr:
O’n cùl is fo dhuibhribh oidhche

Do-cheannsaich thàin’ ’nan dàil;
’S cath-bhuidhne eil’ r’an aodainn
Bu leòr r’an claoiadh ’s an àr
Ach thionndaiddh is chuir gu maoim\(^{70}\) siud
’S am fuil a’ taom’ gu lèir.

\(^{68}\) *An Gàidheal* glosses saor-fhear as “Frangaich” (the French).

\(^{69}\) *An Gàidheal* glosses Do-cheannsaich as “Invincibles,” perhaps revealing the widespread acceptance of this terminology by the latter nineteenth century.

\(^{70}\) Stewart Collection: gu maoim; *An Gàidheal*: fo mhaoim.
25 Nuair⁷¹ shaoil Menou gun d’ aom iad
Chuir [e] marc-shluagh treun ’nan⁷² còir:
Eich Arabach luath leumnach
A dhèanadh euchd air thòir;
Dh’aith-bheòthaich Gàidheil ghleust’

30 Is chuir ’nan steud siud fòs;
Bha Breat’nàich uile treubhach
Ach sibhse treun thar glòir.

O’r feòdain⁷³ ghas a’ smùidrich
Bha frasa drùidhteach geur’;

35 Ur gunna-bhiodaga rùisgte
Mach air an druim ’nan steud;
Ur claidhmhnean sgaiteach lùthmhor
A’ snaigheadh smùis is fhéith;
Sin dhearbh nach sibh na lùb-fhir

40 Bha faoineas riu’ mu’n Rén.

Nì ’m bheil e ’n comas dhaoine
An tréine dol nas àird’
Na chaidh na Gàidheil bheumnach⁷⁴
An tìr na h-Éiphiit an tràth-s’:

45 An cliù a bha cho daor dhuibh
Mo dhòigh a chaoidh nach caill;
Bithidh⁷⁵ neart is cliù nam fraoch-bheann
Sìor-chur r’ur daoin’ is r’ur càil.

Leam-s’ duilich na fir chròdha
A bhith fò’n fhòd gun deò

⁷¹ S: N’air; G: Mar.
⁷² S: gu’n; G: ’nan.
⁷³ S: feadain; G: feòdain.
⁷⁴ S: ghleusda; G: bheumnach.
⁷⁵ S: Bithidh; G: Braidh.
Ro fhad o’n dílsibh brònach
Nach cluinn an glòir nas mò;
Ach is aoibhinn do na beòthaibh
Gun robh iad mòr ’nan lò
Nacht dèan iad tuilleadh gòraich
’S nach eug an glòir no ’n sògh.
Ge duilich leinn na dh’eug dhiubh
Tha ’n luaidheachd ceutach cinnt’
O thuit iad an deagh adhbh
’S gun d’fhàg luchd eucoir sint’;
An gealtach bás, cha chaomhain
Gu dian ged shraon o raing;
’S bithidh druim an eagail reubtadh
Ge fada leum na h-oillt.
Chan iongadh leinn ur diobhail
O iomnaigh dhian ur nàimh
A shaol, tro sgrios na Fiannachd
Gum fagta fiamhach cèach;
Ach mheall sibh tòr mì-rùin
Am miosgainn thug gu’n call
Is sgath sibh catha lòinnmhor
’Nan dòigh bha cinnt d’ur bàs.
O thug na Frangaich buaidh air
An fuigeall through bha an Gàul

76 S: luaidh ac’; G: luaidheachd.
77 S: gealtair; G: gealtach.
78 S: bithidh druim; G: braidh druinn.
79 S: Ged fada leim na h-oillt; G: Ge fad a léim ’na h-aoillt.
80 S: Cha b’; G: Chan.
81 S: miosgain; G: moisgain.
82 S: cinnt’; G: àithnt’.
An déis do Chaesar uaibreach
Am marbhadh, 'n ruag 's an cràdh;
Shaoil iad gum b’ ionnan cruas do
Shaor-Ghàidheil uasal Alb’
Bha ionnsaicht’, aonaicht’, cruadhaicht'
'S d’ an dùth sgor\(^{83}\)-bhuaidh ’nan colg.

Is sibh iarmad Iapheit ‘s Ghòmair
A ghluais o’n Tòr d’an Eòrp’;
Sliochd Choillteach, Ghàidheal Mhóir-thir
Is Ghàidheal-dònach\(^{84}\) cròdh’

Nach géilleadh do shluagh Ròimhe :-
Is Teutonaich thàin’ ’nur\(^{85}\) còir
A chuid a chuid le seòltachd
Is cha b’ ann le treòir cho mòr.

Na Lochlannaich thug ionnsaigh

Ar ceannsachadh gu tur
Le fomharachd\(^{86}\) is droch thionnsgnadh
Far aon air tràigh ’s air muir;
Ach uaidh thug Gàidheil dhoibh siud
Leo gus am b’ annsa sgur

Is bheir sibhse dearbh gach àm air
Gur sinne ’n clann chruaidh mhear.

Ar gaisg do dhùisg dhuinn mi-rùn

\(^{83}\) S: sior; G: scor.
\(^{84}\) The word Ghàidheal-dònach is glossed as “Gaels of the hills” in An Gàidheal.
\(^{85}\) S: na’r; G: n’ur.
\(^{86}\) For the various meanings of this term, see R. Ó Maolalaigh, “Mythnonyms in Scottish Gaelic: Fomóir, fomair, famhair, fuamhair(e), (‘giant’) and Related Forms,” Scottish Gaelic Studies 29 (2013): 172-243.
Egypt, Empire, and the Gaelic Literary Imagination

Nan Gotach fiata searbh;
Seadh, iarmad Ghàidh’l tha lionmh

100 A’ sath’87 ‘nar bian an calg;
Nis, ni ’m bheil Got a sgriobhas
Nach eil le miosgain’88 garg
Do nach’89 sop-reic ar riabadh
Thoirt fiach d’a farruisg bhor.

105 Ach choisinn giùlan laoch-mhór
Dhuibh meas ceud dhaoin’ thug fuath
D’ ur tir gun fhios cia ’n t-adhbhar
Mur h-e bhith daonnan cruaidh;
Is aithne d’ ur deagh righ sibh

110 Is d’a theaghlach riomhach suaire’;
Dhuibh chaoi dh chan easbuidh inbhe
Is sibh an tòir cho dian air buaidh.

Cha ghann dhuibh luchd aith-lionaidh
Is ur cìù cho cian is cho binn;

115 Bidh òig-fhir ghleusta dhiana
‘Gur n-iarradh ás gach beinn;
Tairngidh fuaim ur pioba
Na mìltean ás na glinn;
Bidh breacan is claidhmhnean lìomha

120 A’ dùsgadh miann gach linn.

O Abercromai chliùitich
Gur mòr ar tùirs’ ’ad dhéidh!
Gur mòr a chaill do dhùthaich
’Nad chleachd, ’nad iùil, is ’nad thrèin!

87 S: A’ sath; G: A shàth.
88 S: miosgain; G: mioscam.
89 Although both sources have this, it is likely faulty; “gach” may have been intended.
125  Do bhantrach is t’ òg-fhùrain
     Tha frosadh dìuth nan deur
     Ach is móir am meas is dùth dhoibh
     Air sgàth an fhìùbhaidh dh’eug!

     Ach Alasdair àigh Stiùbhairt
130  Is éibhinn leam-sa t’ euchd
     A stiùir na Gàidheil shunndach
     An còmhrag cliùiteach Éipht’;
     Ged thug aois is droch dhùthaich
     Dhiom slàinte, lùths is gleus,
135  Chaoidh, leanaidh mo dheagh⁹⁰ rùn sibh
     ’S is beath’ bhur cliù do m’ chré.

     Nis, saoghal fad’ is soirbheas
     Do ghaisgich gharg nan Gàidh’l
     A dhìonadh còir na h-Alba
140  Is a chosgadh buirb nan nàmh;
     A bhuannaich sith is sealbh dhuinn
     Air chuantaibh garbh ’s air tràigh
     Gum mair ar reachd is co-dhealbhadh⁹¹
     Fo righ math, soirbh ’s gach àl.

145  Bu dian a ruith air aimhleas e
     A thionndaídheadh⁹² á’n tir
     Ar⁹³ cinneadh dileas lìamh-làidir
     Tre ghionach[d] [is] saidhbreas chrion;
     Is có a choimhdeadh dhoibh-sin siud

⁹⁰ S: mo cheud; G: mo dheagh.
⁹¹ An Gàidheal glosses Coi-dhealbhadh as “Constitution.”
     Sinclair adds, “fundamental laws of government.”
⁹² S: aimhleas neach a thionndaídheadh a’n tir; G: aimhleas e
     a thionndaídheadh an Tìr.
⁹³ S: Ar; G: Bhur.
(1-8) In [the year] 1801, in which the elements howled, the east winds quickly carried a tale of the west on its wings that is both celebratory and sad, that the great lord fell in the battle; hundreds of our own troops fell as individuals, the goodly heroes of the Gaels.

(9-16) If they did [fall], the fierce battalion did not die without [achieving] great repute; the select troops recognized that their manner was rough in their aggression; they wiped out the brave Invincibles to the point of annihilation in the chase and their bellicose banner was selected as a memorial in Scotland of their exploits.
(17-24) The brave men did not get fair play in the battlefield: the Invincibles met them from behind under the dark cover of night; with another regiment before them, there was plenty for them to subdue in the battle but they turned around and routed them, with their blood gushing to the ground.

(25-32) When Menou thought that they had been defeated, he sent cavalry to them: swift, galloping, Arabic steeds that would excel in pursuit; that revived the expert Gaels and set them in motion again; all of the Britons were valorous, but you [Gaels] were courageous beyond words.

(33-40) From your grey, discharging muskets came sharp, penetrating volleys; your bared bayonets were on the ridge like a wave; your swift, biting blades were slicing marrow and sinew; that is what demonstrated that you are not pliant men, the Rhine posed no great challenge for them.

(41-48) It is not humanly possible to summon greater bravery than that of the walloping Gaels who are now in the land of Egypt: they bought their reputation dearly, I am confident it will never be lost; the strength and reputation of the heathery mountains will always enhance your people and your well-being.

(49-56) I am sad that the valiant men are under the sod, with no breath of life, too far away from their sorrowful friends who will no longer hear their clamour; but it brings joy to those who live that they were great in their day and that they will engage in no more folly, and that their glory and their grandeur will never die.

(57-64) Although we are sad about those of them who died, their reward is wonderful and certain since they fell in a good
cause and they left the evil-doers stretched out [dead]; death will not spare the coward, even if he has swiftly dodged the blade; the back of the coward will be cleft even if [his] leap of fear is long.

(65-72) We are not surprised about the harm on you from the intense attack of your enemy who thought, that through the destruction of the “Fenian” warriors that the rest would be cowered; but you outwitted the artifices of their malice, the enmity that brought them to destruction, and you have ruined many troops who were certain of your death.

(73-80) Since the Franks conquered the pitiful remnant who were left in Gaul, after proud Caesar murdered, routed and oppressed them, they assumed that they would create a similar hardship for the free and noble Gaels of Scotland who were trained, united and toughened-up, who were heir to rough-victory in their blades.

(81-88) You are the successors of Japhet and Gomer who relocated from the Tower [of Babel] to Europe; the lineage of the Gaels of the continent, and of the brave Gaels of the mountains, are a lineage of forest people who would never yield to the people of Rome: [nor to] Teutons who impinged upon you with cunning, bit by bit, rather than with overwhelming power.

(89-96) The Norse attempted to conquer us completely with naval-force and evil devices on both land and sea; but the Gaels returned it to them until they preferred to desist [from violence] and you will always demonstrate that we are the tough, high-spirited people.

(97-104) Our heroism has aroused the malice of the fierce, bitter Goths; aye, the barb is being thrust into our skin, the
numerous successors of the Gaels; now, there is not a Goth who writes [about us] without ill-intent to tear us apart for their own profit and to draw attention to their nasty rubbish.

(105-112) But [your] heroic behavior has earned you the respect of hundreds of people who had learned to hate your country without understanding the reason, if it was not just to be perpetually condemnatory; and your excellent king and his illustrious, civilised family has come to know you; you will never lack rank while you pursue victory so hotly.

(113-120) There is no shortage of people who will take your place, while your reputation is so sweet and lasting; well-trained and keen young men will seek you out from every mountain side; the sound of your bagpipes will draw thousands from the glens; the kilt and sharpened swords will inspire the ambition of every [coming] generation.

(121-128) O, renowned Abercromby, we mourn greatly after you! Your example, leadership and strength is a great loss to your country! Your widow and your young heirs are shedding tears copiously but they inherit great respect on account of the warrior who died!

(129-136) But lucky Alexander Stewart, your success in leading the energetic Gaels in the famous battle of Egypt gives me joy; although old age and [living in] a difficult country has drained me of my health, strength and ability, my good wishes will always follow you and your honour is life to my body.

(137-144) Now, [I wish] a long life and success to the rough warriors of the Gaels to defend Scotland’s honour and to check the barbarity of the enemies; they have won peace and prosperity for us on rough seas and on land; may our laws and
constitution endure under a good king, successful in every generation.

(145-152) He [the king] keenly strives against those who would drive our faithful, strong-handed people from their land through greed and miserliness; who could protect that [land] for them without kinsfolk, [who are] their shield? It gives Bonaparte joy that they [Gaels] are emigrating across the western ocean.

(153-160) After toil and tribulations, is it pleasant [to enjoy] contentment and peace, honour from goodly people and a warm welcome from kinsfolk; but where can I find the means to express the contentment of the maidens who have been in love with you since their tender youth and are now breathless with joy?

(161-168) Although you are now far from me in a foreign land, you have my eternal well-wishes; may you have the protection of High King [God] defending you from harm and injury; it gives me joy to get good news of you, even if I am decrepit and frail; but if I am a grey-haired Ossian, I am in good spirits, “May my Fenian-band live forever.”
The Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid spent much of his long life (1892-1978) fighting against various forces in society with which he disagreed. He was, to use Bob Purdie’s phrase, a man in constant revolt’. 1 Christopher Murray Grieve (MacDiarmid’s real name) returned from Salonika (modern-day Thessaloniki in Greece) after World War One, where he had served in the Royal Army Medical Corps as a sergeant. It could be argued he had become a young man with a militaristic plan for his life as an artist, and he continued to see his work in such terms later on in life, as always fighting against an enemy. From the early 1920s onwards he dedicated himself completely to a programme of the intellectual and artistic revival of Scots, Scottish literature and Scotland, but even before that he was politically active from at least 1908, when he joined the Independent Labour Party. Therefore for MacDiarmid, politics and poetry were intertwined from a young age. However, he ‘was bad at politics, he lacked patience and awareness of how other people thought, he alienated potential allies and he did not explain himself effectively’. 2 Only this paradox can explain why he was at certain points in his life an admirer of Italian fascism, a Social Credit Douglasite, a major member of the militaristic nationalist group ‘Clann Albain’, a Scottish Nationalist, and a Communist, amongst other things.

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MacDiarmid published articles, ‘Plea for Scottish Fascism’ and ‘At the Sign of the Thistle. Programme for a Scottish Fascism’ in *The Scottish Nation* in 1923, extolling the virtues of the new arrival of fascism in Italy, arguing for it to be transplanted to Scotland in particular regard to ‘agrarian policy’ which boiled down to ‘the maxim, *the land for those who work it*’.\(^3\) In addition, he spent much of the 1920s and 1930s advocating Douglasite ideas that had been ignited by his association with A.R. Orage’s politico-economical literary magazine *The New Age*. At their best these tenets were an attempt to get rid of long working hours and increase leisure time and thus expand human potential. However, based on the central concept that private banking had to be abolished, they led into dark territory where Jewish business people and usury were conflated, resulting in a particularly nasty strain of anti-Semitism, which did permeate the imagery of MacDiarmid’s poetry at the time. MacDiarmid continued using ambivalent references to anti-Semitism and Nazism until the early 1930s, as Hitler was coming to power in Germany.

Of course, scholars and critics have criticised him for this at times dangerous take on politics. Perhaps the most authoritative denunciation of MacDiarmid’s aberrant politics is Douglas Dunn’s 1980 article ‘Inhuman Splendours’ where Dunn maintains that ‘there is no virtue in being where extremes meet when these are, politically, MacDiarmid’s Fascism of 1923, his alarming use of Nazi cultural ciphers in the 1930s, his sometimes racist Nationalism, and his Stalinism’.\(^4\) Celebrity historian Neil Oliver did not help matters or bring us any greater understanding when in his 2009 book *A History of Scotland* he wrote of MacDiarmid as a ‘wild-haired, chauvinist

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English-hater’ but also claimed that his early 1920s call for fascism in Scotland ‘cast such a dark and disproportionately large shadow’ over the Scottish nationalist cause. Against such claims of fascism we could quote the title of the first proposed publication of the ‘Hugh MacDiarmid Book Club’ in the mid-1930s: *Scotland and the Question of a Popular Front against Fascism and War* or MacDiarmid’s own claim that he was ‘absolutely anti-fascist [and] anti-imperialist’. Scott Lyall writes that from the mid-1930s onwards ‘MacDiarmid’s communism hardened […] in opposition to the rise of European fascism’ and Owen Dudley Edwards surely has a point when he observes that MacDiarmid’s real target was always Scotland. Indeed, when it comes to discussions of MacDiarmid’s ideology Bob Purdie notes that a ‘great deal more historical context is necessary’ before making such flimsy and sweeping claims. Many of MacDiarmid’s political

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beliefs, both positive and misguided, originate from his ‘desire for a better way of living […] the given world was never to be merely accepted and used, but celebrated and criticised, built upon or demolished’. As such, beyond MacDiarmid’s most aggressive and seemingly misanthropic pronouncements lies a sense of the sacredness of life on earth and a protectiveness of the rights of ordinary people.

Arguably the most disturbing lurch towards the Right that MacDiarmid’s writing took was in 1931, when favourably reviewing Wyndham Lewis’s Hitler, in The Modern Scot. MacDiarmid was thinking about the Scottish militaristic organisation Clann Albaín, which ‘resembles the Fascist movement’ in his review, pointing out that ‘class consciousness is anathema to them [Fascists], and in contradistinction to it they set up the principle of race-consciousness […] white supremacy’. On the evidence of a few isolated pronouncements such as these, some modern revisionist historians such as Neil Oliver and Gavin Bowd feel justified in labelling MacDiarmid a crypto, if not outright, fascist. However, in the most extensive engagement with MacDiarmid’s various political permutations, Bob Purdie’s 2014 Black, Green, Red and Tartan, the author states emphatically that ‘he was never a fascist’. Even Tony Milligan in trying to demonstrate how deeply steeped in ‘right-wing prejudice’ the early Scottish Nationalism was in the 1920s, he states that MacDiarmid invoked fascism with ‘little

12 Bowd, Fascist Scotland, 133-134.
13 Purdie, Hugh MacDiarmid, viii.
notion of what fascism actually was’. Scott Lyall instead opts for a middle-road between these two camps where Purdie ‘ignores MacDiarmid’s later comments in relation to National Socialism in the 1930s, just as Gavin Bowd overstates any ostensible connection between war-time Scottish Nationalism and Nazism’. As the remarks made by MacDiarmid himself above show, he was for a short time engaging with ideas drawn directly from National Socialist ideology. But simply because a man well-known for wide, voracious and sometimes plagiaristic reading was airing such views in the early 1930s, long before the war, does not mean that he bought into National Socialism wholesale, and certainly not Nazism as we understand it today. By 1938, MacDiarmid had vehemently rejected German fascism when he wrote ‘When the Gangs Came to London’, an unpublished poem that was only discovered in 1999 amongst the literary papers of Catherine Carswell by researcher Margery Palmer McCulloch. This polemical, ardently anti-appeasement poem sets the tone for much of MacDiarmid’s World War Two poetry discussed in this article. It takes aim at ‘this Brummagem “peace-/maker”’, then Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, for attempting to appease Hitler by allowing the annexation of Czechoslovakia. MacDiarmid blames Chamberlain for easily sacrificing the ‘hard-won liberties of a thousand years / on the altar of fascist violence’. Although the poem builds in rhetorical crescendo, it ends with a bathetic insult: ‘Even littler / Than Hitler! / The rat

By this point MacDiarmid was publically declaring that ‘he hated fascism wherever he found it’. However, the issue is that MacDiarmid’s ire was not primarily aimed at Germany, which he confided in a letter to George Campbell Hay was such a thanatic force that it could not prevail. He was also finding evidence of fascism in England: ‘we are told we are fighting against Fascism but all the time English Fascism is shackling itself on us’. We must be clear here that MacDiardmid’s blinding hatred is not of the English people, but of English imperialism and of government: in a 1942 speech delivered at a demonstration in Glasgow, he claimed that ‘Scotland is a working class country and can best help the working class of England and the world by taking control of her own country to attain a decent standard of life and security for all within it’. This has subsequently led to MacDiarmid being accused of ‘downplaying’ if not a ‘downright denial of the threat emanating from Berlin’.

