

Introduction: A Century of Disorder and Transformation—Scotland 1550–1650

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On 15 May 1587 a formal ritual of reconciliation, staged by James VI, took place in Edinburgh:

the King maid the bancket [banquet] to all his nobilletue, at ewin in Halyroudhouse, quhair the King made thame, efter drinking of many scolis [‘good healths’] ane to ane vther, and made thame efter supper, quho [who] vtherwayis had beine at great fead [feud], tak twa and twa be handis, and pas from Holyroudhouse to the mercat croce [market cross] of Edinburgh.

James also “maid ane harrang to his nobilleties and estaites”: now he had reached adulthood, he “thocht it best first to reconceill his nobilletie [...] to suche point as all sould tend to the plesour of God, his Majesteis standing, the weill of the countrie, and thair awin ease and tranquillitie.”¹ In other words, James was serving notice, through ritual and speech, that his adult reign would be marked by transforming a troubled and disordered realm to one of peace and tranquility. Although the extent to which he achieved his goal continues to be debated by historians,² James’ insistence on symbolic performance here is entirely characteristic of a king who, as Kevin Sharpe and others have amply illustrated, sought to assert authority and power through a variety of political and cultural acts.³ That he felt the need to enact such authority is eloquent of the transformations that persistent disorder had brought about in the kingdom, and that are explored by the essays in this special issue.

The century from 1550 to 1650 was a time of great upheaval in Scotland.⁴ Warfare with England and the end of the French alliance during the long minority of Mary Queen of Scots, the religious crisis brought by the Protestant Reformation of 1559–60 and the following decades of religious change, the forced abdication of Mary in 1567, the Civil War of 1568–73, the factional struggles of James VI’s minority, the Union of the Crowns of Scotland and England in 1603, friction between Charles I and his Scottish realm and the resulting Wars of the Three Kingdoms, as well as demographic, economic, and social factors, made this a period of disorder

and change or, in the words of the writer, Sir Richard Maitland, decades in which “rewle and ordour Is away.”⁵ This special issue examines some of the manifestations of this disorder; the essays explore reactions that led to transformations, whether personal, institutional, or national, and to changes that were cultural, social, and political in effect and scope.

Many of the essays here focus on periods during the reign of James VI (1567–1625), although Jamie Reid-Baxter’s study of Robert Pont’s paraphrase of Psalm 83 examines the years immediately before and after the Reformation, while Richard Oram takes a broader look at the social and economic impact of the plague over two centuries, from 1450 to 1650. Personal transformation is examined in Julian Goodare’s essay, which attempts to pinpoint the period in which the radical presbyterian minister John Spottiswoode changed his course and began his journey towards becoming a leading representative of episcopacy. Stephen Reid analyzes the intensely personal reaction of Andrew Melville to one of the worst manifestations of disorder in Europe, the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in Paris in 1572. Anna Groundwater studies royal reactions to disorder as illustrated by James VI’s policy towards the crime and disorder he perceived in the Borders and elsewhere in his realm, both before and after 1603. How successful was the adult king who paraded his feuding nobles along the Edinburgh High Street in 1587?

Transformation does not necessarily involve wholesale or immediate change. It has been argued that, at least in the short term, the success of the Reformation was greatest “where it chose to draw on the rich cultural heritage of late medieval Scotland; it was far less successful[...] where it offered change, disruption or uncertainty.”⁶ Jamie Reid-Baxter’s essay illustrates this point by emphasizing how the new Reformed tradition of metrical psalms drew on the resources of pre-1560 religious reform movements as well as influences from abroad. Moreover, he demonstrates how the Bannatyne Manuscript, compiled in 1565–68, and yet striking both for its assemblage of late medieval Scots poetry and for contemporary texts in debt to earlier aesthetic modes, showed its attachment to pre-Reformation religious traditions: “The inclusion of Catholic religious verse, censored or otherwise, and the striking omission of overtly Reformed material, reveals a conscious attempt to maintain continuity with the culture of pre-Reformation Scotland in a world of flux and disorder.” Offering a new perspective on the collection’s compellingly hybrid nature, Reid-Baxter argues that one of the reasons Pont’s paraphrase of Psalm 83, intended for the new Psalter of 1564, could be included in the Bannatyne Manuscript, was precisely that it could be read in different ways by both Catholics

and Protestants.⁷ The interrelationship between religion, culture, and music at this time was therefore complex and fluid.

