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Away with the Faeries (or, It's Grimm up North): Yeats and Scotland

Willy Maley

Yeats and Scotland is a coupling that might at first glance seem odd or awkward, but with the recent rise of Irish-Scottish studies it appears less so. According to Cairns Craig: 'The Irish Revival that Yeats led was profoundly shaped by the example of Scotland's acquisition of cultural capital a century before, and constructed on its theoretical foundations'.[1] Yet despite Yeats's Celticism, and his open, if uneven, admiration for the poetry of Robert Burns there are fewer clear connections between his vision of Ireland and his vision of Scotland than might be expected. Yeats, like Joyce, arrived at a negative and pessimistic view of Scotland, and this perspective derived from a despairing vision of the Scottish legacy in the North of Ireland.[2] Unlike Joyce though, Yeats came to this conclusion only after a lengthy effort to build bridges with Ulster, and, by extension, Scotland, through a common Celtic spirit, and, more concretely, through his admiration for the achievements of a series of Scottish writers. Scotophobia in an Irish context is far from being the province of modern writers, and has been a recurrent feature of Irish culture at least since the Ulster Plantation.[3] Attridge and Howes' collection of essays in 2000 addressed *Semicolonial Joyce*, yet Joyce is a writer who complained of struggling under a double yoke of Roman and British imperialism, and was thus doubly colonized, or double-colonial. In 'Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages' (1907), Joyce declared: 'I do not see what good it does to fulminate against the English tyranny while the Roman tyranny occupies the palace of the soul'.[4] Yeats, by contrast, can be seen to be 'semicolonial', yet he has recently been the subject

[1] Cairns Craig, 'National Literature and Cultural Capital in Scotland and Ireland', in Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan (eds), *Ireland and Scotland: Culture and Society, 1700–2000* (Dublin, 2005), 38–64, [57].

[2] Willy Maley, '"Kilt by Kelt Shell Kithagain with Kinagain": Joyce and Scotland', in Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes (eds), *Semi-Colonial Joyce* (Cambridge, 2000), 201–18.

[3] Christopher Fox, 'Swift's Scotophobia', *Bullán: An Irish Studies Journal*, 6 (2002), 2, 43–65.

[4] Richard Ellmann and Ellsworth Mason (eds), *The Critical Writings of James Joyce* (New York, 1959), 173.

of a series of interventions, including a major collection of essays, promoting his 'postcolonial' status.[5]

In this essay, I want to argue for a Scottish context for Yeats and to show the extent to which his image of Scotland was touched and tainted by Ulster. I do not intend to establish such a context through a reading of *On Baile's Strand*, although the repeated references there to 'hungry Scotland' are worth noting,[6] nor do I propose to trace the fugitive and furtive figuring of Scotland in the poetry. I found just one odd instance of the word 'Scot', in 'Nineteen-Nineteen', where the verse runs as follows:

> Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
> Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
> Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
> To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;
> The night can sweat with terror as before
> We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
> And planned to bring the world under a rule,
> Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.[7]

The drunken soldiery going scot-free, are they the weasels? In Shakespeare's *Henry V*, an English Lord invokes 'a saying very old and true: / "If that you will France win, / Then with Scotland first begin"'. He goes on to rehearse a standard fear of the time:

> For once the eagle England being in prey,
> To her unguarded nest, the weasel Scot
> Comes sneaking, and so sucks her princely eggs,
> Playing the mouse in absence of the cat,
> To 'tame and havoc more then she can eat.[8]

These are weasel words, for the fear of the Scots is bound up with an imperial

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[5] Deborah Fleming, (ed.), *W. B. Yeats and Postcolonialism* (West Cornwall, 2001); Marjorie Howes, 'Postcolonial Yeats: Culture, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere', *Field Day Review* 2 (2006), 55–73; Jahan Ramazani, 'Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?', *Raritan* 17 (1998), 3, 64–89.

[6] J. P. Harrington, (ed.), *Modern Irish Drama: a Norton Critical Edition* (New York, 1991), 15.

[7] W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London, 1983), 233.

[8] *Henry V*, 1.2.169–73.

enterprise elsewhere – ostensibly France, allegorically Ireland – and the speech captures beautifully the extent to which Scotland is the key to containing Ireland, and vice versa.