This article is the first in-depth discussion of MacDiarmid’s World War Two poems, which were found by MacDiarmid scholar John Manson in an archive amassed by the rare book dealers and publishers Kulgin Duval and Colin Hamilton. The archive was originally offered to Edinburgh University Library for free on the condition that the University create a professorship in MacDiarmid’s name. After Edinburgh University’s refusal to do so, the archive was sold to the National Library of Scotland. The poems within the archive

17 Bowd, Fascist Scotland, 174.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid, 131.
caused much media controversy when they were published in book form in 2003 under the title *The Revolutionary Art of the Future*, for example in *The Herald*, which carried the headline ‘Why MacDiarmid welcomed the London Blitz’. These poems are little discussed by scholars even today with the exception of Scott Lyall’s *Hugh MacDiarmid’s Poetry and Politics of Place* (2006) which only devotes a couple of pages to their analysis. They have caused much confusion and are invariably taken as evidence of a crazed mind that is ‘insanely murderous, utterly callous and politically inept’, calling for London to be bombed by the Germans and glorying in the prospect of the decline of the West. Lesley Duncan, in another sensationalist article for *The Herald*, remarked on the poems’ power to disconcert, even now, and they do provoke visceral reactions, especially if the reader is English and feels personally attacked. To try and defend these poems would be foolhardy and misguided but it would also be a great mistake to dismiss them as mere misanthropic doggerel: they demand a response, they are calculated to provoke and challenge political stasis.

There are two key aspects to bear in mind when approaching these poems: that MacDiarmid was working by this point from the assumption that German fascism was doomed, that Nazism was an ideology shot through with such a self-destructive death-wish that it could not win out and that these poems are part of MacDiarmid’s continued fight against

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‘a capitalist society that ceaselessly creates the conditions for war and limits the educational opportunities of those who will fight and be killed in them as so much cannon-fodder’.\(^{24}\) His primary concern, as we have seen, lies with the working classes and his Modernist belief that they deserve to get a life worth having, which is continually denied to them by political systems of privilege and power. In writing about MacDiarmid’s letters, Alan Riach argues that in periods of political darkness, MacDiarmid saw the job of the poet as one of the most serious roles in society, that ‘the unacknowledged legislators have far greater constituencies than the acknowledged’.\(^{25}\) This is because the constituencies of a poet can extend beyond their own lifetime and one of the key concepts in MacDiarmid’s work is his address to future generations, which we will return to. At the front of MacDiarmid’s mind at all times were ‘the cultural questions, the language and literary questions that [will be] the decisive factor in the national regeneration’ after the war.\(^{26}\) For Scott Lyall, MacDiarmid’s aim by ‘rebelling against established institutions and received ideas of all kinds’\(^{27}\) was to achieve a ‘new cultural topography’ in Scotland.\(^{28}\)

MacDiarmid’s poetry of this era is directly polemical, incendiary and shocking and it should be considered in the

\(^{24}\) Lyall, *Hugh MacDiarmid’s Poetry and Politics of Place*, 29 & 188.


\(^{28}\) Lyall, *Hugh MacDiarmid’s Poetry and Politics of Place*, 5.
context of MacDiarmid acting, in the words of Lyall, as a ‘cultural worker’ whose primary interest is in ‘the evolution of humanity’. Put another way, these poems are a consistent addition to MacDiarmid’s body of work in that they are marked with what Alan Massey has termed MacDiarmid’s ‘quasi-paternal’ protectiveness of core values and that MacDiarmid is willing here to ‘savagely’ counter-attack ‘those he has identified as injurers’ of his vision of what the world could and should be. One way of beginning to understand these poems could be found in the writings of MacDiarmid’s friend Fionn Mac Colla, who compared Nazism with the Reformation in Scotland in his 1967 philosophical polemic At the Sign of the Clenched Fist: ‘the colossal non-sequitur in the suggestion made to us that because […] the morals of the pre-Reformation clergy were bad, therefore the doctrines of the Reformers were true?’. As such, we see Nazism in a binary context as representing absolute evil and the winning side, the Allies, as absolute good. We read MacDiarmid’s poems in this binary light as well, with no time for any suggestion of the failings of England. MacDiarmid himself, let us not forget, was writing in this binary way, the alarming subtext of all of these poems being his mistaken belief that salvation might lie in Stalinism. Although a poem such as ‘Of the Cheka’s Horrors’ acknowledges the monstrous crimes of the Soviet secret police, it seems to insist on pursuing the Bolshevik line simply out of perversity and freedom of expression, something ironically suppressed under such a regime:

29 Lyall, ‘MacDiarmid, Communism and the Poetry of Commitment’, 76.
31 Fionn Mac Colla, At the Sign of the Clenched Fist (Edinburgh: M. Macdonald, 1967), 53.
Yes. They are murderers and thieves.

[...]
Then I can’t as a Bolshevik pass?
That’s just why I am, you ass!
Can’t one have one’s likes and dislikes
In theft and murder as well[...].

Peter Porter has praised these poems as being the work of ‘an argumentative poet [...] a poet of ideas’ whose real aim is to shock us out of complacency and the received line, or to ‘shake the masses of our people out of their indifferatism’, even in profound disagreement. These poems are more important than has been previously thought because they were some of MacDiarmid’s last original poetic efforts: the bulk of work he published after World War Two was the result of his most sustained period of creativity on Whalsay, Shetland, during the 1930s, or else it was additions to longer poems such as In Memoriam James Joyce (1955) and The Kind of Poetry I Want (1961). It is also worth remembering that by this point MacDiarmid was an impoverished and marginal figure in Scottish cultural and political life and that, judging by the incendiary content of these poems, it is unlikely that they would ever have been published. If they were, it is unlikely that they would have been in any way influential on the thinking of MacDiarmid’s co-patriots. It may seem paradoxical that at a

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34 Purdie, Hugh MacDiarmid, 15.
time when MacDiarmid was calling for ‘giantism in the arts’, he was also returning to his journalistic roots by writing in note-book form short, topical poetry on the themes of imperialism, tyranny and freedom. Bob Purdie reminds us that MacDiarmid saw the war as representing a fall of the world’s great imperial superpowers, presenting ‘an opportunity for Scotland to emerge from stagnation and to reassert its status as an independent European nation’ and that this came from his utopianism and his innate sense of optimism. In this light, MacDiarmid needed to write belligerent verse, drawing on facts, figures and newspaper reports, to project his anti-war stance, even if at times this engendered alarming stances or results. For instance, in ‘Surely It Were Better’ the reader is hit with one of MacDiarmid’s most infamous rhetorical questions:

Is a Mussolini or a Hitler
Worse than a Bevin or a Morrison
– At least the former proclaim their foul purposes
The latter practise what their words disown.

As John Manson points out, there is an unpublished chapter of MacDiarmid’s sprawling 1943 ‘autobiography’ Lucky Poet which deals with his frustration of the official language of his times, how he considered it little more than ‘propaganda, craven euphemism, panglossing, bombast, semantic blank-fire’. Although some of these criticisms could easily be applied to MacDiarmid’s own writing, it does show us that he

36 Purdie, Hugh MacDiarmid, 22.
37 MacDiarmid, ‘Surely It Were Better’ in The Revolutionary Art, 50.
was trying to achieve a new register or utterance in his poetry. Paul Addison supports this view by claiming that even in left-wing circles at the time, the parlance of political writing and opinion was ‘decidedly woolly’. MacDiarmid had little time for the often public-school educated English left-wing poets who belonged to the ‘Pylon school’. He was particularly caustic in his assessment of W. H. Auden as a ‘complete washout’ for ‘saving his bacon’ by moving to America during World War Two, while poets such as MacDiarmid stayed and played their part in the war effort.

That said, in many ways ‘Surely It Were Better’ is an extreme example of the disillusionment captured in Cecil Day Lewis’s oft-quoted 1943 poem ‘Where are the War Poets?’:

It is the logic of our times,
No subject for immortal verse –
That we who lived by honest dreams
Defend the bad against the worse.

Also, both Ernest Bevin and Herbert Morrison, wartime Ministers of Labour and Supply respectively, were not entirely uncontroversial figures themselves. Here MacDiarmid attacks their forced conscription of Scottish men and women, who were often moved into unsympathetic work in the South of England, far away from their families. MacDiarmid’s stance is similar to that of the Scottish nationalist politician-poet Douglas Young who effectively martyred himself to two terms

in prison for a cause, to show that according to his understanding of the repeated breaking of the terms of the Treaty of Union 1707, the English government had no right to force the Scottish people into the war effort.

The contexts of these poems, both personal and national, are crucial. MacDiarmid himself was nearly fifty when he found ‘the meshes of National service closing over me’. Unlike Young, who refused both counts of military and industrial conscription, MacDiarmid seems to have accepted his fate out of sheer poverty. He left Whalsay for the last time and found himself in the Scotstoun, Clydeside area of Glasgow, working long, tiring and dangerous days in the Copper Shell-Band Section of Mechan’s Engineering Company where he was seriously injured in two industrial accidents. He was then transferred to the Merchant Service where he worked on and off fleet-ships in Greenock as a postal officer. That MacDiarmid was nearly entirely unsuited to this line of work almost seems to be the point. In a letter from his wife, Valda, in 1942 she commiserates ‘It doesn’t look as if you’re going to get much time for your work, which is the main thing’. It is conceivable that his conscription was an attempt to break his spirit and silence him creatively. Certainly, MacDiarmid was thought of as a sufficiently subversive figure to be watched and monitored by MI5 as early as 1931 and the very existence of these poems is testament to his intellectual

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42 MacDiarmid, New Selected Letters (Manchester, Carcanet), 199-200.
resilience. Angus Calder, strangely enough in *The People's War*, a book all about debunking received myths of the war, makes the mistake of describing MacDiarmid’s wartime work as an act of ‘personal immolation’, as if he went of his own volition.\(^{45}\) In fact, without the intervention of MacDiarmid’s poet-friend Helen Cruickshank, who was by this time well-connected in the Civil Service, he would have ended up working as a road-mender. It is hard to imagine his middle-class Modernist contemporaries such as T. S. Eliot, Basil Bunting or Ezra Pound being forced to undertake such menial work.

One of the most controversial of MacDiarmid’s war poems is the sensationally-titled ‘On the Imminent Destruction of London, June 1940.’ The received notion, propagated as we have seen by writers like Neil Oliver is of MacDiarmid during this era as an Anglophobe taking bludgeoning swipes at the Establishment and England from a Scottish nationalist margin. This is difficult to gainsay, but there is more to this poem than mere murderous rage. Even considering that this poem predates the Blitz, the opening lines are designed to shake us out of any conventional attitude towards violence and destruction:

> Now when London is threatened  
> With devastation from the air  
> I realise, horror atrophying in me,  
> That I hardly care.\(^{46}\)

On the surface this seems blunt and callous, but there is a lot going on here. The moment of ‘horror’ connects this poem to a canon of poems that treat London as a place of spiritual


despair, physical disease and suffering, such as William Blake’s ‘London.’ The speaker is saying that his sense of horror is beginning to wane, not that he is totally without a capacity of experiencing horror. The numbing to a continual onslaught of horror is well-known to happen in times of intense fighting or conflict. The following stanzas operate as a thought-process, rationalising why London above all places should be bombed. Our primary reaction of shock needs to be countered by sensitivity, as if MacDiarmid was deliberately testing our capacity for reason and sensitive apprehension, in the face of the attack, not only of what is depicted but his own reported attitude to it:

For if any further place as is inevitable
Must in this way be burst asunder, burned, and lost
It may as well be London as any
- Nay, London far better than most.

Other places may be blasted to bits
And it simply does not matter.
But London, London, what countless shackles
Must with its shattering shatter!

This poem is trying to persuade us of MacDiarmid’s fears, of London representing the stronghold of English imperialism and the need for a society where power is devolved to nations such as Scotland, but it is not calling for war or bombing, nor is it revelling in bloodshed or destruction. Conversely it appears to be a call against war. It says that unless the great cities of imperialism are destroyed, war will continue, because small places simply do not matter to those in power. MacDiarmid’s ‘amanuensis’ on Whalsay, Henry Grant Taylor, captures the humanist dilemma that the poet faced by both

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47 Grieve; Manson, & Riach, ‘Introduction’, xi.
being exhilarated by the impending collapse of imperialism and empire and horrified by an awareness of the deaths of innocent people: ‘when the Blitzkrieg started the poet was rather delighted […] he thought the old order was being smashed up’, however this was quickly offset by his fear that ‘the war can only make for a bestial submergence and perhaps final dissolution of all decent values’. MacDiarmid saw the leading empires of the world as being based on excessive wealth generated by excessive violence, and his desire to do away with this was in many ways an extension of his Douglasite utopianism. He saw their destruction as being the means by which people could be liberated from oppression. Peter McCarey has written that in the case of both World War One and Two, MacDiarmid believed that there was a choice to be made between ‘status quo or the apocalypse […] Hugh MacDiarmid, of course […] plumped for the apocalypse.’

In the bombing of London, MacDiarmid foresees two oppressive regimes exhausting themselves. He does not want to see London reduced to rubble: he wants to shock people into an awareness of the possibility of it happening if affairs continue unchanged. While it is well-documented that MacDiarmid enjoyed the pre-War artistic and bohemian company and pub-life in London, here he views it as the capital of an empire that has marginalised and persecuted Scotland and the rest of the world. There are many occasions in MacDiarmid’s letters particularly where he expresses, alongside Sorley MacLean’s opposition to fascism, an equal or even greater resistance to the British bourgeoisie:

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I note what you say about the War but do not agree although the Germans are appalling enough and in a short-time view more murderously destructive, they cannot win – but the French and British bourgeoisie can, and is a far greater enemy. If the Germans win they could not hold their gain long – but if the French and the English bourgeoisie win it will be infinitely more difficult to get rid of them later.\footnote{Hugh MacDiarmid, ‘Letter to Sorley MacLean, 5/6/40’, in \textit{The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid}, ed. by Alan Bold (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1984), 611.}

This prompted the critic Gavin Bowd to state that MacDiarmid’s ‘anti-Englishness and anti-Imperialism’ led ‘to a downplaying, if not downright denial, of the threat emanating from Berlin.’\footnote{Bowd, \textit{Fascist Scotland}, 160.} However, such a claim is highly problematic. Douglas Dunn suggested that MacDiarmid looks like ‘an armchair fuhrer’\footnote{Dunn, ‘Inhuman Splendours’, 20.} and Neal Asherson’s stance is that he was ‘a racist […] it is perfectly clear that he thought that heredity could determine national culture.’\footnote{Neal Asherson, ‘MacDiarmid and Politics’, in \textit{The Age of MacDiarmid: Essays on Hugh MacDiarmid and His Influence on Contemporary Scotland}, ed. by A. C. Davis & P. H. Scott (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company, 1980), 233.} But we must look again at MacDiarmid’s own words, and more recent criticism. Despite intemperate pronouncements by MacDiarmid himself, Bob Purdie finds that MacDiarmid ‘subtly distanced himself from this blood and soil rhetoric’ of other Scottish nationalists such as Lewis Spence and felt that under war conditions ‘racial antipathies had flared up from time to time’ yet he remained
'as open to the English as any other friends.' 55 Behind MacDiarmid’s surface pose of ‘Anglophobia’ lies a much more considered stance of resistance to the super-structures of governments, the military, and economic power. Despite MacDiarmid’s early, mistaken calls for ‘race-consciousness’, by this point, his war is not based on race, but on systems and structures of government. He was willing to risk, as he wrote in a letter to Roland Muirhead in 1928, becoming an unpopular fighter, if that meant being an enemy of accepted things as they were. 56 Against accusations of narrow and isolationist nationalism, MacDiarmid – using the pseudonym Arthur Leslie – wrote that he believed that while he concentrated on ‘his own immediate neighbourhood’, his ‘comrades’ in other nations would do likewise and produce an era of ‘integrated communism.’ 57 As has already been pointed out, the primary issue we should be confronting is the fact that MacDiarmid seemed so uncritical of communism and Stalinism, not the erroneous idea that he was by this point a supporter of fascism. By 1949, his pronouncements saw him included in George Orwell’s list for British Intelligence of suspected communist sympathisers and his single most controversial political action was to re-join the Communist Party in 1956 after the bloody Hungarian Revolution of that year in which the world began to understand the great potential brutality of communist regimes.

One of MacDiarmid’s later poems, ‘Aberfan and Viet-Nam’, dating from 1966, shows us that he was not blind to the global humanitarian crisis, and intended to shock people out of

55 Purdie, Hugh MacDiarmid, 65.
sorrow and into indignation and action. However, the poem is also motivated by MacDiarmid’s communist tenets, as it shows one superpower (the USA) in a much more negative light than pro-communist North Vietnam:

- The disaster that befell  
The children of Aberfan  
Is nothing compared with Viet-Nam’s  
Where there’s an Aberfan every day  
- Is that nothing to you,  
All people who could stop  
This insensate and bestial war  
In a moment if with one voice  
You condemned its perpetrators?58

MacDiarmid uses the local here as a means of shocking us out of cultural myopia. Likewise, his poems about World War Two, written largely before the Blitz and before a global awareness of the Holocaust, are rhetorical attempts to make his readers more aware of the neglected and wasted local potential in the midst of global conflict. The violence advocated in these poems is rhetorical hyperbole, intended to jolt the reader into thinking independently. The crucial difference between the disaster in Aberfan and Vietnam in MacDiarmid’s eyes is that, while innocent and ordinary people suffer in both, the latter was a direct result of military aggression and political imperialism.

Throughout his poetry from ‘The Eemis Stane’ onwards, MacDiarmid returned to the image of the war memorial or the gravestone. The grave or memorial is the focal point in poems such as ‘The Skeleton of the Future’, ‘Five Minutes Silence’, ‘At My Father’s Grave’, ‘At the Grave of

William Livingston’ as well as ‘At the Cenotaph’ and ‘The War Memorial’. MacDiarmid’s repeated message has been to not waste time, money and energy on the dead, or to repeat the mistakes of the dead, but to unlock the potential of the living:

We knew them – queer that side by side in the ranks
The immortal heroes alone should all have been slain
And only the worthless, the unemployables, the scum
Like us spared to come home again.