Recent work on Scottish culture and history, indeed, has questioned the idea of the Reformation of 1560 as a watershed, although it certainly prompted a new and vociferous print culture of popular protest. A recent discussion of essays on early modern literature has argued that the texts examined there “work diachronically, invalidating the watershed traditionally posited between medieval and ‘Renaissance,’ which has in Scotland often been further simplified as pre- v. post-Reformation literary culture.”⁸ A similar point could be made about the Regnal Union of 1603, although many of the political and cultural transformations it wrought are clearly obvious. Groundwater’s essay points out how many of the policies of James VI after 1603 had their origins in the period before he succeeded to the English crown.

Scotland occupied an unusually large presence on the European stage in the later sixteenth century as both Protestant and Catholic powers attempted to influence the affairs of a realm whose sovereigns seemed likely to inherit the English throne.⁹ Scotland was very open to European influences—politically, intellectually, and artistically (as R. D. S. Jack has amply shown in terms of Renaissance literary culture).¹⁰ This is a theme common to many of the essays, from Andrew Melville’s neo-Latin poems on the St Bartholomew’s Massacre which, along with other imported material, helped foster sympathy in Scottish circles for French Calvinists, to the French and German tunes and Anglo-Genevan influences on Robert Pont’s work for the 1564 Psalter, to the forms of plague treatment and prevention borrowed by Scottish communities from Italy and France. Melville spent part of his student days in Europe, in what was a common pattern for many Scots, although Melville was perhaps more studious than some. Indeed, the sons of the earl of Mar wrote to their father from Bourges in 1617 of the many Scots who disturbed their lessons and prevented them from learning French.¹¹ The reforms which Melville subsequently introduced to the universities of Glasgow and St Andrews were enriched by European ideas and influences.

The influence of Geneva was particularly strong in these years. Reid argues that it was the less radical ideas of the Genevans on questions of resistance to authority which prevented Melville from adopting wholesale the theories of his mentor and countryman, George Buchanan, who had tutored him in Latin poetry.¹² The Scots Psalter of 1564 was probably influenced by the Anglo-Genevan experience of John Knox and Christopher Goodman where they experienced the use of English metrical psalms and Huguenot Psalter tunes. And yet influences need not be absolute and all-encompassing. Reid-Baxter points out that contrary to the common idea that

the 1564 Psalter was simply the English Psalter of 1562, the work was a Scottish one (despite being written in English rather than Scots), reflecting not only English, but also French and German influences. The “Scottishness” of the psalter was demonstrated when Charles I tried to introduce changes to it in 1631; he had to retreat, and a second attempt, along with the introduction of a new royally-sponsored Scottish Prayerbook, resulted in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms.

The religious changes set in force by the Reformation brought Scotland closer to its old enemy but now co-religionist, England. Both Pont and Melville wrote poems of praise for the Union of the Crowns in 1603, seeing the uniting of England and Scotland as increasing the strength of Protestantism against the perceived threat of European Catholicism. Whether such a union should also lead to a pan-British identity was a matter of general and not just literary dispute. The period 1560–1660 “brought a new questioning of a single national identity as well as novel definitions of it.”¹³ James VI had been arguing for a pan-British identity since at least the 1590s, and tried even harder after 1603 to bring it about, especially with his policies in the newly-named Middle Shires, but his subjects on either side of the Border were markedly less enthusiastic. There were also practical problems, caused by the separate legal systems of Scotland and England.¹⁴ While James’s own ambitions may not have been met, Groundwater’s essay demonstrates the value of the insights of “the new British history” which argues for the importance of considering the wider “British” perspective when examining events in one part of the islands.¹⁵