I will be exploring the Yeats and Scotland connection largely by author, through his encounters with Burns, Scott, Stevenson, and MacDiarmid. When I came up with the idea for a discussion of Yeats and Scotland, I was thinking of a short text reprinted in *Mythologies*, entitled 'A Remonstrance with Scotsmen for having soured the disposition of their Ghosts and faeries'. An earlier version, 'Scots and Irish Faeries', had appeared in the *Scots Observer*, on 2 March 1889. In this text, Yeats accused his Celtic country cousins of demonising the little people:

> In Scotland you are too theological, too gloomy. You have made even the Devil religious. 'Where do you live, good-wyf, and how is the minister?' he said to the witch when he met her on the high-road, as it came out in the trial. You have burnt all the witches. In Ireland we have left them alone. To be sure, the 'loyal minority' knocked out the eye of one with a cabbage stump on the 31st March 1711, in the town of Carrickfergus. But then the 'loyal minority' is half Scottish. You have discovered the faeries to be pagan and wicked. You would like to have them all up before the magistrate. In Ireland warlike mortals have gone among them, and helped them in their battles, and they in turn have taught men great skills with herbs, and permitted some few to hear their tunes. Carolan slept upon a faery rath. Ever after their tunes ran in his head, and made him the great musician he was. In Scotland you have denounced them from the pulpit. In Ireland they have been permitted by the priests to consult them on the state of their souls. Unhappily the priests have decided that they have no souls, that they will dry up like so much bright vapour at the last day; but more in sadness than in anger. The Catholic religion likes to keep on good terms with its neighbours.

Yeats thus uses his argument about Ireland being a friendly host to spirits in order to forge an alliance with Catholicism. Protestantism wants facts, not faeries or folklore. That puts Yeats and Protestant Ireland, north and south, in a slightly problematic position. Although he is drawing a distinction between Ireland and Scotland, Yeats is also speaking to a division within Ireland, as witness the unsporting behaviour of 'the "loyal minority"', explained by the fact

that 'the "loyal minority" is half Scottish', and not neighbourly and tolerant like the true Catholic Irish:

> These two different ways of looking at things have influenced in each country the whole world of sprites and goblins. For their gay and graceful doings you must go to Ireland; for their deeds of terror to Scotland. Our Irish faery terrors have about them something of make-believe. When a countryman strays into an enchanted hovel, and is made to turn a corpse all night on a spit before the fire, we do not feel anxious; we know he will wake in the midst of a green field, the dew on his old coat. In Scotland it is altogether different. You have soured the naturally excellent disposition of ghosts and goblins.[9]

A few years after the first appearance of this piece in the *Scots Observer*, Yeats visited the North of Ireland and lectured to the 'loyal minority' in Belfast on faeries, a difficult enterprise at the best of times. Apparently it was not very well received. Yeats later remarked: 'I have been away in County Down, looking almost in vain among its half-Scotch people for the legends I find so plentiful in the West'.[10] Whether half Scottish or half-Scotch, the inhabitants of the North had a problem with the kind of Celtic mysticism expounded by Yeats.

Liam McIlvanney has shown how the work of Robert Burns was intimately bound up with the Ulster-Scots Literary Revival of the 1790s.[11] If Ulster had a Romantic streak, it owed it to Burns, so it is no surprise that Burns was the basis of Yeats's admiration for, and antipathy towards, Scotland. Burns occupied an awkward place in Irish culture, and not just for Yeats. Even admirers were unsure if the ploughboy-playboy could or should be imitated by Irish writers. Yeats often invoked Burns as a breath of fresh air bursting out of the gloom, and was especially fond of comparing J. M. Synge to Burns in terms of their use of dialect and earthy topics. But at other times Burns is resisted and represented as a writer of limits. According to Yeats, 'the fruit of Robert Burns and Scott with their lack of ideas, their external and picturesque views of life, has been to create not a nation but a province with a sense of the picturesque . . . The

[9] W. B. Yeats, *Mythologies* (London, 1959), 107–8.

[10] Denis Donoghue (ed.), *W. B. Yeats: Memoirs: The original unpublished text of the Autobiography and the Journal* (London, 1972), 45, fn. 6.

[11] Liam McIlvanney, 'Robert Burns and the Ulster-Scots Literary Revival of the 1790s', *Bullán: An Irish Studies Journal*, 4 (1999/2000), 2, 125–43.

external and picturesque or political writer leaves the strongest intellects of their countries empty (and in the case of Scotland, England has crowded into this emptiness), and is content to fill with kilts and bagpipes, newspapers and guidebooks, the days of the least creative'.[12]

Yeats, like other Irish critics, envied Burns's status and admired his language, but occasionally expressed doubts about the very popularity which at other times he praised and envied. Other Irish commentators were wary of the Scottish comparison. John Eglinton, writing in 1899 in *Literary Ideals in Ireland*, observed:

> [A] well-known Scotch Professor once said that Ireland was not a nation because it had never had a Burns or a Bannockburn. It is, however, as reasonable to think that these glorious memories of Scottish nationality will form a drag on its further evolution as that the want of a peasant poet, or of a recollection of having at least once given the Saxons a drubbing, will be fatal to an attempt to raise people above themselves in this country by giving expression to latent ideals. Ireland must exchange the patriotism which looks back for the patriotism which looks forward.[13]

Yeats wanted to champion Ireland's peasant poets, Synge, the playwright Burns, and William Carleton, the prose Burns, but he had misgivings too. Carleton himself, in the preface to *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1830), had written of avoiding 'intolerable Scoto-Hibernic jargon' (p. xi). D. P. Moran, another Irish critic, cautioned against a wholesale buying into Burns and the brogue:

> [T]hough certain classes of ballad and lyric poetry can be written in dialect, as Burns has proved, you cannot rise to dignity or poetry on 'begors' and 'bedads'. There is something essentially mean about the corrupt English of the Irish peasant, particularly when put into cold print; it passes the power of man to write literature in it.[14]

Moran blamed Yeats for sponsoring 'The Celtic Note'. Moran's criticisms

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[12] Denis Donoghue (ed.), *W. B. Yeats: Memoirs*, 248.