Spared to come home and appreciate to the full
The services our fallen comrades gave.
A country fit for heroes to live in. Certainly
It takes a lot less courage to lie in the grave.59

Written from the perspective of the poet’s own wartime hardship, the speaker is not repudiating the heroism of the fallen or undermining their humanity, instead he is objecting to the posthumous propagandistic exploitation of their names, actions, bodies and lives. In fact, what MacDiarmid appears to imply here with the line ‘It takes a lot less courage to lie in the grave’ is that, as an atheist, he sees death as merely the curtailment of suffering. You have to be alive in order to suffer and MacDiarmid’s argument is that for the very poorest, in particular the Scottish working classes, it takes a great deal of courage to compel yourself to go on living in such uncaring times. Despite the poem having MacDiarmid’s trademark haranguing tone, it is worth noting that he sides with the ‘scum’ and not the ‘immortal heroes’. Joan Littlewood’s 1941 remark to MacDiarmid in a letter that ‘others are singing “Roll out the Barrel” in air-raid shelters, saying that now is not the time for

propaganda – we feel such behaviour is insulting,’\textsuperscript{60} implies that for all of the shock and visceral emotion, of what David Goldie calls MacDiarmid’s ‘spleenetic’ wartime anger, these poems are radically different from the vaudevillian sing-song and ‘keep calm and carry on’ government propaganda.\textsuperscript{61} They could be taken as misanthropic or anti-democratic, yet MacDiarmid might defend his anti-democratic stance as being against those ‘pre-conditioned by mass media’ and ‘subject to hidden persuaders.’\textsuperscript{62} In fact, these poems dramatise the poet’s frustration with ‘ordinary lives’ precisely because he ‘wants no life to be ordinary’, the ‘objective is to change human nature’ for the better.\textsuperscript{63}

Hamish Henderson has described MacDiarmid’s war poems as the actions of a social surgeon cutting away ‘the rotten flesh of contemporary society’ with his ‘draconian surgery.’\textsuperscript{64} In \textit{Lucky Poet}, MacDiarmid indeed stated that his task during the war was to ‘dream of creating a poetry which will operate on mankind.’\textsuperscript{65} Similarly, in a late interview captured in Oscar Marzaroli’s 1972 documentary \textit{No Fellow Travellers}, MacDiarmid can be heard admitting that his work


\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ibid}.


\textsuperscript{65} Hugh MacDiarmid, \textit{Lucky Poet: A Self Study in Literature and Political Ideas} (London: Methuen, 1943), 407.
was always written with a future, more technologically advanced society in mind. In this light we can turn once more to ‘On the Imminent Bombing of London’ and read the line ‘London is like a foul disease’ not as an attack on ordinary people at all, not an attack on human life, but a clarion call to be aware of imperialist ideology, of how it stifles human potential for its own advancement, and of how this is represented in the industrial and post-industrial phenomenon of ‘the city’.

Another poem that attacks the convention of commemorating the war dead is ‘from Five Minutes Silence’. Here, MacDiarmid uses the minutes to argue what he thinks this solemn silence really represents. The poem closes with the speaker thinking about those who have died and those who have returned from World War Two, and the poet casts his mind back to his own military experience as well:

And I remember how I too
A quarter of a century ago
Became one man in a similar horde
Not because I was valiant and brave
And full of faith in my action
But carelessly, helplessly until I hoped to be killed
In order that I would no longer
Have to suffer the intolerable sense
Of shame for being a man,
One billionth part of what was called
‘The Civilised West.’

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66 Oscar Marzaroli (dir.), No Fellow Travellers (Films of Scotland and the Scottish Film Board, 1972).
67 MacDiarmid, Lucky Poet, 407.
The speaker bears the guilt of survival, in a complex anger at the society that engendered the war itself. Alan Bold is correct to say that at the heart of MacDiarmid’s most politically uncompromising poems lies the urge to be at war ‘with misery’ and the political super-structures and regimes that make and prolong human suffering. MacDiarmid despairs of the fact that the ‘Civilised West’ has been at war since before any living memory, but still the poem is not purely fatalistic. Rather, it acts to stir the reader out of mere acceptance of the world covered ‘in marching men.’ The speaker seems to be addressing a new generation, in what might indeed be described as a ‘quasi-paternal’ way, to move them to reject old political and martial systems of governance. If there is one major, consistent thread to be found throughout MacDiarmid’s work, it is the commitment to fighting for ideals most pithily and memorably put across in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*:

A Scottish poet maun assume  
The burden o’ his people’s doom  
And dee to brak their livin’ tomb.  

Both Douglas Dunn and Margery McCulloch have found, in varying degrees, a ‘reforming, missionary’ voice as well as a ‘totalitarian’ search ‘for sheep to lead’. McCulloch is nearer

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71 Catherine Lockerbie, ‘Poet who saw through the life of “peace in our time”’ in *The Scotsman* (25/11/1999), 3.
the mark in saying that MacDiarmid did want to influence his social surroundings through his work, but the idea that he was looking for recruits to proselytise seems unlikely, considering that so many of his poems are about the lone outrider poet commenting on society from its margins. As we saw in ‘The War Memorial’, the closest MacDiarmid comes to belonging to a group is aligning himself with the undesirable ‘scum’ that survived World War One. It is reminiscent of John Berger’s claim that ‘solidarity’ is something that only has a valid context in hell and not heaven. As Alan Riach points out, while MacDiarmid had some followers, he did not ‘rule over a whole cultural scene’ and his years on Whalsay show how vulnerable he was at that time. It is only since his death and the publication of his unpublished work, a biography and his letters, that it appears MacDiarmid was a towering figure.

However, even if MacDiarmid is aiming his ire at the British Empire in these poems, the problem of the much greater threat of fascism remains. To a modern reader with a panoramic view of the horrific events of World War Two, MacDiarmid’s obsession with England instead of the global spread of fascism does seem wilfully perverse and negligent, yet these were clearly MacDiarmid’s greatest priorities as a Scottish nationalist. In a letter to Sorley MacLean, quoted already, he wrote that he thought fascism, with or without war, could not last, that it possessed too much of a death-drive to sustain itself for long. This idea is neatly distilled in the lines that describe Hitler as the kind of man who ‘would chop up a

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73 Tilda Swinton, Colin MacCabe and Christopher Roth (dirs.) *The Seasons in Quincy: Four Portraits of John Berger* (Derek Jarman Lab, 2016).

Stradivarius violin / To grill a steak.\textsuperscript{75} He also used Nazism as an objective correlative for disease and cancer in his poem of the mid 1930s ‘Ex-Parte Statement on the Project of Cancer’. By the time MacDiarmid was writing these war poems, the threat of fascism was well established and he believed that it was already in its terminal stages. He therefore either satirises it generally, or else makes it a means with which to attack the English establishment. A good example of the former is ‘While Goering Slept’, a squib where two caterpillars challenge themselves to be the first to crawl the length of a sleeping Goering’s mouth:

Thrice they went, and the same worm won
Though the other failed to see it run.
Then, ‘Tell me how you do it, pray?’
‘It’s easy,’ the winner replied, ‘By heck!
You go the whole length of the lips. I take
The short cut round the back of the neck.’\textsuperscript{76}

Although this seems no more than a squib, it makes the claim that Nazism is essentially based on loud-mouths and hot-air and its radicalism comes from the fact that the poet is not moved into righteous indignation but irreverence, suggesting that such a regime is beneath his contempt. This is a more extreme version of the attitude Brecht adopted in his drama of the era, and can also be seen in Charlie Chaplin’s 1940 film \textit{The Great Dictator}. David Craig has compared the war work of Brecht with MacDiarmid and found that both use humour and satire in similar ways. The principle here is that in times of oppressive earnestness, the most effective weapon is laughter. For Brecht, as a communist writer, the political context was

\textsuperscript{75} Grieve; Manson, & Riach, ‘Introduction’, xvi.
\textsuperscript{76} MacDiarmid, ‘While Goering Slept’ in \textit{The Revolutionary Art of the Future}, 41.
one of opposition to ‘the most savage of all reactionary antagonists – German fascism.’ MacDiarmid’s work, by contrast, was, according to Craig, allowed to ‘splairge all over the place in the un-urgent, fumbling, amateurish milieu of Scottish nationalism.’ It is an error to say simply that MacDiarmid’s work lacked focus or consistency. Against such accusations of inconsistency we could put Edwin Morgan’s point that ‘I don’t think he, so much as life itself, was being inconsistent.’ Indeed, in these war poems, MacDiarmid attacks people he thinks inconsistent, such as the clergymen of the Church of England who preach peace while owning ‘armament shares’:

Who speaks of sacrilege in England’s shrine  
Where boys are taught sweet Christmas carols to sing  
And next forced on to human butchering  
And all war’s horrors by the same suave swine?  
Con men, gangsters, corrupters of youth, condign  
Must be the punishment of those who bring  
Successive generations to the bloody bull-ring  
Blandly in the name of the dud-Divine.  

An important touchstone that shows the consistency of MacDiarmid’s views is his 1972 pamphlet *A Political Speech* where he clearly states his ‘auld enemy’ is ‘English

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79 MacDiarmid, ‘Westminster Abbey’ in The Revolutionary Art, 70.
Imperialism’ and not the English people. Yet, this distinction between ideology and people is in itself an inherently opportunistic authoritarian line. If we look at Valda Grieve’s wartime letters to her husband, we find her extolling the virtues of Stalin: ‘Stalin gave a fine speech to the Red Army & incidentally let our people know that he was only concerned with driving out the Nazi Germans from Russian territory – & that he had no intention of destroying the German people – how different from Churchill’s Billingsgate display’. Roderick Watson reminds us that while MacDiarmid could be witheringly critical of the ‘complacency of Christianity’ as in the poem above, while at the same time ‘praising Stalin and seeking a connection between the Celtic spirit and Stalin’s homeland in Georgia’. For every utterance of humanity that MacDiarmid’s poetry offers, there is an equal and counter attraction to that which is in- or super-human. This allows him to make such claims as ‘no one in his senses wants warfare, but if we are determined to be absolutely independent, it may be, and almost certainly will be forced upon us.’ This meticulously worded statement is not the act of, in Douglas Dunn’s words, an intemperately hot-headed ‘armchair fuehrer’, but it does show that often MacDiarmid’s ‘cultural reality was at odds with the reality of Scotland as a whole’. It also reminds the reader of Sartre’s rallying cry of a justifiable and oppositional violence to tyranny: ‘By any means necessary’ which was adopted by many generations of freedom fighters, such as the Black Panthers and supporters of the Palestinian cause. The phrase was in turn echoed by Frantz

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81 Trevlyn Grieve, ‘My dearest Christopher’ in *Scarcely Ever Out of My Thoughts*, 107.
82 Lockerbie, ‘Poet who saw through the lie […]’, 3.
Fanon in an anti-colonial context and has entered into the discourse of post-colonialism. It could be argued that MacDiarmid’s attitude during World War Two was also a type of proto-post-colonialism where independence was to be gained ‘by any means necessary’. His aggression stems from idealism and his anger is reserved for anyone who stood between him and his comprehensive vision of people and society and the arts, a cause of ‘Scottish national awakening’ he saw younger writers taking up after the ‘forcing bed’ of war and military experience.85

‘The German Bombers’ comes from MacDiarmid’s own civilian, home-front experience and takes place after a day in which Nazi bomber planes have flown over Edinburgh and not dropped a single bomb. The speaker reads into this the English government’s contempt for its neighbours:

Scotland might have been shattered to smithereens
For all the English cared, or the Scots themselves dared;
We owe our thanks to German inadvertence,
Not English protection, that Edinburgh was spared.86

When readers look beyond the blunt anti-English message, they may see that both fascism and imperialism are treated here as grave threats and disaster is averted due to human failure. The gratitude expressed is mordant. Edinburgh seems to have survived despite the neglect by England and due to the incompetence of Germany. There is no suggestion here that Germany is sparing Scotland because of the fallacious belief in the potential of some illicit peace deal to be made with

86 Hugh MacDiarmid, ‘The German Bombers’ in The Revolutionary Art, 45.
prominent Scottish Nationalists and Nazi Germany. Instead, MacDiarmid is writing from almost first-hand knowledge of the devastation of an aerial attack. He moved to Glasgow in early 1942, less than a year after the ‘Clydebank Blitz’, which claimed the lives of over 500 people. Riach points out that these poems are not merely acts of ignorant racism or Anglophobia, but are carefully considered attacks on specific aspects of political and cultural life from a Scottish nationalist standpoint. Like in ‘On the Imminent Destruction of London, 1940’, MacDiarmid seems to be trying to shock us into caring. Note how MacDiarmid is referring to a few, not all, of London’s inhabitants:

The leprous swine in London town
And their Anglo-Scots accomplices
Are, as they always have been,
Scotland’s only enemies.

It is easy to dismiss such poetry as bilious and rhetorical, but that would overlook the fact that MacDiarmid’s life, as is well documented, was not only that of a poet and intellectual, but also that of a political worker, reformer and agitator. He had practical work to do in Scotland, from defending cottars against unreasonable hikes in their rents on Whalsay to running as a political candidate on a number of occasions. In this sense, these poems are an immediate, if jaundiced, type of journalism, coming out of the danger and exhilaration that MacDiarmid lived with on a daily basis. In an interview with George Bruce he acknowledged that people may consider him fatally cynical, but that he was thinking in terms of improvement and

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regeneration. He urged people to take the ‘long term perspective’ and even these little, seemingly impetuous war poems do this. If they are described as callous or brutal, they are misread.\(^89\)

The long-term view, a view of commitment to regeneration, is perhaps not immediately apparent. Such a view is further obscured by the fact that other poems take place in a much more mundane or domestic setting, such as memories of MacDiarmid’s time on Whalsay. These quieter island poems, while still demonstrating MacDiarmid’s radicalism, act in symbolic ways, bringing to mind Edwin Muir’s techniques of myth and fable. For instance, in ‘A Shetland Cottage’, MacDiarmid uses his ascetic existence on Whalsay as a means of trying to strike at the heart of the matter. The poem is not only about the search for shelter and stability on the island – something MacDiarmid would bring down to ideological and imaginative bedrock in ‘On a Raised Beach’ in the 1930s – but an attempt to locate the source of the global chaos surrounding the poem. MacDiarmid diagnoses the source of the problem not as a racist or prejudiced attack on groups of people, but as the corrupting power of capital; it is the ‘money age’ where ‘money has become supreme’, which is a vestigial trace again of his Douglasite utopianism:

That is going to make the world hell – for none of the realities
Are capable of a rational justification. 
Every other week the papers are full of details 
Concerning the most appalling catastrophes
- Earthquakes, massacres, and God knows what.
But no one ever mentions them. They’re forgotten

The only things that are taken seriously are sweepstakes. But they relate to money. Money is the only reality left. There’s no need to even pay lip-service to anything else.90

This poem challenges us to agree with such a fatalistic and cynical assessment of the world. Yet its closing lines ring out as prescient when considering the fiscal exigencies of our own age. Such poems read like warnings from a different era, urging us to value above all human potential, to restore in a broken and fragmented era a ‘bracing and zestful appetite for life’ and a sense of solidarity across the ages, as in this untitled fragment from the same archives that yielded the poems in The Revolutionary Art of the Future:

How glorious to live! Even in one thought
The wisdom of past times to fit together
And from the luminous minds of many men
Catch a reflected truth: as, in one eye,
Light, from unnumbered worlds and farthest planets
Of the star-crowded universe, is gathered
Into one ray.91

MacDiarmid’s war poems maintain their power to disquiet to this day. They seek out ‘the extreme in order to extend human consciousness.’92 For him, the world and its traditions are not to be accepted unquestioningly. As readers, we must apply the same approach, even if it means we find his work wanting and

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90 Hugh MacDiarmid, ‘A Shetland Cottage’ in The Revolutionary Art, 34-35.
91 Grieve; Manson, & Riach, ‘Introduction’, xxvi.
92 Boutelle, Thistle and Rose, 229.
irresponsible. The intention of these poems is to shock readers out of complacency and uncritical thinking that leads into believing the myths of the ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’ Blitz, where ordinary people were expected to stoically put-up and shut-up. At their core the poems are about trying to project the cause of Scottish nationalism and independence, improving the lives of the working classes and about MacDiarmid’s ambitions for humanity, for great intellectual achievement. These priorities are not shared by everyone, but MacDiarmid felt they were the most important issues for his time. Unfortunately they are also tainted by MacDiarmid’s firm belief in the positive influence of Stalinism. Besides, his extreme egotism as an artist led him to assume that his ideals were without question the right ideals for everyone of his time. The outspokenness and vociferousness of these poems are the result of an impassioned mind, and an attempt to be heard and taken seriously in matters pertaining to life, nation and society, from someone on the periphery of the action. As Tom Scott says:

To scientists and philosophers we look for facts, information, truths, principles, ideas, wisdom: but in matters of value and priority the poet is, or ought to be, consulted. That he isn’t is one of the main reasons why the present mess is the present mess.  

In addition, Scott’s points extend, and make more directly applicable to MacDiarmid’s work, Ezra Pound’s belief, expounded in the 1913 essay ‘The Serious Artist’ that ‘the arts provide data for ethics.’ To Pound’s mind, ‘ethics are based on the nature of man’ and we ‘must know what sort of animal

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man is before we can contrive his maximum happiness.’ The arts, including literature and poetry, are as much a scientific discipline as chemistry, and in this context they ‘give us our best data for determining what sort of creature man is’. The important role of poetry in this light, of the war, becomes a matter of necessity. MacDiarmid was working under the sincere illusion that he was pointing the way towards a better post-War Scotland. But as we have seen, he was ‘bad at politics’ and ‘lacked patience and awareness of how other people thought’. 95 His apodictic belief in the truth of his work as a poet was both his strength and his downfall as it meant his work, rather resembling a dictatorship, had no time for dialogue, equivocation or discussion.

In writing about MacDiarmid’s poetry Douglas Dunn bemoaned the fact that his work engendered two types of response, either ‘permanent evangelism or permanent explication’. Dunn’s third, preferred, type of response, outright repudiation, is not the way forward either. It is not easy to be an apologist for MacDiarmid’s poems of World War Two, as for every instance of compassion or anti-fascism, there are also examples of cruelty and a blindness to the threat of Stalinism. But it is also not right to allow these poems to either pass unremarked-upon or be patently misrepresented. MacDiarmid’s work was coloured by his Modernist commitment to seeing life as potential that has been denied by hegemonies and war-generating imperialisms. The problem is that at the height of his egoism as an artist he was convinced his path was the right one which led him to see the war in an extremely binary way of good and evil. When he did not see much ‘good’ represented by the Allied Forces of the UK and USA, he impetuously advocated Stalinism as the solution, which flawed his work. What emerges from the poems

95 Purdie, Hugh MacDiarmid, ix.
explored in this article is a drive to transcend the general sense of ‘helplessness’ that Angus Calder has diagnosed as the prevailing mood of the arts during the war. 96 That said, MacDiarmid was working beyond his means in that he never brought about lasting change. His conscience and ego however would not allow him to remain silent. According to Calder the main literary wartime dilemma was how ‘could the writer, made intensely political by the events of the era, hope to influence events, if not by propaganda’. 97 Calder’s remark shows an awareness of active poets in society, such as MacDiarmid, who desire change and try to enact it through work that persuades its readers by shocking or provoking them with dystopian futures or extreme viewpoints. Far from glorying in the death of innocent civilians and turning a blind eye to the threat of fascism, these poems show MacDiarmid at his most topically engaged and attuned to the challenges and troubles of his time. He was without doubt a man in constant revolt against the prevailing order of his times, and his work shows his ability to entertain political ideas and then violently abjure them for the sake of something else that might well serve people better. Behind most acts of revolt there is an anger, and behind that anger there is, more often than not, a frustrated form of idealism. Certainly, the fate of Scotland is at the forefront of his mind, but he is also deeply concerned about the potential of humankind and the anti-life forces that prevent a greater society from being envisaged and achieved. With this in mind, and considering these poems were some of MacDiarmid’s last sustained creative efforts, for all of their glaring faults, they can be fairly described as ‘the revolutionary art of the future.

96 Angus Calder, *The People’s War*, 514.
ESTHER BARBARA CHALMERS’S SCOTTISH INTERNATIONAL LIVES

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It is a truism that lives can be told in many ways.

Some ways ratify or expand existing or emerging paths of scholarship. Some bring surprises, including surprises which turn out to have been in plain view.

The Scottish international lives in this essay will include but not be limited to that of Esther Chalmers herself.

I.