[13] John Eglinton, from *Literary Ideals in Ireland* (1899), cited in Seamus Deane (ed.) *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Derry, 1991), Vol. 2, 957.

[14] Seamus Deane (gen ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, 3 Vols (Derry, 1991), Vol 2, 555.

would apply to Synge, but Yeats wanted to defend Synge while acknowledging the difficulty of writing in 'dialect'. There is a long and involved debate around the language question in Irish and Scottish literature. While Burns was often invoked as a positive role model by Yeats, Edwin Muir held Yeats up as an example for Scottish writers to follow. Muir argued that Yeats does more for Irish literature by writing in English than Scottish writers do for Scotland by writing in 'dialect'.[15]

Synge, for Yeats, was Burns at his best. Yeats pointed out that while 'Scotland left Burns in the Excise; the world has mocked her for it', Ireland must prize its writers, whatever language they chose.[16] Defending William Carleton against neglect and abuse, Yeats hoped that Ireland wouldn't likewise constrain its writers. But Burns was also for Yeats a universal writer. Moran had urged Yeats to do for Ireland what Burns had done for Scotland. Yeats – though he encouraged the comparison between Synge and Carleton and Burns – did not do 'dialect'. Though he liked to bend it like Beckett, Yeats preferred Posh. Yeats saw Burns's Irish following in this case as based on a hankering after the obvious, the popular. Perhaps the finest and funniest illustration of Yeats's double take on Burns, half admiring, half envying, can be seen in the episode I mentioned earlier. Ezra Pound had a laugh at Yeats's efforts at reciting Burns. 'Years ago', says Pound,

> Yeats was struggling with rhythms and saying they wouldn't do. I got him to read a little Burns aloud, telling him he cd. read no cadence but his own . . . I had a half hour of unmitigated glee in hearing 'Say ye bonnie Alexander' and 'The Birks o Averfeldy' *keened*, wailed with infinite difficulty and many pauses and restarts to *The Wind Among the Reeds*.[17]

His inability to recite Burns notwithstanding, Yeats imagined what he'd wish for if granted an audience with the King of Faery: 'I would say "I do not ask even a fiftieth part of the popularity Burns has for his own people, but I would like enough to help the imagination[s] that were most keen and subtle to think of Ireland as a sacred land".'[18]

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[15] Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer* (Edinburgh, 1982; 1936), 111–12.

[16] John Kelly, and Eric Domville (eds), *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, *Volume One 1865–1895* (Oxford, 1986), 206.

[17] Daniel Albright, *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the science of modernism* (Cambridge, 1997), 148.

[18] John Kelly, and Eric Domville (eds), *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, *Volume One*

Yeats admitted his shortcomings when it came to dialect, but praised the efforts of Synge and Lady Gregory – who wrote in an 'Irish' that was 'as true a dialect of English as the dialect that Burns wrote in'.[19] In 'What is Popular Poetry' Yeats could say: 'Despite his expressive speech which sets him above all other popular poets, [Burns] has the triviality of emotion, the poverty of ideas, the imperfect sense of beauty of a poetry whose most typical expression is in Longfellow'.[20] Yet in his Nobel Prize speech Yeats rejoiced in Synge's ability to do for Ireland what Burns did for Scotland: 'Burns himself could not have more shocked a gathering of Scotch clergy than did he our players'.[21] Burns, then, was a writer who divided Ireland, and divided Yeats too. For while Yeats wanted to support the Irish tradition that drew on Burns, it was not one that he himself could follow – and although he admired Burns's status he also resented it. I have argued elsewhere that a lot of this debate about 'dialect' has to do with class and religion, and similar conclusions can be drawn with regard to the ways in which Yeats shifted his ground on Scotland and Ulster.[22]

Walter Scott is another major Scottish writer about whom Yeats had mixed feelings. Yeats's father – 'Papa' – read *Redgauntlet* to the young Yeats, and Yeats later read Scott to his own children. Yeats, in Celtic mode, drew analogies between 'defeated' races. The 'Highlanders', he said, were like the Irish, 'of one stock with ourselves'. But Scott was a shadow as well as a shaping influence. Yeats asserted that: 'Scott made a single lowland Scottish dialect serve for all Scotland', and he resented the fact that Scott was seen as a national and international writer while Irish authors like Synge and Lady Gregory were viewed as parochial or provincial.[23] The same combination of grudging respect and admiration coupled with envy and disdain marks Yeats's attitude to both Burns and Scott. Roy Foster describes Yeats's shift from Scottish models to Irish mores with typical terseness: 'His reading is related to his own early work; Scott gives way to Sligo county histories'.[24]

1865–1895, 388.

[19] William H. O'Donnell, (ed.), *W. B. Yeats: Prefaces and Introductions* (London, 1988), 225.

[20] W. B Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London, 1961), 6.

[21] Yeats, 'The Irish Dramatic Movement', Nobel Lecture 15 December 1923.

[22] In '"Kilt by Kelt Shell Kithagain with Kinagain": Joyce and Scotland', in Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes (eds), *Semi-Colonial Joyce*.

[23] John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (eds). *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, 2 Vols (London, 1975), II, 468.

[24] R. F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: a life*, *I: The Apprentice Mage, 1865–1914* (New York, 1997), I, 530.

Robert Louis Stevenson fares rather better. Yeats is more positive about a writer who is his contemporary. Stevenson wrote admiringly of Yeats's work, and Yeats returned the compliment. 'I need hardly tell you', he told Stevenson,

> that your praise of 'The Lake of Innisfree' has given me great pleasure. After all it is the liking or disliking of one's fellow craftsmen, especially of those who have attained the perfect expression one does but grope for, which urges one to work on – else were it best to dream ones dreams in silence. My grandfather a very passionate old retired sailor – quite the reverse of literary – read 'Treasure Iseland' [sic] upon his death-bed with infinite satisfaction. It is well nigh the only book I ever heard of him reading. I wonder at the voice, which while delighting studious and cloistered spirits, can yet hush into admiration such as he, much as I wonder at that voice which stilled the waves of old.[25]

Again, what Yeats admires in Stevenson is what he found enviable in Burns and Scott – the ability to cross over between privileged and popular audiences and to 'go global'. This is what Yeats wanted for Irish literature, but he felt that Scotland took its 'mature' tradition for granted, while Irish critics failed to appreciate the emerging apprentice work of Ireland. Crossing swords with Professor Edward Dowden, Yeats bristled at being accused of endorsing literature 'that raves of Brian Boru'. Yeats countered that none of the books on his recommended reading list '"raves of Brian Boru" half as much as Burns did of Bruce and Wallace, or has an "intellectual brogue" more "accentuated" than the Scottish characteristics in Scott and Stevenson'.[26] Dowden subscribed to the Anglo-Irish tradition of Swift and his successors – to which of course Yeats belonged – but Yeats said that those works 'will be substitutes for the books I have named only when the books of Hume are considered Scotch literature in the same sense as the books of Burns and Barrie'.[27] J. M. Barrie was another Scottish writer who saw and supported the new Irish drama. But are we living in Cloud Cuchulain Land, the Never Land of Peter Pan Celticism?

This brings me to two more minor Scottish figures that crossed Yeats's path: MacGregor Mathers, or Samuel Liddell Mathers, and William Sharp, also known as Fiona Macleod. Yeats explains how he first met Synge in Paris,

[25] John Kelly and Eric Domville (eds), *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, *Volume One 1865–1895*, 404.

[26] Ibid., 440.

[27] Ibid., 448.

and had a strange encounter with MacGregor Mathers – the Eminem of his day – concerning Fiona Macleod:

> I saw Mrs Sharpe [sic] the other day and know a great deal more about the Fiona Macleod mystery. It is as I thought. Fiona Macleod was so far as external perception could say a secondary personality induced in Sharpe by the presence of a very beautiful unknown woman whom he fell in love with. She, alas! has disappeared from everyone's sight, no one having set eyes on her except George Meredith who says she was the most beautiful woman he ever saw. Whether there was more than this I do not know but poor Mrs Sharpe, though generous and self-sacrificing as I can see does not want to enlarge that unknown woman's share. A great deal, however, which Sharp used to give in letters as an account of Fiona's doings were she insists a kind of semi-allegorical description of the adventures of his own secondary personality and its relation with the primary self. For instance in one letter to me he had said 'I will leave your letter where Fiona will find it when she wakes', and by this he meant that the secondary personality when it awoke in him would answer the letter which it certainly did in a much more impassioned way than that of the rest of the letter. I don't think there would be much of all this in the official biography for when I said to Mrs Sharpe that she should tell the whole truth, she answered 'How can I! Other people are so much involved.' She never talked quite openly about things, except it being a secondary personality, but told things in a series of hints and yet, at the same time, quite clearly. I noticed that each time she said this personality was awakened in him by a beautiful person she would add as if to lessen the effect, 'and by beautiful scenery'. She was evidently very fond of him and has sent me his birth date and her own to find out how their horoscopes interlocked. I would be rather glad if you would keep this letter, for I am fresh from seeing Mrs Sharp (I saw her a week ago) and this will be a record. Put it in a safe place and I may ask you for it again some day for it is a fragment of history. She told me that the morning William Sharp died she heard visionary music and indeed a good deal of one sort and another about the supernatural side of his talent.[28]

[28] Terry L. Meyers, *The Sexual Tensions of William Sharp: A Study of the Birth of Fiona Macleod, Incorporating Two Lost Works, 'Ariadne In Naxos' and 'Beatrice'* (New York, 1996), 19–20.