Here is one way one could tell the life of Esther Barbara Chalmers, (1894-1983). This way connects with some broad themes in women’s history, especially histories of women’s transnational activism in the twentieth century; women, war, and anti-war activism; women in socialist and other international organizations; and the history of women’s passionate relationships. These are fields with deep backgrounds which continue to expand.¹

¹ The bibliography on women and international organizations is very rich. See, e.g., Jill Liddington, The Long Road to Greenham: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain Since 1820 (London: Virago, 1990) and Sybil Oldfield, Women Humanitarians: A Biographical Dictionary of British Women Active between 1900 and 1950: “Doers of the World” (London: Continuum, 2001); for more recent work, see Women’s History Review 26:2 (2017), special issue on “Women’s International Activism During the Interwar Period, 1919-1939,” especially Ingrid Sharp & Matthew Stibbe, “Women's International Activism During the Inter-War
Although she began university studies in Edinburgh in 1915 under pressure from her mother, Chalmers was attracted by the possibility of war work, as was her older sister Alison Bell Chalmers (later Volchaneski).^2^ Alison Bell Chalmers

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2 Unpublished Autobiography, Esther Barbara Chalmers, National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), Acc. 8695/1, ch. 4, pp. 4-5 (hereafter NLS and hereafter cited as EBC autobiography). Note: This document has separate and repeating pagination for chapters and sometimes for sections which begin anew without a new chapter number, often separated by a brightly colored divider page. I will be as clear as possible in specifying page locations, including using “p.” or “pp.” as above, which I will omit for other cited works. This text also may end sooner than planned; see NLS Acc. 8695/16 for an outline of EBC’s plan for the work. The NLS inventory, available online at https://www.nls.uk/catalogues/online/cnmi/inventories/acc8695.pdf (accessed 10/17/2017) is invaluable and I have used its headings, as well as numeration, in some notes to identify folders. I regret that neither NLS records nor staff memories could tell me who did the inventory and organization of the archive. Alison Bell Chalmers Volchaneski or Voltancheski (sometimes also spelled Voltchaneci or Volcanecki), b. 1884 (see passport, NLS Acc. 8695/114), d. 1959 in Anstruther (NLS Acc. 8696/107; see also “Out of the Green Box”—see below n. 84 (hereafter “Green Box”), handwritten note by EBC on 255). Alison was known as “Elsie” in the family and
became a probationer nurse in a French hospital before ultimately joining the Scottish Women’s Hospitals units in 1916. Esther, however, after attempting Red Cross training, found it impossible to deal with blood; she instead took an Edinburgh University course in pathology and bacteriology in order to work as a laboratory technician along with her friend Ada Fyfe, whom she knew as a fellow-member of the Ladies’ Caledonian Club. Frustrated by the difficulty of getting work despite “bombarding Labour exchanges, interviewing Red Cross Commandants, filing applications to join the Scottish Women’s Hospitals for Foreign Service, even advertising in the Scotsman,” Esther Chalmers became involved in the processing of sphagnum moss for medical use in Edinburgh—of which she left a fascinating account. Finally, she and Ada Fyfe got work as lab technicians at the Royal Victoria Military Hospital at Netley near Southampton. She was seconded for some time to supervising the “recycling” of dud bombs in order

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is named thus in some of EBC’s papers; she is abbreviated as ABV in the NLS inventory of EBC’s papers.

3 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 5, p. 9, says Alison joined the Scottish Women’s Hospital in July 1916; Alison is noted in the entry for EBC in the inventory of personnel at http://scottishwomenshospitals.co.uk/women/ (accessed 10/16/2017) but does not have an entry herself.

4 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 5, p. 2. On the Ladies’ Caledonian Club, see Elspeth J. Boog Watson, “The Ladies’ Caledonian Club, 1908-1970,” tss. in NLS, shelfmark HP3.84.728; this is a pamphlet dated by the library “1970s?” accompanied by a second pamphlet by Elizabeth D. Stevenson covering the years 1970-82; the club closed in 1981. As the Club was only founded in 1908, EBC and Fyve were relatively early members, amongst whom the most prominent was Elsie Inglis (Boog Watson, 2).

5 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 5, p. 3.
to retrieve their powder at a factory near the hospital; her autobiography notes her worry about possible assault by a male worker who harassed her and lack of respect from a male manager who took credit for her work. After the war, eager for further work (“out of work once more I must find another war métier”) she was also desperate to return to Europe, to which she had passionately committed before the war. She found through “a sister of one of Alison’s Scottish Women’s friends” that the Friends’ War Victims’ Relief Committee in France was in need of workers with strong French language skills.

Through this work, initially in Lisieux in 1918 and then in the Marne, working with refugees and people returning from wartime displacement, Esther Chalmers embarked on a career in France and Belgium. Through the Friends, she became close to a cluster of women, including several Americans like Eleanor Lansing Dulles, Margaret Scattergood, and Mary Kelsey. In a circle replete with nicknames and shared jokes (Esther was “Jock”), lasting friendships and partnerships were formed. Esther Chalmers returned to Edinburgh in 1920/21 to impatiently finish her degree—whilst frustratedly remarking on “bitter unemployment, inadequate relief”; she bearded a Bishop to demand that the Churches act more strongly. She returned to France in 1922 at the invitation of Mary Kelsey.

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6 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 5, pp. 17-22.
7 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 5, pp. 24.
8 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, especially section marked “The Marne—1919” which appears to have been annotated by Scattergood and intended for separate publication.
10 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, section marked simply “9,” pp. 2-3, and ch. 10, 1. Mary Kelsey is somewhat
Kelsey wanted to start “an international school for the discussion of world affairs,” a project which led to the Honfleur Conferences to promote peace between nations. During this work with Kelsey, Esther Chalmers met “Mesdemoiselles Pognon,” feminists to whom she paid tribute in her memoir; Maria and her daughter Matilde Pognon were early members of Le Droit Humain, an international cross-gender masonic elusive, but she was clearly a pacifist and feminist activist from the USA; see http://www.swarthmore.edu/Library/friends/Peace%20in%20Friends/PeaceTest%20%20K_O.htm (accessed 10/16/2017); https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=161228552 (accessed 10/16/2017); Mary Kelsey, “Love Thy Neighbour,” The Messenger of Peace, 45-46 (1920): 8-12, is an essay by Kelsey dated December 1919 from Short Hills, NJ. EBC claims that Kelsey was not a Quaker although close to them, and EBC notes “something magnetic about Mary’s personality, something inherited from the great-grandmother she liked to claim—a Scotch woman burnt as a witch!” and cryptically alludes to her papers being “buried deep in the subterranean vaults of the Rockefeller Center”; EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 11, p. 10, 15. See also NLS Acc. 8695/5, “Draft and copy description of EBC’s return to Honfleur, Normandy, with Mary Kelsey in 1946…”.

organization “aimed at the education and emancipation of women,” which Chalmers joined. Fatefully, Kelsey’s project led to Esther Chalmers’s first meeting with Lucie Dejardin.

Dejardin, born in 1875, was a Belgian working-class socialist feminist trade unionist, heroic member of the resistance during World War I, child welfare organizer, and peace activist; she was a Belgian delegate to the 1921 Vienna conference of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom; she was the first woman member elected to the Belgian Chamber of Representatives. After some diversions,

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12 EBC may have confused the relationship of the Pognons by the time she was writing; she probably met Maria Pognon and her daughter, Mathilde. EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 11, p. 10: “To harbor such pioneering ideas was genuinely dangerous, hence the sacred oaths that each member had to swear never to reveal the identity of his or her fellow—I had almost written: conspirators. And that indeed was how these early Free Masons were popularly regarded. The courage shown by the women in France and Belgium who dared to join ‘Le Droit Humain’ cannot be overestimated.” See also NLS Acc. 8695/62, 63, 64, 189, 286, 290, 299, 331. On Le Droit Humain, see https://droit-humain.org/web/?lang=en (accessed 10/22/2017); there is an Histoire de la Federation belge du droit humain, 3 vols. (Brussels: Editions du Droit Humain, 1982-84) which I have not been able to consult. A peculiar certificate inducting EBC into “the Order of the Ancient Wisdom,” during her war work near Southampton, in December 1916, is in memorandum book, NLS Acc. 8795/52.

13 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 10, pp. 5-7.

14 On Dejardin, see http://connaitrelawallonie.wallonie.be/fr/wallons-marquants/dictionnaire/dejardin-lucie#.WeYWQUzMzX8, accessed 10/17/2017; and E. B. Chalmers, Lucie Dejardin:
including visiting her sister Alison in Dalmatia and evading a marriage plot concocted by her mother, Esther returned to Lucie and Belgium: “Deep in my heart I knew that if I accepted Lucie’s invitation it would be for keeps.”

Lucie and Esther lived together in Liège from the mid-1920s in a ramshackle house; however they labelled, or refused to label, their relationship, or dealt with differences of age (Lucie was nearly twenty years older), class, and nationality, this was clearly a partnership. Esther felt “an overwhelming compulsion to stay with Lucie for good.” She said that Lucie offered her purpose: “Wasn’t she the solution to my problem of what to do with my life? Hadn’t I been toying with the idea of doing something useful, but not as a detached do-gooder?” Serving Lucie’s work would not be “soulless slumming.” But

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15 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, p. 2 of unnumbered section which follows unnumbered section on visit to Dalmatia, which follows ch. 12.
16 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 5, p. 24, has an enticing but ambiguous moment: during a partial “breakdown” after leaving her arms recycling post, which she attributed to cumulative stress, she returned to Edinburgh: “Consulted Murray Lyon, Edinburgh’s well-known psychiatrist. He puzzled me with searching questions about my sex life. I hadn’t an idea what he meant. Sex had something to do with men. So how could it possibly worry me?”
this was clearly a relationship of deep emotional connection: “at our first meeting under Mary Kelsey’s auspices in 1922, we, two people as unlike as possible, had known the shock of complete understanding. How could anything so absurd happen, against all odds? But it did.”

Esther and Lucie bought—in Lucie’s name because Esther, as a foreigner, was prohibited—28 Quai St Barbe with a loan from Esther’s mother Alice to allow crucial repairs (on a later visit, the impressed Alice forgave the loan). In Liège, Esther Chalmers was in an industrial city with a rich history of left politics; before World War I, it was a center for radical émigrés from the Russian empire, especially Mensheviks, and “a supplier of small arms for the revolutionary underground.”

This history left patterns in politics and daily life atop local patterns of industrial radicalism. At 28 Quai Ste Barbe, Esther and Lucie took on sitting tenants of considerable individuality and added others, including Lucie’s sister and niece and, in the 1930s, German, Austrian, and Spanish refugees. Esther Chalmers set up a bookshop, the Librairie Chalmers, for

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17 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, unnumbered section (see note 13 above), pp. 17, 18.
18 NLS Acc. 8695/14, p. 7. After Lucie’s death intestate, her heirs unanimously agreed that 28 Quai St Barbe should remain EBC’s; NLS Acc. 8695/110.
20 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, unnumbered section (see note 13 above), p. 20; another brief unnumbered section, partly typed on obverse of a 1978 letter from the Scottish Fisheries Museum, begins directly after the mention of refugees, has more on tenants; the following section discusses Lucie’s sister Jeanette, niece Andrée, and the bookshop.
“second-hand books for the impecunious,” with help from Marius Truchard, a red-bearded and garrulous anarchist bookman. Truchard had been gassed in the war, liked a drink, and had exclusive distribution rights for Belgian distribution of the publications of the International Labour Organization. In addition to her role as Lucie Dejardin’s overall aide (and ghostwriter for Lucie’s speeches), Esther Chalmers took responsibility for a children’s home and other services established by Belgian socialist women. When a new Belgian king was crowned in 1934, Esther attended the ceremony in the Chamber of Representatives; “… as I performed any number of wifely chores, I insisted on a wife’s privilege and Lucie had applied for a ticket for me.”

In acute danger from the approaching German occupation in 1940, Esther and Lucie narrowly escaped after a harrowing, complex, set of journeys—initially attempting to travel into France to offer assistance to fleeing Belgians—which ultimately led to Dunkirk beneath strafing German planes. In Belgium and on arrival in Dover, Esther flatly refused to go on without Lucie and successfully fought to keep Lucie out of a refugee camp.

21 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, last section noted, pp. 3-6. For Truchard, see also http://militants-anarchistes.info/spip.php?article13214, accessed 10/19/2017.
22 NLS Acc. 8695/2, “draft chapter on EBC’s involvement with the administration of a children’s home at Glons/Mont Comblain-au-Pont, during the 1920s and 1930s, and a description of a fête du quartier in Liège, at which she was honored for similar work.”
23 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, final section, p. 2.
24 NLS Acc. 8695/4, “Exodus for Two.” This 35-page long document is extremely vivid; clearly begun during the war (internal evidence) it may have been revised later.
Lucie Dejardin died in 1945. After the war, Esther Chalmers gave thirteen “oraisons funibres” [sic] for “departed friends,” including Lucie, numbering carefully those who were murdered during the war. She returned to Belgium to again engage in relief and reconstruction work. She received an MBE in 1954 for this work. She wrote a biography of Lucie in French. Lucie Dejardin, hiercheuse et député socialiste, was published in 1952; its title foregrounds Lucie’s proud identification with her background (she had worked in mining; her brother Joseph was a miners’ leader noted for his internationalism). The epigraph of this book is a line, translated into French, from Robert Burns.

Esther Chalmers ultimately returned to Scotland where she lived in Anstruther, but across her life she maintained friendships with women she had first met in relief work, including sustained visits and travels. Her relationship with Grace Lindley, “Benj” in the nickname created during their early friendship in France, was especially close; they travelled together repeatedly and when Benj died, Margaret Scattergood

25 “Spirou” [Thérèse Foidart] to Hannah Chalmers Campbell, 27 November 1950, NLS Acc. 8695/21; see also NLS Acc. 8695/15(i), list of names of former coworkers in Belgium with their fates.
26 Supplement to the London Gazette, 10 June 1954, 3278; NLS Acc. 8695/33 makes clear that this was specially in relation to her work for the Association Belgo-Britannique.
28 See, e.g., NLS Acc. 8695/5 (travel with Mary Kelsey), and the letters from Grace Lindley, Margaret Scattergood, Eleanor Dulles Lansing, and others in NLS 8695/27; for Dulles see also 329. For travels, NLS 8695/16 includes a timeline of travels abroad and companions.
wrote Esther Chalmers with special commiseration. 29 (Scattergood had settled in Virginia with Florence Thorne, Director of Research for the American Federation of Labor on a farm which, ironically, later became part of the headquarters of the CIA. 30) Esther Chalmers shared her home in Scotland for some time with the Belgian Eugénie-Thérèse Foidart, nicknamed “Spirou,” who provided drawings for Esther’s family history.31

In telling a story of Esther Chalmers along these lines, one would explore further the work that she did in preserving and organizing letters and photographs from her companions in post-World War I relief work. One might write at greater length of connections and variations between Esther

31 Foidart, as “Spirou,” is noted in letters to EBC from others and some notes; her full name is given, with credit for drawings for “Green Box,” at NLS Acc. 8695/106; see also NLS Acc. 7109 and below, p. 29. See also https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QJ13-X1X5 (accessed 10/17/2017). Spirou (“squirrel”) was a Franco-Belgian comic strip character, partner with a character named Fantasio, which began in 1938; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spirou_et_Fantasio. EBC also had a very powerful, often painful, relationship with Madeleine Fillet of Liège who visited her in Anstruther; see EBC diaries in NLS Acc. 8695/44-47.
Chalmers’s life and that of her sister Alison. After her time with the Scottish Women’s Hospitals, Alison Bell Chalmers lived in Europe for many years. She had taken a post as matron of a children’s home in Croatia established by Katherine MacPhail of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals, who remained in Serbia for many years before retiring to St. Andrews. (Esther Chalmers saved a press-cutting about a talk MacPhail gave in Ceres, Fife, in the early 1960s, about her war experiences). After World War I, Alison Bell Chalmers met and married a Russian, Vsevolod Vladimirovitch Volchaneski, a former army captain and amateur artist; through the 1920s and 30s she lived with him and his children near Dubrovnik.32 Alison and her household too ended in flight from Nazi advances—via Baghdad and India—and finally back in Scotland, where Alison settled in Anstruther, where she died in 1959. Esther preserved and organized Alison’s account of that frantic journey from Nazi advances as well as many letters and photographs.33

33 NLS Acc. 8695/20 contains many letters from Alison to EBC; NLS Acc. 8695/114 includes Alison’s passport and a ts. written during World War II about her time in “Jugoslavia,”
One might integrate aspects of Esther Chalmers’s family story with stories of women’s war work, lives during and after the war by women involved with the Scottish Women’s Hospitals and the Friends’ war and post-war services, and stories of war’s scatterings and re-gatherings, as well as with the story of Esther Chalmers and Lucie Dejardin’s profound partnership of love and commitment. Alison Bell Chalmers Volchaneski can appear in this story not just as a literal sister but as part of a world of connections, which included lesbian partnerships, between women including Ada Fyfe, Mary Kelsey, Margaret Scattergood, Grace Lindley, and Thérèse Foidart. For Esther Chalmers, these networks came to be centered on a nexus of socialism rather than primarily under the label of “peace.” In a lecture given during World War II, she explained her understanding of socialism as a commitment to the full flourishing of three oppressed “classes of individuals”: “the child, the woman, and the worker.”

II.

There are other ways one might organize and recount a life of Esther Chalmers. We could begin with family connections and with Scotland rather than moving so directly to war work, internationalist feminist and socialist politics, and all that Belgium became for Esther Chalmers. Indeed, one could take a cue from the introduction to the excellent inventory of Chalmers’s papers in the National Library of Scotland (NLS).

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“the black days of 1917” and “nursing in Salonica” and “Kosova,” and the Volchaneski’s flight from Croatia.

34 Undated ts. of “lecture in Hampstead to a small club of refugees and some H[ampstead] residents” regarding visit to Soviet Union in 1936. EBC reconsidered her views on the USSR by the late 1960s; see NLS Acc. 8695/40, EBC pocket diary for 1968, page for March 10-16.
This begins by providing a highly condensed evocation of the kind of families into which Esther was born:

Esther Barbara Chalmers [EBC] was born in Edinburgh in 1894, the youngest of the six children of Sir David and Lady Janet Alice Chalmers. Her father was the first Chief Justice of the Gold Coast from 1869 to 1878 and was then appointed Chief Justice of British Guiana, a post he held until 1893, when he retired from the colonial judicial [sic] service, although he continued to serve when called upon to do so, eg, in Jamaica in 1894 and Newfoundland in 1897 and as a Royal Commissioner to enquire into a native uprising in Sierra Leone in 1898. Her mother’s side of the family was no less distinguished [sic]: Esther Chalmers’s maternal grandfather was James Lorimer, Professor of Public Law at the University of Edinburgh and two of her uncles were Sir R S Lorimer and J H Lormier [sic] RSA.35

As this introduction suggests, we can locate Esther Chalmers within some specific pedigrees of public life as well as strongly implying an inheritance of considerable class privilege, even if we didn’t yet know anything about how or when that privilege had accumulated. Her father’s career in imperial service is foregrounded along with an implication of smooth official recognition of his eminence. Despite the slight weighting of the Chalmers side in this account, there is an enticement to expand on the Lorimer side; both sides suggest using Esther Chalmers’s life and archive to explicate some

35 NLS, “Inventory,” Acc. 8695. I am indebted to Geoff Eley for drawing my attention to the uses of this particular paragraph.
aspects of Scottish cultural history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As the summary notes, Esther’s grandfather, James Lorimer (1818-1890)—the son of a factor—became Professor of Public Law at Edinburgh; his wife, not named in the summary, was Hannah Stodart (1835-1916). The summary notes two of their children’s names and, aided by small markers of distinction (“Sir” and “RSA”), implies that these are names which may already signify and place Esther Chalmers in elite circles. The summary provides perfectly reasonable concision and signposting, but I suggest taking it as a starting place for an expanded and revised account of Esther Chalmers’s archive of her family.

As the birth/death dates above signal, James Lorimer was considerably older than Hannah Stodart. By the time of their marriage in 1851, James had been admitted to the faculty of advocates and was steadily publishing on legal issues although he did not become professor of law until 1862; throughout his early career, he had benefited from patronage whilst making a mark for himself in speaking and writing on behalf of reform of the Scottish universities.\footnote{Information here and following is, unless otherwise noted, drawn from John W. Cairns, “Lorimer, James (1818–1890),” \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [ODNB]}, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2011, \url{https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17016}, accessed 5/17/2018.} Hannah Stodart, although scandalously younger—only sixteen when she married—was part of the social world of law into which James Lorimer had entered; she was the daughter of John Riddle Stodart and Jemima Henrietta Brown; her father was a Writer to the Signet. James and Hannah Stodart Lorimer produced a family of children who included the extremely successful painter John Henry Lorimer (1856-1936) and the great
Esther Barbara Chalmers’s Scottish Int'l Lives

architect Robert Stodart Lorimer (1864-1929). 37 Their eldest son, James (1852-1898), went into law and emigrated to South Africa, leaving few traces in Esther Chalmers’s papers. 38 Their three daughters were Esther’s mother Janet Alice (1857-1951), known as Alice, and her aunts Hannah Cassels (1854-1947) and Carolina Louise, known as Louise (1861-1946). 39 Esther Chalmers’s grandparents also produced a legacy in the form of a place that became an archive: James and Hannah Stodart Lorimer took, almost on a whim, the lease of a then disused and moldering Kellie Castle in Fife, which they restored and made a family home, garden, and collection of works. Reflecting on the initial state of her home with Lucie Dejardin, Esther Chalmers remarked “Hadn’t my grandfather fallen in love with Kellie Castle in just such a parlous condition? At any rate 23 Quai Ste Barbe didn’t have trees growing out of the walls as had Kellie.” 40 Kellie Castle is now a property of the National Trust of Scotland after passing through more

38 EBC was a young child when he died and may never had had direct contact with him, but NLS 8695/140 contains photographs related to this uncle and EBC’s notes on family history include him, e.g. NLS 8695/81.
39 Dates drawn from NLS Acc. 8695 and confirmed at Scotland’s People.
40 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, p. 20.
generations of Lorimers; it is a site of considerable display of the Lorimer artistic legacy.\footnote{1}

Despite the bland and even officious tone in which I have presented this family background, this frame of life-writing easily opens into a story of Esther Chalmers’s inherited and lucky location in networks, including familial ties, of women rather than of famous men. One such opening lies both inside and outside the papers in the NLS. In 1971, “E.B. Chalmers” published an essay in the \textit{Times Literary Supplement}, “Mrs Carlyle’s Letters to John Stodart,” which has suffered from two errors of attribution since: the \textit{TLS}’s online historical archive both combines it with an (unsigned) and separate review by Kenneth Allott in its formal citation and assumes that “E. B. Chalmers” was Eric Brownlie Chalmers, a writer on economics.\footnote{2}


\footnote{2} E. B. Chalmers, “Mrs Carlyle’s Letters to John Stodart,” \textit{Times Literary Supplement}, 25 June 1971: 739-41. For the online version and muddled citation, see \url{http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/tlsh/infomark.do?action=interpret&source=gale&tabID=T003&prodId=TL&userGroupName=umuser&docPage=article&searchType}
E. B. Chalmers’s essay begins with a tease about the fullness of, and gaps in, stories and archives.

A visit to my aunt Louise Lorimer was apt to become a literary murmuration: of Charlotte losing her head in Brussels; of Louise falling off the Cobb; of meeting Mark Twain and his family—‘the best type of Americans’—on her way to visit the Austrian novelist Dorothea Gerard in 1890. She might intone 'The Owl and the Pussycat...', read a verse of her ballad 'The Braes o' Menstrie,' or one of her lyrics from 'The Trumpeter'. She might even display her greatest treasure, a note from R.L.S., but never once did she mention the letters of Jane Welsh Carlyle to her grandfather John Riddle Stodart.

E. B. Chalmers’s introduces her aunt with multiple references to her knowledge, work, and connections en route to establishing that Louise’s mother, and thus Esther’s own grandmother, had her own connections to literary history through the Stodart line rather than only through her marriage to the proliferating Lorimers. 43 E. B. Chalmers takes the

43 Jane Welsh, later Carlyle, was friends in Haddington with a family of Lorimers, the family of the Reverend Robert Lorimer but there was no meaningful connection between two sets of Lorimers; they were on different sides in the Disruption. See David G. Ritchie, *Early letters of Jane Welsh Carlyle, together with a few of later years and some of Thomas Carlyle, all hitherto unpublished* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1889); and Thomas Carlyle and Jane Welsh Carlyle, *The Carlyle Letters Online* [CLO], ed. Brent E.
chance to depict her maternal great-grandmother, Jemina, as a “strikingly handsome…would be bel esprit” who captured her husband away from Jane Welsh by fiat and whose “piercing eye” and “astringencies” thereafter ruled the household to the extent that James Lorimer and Hannah Stodart eloped rather than face her. 44 E. B. Chalmers concludes her essay by reprinting a letter to her great-grandfather from a friend, after both Jane Carlyle and Jemima Stodart were dead, which claims that Jemima and Jane were alike in being unhappy as well as “strong minded.”45

Esther Chalmers elsewhere tells us even more about Jemima Brown Stodart’s female descendants, from Esther’s grandmother and great-aunts through her aunts, mother, and sisters. Esther’s aunt Louise Lorimer, “clever as a monkey,” is one of the more flamboyant: she wrote and travelled extensively, translated, and spoke and published on Scottish history, poetry (including a talk on “Scottish Women Poets—New and Old”), and generally did as she liked, including converting to Roman Catholicism. 46 She was at least

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44 EBC, “Mrs Carlyle’s Letters,” 739, 740. EBC is drawing here in part on James Lorimer’s memoir as quoted in EBC, “Green Box,” 292-93. There is more than a hint that Jemima Brown Stodart could reasonably have understood James Lorimer to be flirting with her before he ran off with her daughter; EBC, “Green Box,” 292-93.


46 For monkey simile, see EBC, “Green Box,” 230. NLS Acc. 8695/137 contains miscellaneous papers by and about Louise Lorimer; the paper on Scottish women poets is a tss. of 36 pages which runs from anonymous early women through Mary Queen of Scots and 18th century writers to Christine Orr
intermittently a member of the Edinburgh Ladies’ Debating Society. Esther Chalmers is frank that Louise was “[n]o regular writer, but as the spirit moves her she contributes an occasional article to the monthly literary reviews.” She admires Louise’s embroidery as part of the family project of refurbishing Kellie Castle into a place of art.

Louise’s travels to Austria and Poland were connected at least in part to her friendship with Dorothea Gerard, as E. B. Chalmers noted; as it turns out, this is not just a reminder that one might explore Esther Chalmers’s archive for the history of “minor” women writers and their networks in the nineteenth century but, in fact, E. B. Chalmers’s reference has already led to such work. The TLS essay led to a long and very friendly correspondence between Esther Chalmers and Robert Lee Wolff, then a professor of history at Harvard, which lasted until his death. Wolff was fascinated by Gerard, Louise Lorimer, and other “minor” Victorian writers. Wolff’s historical specialty was the history of the Balkans—where he had significant experience during World War II. Like Esther Chalmers, he combined highly grounded experience of

and Violet Jacob; another tss., of 31 pages, is headed “On Some Women Poets of Today (From Sappho to Violet Jacob)”; for her conversion, see note at Acc. 8695/81, for 1914.


twentieth-century histories of war with deep knowledge of other times and places, in his case, nineteenth-century British culture. Esther Chalmers preserved his letters, and he left a major archive of Victorian fiction which includes books he bought from or was given by her. Archives accumulate and ramify beyond Esther Chalmers’s own.

Louise Lorimer cannot be figured—and is not figured by Esther Chalmers—as an outlier in her family because of her creativity, travels, or connections to other places. Esther was part of the third generation of women in her family to have participated in the movement for women’s university education even if she was the first to take a degree; her grandmother Hannah and her mother Alice studied through the Edinburgh Ladies’ Educational Association. Despite her exasperation with her own university studies, Esther Chalmers carefully noted and preserved the history of women’s university education in Edinburgh in her notes and files. She saved a scrappy memoir by her older sister, Hannah Anderson Chalmers Campbell (1882-1974), which emphasizes Hannah Stodart Lorimer’s musical gifts, her “wonderful power of expression in the use of words,” and her frankness; pervasively, family writers present Hannah Stodart Lorimer as a full participant in the Kellie Castle project. Hannah Chalmers

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49 Wolff’s letters to EBC are collected in NLS Acc. 8695/36; for Wolff and his collection, see http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/collections/books/holdings/wolff/ (accessed 10/21/2017) and Wikipedia, s.v. “Robert Lee Wolff.”

50 NLS Acc. 8695/251 for Janet Alice Chalmers’s certificates; for EBC’s exasperation, EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, p. 4; for an example of preservation and chronicling, NLS Acc. 8695/334. The frontispiece of “Green Box” is a photograph of EBC when she took her degree.

51 NLS Acc. 8695/117.
Campbell gives a first-hand account that Esther could not of their mother’s life in Guyana as wife of the Chief Justice, including her charitable projects there, but Esther’s memoir notes Alice Chalmers’s voluntary work in Edinburgh, including her connection to the Bruntsfield Women’s Hospital (founded by Sophia Jex-Blake). The archive also includes sketches and watercolors by “J.A.C.”—Janet Alice Chalmers. If Esther’s autobiography woefully notes her mother’s disappointment that she did not marry, it hardly depicts her mother’s marriage as the whole of her life. It also tells us that, at Netley, Esther worked with a Guyanese woman who had first been encouraged to train as a nurse by Alice Chalmers in Georgetown.

Esther Chalmers’s archive is even more pointed in documenting the talent and seriousness of her aunt, Hannah Cassels Lorimer im Thurn. Hannah’s marriage to Everard im Thurm, a colleague of her father’s in the Colonial Service in 1895, took place when Esther was only a year and half old—that is, Esther Chalmers draws attention to the fact that she is collecting and narrating this aunt’s life, not just relating her own memories. Evarard im Thurm’s work subsequently took the couple from Scotland and Guyana to Ceylon, Vanuatu, and Fiji before retiring to Cockenzie House, Port Seton. It is easy to register (Sir) Everard’s prestige; in obituaries, he was lauded as a botanist, explorer, and scientist rather than just an agent of government. But “Lady im Thurn” is not cast into the

52 EBC autobiography, NLS 8695/1, ch. 2, p. 15; ch. 4, p. 1.
53 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 5, p. 12; see also 8695/15(ii).
54 NLS Acc. 8695/81.
shadows in the archive of her niece. Esther Chalmers repeatedly notes that Hannah Lorimer was not just another keen participant in the decoration of Kellie Castle but had serious artistic ambitions beyond its walls. Esther Chalmers explains that, at Kellie:

An easel, a stand with a clay head wrapped in damp cloth are Aunt Hannah’s property. A near professional artist, Aunt Hannah will have a season in the studios of Paris in 1891, work as hard as brother Jack and have pictures accepted at the Royal Scottish Academy. Many years later, the studies she has made of orchids and other tropical flowers in British Guiana and Fiji will be recognized as valuable botanical documents and welcomed by the Edinburgh Botanical Gardens museum…. A rarely versatile experimenter in materials, she does not stop at the moulding of soft clay, but attacks hard wood. Designs on bookcases, stools, and racks emerge from her hammer and chisel to beautify Kellie.56


56 EBC, “Green Box,” 262-63
Hannah Lorimer had exhibited paintings at the Royal Scottish Academy at the same time as her brother, the more famous John, and at least once she got in and he did not.\textsuperscript{57} She continued to paint and exhibit during her life as a diplomat’s wife. Her niece’s collection includes sketches as well as letters to and from her aunt, including letters from Cornelia Sorabji.\textsuperscript{58} In telling some stories of some of Esther Chalmers’s female relations—and I am leaving out many others—I am clearly suggesting that attending only to the famous uncles, J. H. and R. S., occludes both a multi-generational family’s privileged participation in Victorian and Edwardian, Scottish and imperial, artistic and public life and the lively confidence with which women in this network contributed to and benefited from Edinburgh’s particular place in the history of women’s education. Paying attention to this family background undermines any temptation to over-emphasize rupture, break, or rebellion as tropes for narrating Esther Chalmers’s life, e.g. as an escape from a late Victorian destiny of domesticity. From some angles, Esther Chalmers’s family background, and that of the class-fraction the women of her family inhabited or entered, looks not like a fate from which she escaped but foreshadowing and enabling of the life she went on to live.

III.

This mapping of continuities rather than disruption expands if we pay attention to some extra-familial and para-familial relationships to which Esther Chalmers insistently draws attention. Those relationships were created and enabled by family.

Esther Chalmers’s unpublished autobiography places great emphasis on the imbrication of her family with a French

\textsuperscript{57} NLS Acc. 8695/81, item 13.
\textsuperscript{58} NLS Acc. 8695/125, 126, 127.
pair of sisters, Blanche and Aline Bessire--fondly known as the Tantes--and their niece Jeanne Guillaume. The Bessires kept a small school in Edinburgh, at the corner of Manor Place and Rothesay Terrace, known as The French School; conducted entirely in French, it had drawn the dedication of David and Alice Chalmers for the education of their daughters. This was by no means the only or most obvious choice for the Chalmers daughters’ education (the three Chalmers sons were sent to Edinburgh Academy and Ardvreck.). By the time their eldest daughter, Hannah Helen, born in 1882, was of school age, Edinburgh was burgeoning with educational possibilities for girls of the Chalmers’s class, including those like St. George’s which were explicitly tied to the project of women’s higher education. But apparently the Chalmers parents, and perhaps especially David Chalmers, were “captivated” by the Bessires. The relationship between the families extended far beyond term-time. Alice Chalmers and her daughters—and later sometimes Esther and other girls—repeatedly travelled with the Bessires as (undoubtedly paid) guides and arrangers of housing and excursions during holidays. The relationship included Lorimers as well; Louise and John Henry came for visits to the Bessires’ house in Normandy and Robert Stodart

59 EBC, “Green Box,” 355.
61 EBC, “Green Box,” 355; EBC is quoting Hannah Chalmers Campbell.
Lorimer designed a villa for them at their home near Mentone.⁶²

Esther Chalmers later claimed that the allure of the Bessires’ school for her parents was not predominantly its intellectual standards:

> [T]he Bessires well knew our parents were not, as a rule, very interested in scholastic attainments. What they wanted for their daughters was a certain standard of behavior, of *deportment* to use an outmoded Victorian/Edwardian word. This included training in the art of avoiding those chilly silences that must never *never* be allowed to occur in polite society.⁶³

And yet… Esther Chalmers goes on to make clear that the “social” education she received from the Bessires was not limited to social graces. Blanche Bessire displayed an admirable sense of fair play: “she wore the swishest of taffeta petticoats, chosen on purpose to warn us of her approach. That was the kind of person she was.” Blanche Bessire was an early woman graduate of the Sorbonne, taking a degree in literature and philosophy alongside her blind brother, Emile, explaining

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⁶² EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, section following ch. 3 (c. 1907), pp. 3-4; for the villa, see http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/building_full.php?id=212172 (accessed 10/22/2017).
⁶³ EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 3, p. 8; see also ibid., ch. 3, p. 6; EBC describes her mother as possessing “true Lorimer gregariousness” but her father as much more socially awkward; the emphasis on social graces may have come from both for different reasons; ibid., ch. 1, p. 8.
that she was doing the reading for him in any case.64 “One of
the Sorbonne’s earliest female graduates, she had to ‘show
proficiency in needlework’ and liked to tell us how she got by
with a piece of canvas covered with enormous stitches.”65
Esther commended the rigor of her own education in French
literature and thought especially and in terms which carry a
charge: the Bessires and their staff gave her “[i]nvaluable
training for what was to come many years later when I would
skim rapidly through stacks of newspapers, Government
documents, reports, etc. and pounce on any points that might
be necessary or helpful to Lucie Dejardin, the Belgian M.P. for
whom I bottlewashed from 1923 till the invasion of Belgium
on May 10th 1940.”66

Beyond this education through the formal curriculum,
the Bessire family brought the Chalmerses into contact with
European radical traditions. Jeanne Guillaume, who taught at
the school, was the “Tantes’” niece; Jeanne’s mother, their
sister Léopoldine, was married to George Guillaume, who had
been a Swiss volunteer in defense of France and the Commune
in 1870 and 1871. Jeanne was thus the niece of James
Guillaume, a leader of the anarchist side in the First
International, translator of Bakunin and friend of Kropotkin.67

64 For Emile Bessire, see https://diju.ch/f/notices/detail/4370,
accessed 10/22/2017, and items, including photographs, EBC
preserved in NLS Acc. 8695.
65 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 3, p. 1.
66 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, ch. 3, p. 6.
67 For the Guillaumes, see La Famille Guillaume at
http://www.montmollin.ch/pub/Guillaume.pdf; materials are
more abundant on James, e.g.
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/guillaume/index.h
htm; https://robertgraham.wordpress.com/2016/05/29/from-
anarchism-to-syndicalism-the-journey-of-james-guillaume/
Esther Chalmers was very close to Jeanne, from whom she heard of Jaures, Kropotkin, and others whom Jeanne met through her uncle. Esther went on to meet this older generation of the family (as well as the Tantes’s brother Emile), and she never lost contact with the Tantes. Later, in Liège, she would attempt, unsuccessfully, to help Jeanne Guillaume print the work of her uncle James, especially his “Histoire de la Seconde Internationale.”

This familial and extrafamilial nexus, not trivially, ensured that Esther Chalmers, like the other women in her family, was utterly at home in French long before she began post-war relief work. It expands the contexts of Esther Chalmers’s enthusiasm for Europe and cosmopolitanism. It reminds us too that dismissive generalizations about girls’ education in private schools in Edinburgh or elsewhere can forestall actual investigation of women school-keepers’ erudition, talent, and sometimes highly distinctive cosmopolitanism. Esther Chalmers’s knowledge of socialism, anarchism, and profound political commitment began before the war. And again, this is not a story of rebellion against a family but one of knowledge and experiences which that family itself made possible and even cherished. Cross-generational cosmopolitanism and international engagements are stitched together with specific Scottish histories of

68 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695, penultimate (unnumbered) section, p. 6. According to EBC, the history was printed but uncirculated when all copies were lost in a fire.

69 This is a large topic about which there is more to say, but I hope to flag that the dismissal of elite girls’ education before some arbitrary time-point as only about “accomplishments,” understood as inherently trivial, should be challenged on multiple grounds.
education, women’s rights, and even a flash of Scottish architecture in the south of France.

IV.

These stories pervasively (if, until now, implicitly) share something which must not go unremarked: the material for these histories was created, organized, and shaped by Esther Chalmers. I have offered overlapping accounts of some lives but, more pointedly, a ramifying account of an archive, including the “intertext” of an archival record created by a librarian, the NLS’s inventory of “Esther Chalmers’s” papers. While, sadly, the name of the librarian who created the inventory has not been remembered, it seems clear that much organization, as well as overt labeling, was done by Esther Chalmers. It was her work which preserved such rich materials on other women, including some of the papers of her sisters, aunts, and grandmother, and letters from her own network of women co-workers and friends. It was especially her work which created a typescript autobiography, however incomplete, and which saved drafts. It was Esther Chalmers who wrote a long, bound typescript family history, “Out of the Green Box,” for her younger relatives on the Chalmers side and kept the notes and early drafts of that work too. It was primarily Esther Chalmers who annotated photographs to identify dates, locations, and subjects, including the Bessire family; who conserved sketches and watercolors; and who kept and filed miscellaneous printed texts, whether an article by her aunt Louise, a pamphlet on children’s homes in Belgium, a funeral programme, material from *Le Droit Humain*, or the minutes of ARP and Civil Defense meetings from Fife during the war.