This is a bizarre passage – haunting, hallucinatory, hilarious. Did the Scots put Yeats off Celticism, having helped put him onto it?

Some Ulster writers changed their names to move closer to Yeats's vision, but one Scottish writer went further. Yeats admired Fiona Macleod, and corresponded with her, before he found out that 'she' was in fact a 'he': William Sharp, prominent critic, biographer, poet and Whitmaniac. In 1894 Sharp assumed the persona of Fiona Macleod, and so began a split-level writing career. Writing as Fiona Macleod, Sharp was able to get in touch with his feminine side, which came in handy if you were Victorian and Scottish. As Fiona, William published visionary Gaelic poetry, fiction and drama. She was considered a better writer than the man who gave birth to her. Folklore was her forte. Yeats said of her that she 'had in her hands the keys of those gates of the primeval world, which shut behind more successful races, when they plunged into material progress'.[29]

Fiona was the Celtic Tigerlily who put the prim into primeval, but she got on less well with Oscar Wilde than she did with Yeats. Isobel Murray argues that Sharpe's *Children of To-morrow* is a source for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, but whoever heard of a Scottish writer influencing an Irish one?[30] In fact, going back to Burns and Carleton, Edgeworth and Scott, there is a constant two-way traffic. In Yeats, Fiona Macleod found a soul mate. He understood 'The strain of life – the strain of double life'.[31] Fiona was fond of quoting Yeats to the effect that 'the arts have become religious', by which I assume Yeats meant mythical and spiritual, though they remained 'religious' in other ways. When Yeats first met William Sharp, before he had assumed the alter ego of Fiona Macleod, he was not impressed: 'I was introduced to Sharp of the *Sonnets of This Century* and hated his red British face of flaccid contentment'.[32] When Sharp went on to lead a double life, getting in touch with his feminine side, in the form of the fair Fiona, Yeats warmed to him/her, to the 'secondary personality' as he called it. Some contemporaries had even surmised that Yeats was Fiona Macleod. Yeats had written to Sharp at one point – in 1896 – urging an alliance between 'Scotch Welsh and Irish Celts'. Yeats, repulsed by Sharp's 'Britishness', seduced by Fiona Macleod's cod Celtic femininity, eventually rejected both as two sides of the same (debased) coin.

[29] Frayne and Johnson (eds), *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, II, 45.

[30] Isobel Murray, '*Children of To-morrow*: A Sharp Inspiration for Dorian Gray', *Durham University Journal*, n.s. 49 (1987), 1, 69–70.

[31] Richard J. Finneran, George Mills Harper, and William M. Murphy (eds). *Letters to W. B. Yeats*, 2 Vols., with the assistance of Alan B. Himber (New York, 1977), I, 52.

[32] Donoghue (ed.), *Memoirs*, 129, fn. 1.

Lady Gregory famously looked back on the setting up of the Irish National Theatre as an exercise in bad faith:

> I think the word 'Celtic' was put in for the sake of Fiona Macleod, whose plays however we never acted, though we used to amuse ourselves by thinking of the call for 'author' that might follow one, and the possible appearance of William Sharp in place of the beautiful woman he had given her out to be, for even then we had little doubt they were one and the same person. I myself never quite understood the meaning of the 'Celtic Movement', which we were said to belong to. When I was asked about it, I used to say it was a movement meant to persuade the Scotch to begin buying our books, while we continued not to buy theirs.[33]

There is nothing worn under the Kiltartan, it's all in perfect working order. We have come a long way from Yeats's envious reaction to the popularity of Burns and Scott to the superior taste of the Irish.

If Sharp was a Scotsman on the make, James Connolly was a different proposition, yet Sharp and Connolly were connected, as Murray Pittock explains: 'By most measures of nationality, James Connolly was a Scot: described as "Scotto-Hibernian" even in Dublin (where he came from Edinburgh at the age of 28), he spoke with a Scots accent and named his daughter, born in 1907, "Fiona" after William Sharp's alter ego'.[34] Yeats encountered Connolly in a dramatic and memorable context, as he recounts in *Autobiographies*:

> Is our Foundation Stone still unlaid when the more important streets are decorated for Queen Victoria's Jubilee?
>
> I find Maud Gonne at her hotel talking to a young working-man who looks very melancholy. She had offered to speak at one of the regular meetings of his Socialist society about Queen Victoria, and he has summoned what will be a great meeting in the open air. She has refused to speak, and he says that her refusal means his ruin, as nobody will ever believe that he had any promise at all. When he has left without complaint or anger, she gives me very cogent reasons against the open-air meeting, but I can think of nothing but the young man and his look of melancholy. He has left his address, and presently, at my persuasion, she drives to his tenement, where she finds him and his wife and his

[33] Harrington, *Modern Irish Drama*, 378–79.