Esther Chalmers was not a professional archivist, but she was a committed one, and as in the case of Robert Lee Wolff, she enabled the archival practices of others. It is worth underscoring some elements of her life in Liège: her work with
Marius Truchard, including the creation of the Librairie Chalmers (forcibly lost during the war) and her attempts to help preserve the work of James Guillaume. We should, as well, return to her “retirement” to Anstruther. It would be easy to think of this as a retreat to a picturesque village near some childhood haunts and relatives in Fife. But Anstruther also combines aspects of Esther Chalmers’s adult history: it was among the Fife fishing villages simultaneously associated with artists and with intense working-class history and pride; it is, as well, part of a land- and seascape deeply marked by war and the militarization of place. Relative proximity to St. Andrews and Dundee, as well as Edinburgh, also gave her easy connections to university life, notably, to the world (emphasis intentional) of legal scholarship in which her Lorimer grandparents and her father had participated. Elizabeth Fellowes Willock and Ian Douglas Willock---respectively a solicitor and a professor of jurisprudence at Dundee---were close friends and Esther Chalmers was very impressed by Angeline Kamba (wife of legal scholar and later vice-chancellor Walter Kamba), a legal librarian and, later, national archivist of Zimbabwe, whom she met when they lived in Anstruther.

70 The Willocks are, for some reason, almost always spelled Willocq in EBC’s diaries. They were frequent visitors and Elizabeth seems to have handled EBC’s will; for Ian Douglas Willock, see https://www.scotsman.com/news/obituaries/obituary-ian-douglas-willock-legal-academic-1-3142727 and http://www.scolag.org/system/files/2013_SCOLAG_236-239.pdf; for the Kambas, see https://www.scotsman.com/news/obituaries/walter-kamba-1-905935; http://caineprize.com/blog/2017/9/28/a-tribute-to-angeline-kamba-from-the-council-of-the-caine-prize-for-african-writing; http://www.sundaymail.co.zw/dr-angeline-
Ironically, one aspect of Anstruther’s history could (and still can) obscure her own family history and even falsely overwrite it. Anstruther was the birthplace of Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847), minister, professor, and leader of the Disruption, a name of enormous power in Scottish history and no relation to Esther Chalmers at all. Thomas Chalmers’s name marked Anstruther’s great church; Chalmers Brae, a central street; and the Easter Chalmers lighthouse at the harbor. In Anstruther, “Miss Chalmers” might easily have been thought as perhaps a spinster descendant of that family rather than associated with the Lorimers; even today, in speaking with local historians, one needs to quickly explain that she was a different Chalmers. But she left her archival mark nonetheless; she was a supporter of the Scottish Fisheries Museum, mooted in 1965 and founded in 1967. Some traces of the Museum are in her own archive in the NLS in Edinburgh, but her name can be found on a door in the Museum. It is the door of the Research Library which contains, e.g., boat registers, many thousands of photographs, government reports, and other materials documenting fisherfolk in work, community, war, and family all around Scotland. A brass plaque reads, in part, “The creation of this library was made possible by the generosity of Miss Esther B. Chalmers, M.B.E.,

kamba-dies/ (all accessed 5/17/2018); and NLS Acc. 8695/45, EBC pocket diary for 1980, entry for 29 June 1980.

71 Though the church is gone, many records of it endure; see https://canmore.org.uk/site/70072/anstruther-easter-chalmers-memorial-church (accessed 5/14/208) and a memorial garden with sculpted head of Thomas Chalmers was dedicated in 2013.

72 http://www.scotfishmuseum.org/history-of-the-museum.php (accessed 5/16/2018); NLS Acc. 8695/284, in EBC’s papers, is a copy of the 1983 annual report of the museum.
Chevalier de l’Ordre de Leopold II, M.A.” Her Belgian life and its recognition, and her education, are marked (and perhaps ensure that she was not assumed to be one of the other Chalmers?), but what lies behind the door enables exploration of the lives of others, made possible in part by her.

Esther Chalmers’s archive in the NLS was clearly a distinct as well as distinctive project: these are the materials she wrote, kept, sorted, and annotated. These are the materials whose destiny she organized. This preservation of papers and creation of accounts should not be regarded either as miscellany nor, through focus on the family papers alone, as a performance of familial piety to be expected of an unmarried daughter of a house; it is far more diverse than that. She could have put the fate of this material into the hands of family members or picked out for preservation only the materials that might enter the Lorimer archival vortex of Kellie Castle. She didn’t—she kept family history, political life, friendship, and research together. She took no chances, saving drafts and duplicates. In an act moving and protective, Esther Chalmers deposited a copy of “Out of the Green Box,” which she had

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74 There were occasional tensions about that vortex; on 22 June 1946, EBC’s brother Patrick Chalmers wrote Alison Chalmers Volchaneski asking to borrow their grandfather’s memoir: “I understand it belongs to Christopher [Lorimer], but as he and I are not on speaking terms, and never likely to be, I don’t want to have it go back to him and then have to ask his Lordship’s permission to see it. In fact I shouldn’t get it that way; nor would I ask. But I will send it back to Nan [Hannah Chalmers Campbell], or you, as soon as I have taken a copy.” This letter ended up in EBC’s hands; NLS Acc. 8695/21.
written for the younger generation of her family, most directly the children of her brother, in the NLS well before her death. That copy had belonged to her “very dear friend and partner, Spirou Foidart,” whom she thanks in an inscription for her design skills and “her unstinted help & patience.” She later added the date 1965, and a further note: “Thérèse (Spirou) Foidart/born 12.4.1898 at Liège/died 5.1.1978 at Camelon Hospital,” providing historical specificity and provenance. She ensured that this loved copy of the book and the name of a loved person were conserved.75

And there is more. I want to highlight some clusters of material in that archive to which I have not yet granted prominence in this essay. These materials—and Esther Chalmer’s commitment to them—connect, underline, and extend the range of Scottish international lives.

V.

Two sets of materials are, at first, family stories about men.

As noted earlier, Esther Chalmers’s grandfather, James Lorimer, had become Professor of Public Law at Edinburgh. He died in 1890, i.e. before Esther Chalmers’s birth. The son of a factor who benefited from his father’s inheritance of money derived from the Dutch East India Company, as well the patronage of his employer, the earl of Kinnoul—and thus with a close link to the events around the Disruption, as it was the earl whose actions led to the Auchterarder case—James Lorimer was, not surprisingly, sympathetic to conservatism and patronage. He opposed not just universal suffrage but even

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75 EBC, “Green Box,” 1; the book is addressed to the children of her brother James Lorimer Chalmers, known as Giac or Jack, b. 1888. The copy EBC presented in January 1978 is NLS Acc. 7109; the NLS online manuscripts catalogue provides this information.
the limited 1867 act. His role in the history of Scottish university reform in the 1850s was more forward-looking—Esther Chalmers summarized the goals of the Association for the Extension of Scottish Universities as “to move beyond the pervading classics and foster the teaching of new subjects, even including the History of Art.” His legal thought was similarly divided between conservatism and an interest in innovation; centered on ideas of natural law, which have not endured well, it was notable for its role in the development of theories of international law.

More specifically, James Lorimer foresaw and argued for some form of international, at least European, government, a “permanent congress of nations,” and an international court

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76 For the inheritance of resources, see http://archive.org/stream/lorimerscotland00stod/lorimerscotland00stod_djvu.txt (accessed 6/2/2018) as well as information on display at Kellie Castle. For the Auchterarder case and the Disruption more general, see entries in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed., Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1993); for James Lorimer on the disruption, see his tss., “The Family Story,” in NLS Acc. 8695/138, 151-55; on suffrage, 147.

77 EBC, “Green Box,” 293-94.

of justice of some kind. James Lorimer was notable for the breadth and depth of his European engagement. He was on close terms with European scholars of law, with whom he was a founder of the Institute of International Law (Esther Chalmers’s autobiography specifically notes that the foundation took place in Belgium).79 Esther Chalmers’s older brother Patrick (1880-1953) claimed James Lorimer’s importance in the pre-history of the League of Nations in newspaper cuttings Esther archived; Patrick added that, in his own career in the Foreign Office, he had proposed an arrangement for “interchangeability of citizenship” among a number of European nations at least for the duration of World War II, drawing on his grandfather’s ideas.80 Esther Chalmers’s archive includes a typescript family history of the Lorimers by James Lorimer and an annotated text of a talk in which James Lorimer claimed a history of Scottish internationalism; miscellaneous other materials by and about him; Patrick Chalmers’s letters; and some material from the 1970s regarding an ongoing skirmish with Lorimer relatives about the control and prominence (or lack thereof) of display at Kellie Castle of documents from Italy and Russia honoring James Lorimer.81

James Lorimer’s thinking about Scotland and Europe, international law and institutions, are part of a longer history

79 EBC, “Green Box,” 301-303.
80 Patrick Chalmers to EBC, 25 July 1948, NLS Acc. 8695/21 and 8695/324.
81 For James Lorimer’s memoir, see note 66 above; for James Lorimer on Scottish internationalism, see “Notes by Prof. James Lorimer” on the ‘Anglo-Mania,’” n.d., Acc. 8695/131; for the arguments with relatives, see Hew Lorimer to EBC, 2 February 1972 and 24 April 1972, and EBC note on letter of 16 May 1977 from Christopher Lorimer (“C. apparently thinks I am an imbecile! …” all in NLS Acc. 8896/21.
Esther Chalmers and her brother inherited. But it is crucial to highlight that James Lorimer’s ideas about international law and international organizations, according to the contributors to a 2016 forum on his work and legacy, were not just infused by but fundamentally structured by a committed imperialist frame and deeply embedded racism.\(^{82}\) I draw attention to James Lorimer’s legacy to Esther Chalmers not to redeem it but make explicit that the family intellectual and political heritage she preserved was both a history of Europeanness and an archive of empire and racism.

The second cluster of male-centered family materials in the archive is much larger. Esther Chalmers’s archive contains writings by her father, David Chalmers—letters and his autobiographical writings in the form of his published memoirs of his “colonial service.”\(^{83}\) But David Chalmers’s centrality to Esther Chalmers’s archive is greater than that: the longest text in the NLS Chalmers collection is Esther’s family history for

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\(^{83}\) David Chalmers’s papers can also be found in the University of Edinburgh Library; see https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb237-coll-239.
her Chalmers relatives, “Out of the Green Box.” She explains that she had found, in “a large, green-painted box known to my generation as the Turkish soldier’s chest,” materials she had first seen decades earlier:

As relaxation from taking my degree in the 1920s I browsed among these oddments [of papers in her mother’s house] sufficiently to realise that there lay the bones of the family story. I realized too---what was much more important to me---that … [the box] must contain the story of my father, the man whom I had learnt from my mother to respect and admire but had never known.84

Esther Chalmers’s impetus to write that history is far more than daughterly curiosity or familial emotion. The impetus is vindication and indictment. This history escapes and exceeds “Out of the Green Box.”

To summarize with unforgiveable brevity: in 1898, David Chalmers—by then several years retired and frustrated by the “four walls of an Edinburgh house”--was asked to investigate events in Sierra Leone known as the “hut tax war,” which he saw as “the opportunity … to render a last valuable service to the community of Sierra Leone” only to find “his high hopes wrecked by political intrigue.”85 David Chalmers’s report was intensely critical of the British government’s actions

84 EBC, “Green Box,” 1.
85 EBC, “Green Box,” 1.
in policy and action in startlingly frank terms.\textsuperscript{86} The report was viciously attacked and discredited before publication by the government in actions orchestrated significantly by Joseph Chamberlain.\textsuperscript{87} David Chalmers died soon after, but his widow—Janet Alice Chalmers—assisted by E. D. Morel, wrote and published a defense of his report which is (of course) included in the archive; Esther Chalmers drew on it as well.\textsuperscript{88} Esther Chalmers commended David Chalmers for his documentary work: he “[made] the fullest use of the nearly three hundred witnesses who [came] to his office… [and] record[ed] the rambling answers of women traders, relatives of

\textsuperscript{86} Report by Her Majesty's Commissioner and correspondence on the subject of the insurrection in the Sierra Leone Protectorate, 1898 (London: Darling and Son, 1899); see also “Report on the insurrection in Sierra Leone Protectorate, and on affairs generally in the colony and protectorate, by commissioner Sir David Chalmers. Includes documentary evidence and verbatim transcripts of oral evidence,” National Archives ref. CO 879/54/9, record at http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C8869372, accessed 10/27/2017. For Janet Alice Chalmers’s article, see “In Defence of Sir David Chalmers,”\textit{The Nineteenth Century} 47 (March 1900): 485-97. For these texts in EBC’s archive, see NLS inventory.


missionaries, boatmen, policemen’s widows, a shipwright, numerous farmers and headmen, a carpenter, etc., etc.” as well as his close questioning of government officials. 89 His account, like hers, is accumulative and analytic.

While writing her account, Esther Chalmers corresponded with noted historians of Africa, especially Kenneth Little.90 She obtained and kept articles and references from scholarly work, including materials she could access in Belgium, especially those which helped her to understand Sierra Leonean actors. She kept her index-card notes.91 She gave a lecture (in French) on the issue as well as writing a pugnacious account in “Out of the Green Box.”

David Chalmers cannot stand as the non-imperialist, non-racist counter to James Lorimer in a falsely unified narrative of Esther Chalmers’s inheritance. His own published memoirs, which she included in her files, contain plenty of racist categorizations, especially from his time in Guyana. Nonetheless, in his own memoirs, his daughter’s account, and in some much later re-visittings by scholars and others, David Chalmers’s respect for African legal systems is notable; his report continues to be mined by historians of Sierra Leone.92

89 EBC, “Green Box,” 406-07.
90 NLS Acc. 8695/31; NLS ACC. 8695/272 and 274 are copies of essays by Little.
91 NLS Acc. 8695/64.
92 This is a literature beyond my range, but see, e.g., Magbauly C. Fyle, Historical Dictionary of Sierra Leone (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2006), s.v. “Chalmers Report,” 35-35; Sylvia Ojukutu-Macauley and Ismail Rashid, eds., The Paradoxes of History and Memory in Post-Colonial Sierra Leone (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013), especially Lansana Gberie, “The Chalmers Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Sierra Leone: Official Inquiries as Historical Memory,” 101-126;
My account of him is deliberately very brief here as an incitement to others to make use of the material in Esther Chalmers’s archive for its value to historians of Scotland and Africa. In the context of my own arguments here, this cluster of materials stands as more evidence that Esther Chalmers’s archive should be seen as a huge, engaged, unfinished work which often foregrounds histories of law, human rights, and internationalism as they run through and beyond other Scottish histories.

David Chalmers’s remains in the NLS are not evidence for a story I can tell about West African history. But it is a story Esther Chalmers took enormous trouble to explore and even more trouble to preserve and to present. If her own life work can sometimes—with plenty of its own lacunae and biases—rebuke the limitations of her grandfather and her father, her archive discourages sharp divisions between the versions of her story with which I began—as internationalist feminist and socialist, on the one hand, and member of a multi-generational family network of women on the other. It refuses a neat opposition between “her” stories and the inscriptions of men in official histories and institutions. Indeed, it is partly through her father’s activities—and the knowledge she accumulated in order to document him—that another woman appears in Esther Chalmers’s archive.

Joanna Herbert was a Guyanese woman of color whom the Chalmers family met and employed in Georgetown during David Chalmers’s term of service as chief justice of Guyana, born c. 1846. Esther Chalmers’s autobiography begins by evoking her, albeit with an unfortunate attempt at phonetic spelling of her accent (“Mercy on da chile”) and it largely refers to her by the family nickname of “Nana” (she was also known to the Chalmers children as “Hubbie,” probably a child’s version of “Herbert”). In “Out of the Green Box,” Esther Chalmers briefly speaks for all of her siblings in saying that Herbert became “our dearest friend for the next thirty-six years” when she was hired in 1881 (Esther knew her for twenty-three years). Herbert travelled back and forth to Scotland with Alice Chalmers during David Chalmers’s service in Guyana and then remained in Scotland after his retirement.

Esther Chalmers’s autobiography takes care to include a wider history: Herbert was the descendant of an African man “press-ganged from Africa to eat his heart out on a British Guiana sugar estate.” Chalmers would not have shied from the word “enslaved”; she is making clear that, in her

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93 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, p. 2, spells her first name “Johanna” but Hannah Helen Campbell Chalmers refers to her clearly as Joanna in NLS Acc. 8695/117, ts. memoir “My Mother.” I shall follow that spelling, which is also in Scotland’s People with a death date, 1917, and Herbert’s own will. There is a photograph of her marked “Nana and Jack” in Guyana in NLS Acc. 8695/166 (Jack was EBC’s older brother), and 4 or 5 photographs of her in Edinburgh at NLS Acc. 8695/148.

94 EBC, “Green Box,” 256. Hannah Chalmers Campbell notes that Joanna Herbert and Alice Chalmers were together for most of forty-five years, NLS Acc. 8695/117, ts. “My Mother.”
understanding, Joanna was descended from a victim of forced indenture. 95 Esther Chalmers’s autobiography is clear in stating that Joanna was the daughter of a mother born in slavery through the rape of her mother; Esther remembers Joanna Herbert’s talk about the bitterness of memory. Esther Chalmers’s archive makes space for Joanna Herbert’s story. It preserves a text by Hannah Chalmers Campbell recalling that Joanna Herbert told the children that “The Freedom come when my mother was a little girl.” 96 Hannah Campbell’s text explains that Joanna Herbert was a keen reader of the Times and a churchgoer, and it provides precious evidence that Herbert told the children stories, including Anansi tales, which had passed from Africa through the diaspora.97

Around 1908, Herbert wished to return to Guyana and Alice Chalmers arranged her passage and a pension. The archive includes her letters to Alice, Hannah, and Alison Chalmers, including one which asks that she be remembered to

96 EBC was proud that among her own ancestors was one who changed his life because of revulsion at slavery; Robert Stodart, her great-great-grandfather went to Tobago but left “he saw too much [of slavery] at first hand” and apprenticed instead to Swiss piano-maker Burkhart Tschudi; NLS Acc. 8695/85 regards; EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, p. 2.
97 NLS Acc. 8695/117, ts. “My Mother.” These may be unreliable memories, but Hannah Chalmers Campbell mentions “Brer Rabbit” and “Nanny” spider stories, as well as a song originally from Newfoundland which she remembers in a “creole” accent.
the Bessires from this time. However, Herbert became unhappy in Georgetown and returned to Edinburgh and the Chalmers/Lorimer households until her death in the Edinburgh Women’s Hospital in 1917. A draft copy of Joanna Herbert’s will is tucked in a folder with Esther’s earliest childhood writings.\textsuperscript{98} That will left a five pound bequest for the Scottish Episcopal Holy Cross Church then being built at Davidson’s Mains; the building still stands.\textsuperscript{99}

Esther Chalmers’s archive includes precious photographs of Joanna Herbert in Edinburgh. But I said earlier that sometimes untold lives are in plain sight. Esther Chalmers and her sister Hannah Campbell take care to note Joanna Herbert’s presence in paintings by their uncle, John Henry Lorimer: “The Mushroom Gatherers,” “Lullaby,” and “Bénédicité/Our Grandmother’s Birthday.”\textsuperscript{100} In a variety of

\textsuperscript{98} NLS Acc. 8695/122.
\textsuperscript{99} NLS Acc. 8695/110, “General Disposition and Settlement” document dated 1908, inside folder marked “Childhood.” For Holy Cross, see http://www.holycrossedinburgh.org/?page_id=128 (accessed 5/18/2018). I am grateful to the Reverend Canon Dr. Douglas Kernahrens for conversation about Holy Cross’s history and for showing me the church and some of its records.
ways, Esther Chalmers’s archive resists turning Joanna Herbert’s life into a “mammy story,” in which the historical importance of a woman of color rests only in the fact that some white children once loved and depended on her. Esther Chalmers ensured that the visual evidence of Joanna Herbert’s life in Scotland was documented, and she took care to inscribe Joanna Herbert’s African lineage as far as she could: Herbert “had the high cheekbones, the dignified bearing of a Mende warrior.” 101 The Mende people are principally from Sierra Leone.

VI.

Christopher Fyfe, who died in 2008, was born in 1920. Although his family was Scottish, his life included time in Ontario, Oxford, Dusseldorf, Bristol, and Belfast, as well as Aberdeen, before he settled in Edinburgh in 1962. He remained for many years and became deeply committed to the preservation of the Scottish past as an activist on behalf of the Old Town and the development of contemporary Scottish culture, notably as a supporter of the Traverse Theatre. 102 He participated as well in organizations addressing homelessness, slum housing, and the needs of young people. He left his papers dealing with these social issues and with historical

during her research (NLS Acc. 8695/45, EBC diary entry for 24 April 1980 and passim).

101 EBC autobiography, NLS Acc. 8695/1, p. 2.

preservation to the NLS, with prefatory texts to each file, “a narrative account by Christopher Fyfe of the background to the particular protest campaign, or the origins of an individual community association or action group” and directions that these “should be read straight through in order to obtain an overview of the circumstances in which the papers were accumulated.”

Like Esther Chalmers, Christopher Fyfe took no chances with this archival legacy.

Fyfe’s larger legacy was his work as an important, innovative, and generous historian of Sierra Leone. He first went to Sierra Leone in 1950 as an (officially entirely unqualified) archivist; he rapidly retrieved, preserved, and organized an irreplaceable collection of documents. He went on to write a history of Sierra Leone which was shaped, in part, by his reading of Wittgenstein and James Joyce. Appointed to a post in African history at the University of Edinburgh in 1962, he went on to edit and write many more books of Sierra Leonean history, including a biography of James Africanus Horton, the first African student to graduate from Edinburgh.

He refused promotion to a professorship on the grounds that resources should go to creating posts for younger scholars. He served as editor of the Journal of African History and took on other official responsibilities, and he was remembered as well for his less official roles. “In the 1970s, when the African scene in Edinburgh was vibrant, the ‘wee Fyfe’ was a central figure. His bohemian parties in St Mary’s


Street were, as one colleague put it, ‘worthy of record by a latter-day Cockburn.’ He did not marry but was close to his family, especially a nephew. Most profoundly, he was appreciated in Sierra Leone and Sierra Leoneans elsewhere, especially by Krio people. He was specially honored at a 1987 celebration of the bicentenary of Freetown. His role in modern Sierra Leonean history went beyond his publications.

Esther Chalmers may have contacted Christopher Fyfe directly during her research; she could have met him through Basil Davidson, the eminent Africanist with whom she corresponded a about a history they shared with Robert Lee Wolff, the history of the Balkans. Their paths could have

105 *Scotsman* obituary, n. 92 above.
107 NLS Acc. 8695/3, is the ts. of an account of a journey in Dalmatia in 1931 in which EBC later discerned fascist code-language, and a letter from Davidson of 20 December 1981 returning this “Serbian memoir” notes that “Christopher” was in Gambia.
crossed on the many shared terrains of Edinburgh and its history. No letters to or from Christopher Fyfe remain in Esther Chalmers’s archive although he appears in her address books and diary; when he visited her in Anstruther in 1980, she wrote that the day was “not nearly long enough” but “lovely,” as well as that he too took an interest in the Scottish Fisheries Museum. In any case, the NLS’s acquisition records note that, after the death of Esther Chalmers in 1983, her papers came there “through the good offices of Christopher Fyfe.”

VII.

This essay has not been a biography of Esther Chalmers---nor of Lucie Dejardin, the many Lorimers and Chalmerses, the Bessire/Guilluame family, Robert Lee Wolff, Joanna Herbert, or Christopher Fyfe. It is not even a full biography of an archive; that archive contains more threads to be followed and more intertextual and inter-archival connections to explore. It certainly leaves unanswered questions. Some may be answered with further research; others will remain. At the least, this essay will increase the sometimes unexpected visibility of some names in searches of current and developing digital archives. Yet clearly Esther Chalmers created her archive, including some very long texts. Her care and control

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108 NLS Acc. 8695/49 (c. 1978-80) and 50 (undated); NLS Acc. 8695/45, EBC diary for 1980, entry for 26 April.
109 I am indebted to Alison Metcalfe of the NLS for finding and sharing this information with me in August 2017. It appears that EBC first approached the Edinburgh University Library about some of her materials (NLS Acc. 8695/45, entry for 7 December 1980 and 8695/46, entry for 15 January 1981); Christopher Fyfe’s own papers are in both the NLS and the University Library.
ensured that at her death it passed not to or only through family hands but through the care of a remarkable Scottish and international historian of Africa, a proponent of cultural innovation and advocate for the needs of the most vulnerable people of Edinburgh. Through Christopher Fyfe, Esther Chalmers’ work came to the National Library of Scotland, a building ornamented by sculptures by her kinsman Hew Lorimer. But again: this is not a story of rebellion against or disavowal of family or place: Esther Chalmers and Hew Lorimer were on good terms and collaborated in family history. He provided many kindnesses during her later years. It can only be through Hew Lorimer’s permission that John Henry Lorimer’s portrait of David Chalmers hung, and still hangs, in Kellie Castle.

Esther Barbara Chalmers left an extraordinary and incomplete map of relations between Scottish and other histories. It demonstrates that such relations were not always extraordinary but could thickly knotted into visible daily lives for some. It suggests that radical questioning and decisive new commitments could flow from and alongside these inherited relations. Her work deserves to be continued by historians of many kinds making use of it. Her own Scottish international life is only one of those she brought to history.

It is a truism: Lives can be told in many ways.

The author would like to particularly thank James Fraser for his generosity and acute suggestions; Geoff Eley for endless empathetic support; and Peter Syme for his lively interest including a superb excursion to Kellie Castle and elsewhere in Fife.
REVIEW ESSAY

STEP DANCE IN CAPE BRETON AND OTHER COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIPS: A REVIEW ESSAY

Michael Newton, University of North Carolina

*Canadian Folk Music*, the journal of the Canadian Society for Traditional Music, devoted an entire issue in 2015 to the subject of vernacular percussive dance (commonly known as “step dance”) in Canada.¹ The introduction to the volume, co-written by the three editors, notes that insufficient scholarly attention has been paid to this form of cultural expression despite its popularity amongst numerous Canadian ethnic groups.

Each of us was frustrated by particular gaps in the scholarship on percussive dance in Canada, including our individual styles from Cape Breton, Newfoundland, and the Ottawa Valley, their antecedent forms in Scotland, Ireland, and England, and particularly work that looked across all of these styles.²

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¹ I’d like to thank Greg Adams, Robert Dunbar, and Mats Melin for comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this essay. Any remaining shortcomings are my own.
Commonalities between regional styles in Canada, and in fact in North America more widely, despite local variations, point to a significant set of shared lineages or influences, yet the social histories and cultural dynamics which explain the origins and trajectories of many local branches of choreographic tradition have yet to be untangled.

Some excellent work has been published in the last few years which subjects a body of evidence – the observations of outsiders, commentary from community insiders, social history, musical remains, dance manuals, and formal ethnography – to the modern methodologies of anthropology, folkloristics, ethnomusicology, and ethnochoreology. The results not only illuminate the personalities and processes that have contributed to the dances of particular groups but can provide insights that can be applied to others. There are two volumes in particular that were too new to be used by the authors of the *Canadian Folk Music* but which warrant special mention, especially as they pertain directly to the history of step dance in North America.

Catherine Foley’s *Step Dancing in Ireland* \(^4\) is an historical and ethnographic history of the tradition in Ireland, tracing its roots from eighteenth-century dancing masters to her own experiences in the twentieth century. She pays particular attention to the social meaning and context of dance, making it a living thing that is negotiated and contested. Although introduced as a feature of colonisation and an embodiment of social class, the Irish dancing master acted as a cultural mediator between diverse social groups and reshaped step dance as a choreographic rejoinder to the “civilising process,” a form of cultural expression allowing the assimilation of external innovations to became distinctively Irish.

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\(^3\) Ibid., 2.

Phil Jamison’s *Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics*\(^5\) treats the history of the various forms of dance in Appalachia as a complex weave of many ethnic influences. His first task is to demolish the myth of Appalachian isolation, tracing the migrations, settlements, trade patterns and travel routes that have continually brought influences into the region, even if they sometimes lingered longer than elsewhere. By dissecting the components of social and solo dances, Jamison is able to identify the contributions of various ethnic groups to Appalachian dance tradition. Not only has the crucial influence of dancing masters in the formation of step dance (variously referred to as “flatfooting,” “clogging,” and “buckdancing”) been largely forgotten, but the tradition has ricocheted so many times between “high” and “low” culture, European, African and Native performers and contexts, that no single social category can claim ownership of or authority over it.

There is a vibrant percussive dance tradition of Scottish Gaelic origin in Cape Breton, with related branches in mainland Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and the Codroy Valley of Newfoundland. While some have doubted the Highland pedigree of this dance form and have posited Irish influence, advocates over the last two decades have insisted that it represents a relic of eighteenth-century Gaeldom, lost in Scotland but maintained in its purity in Canadian exile. The cohesion of linguistic, musical, choreographic and familial networks in the Maritimes have enabled it to survive and thrive, according to its advocates. A careful study might help clarify its origins in Scotland, its transmission to Canada, and the various forces on and contributions to its evolution in Gaeldom, including its virtual absence in Scotland.

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John Gibson’s *Gaelic Cape Breton Step-Dancing* is the first attempt to provide a comprehensive and systematic account of the history of the tradition both in Scotland and the Canadian Maritimes. This book presents the largest collection of materials about dance in Gaelic contexts available to date, gathered from the records of local cultural organizations, the descriptions of anglophone outsiders (mostly travelers and sojourners), and texts internal to the native Gaelic community itself (mostly song-poetry and expository prose). He also provides summaries of his notes of fieldwork interviews of Cape Breton Gaels he conducted from the 1970s to the present day and correspondence with some notable authorities. Copious genealogical information places dancers into a kinship and geographical context.

Although accomplished scholars such as those noted above have provided appropriate precedents for the research of ethnic dance traditions in North America, Gibson’s volume has a narrow agenda: to prove that modern Cape Breton step dance is the only genuine, authentic form of Scottish Gaelic choreographic practice that survives to the present, that it provides the singular missing link for understanding the history of dance in the Highlands, and that its demise in Scotland, along with documentation about it, is due to the hostile prejudices of evangelical Protestantism and Anglocentric “Improvement.”

There are many valid reasons for the resentment that lingers about the persecution of the Gaelic language and culture, but chips on the shoulder can have the effect of creating blind spots that compromise scholarship. Gibson’s adherence to a tightly circumscribed definition of dance causes

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him to suppress materials and lines of inquiry that would call his assumptions into question and expose the complicated relationships of historical reality where dance and Gaeldom are concerned.

One fundamental flaw in the work is an essentialised vision of culture and tradition that anthropologists abandoned generations ago: authentic Gaelic dance, it is implied, was inseparably tied to Catholic, Jacobite, and isolated rural communities. From this static starting point, it can only decline through malicious influences of external origin (pp. 4, 14, 16, and 26). This master narrative of Gaeldom’s collapse is not a wholly invalid one, given that its transformation into modernity was driven by anglocentric institutions with little respect or accommodation for the specific ethnic, linguistic, cultural and social characteristics and needs of Gaels. The irony, however, is that the form of dance for which Gibson is an advocate is a syncretic one, the result of Gaeldom’s acculturation of élite European choreographic fashions, not an ancient relic predating or contrasting with such innovations.

Gibson himself provides the data to support this idea but is not open to it and lacks the methodology to analyse the dynamic processes adroitly explored by Foley, Jamison, and others. “Improvement” is a recurring centripetal paradigm in the cultural history of eighteenth-century Scotland and education is improvement applied to the human. Numerous sources quoted in the book reiterate the role of dance as the physical correlative of formal instruction and discipline to enable pupils to become members of the refined, genteel, upwardly-mobile social class (pp. 79, 156, 178, 189, and 377).

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Against this evidence and the inexorable forces of social change, Gibson claims that formal methods and institutions of dance made no significant, lasting impact on tradition, especially in Nova Scotia (pp. 6, 12, 38, 45, 52, 63, 89, 134, 198, and 266). This is naive and detracts from giving credit to Gaelic communities for their creativity and resiliency in evolving their cultural expressions according to contemporary conditions. Amongst those formal institutions and methods were dancing masters, dance schools, and balls/assemblies which exposed Gaels, even in the eighteenth-century Outer Hebrides (e.g., p. 155), to new forms of and ideas about dance.

Indeed, another of the fatal flaws of the book is that there is no attempt to discuss dance in general terms, to define step dance explicitly, to break it down into its constituent elements, to attempt to explain why Gaels danced and the contexts for doing so, or its role in traditional culture. This would have enabled a more nuanced and fine-grained analysis of its historical development, relationships to other Gaelic dance genres, influences on and from the choreographic practices of other ethnic groups, and the significance of dance in Gaelic society in the past and present.

For Gibson, “Nova Scotia Scotch step-dancing is the one and only key to the old puzzle … There is no plausible alternative,” (pp. 12 and 260). Ethnochoreologists will beg to differ with such a blinkered view. It is impossible to believe that someone who has rummaged through so many obscure texts would miss references to dance forms and practices in the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography, so his pattern of excluding material that might contradict his predetermined conclusion cannot be accidental. He represses,

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8 Fortunately, such issues are skillfully examined in Mats Melin, One With The Music: Cape Breton Step Dancing Tradition and Transmission (Sydney, Cape Breton: Cape Breton University Press, 2015).
for example, evidence for ritual/dramatic dances, even when sources are available from authorities he quotes, such as Alexander Campbell, Fr. Allan MacDonald, and Alexander Carmichael, and denies the importance of such genres in Gaelic society (pp. 109, 186, 219 and 250). This suggests a lack of expertise in the categories, functions, and contexts of pre-modern dance⁹ and trivializes the differences between archaic Gaelic dance traditions and modern forms of social dance, such as step dance, that are rooted in élite continental precedents. He similarly ignores evidence for the ring dance, a choral form of song movement performed at ritual events, which predates any form of step dance by centuries in Gaeldom.¹⁰

Perhaps the most glaring omission is a lack of discussion on the relationship between step dance and (so-called) Highland dancing, both of which are clearly derived from the same eighteenth-century dance practices but have evolved separately. While the former became a vernacular genre in Canada, detached from formal settings, the latter became fixed and ossified as an institutional practice with

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increasingly non-Gaelic influences, performed competitively. Although there is evidence of the existence of dancing masters and fixed, choreographed dances of a formal nature in Cape Breton, Gibson gives them little weight and even implies a dismissive attitude towards dance genres of this sort (as on p. 99).

Cape Breton itself has never been entirely cut off from external influences and as a living, vernacular tradition, Canadian Gaels have continuously responded to the creative musical and choreographic possibilities available to them, adding musical instruments (such as the piano), musical styles (such as the stride piano style\textsuperscript{11}), and dance motifs (such from the Charleston and tap dancing in Hollywood films). Indeed, many sources remark on the performance of incoming dance fashions in the same spaces as the traditional ones in Cape Breton.

This volume is at its best when Gibson shows how different kinds of sources can shed on one another, such as when he finds Gaelic song-poetry, fieldwork interviews, and documentary remains that flesh out the biography of a nineteenth-century tradition bearer whose reminiscences about dancing in her youth has been much quoted from Carmina Gadelica (pp. 162-69).

Although Gibson has identified an important collection of references to dance in primary Gaelic texts, presenting them in geographical and chronological groups, there are problems with some of the sources and the way that he interprets them. The most significant issue is confirmation bias: Gibson is too eager to read too much into brief and ambiguous comments. Step dance is not just people moving their limbs and kicking their feet, keenly and vigorously, in time to the music, but few

sources are more precise than this (pp. 77, 80, 90, 152, 166, 203, and 211).

There are challenges with the Gaelic terminology and the semantics of particular words used for dance in general, for specific dances, and for particular movements, and the volume does not address them in sufficient detail. Amongst these is the ambiguous dannsa Gàidhealach, which, as Gibson shows, does indeed refer in some sources to Cape Breton step dance (p. 102), but in some of his other texts it could equally connote the performance of modern Highland dancing.

Gibson has not utilised secondary sources that would elucidate the meaning and context of some of the primary texts he uses, as when he trusts a spurious nineteenth-century interpolation (“Bhiodh fleasgaichean donn’ air bonaibh ri ceòl”) into an eighteenth-century song-poem12 (pp. 50 and 166). He also commonly relies on implications of Gaelic isolation or cultural continuity in texts without considering the agenda or rhetorical aims of the author (i.e., pp. 80, 130, and 152).

Step dance is a physical activity which is dependent upon specific material conditions – especially wooden floors and hard shoes – which were much more readily available to Canadian Gaels than Scottish ones. Gibson does not discuss this issue and very few of his printed excerpts mention it (pp. 46, 228, 232 and 239) but I believe that it contributed to the divergent evolution and popularity of this percussive dance form in Dùthaich nan Craobh (“the Land of Trees”, as Gaels called North America), in contrast to Scotland.13

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13 See discussion in Newton, “ ‘Danssair air ùrlar-déile’,” 57-58.
Gibson’s lack of familiarity with the aesthetics of European dance fashions\(^{14}\) cause him to misinterpret remarks about the perceived grace of Highlanders (or lack thereof), according to outside observers (pp. 132, 137-39, 142, 178, and 216). He erroneously claims, for example, that “The Victorian phenomenon of Highland dancing strives to find use for the arms, hands, and fingers in some of its repertoire.” (p. 265). By comparing textual descriptions with visual representations of dancing in eighteenth-century Scotland (such as those included in the works of George Emmerson and Tom and Joan Flett), there is copious evidence that rural Scots danced with their whole body, typically elevating their arms and legs, and snapping their fingers. The focus on the neat, minimalist movement of the feet in percussive dance, particularly under the formal discipline of dancing masters, shifted the emphasis to the feet and eliminated the gestures of other limbs. Cape Breton step dancing has thus narrowed the choreographic repertoire that existed in the eighteenth-century Highlands, whereas (so-called) Highland dancing has, in this case, preserved an anachronism, even if it has since been codified and rigidified through ballet aesthetics.

Gibson ends on a sour note, objecting that three of the foremost folklorists of the twentieth century – John Lorne Campbell, Margaret Fay Shaw, and Calum MacIlleathain – did not seek out the data from informants that would have vindicated his conviction that step dancing was a principal form of Gaelic cultural expression. Nor did their informants offer such information on their own accord, despite some of them being opinionated personalities indeed.

Most Gaelic folklorists of the twentieth century were primarily concerned with gathering oral tradition relating to Highland folk life in the past, particularly the sophisticated song-poetry and oral narratives that evince continuity with the medieval past. That Gibson should be surprised that his own personal shibboleth for authentic Gaelicness was not prioritized by earlier folklorists suggests either a lack of self-awareness of his motives or an insufficient grasp of the history of folkloristics. Cape Breton step dance commonly serves as emblematic certification of the purity of Gaelic culture in exile and the corrupted state of tradition in the Highlands, but this is an oversimplification of the diverging paths of branches of Gaeldom at best.

This review essay may seem to be a prolonged treatment of a niche topic, but step dance is a widely-celebrated “product” of Cape Breton Gaeldom with a large public following, commonly extolled as a fossil from the eighteenth-century Highlands. It is thus invested with considerable symbolic significance. Despite claims of it being an archaic isolate of pure Gaelic pedigree, Cape Breton step dance should be studied as one member of a family of related modern dance forms that evolved in dialogue between disparate communities. Scottish Highland immigrants – as individuals, families, and communities – were widely dispersed in Canada and the United States and had many points of contact with other ethnic groups. Creating a more complete and accurate understanding of North America will necessarily require ending the long exclusion of Scottish Gaelic Studies from the academy. Scholars attempting to research the history, and literary and

cultural expressions, of Gaeldom need rigorous intellectual tools and a wider context to interpret and represent them accurately. Likewise, scholars in broad disciplines (such as dance) need to be able to draw upon research about Gaeldom that meets modern academic standards of being scrupulous, objective, and balanced.