[34] Murray Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester, 1999), 77.

> children crowded into a very small space – perhaps there was only one room – and, moved by the sight, promised to speak. The young man is James Connolly who, with Padraic Pearse, is to make the Insurrection of 1916 and to be executed.

Yeats then describes being caught up in a street protest with Connolly and reflects on whether he is implicated in the violence that follows:

> Connolly carries in procession a coffin with the words 'British Empire' upon it, and police and mob fight for its ownership, and at last, that the police may not capture it, it is thrown into the Liffey. And there are fights between police and window-breakers, and I read in the morning papers that many have been wounded; some two hundred heads have been dressed at the hospitals; an old woman killed by baton blows, or perhaps trampled under the feet of the crowd; and that two thousand pounds' worth of decorated plate-glass windows have been broken. I count the links in the chain of responsibility, run them across my fingers, and wonder if any link there is from my workshop.[35]

After that Sharp exit, and the jettisoning of the Union Jack-draped coffin, Hugh MacDiarmid brings us back to the majors. MacDiarmid enjoyed his stay in Dublin in the summer of 1928. Although he chiefly admired Joyce, MacDiarmid was grateful for the respect and support of Yeats.[36] MacDiarmid had an ulterior motive for exploiting connections with Yeats and other Irish writers. After that Dublin trip he claimed that he was 'able to make certain arrangements which will help the Scots National Party to the Irish vote at the General Election'.[37] MacDiarmid scholars have recognised his role in 'fighting Irish parochialism towards Scotland', but I am not sure how successful MacDiarmid was.[38] I have written elsewhere on Joyce's lasting antipathy to Scotland[39] but Yeats certainly did act as an advocate of MacDiarmid – much more so than did Joyce, the writer MacDiarmid most admired. Yeats included

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[35] W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London, 1966), 366–8.

[36] Edwin Morgan, 'James Joyce and Hugh MacDiarmid', in W. J. McCormack and Alistair Stead (eds), *James Joyce and Modern Literature* (London, 1982), 202–17.

[37] Dorian Grieve, Owen Dudley Edwards and Alan Riach (eds), *Hugh MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters* (Manchester, 2001), 34.

[38] Ibid., xxvi–xxvii.

[39] In "'Kilt by Kelt Shell Kithagain with Kinagain": Joyce and Scotland', in Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes (eds), *Semi-Colonial Joyce*.

four of MacDiarmid's poems in the 1936 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. Yeats knew that a lot of Scottish input had gone into the making of modern Ireland, in terms of writers and thinkers, and in terms of the Scottish influence in the North in the wake of the Ulster Plantation. But he was ambivalent about both those Celtic connections.

In the last few years, critics like Edna Longley, Owen Dudley Edwards, and John Wilson Foster have focused on the 'North' as key to understanding the Irish-Scottish avenue or impasse.[40] Vexed issues of class, religion and language as well as an attachment to empire, affect the Irish writer's attitude to Ulster and to Scotland. According to John Wilson Foster: 'Social class and religious denomination would have early instilled in Yeats a distaste for the bulk of his co-religionists in what in his lifetime became Northern Ireland'.[41] Yeats wanted to keep the baby of Burns but throw out the bathwater of bigotry, though he arguably succumbed to some doom and gloom of his own. Again, according to Foster:

> Yeats wished Ulster to mean an inspired peasant Carleton and an aristocratic Ferguson in the real world, and Cuchulain in the unreal world, a place that had produced the figures that mattered most to Yeats: peasant, artist, aristocrat and hero. But such a view of modern Ulster could not be sustained and Yeats gave up on the north as a bad job. Scots Ulster, Presbyterian Ulster, became indeed a kind of antithetical cultural self.[42]

Yeats's discomfort with the North goes back well before Partition. Ulster is caught up in his mind with a negative notion of Scotland, or perhaps Scotland is caught up in his mind with a problematic perception of the North. Either way, Yeats gave up on both as bad jobs. Yeats defended Synge's use of 'dialect' but when the Ulster-born Daniel Deeney used some 'Northern' pronunciation in his 1900 volume, *Peasant Lore from Gaelic Ireland*, Yeats was less sympathetic. It is John Wilson Foster's contention that Yeats's Ireland excluded the

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[40] Edna Longley, 'Including the North', *Text & Context* 3 (1988), 17–24; Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Scotland, Ulster, and You', in Ian S. Wood (ed.), *Scotland and Ulster* (Edinburgh, 1994), 173–82; John Wilson Foster, 'Getting the North: Yeats and Northern Nationalism', in Warwick Gould and Edna Longley (eds), *That Accusing Eye: Yeats and His Irish Reader*, *Yeats Annual* 12 (1996), 180–212

[41] Foster, 'Getting the North', in Warwick Gould and Edna Longley (eds), *That Accusing Eye: Yeats and his Irish Reader*, *Yeats Annual* 12, 180–212, 181–2.

[42] Ibid., 183.

North. The Faeries had been driven out of Ulster as well as Scotland. As Foster says, 'many a celebrated Southerner . . . found the [North] galling'.[43]

Joyce could be added to the list. In Ireland, the Scottish North did not measure up to the English South. This is about more than snobbery, but not much more. Edna Longley finesses the parting in the Celtic fringe: 'In fact, Joyce and Yeats shared an anti-Ulster prejudice with implications for Irish-Scottish literary intercourse. This prejudice marks regional and religious (not just Catholic/Protestant but also Anglican/Presbyterian) partitions in Ireland'.[44] Yeats hoped that the South would come to stand as a good example to the North. In 1924, speaking in the Irish Senate, he declared: 'I have no hope of seeing Ireland united in my time, or of seeing Ulster won in my time; but I believe it will be won in the end, and not because we fight it, but because we govern this country well. We can do that, if I may be permitted as an artist and writer to say so, by creating a system of culture which will represent the whole of this country'.[45] Yeats really was away with the faeries. But being away with the faeries – or blue-sky thinking – has its uses. In his study of MacDiarmid, Alan Riach remarks: 'A homogeneous image of Ireland was proposed by the Celtic Revival and the Anglo-Irish Yeats'.[46] It could be argued that Yeats tried hard to incorporate conflicting elements of Irish culture into a single vision. He certainly developed a very gloomy and one-sided view of Scotland, seeing in it a fulcrum of all that was conservative, Unionist, imperialist: in short, 'British'. Yeats had warned the South not to get too Catholic if it wanted to get the North. He might have warned the North, with an eye on the 'loyal minority', not to get too Protestant.

The same prejudice that made Scotland a hard sell in Ireland and especially the South – because of the North – is what makes it so easy for Scottish critics to plump for stateless Joyce over Free State Yeats, the latter dismissed, either unsubtly in Terry Eagleton's terms in his 'Ballad of English Literature' – 'Willy Yeats was a fascist' – or more delicately in the slightly subtler but no less problematic terms of critics like Seamus Deane and George Watson.[47] Yeats gets short shrift, or shorter shrift than Joyce. The fact that

[43] Ibid, 183.

[44] Edna Longley, 'The Whereabouts of Literature', in Gerard Carruthers, David Goldie and Alastair Renfrew (eds), *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Amsterdam and New York, 2004), 151–65 [157].

[45] John Wilson Foster, 'Getting the North', 184–5.

[46] Alan Riach, *Hugh MacDiarmid's Epic Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1991), 88.

[47] Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880–1980* (London, 1985); G. J. Watson, *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce and O'Casey*

Yeats was a Protestant who trailed his coat of many colours through the mud and blood of politics has nothing to do with it, just as the reason the Dublin audiences rioted against plays of Synge and O'Casey was nothing to do with their religion. It is all objective and above board. Nothing to see here: no faeries or demons. Scotland gets a bad press in Ireland because of Ulster, and a bad press in the South because of the North. Yeats gets looked at sideways and with suspicion because of the very North at which he looked sideways and suspicious. Scotland and Ulster get brushed with the same tartan. In a sense, Yeats *is* the North.

Recently, postcolonial readings of Yeats have gained ground, most famously that of Edward Said, who read Yeats's Celticism in relation to *negritude*.[48] Yeats's Irishness in Said's account was set against a monolithic Britishness. Said had little to say about Scotland, and like most postcolonial critics tended to see 'Britain' as one flat homogenous and ahistorical whole, interchangeable with 'England', but Jahan Ramazani, in 'Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?', argues that: 'Yeats is completely out of luck if the postcolonial era dawned when the Republic of Ireland was officially founded in 1949 or, for that matter, when the partition might one day be dissolved between the Six Counties of the North and the lower Twenty-Six'.[49] According to Marjorie Howes: 'Yeats and postcolonial studies conducted some of their most sustained and important arguments with the Enlightenment through its opposite: a romantic culturalism'.[50] Howes goes on to argue, among other things that 'September 1913' is a Protestant poem born out of a growing frustration with Catholic Ireland.[51] My argument here is that Yeats slowly relinquished his wish to build bridges between Ireland and Scotland and, because of the Scottish legacy in the North, and its 'half Scottish' people, this meant abandoning his unionism. If Howes wanted to explore Yeats's Romanticism she might usefully have drawn on his attitude to Burns and Scott.

The man who famously declared that there was 'more enterprise / In walking naked'[52] had a rude awakening on the fashion front at the height of his Celticism:

(Washington, D.C.,1994; 1979).

[48] Edward Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization', in Seamus Deane (ed.), *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, (Minneapolis, 1992), 69–95.