The narrow approach of this volume does not directly provide us with any useful resources to answer such basic questions as whether the dance practices of Scottish Gaels did or could have had any influence on the Red River Jig of Manitoba or step dance in the Ottawa Valley, to name just two obvious examples from the volume of Canadian Folk Music mentioned at the start of this article. Nor does it acknowledge or attempt to explore how continental dance practices (such as the antecedents of step dance) interacted with and largely displaced older choreographic genres in the Highlands. Scottish Gaelic Studies can and should be in dialogue with research about all ethnic groups and vernacular cultures in North America, and we are the poorer for the continued lack of attention to it in scholarly activity on this continent.

Who was Robert Baillie? Was he the moderate, even reluctant, Covenanter revealed in his voluminous private correspondence, who claimed to love bishops and constantly urged moderation on his fellow Covenanters? Was he the vitriolic polemicist whose printed propaganda was a major contributor to the downfall of Archbishop Laud in 1640? Was he the university theologian who published learned treatises on reformed theology during his time at Glasgow University? Was he the humble and conscientious country minister of Kilwinning who refused to leave for greener pastures in Edinburgh because it would break the hearts of his parishioners? Indeed, Baillie is such a cypher that in the decades after his death Scots on both sides of the periodic religious divides that erupted in Scotland claimed him as their own. Thomas Ruddiman, an Episcopalian, claimed in 1747 that Baillie was the only Covenanter conscientious enough not to get caught up in the wave of radical anti-episcopal sentiment that became prevalent after the Glasgow Assembly of 1638. A century later, during the Disruption, secessionist minister Thomas M’Crie saw Baillie as a fellow traveler, praising the recent publication of Baillie’s *Letters and Journals* by David Laing as a potential “antidote” to the “numerous misrepresentations” coming from “Jacobite and deeply prejudiced pens” (226).
Baillie, of course, was all of these things, but the question remains – how did a country minister, who was indifferent to the Perth Articles, had no particular opposition to bishops, and disapproved of resistance theories espoused by Buchanan and the like become a leading Covenanter? In this important monograph Alexander Campbell argues that Baillie’s main objective in siding with the Covenanter was creating “peace and unity” in the Scottish church. He despised the innovations brought in by Charles I and William Laud and hoped to create a church that could unify Scotland (and eventually England) in Calvinist orthodoxy, one that would eliminate the need for conventicles. Campbell’s main objective is to provide a more nuanced portrait of Baillie, one that reveals him to be a complex and “dynamic” thinker whose intellectual milieu went beyond the disruptions and disputes taking place in Britain during the tumultuous 1640s and 1650s, and who was connected to the latest ideas from abroad. Baillie, Campbell argues, reveals that Covenanting was a big tent movement, where a moderate voice like Baillie’s could have influence.

This is an ambitious work that takes on topics ranging from intellectual life in pre-Enlightenment Scotland, the historiography of the Covenanting period, and the very nature of historical biography writing itself. It is organized thematically, with chapters covering Baillie’s intellectual development, and his ideas on the power of monarchy, Presbyterianism, reformed theology, the Five Articles of Perth and other contemporary ecclesiastical controversies, biblical exegesis, and his extensive archives and personal writings. Throughout the book, Campbell provides a close reading and analysis of Baillie’s writings and compares and contrasts them with contemporary thinkers in both England and Scotland as well as the European Continent.
This book sheds light on a significant figure of the Covenanting period, one who left an extensive archive of letters and papers for historians to analyze. Indeed, it is entirely possible that this archive has caused historians to attribute influence to him that is out of proportion to what it actually was, something that could have been more clearly addressed in the book. However, it is a point well taken that while Baillie is often a prominent feature of histories of the Covenanting period due to his large surviving archive, not much is known about his life. This book certainly rectifies that problem as it is deeply researched, well written, and thorough, yet Baillie remains a somewhat elusive figure. As Campbell shows, writing a historical biography of an early modern is not without its challenges, and the “real” Baillie might be impossible to fully know.

While the book is a deep-dive into Baillie’s mind, it is also more than that – it is an important contribution to the historiography of the Covenanting period and it provides a deeper understanding of Scottish theology in the seventeenth century. Scholars of the Covenanting period will find the book useful, as will anyone interested in the challenges of writing biographies of early modern figures.

Jason C. White, Appalachian State University
REVIEW


James Legge (1815-97) was an important, now nearly forgotten Scottish translator of the classic Confucian texts that laid the bedrock of Chinese culture for hundreds of years. He was also a Protestant missionary, an educator and a scholar. With this volume, Marilyn Laura Bowman has crafted a tome worthy of Legge’s decades-long work in Hong Kong, from the 1840s to the 1870s, and then as the first Chair of Chinese Language at Oxford, a position he held from 1876 until his death. At over 600 pages in length, the volume illuminates his legacy, carefully contextualizing it within some of the most turbulent years in modern Chinese history – years that marked the beginnings of China’s “century of humiliation.” Indeed, Legge arrived in Hong Kong in July 1843, less than two weeks after formal ratification of the Treaty of Nanking, which ceded Hong Kong to England in perpetuity. There, in the face of incredible odds, Legge forged an impressive body of work, against backdrops of foreign incursions into China, opium wars, banditry, civil war, natural disasters, poverty and disease. Legge was assisted in his ambitious program by men who gained great fame in their own right – for example, Hong Rengan (later a leader of the Taiping Rebellion), and Wang Tao (a renowned translator). Significantly, Legge’s work on the Confucian texts occurred at a time when many Chinese were questioning their value and role in the decline of the Qing Empire.
To this reader, three significances stand out in the book, each underlining Legge’s position as a cultural emissary. First is his work as an intellectual and translator. Legge left a formidable number of translations and Bowman rightly points out the importance of his lengthy commentaries on them, as he unpacks the meanings behind the dense texts, in multiple European languages. His empirical, scholarly approach to the classics constitutes a considerable contribution to Western scholarship that Bowman suggests reflects Scottish ideals of scholastic excellence that melded well with those of his Chinese counterparts. The second major significance is the focus on Legge as a missionary – not only in terms of his considerable activities, but also the support he received from the relatively progressive London Mission Society as well as the penury he endured as, for example, he was denied the children’s allowances to which he was entitled. Bowman is particularly adept at describing the difficulties of life as a missionary and the challenges that Europeans like Legge faced. The third significance is Legge’s dedication, or resilience, best epitomized by his decades-long career when disease often swept missionaries away after about seven years in China, with less than five years of active service – shocking statistics, considering the journey from Scotland to Hong Kong could take five months. Legge’s first wife and four of his eleven children were lost to disease before his second wife packed up the family and moved to England. While this book is rightfully focused on Legge, further study of his two wives and children – and their perceptions of his career – would be fascinating.

James Legge and the Chinese Classics is tremendously detailed, carefully situating Legge and his legacy within wide-ranging historical events in China, England, Hong Kong, and Scotland. While it is currently considered questionable to write about Chinese history without the use of Chinese-language texts, Legge’s work and Bowman’s meticulous gathering of as
many English-language sources as possible are special strengths of the volume. This is an excellent study of a Scottish intellectual legacy in East Asia and the United Kingdom that is far removed from the activities of opium traders like William Jardine and James Matheson, or other missionaries who were less concerned than Legge about respect for Chinese culture, and who left behind tainted imperialist legacies. In the Epilogue, Bowman delivers an incisive evaluation of why Legge’s work has since fallen to such undeserved obscurity; this section, in particular, makes an excellent reading for students of history. Finally, it is important to note how timely this book is. The texts that Legge lavished such attention on, and which the Communist Party publicly excoriated for decades, are increasingly being employed by Xi Jinping in his “anti-corruption” campaigns. As Bowman makes vividly clear, those who seek to understand China would be well-advised to consult Legge’s nineteenth century legacy. This book serves as an outstanding entrée into his life and work.

Norman Smith, University of Guelph
This welcomed volume represents an unparalleled and formidable stòras (treasure-trove) of Scottish Gaelic written expression, both prose and poetry, gleaned from Canada’s sizeable yet subaltern body of knowledge created by members of its Highland and Hebridean diaspora. In terms of scope, from a functional perspective Seanchaidh na Coille deftly picks up where the earlier work of Sr. (Dr.) Margaret MacDonell’s Emigrant Experience (1982) left off, giving voice through an edition of texts accompanied by English translations of materials that capture the five or more generations of Gaelic experience in Canada beyond initial immigration and arrival. Newton’s presentation of materials thematically, rather than by geography as in MacDonnell’s approach, also offers important contextual insights towards both the intersecting diachronic trajectories and synchronic experiences of Scottish Gaelic speakers throughout Canada, from the Maritimes to British Columbia and all provinces in between. It currently sits on my shelf next to his earlier work We’re Indians Sure Enough: The Legacy of Scottish Highlanders in the United States (2001) and together these volumes serve as valuable points of departure towards discovering the nearly three centuries of Scottish Gaelic literary expression in North America. In this sense Seanchaidh na Coille will serve as both an instrumental and perennial source to students and scholars in developing their knowledge of the vast literary corpus in Scottish Gaelic that greatly
complements other anthologies of Scottish Gaelic literature (Black 1999; Black 2001; McLeod and Bateman 2007; Meek 2003; Ó Baoill and Bateman 1994).

Taken as a whole, the materials presented are a testament to Newton’s capabilities as both a diligent and conscientious researcher, presenting here an extensive and accessible survey of source materials that have long remained out of reach to both everyday readership and researchers in various disciplines lacking the necessary linguistic capabilities. It will also be of value to established scholars of Scottish Gaelic language, literature and culture, on either side of the Atlantic, who have yet to engage with the impressive corpus of materials extant, representing, as Newton puts it, “just the tip of the proverbial iceberg” (2015, 29). As a Canadian whose ancestors settled in Scottish Gaelic-speaking districts in Southwestern Ontario, I am grateful to Dr. Newton for opening up this valuable body of knowledge and giving voice to these all-too-often overlooked communities. In the context of my own family’s connections to both West Zorra, Oxford County and Kinloss, Bruce County, I am especially pleased by the way in which Seanchaidh na Coille has brought my own attention to sources that I had previously been unaware of concerning these predominantly Scottish Gaelic speaking communities. This includes, for example, an anecdote from Seumas MacCaluim of Tiverton, Ontario, just a few kilometers from my family’s homestead, relating his emigration from Kilmartin, Argyll to the Bruce as documented by the inaugural Ontario Provincial archivist Alexander Fraser (Alasdair Friseal, 1860-1936) and appearing in The Scottish Canadian (Newton 2015, 154-161).

Furthermore, as both a former colleague of Dr. Newton’s in the department of Celtic Studies at St. Francis Xavier University and as both being doctoral alumni of the same department at the University of Edinburgh, I greatly welcome and am
thankful to him for his continued efforts in establishing a foundational corpus of materials with the admirable intention of engaging in a collaborative dialogue that will result in a deeper and more nuanced understanding of these literary sources and their integral role in interpreting the Scottish Gaelic experience in Canada. For example, in my current home province of Prince Edward Island, I have recently been delving into both published works and extant field recordings of Scottish Gaelic linguistic materials produced within the province’s once widespread Gàidhealtachd communities, often overshadowed in terms of research and general public knowledge by Nova Scotia where mother-tongue speakers of the language are still found to this day. Newton presents an engaging memoir on emigration by one Murchadh Cam (Half-blind) of Baile an Tobair (correctly identified by Newton as Springton, PEI in the district of Sràth-Albainn or Strathalbyn) published in the Cape Breton-based Scottish Gaelic-language newspaper Mac-Talla (an important source for much of the material presented in Seanchaidh).

Prior to the appearance of this volume, I had presented a talk here in Prince Edward Island that explored the writings of Murchadh Cam, which through my research was identified as the penname for Isle of Skye-born Murdoch Lamont (Murchadh mac Aonghais ‘ic Iain ‘ic Mhurchaidh Bhuidhe, 1822-1902), as well as several of his relations. Both Murdoch and his younger Prince Edward Island-born cousin Rev. Murdoch Lamont (Murchadh mac Èòghain mac Caluim ‘ic Mhurchaidh Bhuidhe, 1865-1927) contributed regularly to Mac-Talla. It was Murchadh Cam who sent in to Mac-Talla the epic “Imrich nan Eileanach” (Emigration of the Islanders) (see MacDonell 1982, 105-113) composed by the Bard Buchanan (Calum Bàn) as a versification of his autobiographical experience emigrating from the Isle of Skye to Belfast, P.E.I. as retrieved from the oral recitation of an
anonymous octogenarian by Ewen Lamont (1817-1905), an elder in PEI’s MacDonalite Church, Murchadh Cam’s cousin, and the father of Rev. Murdoch. Rev. Murdoch Lamont, likely inspired by the work of his elder cousin and his father published an anthology of song-poems, including “Imrich nan Eilleanach,” entitled An Cuimhneachan: Òrain Céilidh Gàidheal Cheap Breatuinn agus Eilean-an-Phrionnsa (The Memorial: Céilidh Songs of Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island Gaels) (1917) in Quincy, Massachusetts, which I am currently in the process of editing and translating, revealing the role of anthologizing literary expression and traditions as a long-standing endeavour among Canada’s Scottish Gaels. When taking this corpus, as this volume so aptly does through the expert presentation of Dr. Newton, we are given an engaging memorial to these contributors, each an emblematic seanchaidh na coille in their respective communities, documenting their narratives for those who followed. Gura sinne a tha fada nur comain airson an obair luachmhor seo, a Mhicheil (We are greatly in your debt for this fine work, Michael).

Tiber F.M. Falzett, University Of Prince Edward Island

WORK CITED


Eighteenth-century Scotland is celebrated as a land of the intellect, of rationalism. It was also famed as a northerly place of superstition and dark arts. While many historians focus on either the Enlightenment or the witch hunts, Henderson places witch beliefs within elite intellectual debate. She also places them within the popular culture of everyday charming, cursing, healing and shapeshifting. (pps.107-121). In the decades after the last full-scale witch hunt in Scotland, far from being the preserve of dottled old ladies in run-down cottages, witchcraft remained central to the worldview of ministers, judges, philosophers and, indeed, kings. Henderson is less concerned with what witches may or may not have done, and more with beliefs about witches, providing a fascinating impression of Scottish ‘mindscapes’.

Henderson’s first two chapters provide effective historiographical, terminological, methodological, intellectual, and European context. Here she introduces critical questions of gender. Throughout Henderson keeps a sharp eye on this, going far beyond reviewing how and why witch-hunts were predominantly focused on women, and instead elucidating how folk belief, charming, healing and diabolism were gendered. Subsequent chapters take on topics including hunting witches, the role of the Devil, debates around witchcraft, and the
persistence of witch belief. The only exception is chapter seven which is an engaging case study, dedicated to highlighting these topics in the south west. While the article version of the chapter in the *Scottish Historical Review* worked well, the chapter would have benefited from being shortened rather than lengthened, perhaps through including social and economic background material earlier in the book and culling the repeated examples.

Unlike many Scottish surveys, Henderson’s book takes the North seriously. She draws on many cases from the Gaelic-speaking half of the country, from Argyll through Perthshire to Sutherland, while not neglecting the Northern Isles and Caithness. Thankfully, her consideration of region goes beyond a Highland/Lowland dichotomy. Henderson argues that it was the border areas of the Highlands which were most affected by witch prosecutions, and that Lowland cases tended to be in coastal communities and those closer to judicial centres. (pps.225-7) A particularly interesting and effective section is her assessment of a spate of accusations across Ross, Sutherland and Caithness in the early eighteenth-century. (pps.224-240)

The relationship between church and witchcraft is a recurring topic. Henderson teases out a far more nuanced and changeable relationship than might be expected. Those who have read *Scottish Fairy Belief*, co-authored with Ted Cowan, will be familiar with the idea that treatises arguing for the existence of the magical Otherworld were written by ministers, notably Robert Kirk, as a defence of religion in the face of increasingly open challenges from atheistic writers. Henderson shows how debates about witchcraft were central to the fundamental philosophical question of whether there is more in this world than that which is visible. Through the actions or inactions of ministers the church, alongside the judicial system, also played
a practical role in determining whether witch cases were prosecuted or quietly dropped. Often the church disciplinary system, as well as the personal influence of the minister, worked with the judiciary to keep vigilantism against suspected witches under control. Both institutions were, after all, concerned with maintaining their own social authority. (p.103) Yet at other times ministers were responsible for pursuing prosecutions or stood by with tacit approval, as in the horrific case at Pittenweem where a woman was brutally murdered. (pps.213-224)

Henderson explores the place of magic, providing insight as to how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Scots explained and faced problems such as illness, shortage, crop failures and personal disaster. She argues that most ‘witches’ developed their reputations over years, and that certain forms of witchcraft were clearly acceptable and useful. If such a person, however, became troublesome or if a scapegoat were required, the community might pursue the individual, using formal processes of church and state or through direct action. Incidents such as that at Pittenweem emphasise the agency of ordinary people as they sought to protect themselves by identifying, controlling or punishing those perceived as a threat.

Well supplied with photographs, illustrations, graphs, and case studies, Henderson’s work is valuable and readable, despite the challenging length of some chapters. She effectively demonstrates that witchcraft, far from being a peculiar and inexplicable aberration, was a central part of Enlightenment discourse and of ordinary Scottish life. For most, witchcraft had little to do with diabolical black arts but much to do with the ‘ordinary experiences of sex, childbirth, disability and death … agriculture, fishing and household economics’. (p.84)

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REVIEW


John W. Arthur, physicist and trustee of the James Clerk Maxwell Foundation, Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Institute of Physics, and the Institute of Engineering and Technology, and senior member of the IEEE, takes a different look at James Clerk Maxwell’s life and scientific contributions in the nineteenth century. Instead of focusing on Clerk Maxwell’s life for the entirety of the book, he instead goes back through the family lines of the Clerks and the Maxwells, as well as all of the families that married into those groups and explores how both families and their experiences during the Enlightenment made possible James Clerk Maxwell’s scientific mind and contributions to physics. This work is a good contribution to the field.

Arthur uses a wide variety of research to support his argument though for his discussions on Clerk Maxwell’s life he primarily uses an original biography written in 1882 by Lewis Campbell and William Garnett, both of whom knew the physicist personally and add a personalized account to their narrative of his life. Arthur, in the preface to the book discusses the sources he used in detail. He lets the reader know what archives and repositories the materials were found in, including where to find some sources online. He examines the strengths and weaknesses of the available resources, especially those concerning the women in the Clerk and Maxwell families.
The text of the book starts out with numerous family trees for both lines, allowing the reader to see from the beginning how all of the people discussed fit together. Clerk Maxwell came from two old Scottish families who, for generations, held positions of wealth and influence, and many members were brilliant in their own ways. Arthur then moves from discussing the family lines to a brief history of the Scottish Enlightenment and a brief overview of the Clerk Maxwell family.

The next chapter moves into a more detailed biography of James Clerk Maxwell starting with his parents meeting and ending with the death of the physicist. He goes into detail not only looking at Clerk Maxwell’s life, but also his academic career and innovations and contributions to science. He provides unbiased analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Clerk Maxwell’s personality and his teaching ability. The physicist struggled with meeting his students on their level of understanding and therefore was not always seen as the best lecturer. He also expresses admiration for the innovations that Clerk Maxwell came up with in physics.

From there Arthur moves backward in time to look at the history of the Clerk family and then the Maxwell family. These cover the bulk of the chapters in the book. Arthur looks closely at the family histories and the contributions of significant family members leading up to the joining of the families with George Clerk and Dorothea Maxwell. The book wraps up with a longer look at the Enlightenment in Edinburgh and how that laid the groundwork for James Clerk Maxwell.

The text does, at times, get confusing with all of the family threads Arthur is weaving together but the information is worth taking the time to work through. By doing so you emerge with a picture of how James Clerk Maxwell came to be. Arthur does a good job of showing how not only Clerk Maxwell, but his
ancestors, and his place of birth all made it possible for him to use his creative and innovative mind to come up with innovations such as his theory of electromagnetic radiation, his studies in color vision, on kinetic theory, and thermodynamics, and others. All in all this is a good addition to the body of work on Clerk Maxwell and brings a different approach to understanding the man.

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