[49] Jahan Ramazani, 'Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?', *Raritan* 17 (1998), 3, 64–89; 66.

[50] Howes, 'Postcolonial Yeats: Culture, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere', *Field Day Review* 2 (2006), 55 –73; 55.

[51] Ibid., 66–70.

[52] Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 142.

> On the issue of clothing, the Irish Irelander stood firm. *The Leader* urged the wearing of Irish cloth, tailored in Ireland and Yeats attempted to follow this model: 'I believed myself dressed according to public opinion, until a letter of apology from my tailor informed me that "It takes such a long time getting Connemara cloth as it has to come all the way from Scotland"' . . . Yeats's public engagement with the dress question came at the Dublin Pan-Celtic Congress of August 1901, when the issue of an Irish national costume was debated: Yeats temporised, arguing for the very gradual adoption of national dress; he pointed out that they all had to cope with the reactions of 'the small boy', who could be evaded if they 'started first in evening dress'. Irish Irelanders did not advocate a national costume.[53]

Ireland got from Scotland more than Connemara cloth. It got a key component of its colonial make-up, and not just its romantic culturalism, but also its lasting bastion of Britishness. Including the North – if not getting the North – means thinking about the Scottish contribution and the Scottish undercurrents in Irish life.

According to George Boyce, 'Irish nationalism in the nineteenth century was engaged not only in political agitation; it was concerned also to make good its claim that it had a fundamental right to exist, and was not, as its arch-enemy A. J. Balfour claimed, merely a congeries of grievance, with less foundation in history than the nationalism of Scotland, that noble, patriotic and yet contented member of the United Kingdom'.[54] Boyce underplays connections between Ulster and Scotland until his conclusion, when he comments: 'This is not intended as a piece of advice to Ulster Unionists that they should seek to invent a culture, or embark on a search for a Yeats of their own (Robert Burns, perhaps, who could combine the myth of Ulster Scottishness with an excellent literary pedigree?)'[55] For a time, Ulster had a Yeats of its own: Yeats. But the Scottishness of a political hate-figure like Alasdair Balfour did not help build bridges between the North and South of Ireland. As for 'the myth of Ulster Scottishness', the Ulster Plantation and partition are not wished away so easily.

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[53] Deirdre Toomey, 'Moran's Collar: Yeats and Irish Ireland', in Gould and Longley (eds), *That Accusing Eye*, 45–83, 49.

[54] George Boyce, '"They Have Got Yeats": Asking some more of the right questions about Literature and Politics in Ireland', *Text & Context* 3 (1988), 39–54, 43.

[55] Ibid., 50.

The half Scottish North, like its whole Scottish neighbour, may in one jaundiced vision look like a faerie-free zone, intolerant of others, and more prone to gritty realism than cultured romanticism, but the big picture is arguably a less gloomy one than that painted by Yeats, and less galling too. The Irish-Scottish connection is a vexed one, and the North is where the lines of conflict are most tightly drawn. In his open-ended conclusion to an important essay entitled 'Scotland, Ulster, and You', Owen Dudley Edwards observes: 'Neither Ulster nor Scotland is the thing it seems to be, and we have to make long journeys to understand home'.[56]

This essay has offered some snapshots, images or instances of Yeats and Scotland, portraits in plaid, moments to mull: first, Yeats's father, reading Sir Walter Scott's *Redgauntlet* to his twelve-year old son. Have you ever seen such cruelty? Is this the key to Yeats's adult antipathy to Scotland? Second, Yeats's grandfather, an old sailor reading *his* first book on his deathbed. The book? *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson. Then arguably one of the most influential Scots in an Irish context, James Connolly, an ordinary 'workingman', as Yeats portrays him, as he persuades Maud Gonne to visit Connolly at his modest lodgings, and then gets caught up in a street protest that ends in violence after the Edinburgh-born future Irish martyr throws a coffin bearing the words 'British Empire' into the Liffey. Yeats wonders if he was somehow to blame for his charged advocacy of Connolly. Next up, Yeats standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Hugh MacDiarmid on a Dublin street in the wee small hours of the morning, after a night on the tiles. What are they doing? Playing see-who-can-pee-the-highest. 'I crossed swords with him', as MacDiarmid put it, a living stream that ended in the gutter. Then comes the butt of someone else's joke. Yeats, under instruction from Ezra Pound, tries to recite Burns, fails miserably much to his auditor's amusement, proving to Pound in the process that Yeats, deaf to other cadences, can scan no verse but his own. The final image in these fleeting glimpses is of Yeats, at a time when Irish national dress was being debated, proud as punch of his own habits in this regard. Until he gets a letter from his tailor telling him good Connemara cloth takes time to get delivered these days, as it has to come all the way from Scotland. Dressing in Scots garb while searching for something distinctively Irish – that's a suitable way of thinking about Yeats and Scotland.

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[56] Edwards, 'Scotland, Ulster, and You', in Ian S. Wood (ed.), *Scotland and Ulster*, 182.