Religion was never far from centre stage in these years. Many students of the period have examined the connection between political and other forms of disorder and religious change.¹⁶ Several have focused on the conflict between crown and kirk for control of the institutional church. Goodare’s examination of Archbishop Spottiswoode’s change from presbyterianism to episcopacy focuses on an episode of particularly high tension. In December 1596, presbyterian ministers, in what is usually described as a riot but which Goodare argues was in fact an attempted coup, forced the king out of Edinburgh. Although the tension between presbyterianism and episcopacy¹⁷ is the central focus of only one essay here, it also involved the main subjects of three of the other essays: Robert Pont (who was at one point offered and refused a bishopric) and Andrew Melville, not to mention James VI.

In matters of religion and royal power, Scotland found it difficult to adopt the compromise position of many European states, of *cuius regio, cuius religio*, for in Scotland the Reformation had been established *in spite of*, rather than *by*, the sovereign. Coupled with the forced abdication of Mary Queen of Scots in 1567, this gave a particular immediacy among Scottish political thinkers to issues of the

nature of royal authority and the right to resist tyranny: “The emergence of divine right theories of kingship in response to the ‘populist’ politics of John Knox and George Buchanan polarized Scottish political debate in a manner which was not just unprecedented but which was to resonate profoundly through the constitutional conflicts of the seventeenth century.”¹⁸

In Europe, the shock of the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre galvanized a Protestant response, resulting in “a reconstructed Calvinist theory of law and religion, authority and liberty, rights and resistance,”¹⁹ ideas which were articulated powerfully by George Buchanan. But not all Scottish Calvinists followed this lead completely. Although Andrew Melville has been described as “a Protestant figure-head [who would] afflict King James in the years of his adult rule with his greatest headache,”²⁰ recent work, as Reid points out, has revised the picture of him as the leader of a “Melvillian” party in the kirk. Melville did not leave a treatise about his ideas on resistance, and his attitudes have to be gleaned from other sources such as the poetry analyzed here, but Reid argues that he was more lukewarm than Buchanan about the idea of the right to resist. Both Melville and Spottiswoode, who seems to have been influenced by resistance theory in his presbyterian phase but then changed his mind, serve as reminders that many people fell between the extremes represented by Buchanan and James VI.

Just as the shock of the events of 1596 pushed Spottiswoode towards episcopacy, so the instability and crises of the period, argues Goodare, led “many people to desire a strong monarchy as a bulwark against instability.” There has been much debate about the growth of an “absolutist” state in this period. Groundwater points out that “any definition of the state should encompass the interactions of its individuals” and that historians need to see the state as more than institutions. Her essay takes the Borders as a particular case study, allowing an examination of “the constant but ever-shifting relationship between the centre and the periphery, which was one of the main dynamics of Scottish political life in the early modern period.”²¹ James’s policies towards the Borders, harnessing the power of local men in the service of the crown, were part of a growing centralization of political authority which marked many of the European states of the early modern period, although as has been pointed out, royal attention to disorder in this period was “both discriminating and opportunistic.”²² Groundwater demonstrates how before 1603 James’s policies towards the Borders were affected by Elizabeth’s attitudes towards his claim to the English succession. After 1603 the issue of crime in the Borders took on an increasing significance as he attempted to promote himself as a king for both countries.

Crown-magnate relations have been a major concern of historians of late medieval and early modern Scotland. One aspect prominent in recent historiography is feuding. The late sixteenth century saw over 365 bloodfeuds, although there was a decline in the number of feuds from around 1610.²³ The episode with which this introduction opened was a royal attempt to bring an end to such feuds among the nobility, as part of the king's mission to "civilize" their behaviour. Groundwater highlights the increasing personal involvement of James VI in trying to pacify such disorder as he attempted to extend his control of justice throughout his realm.

The later sixteenth century was marked by demographic, economic, and social changes. There was substantial population growth in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, despite several devastating visitations of the plague.²⁴ Oram's wide-ranging study looks at the impact of plague on both town and countryside in this period, and argues that earlier historians have been mistaken in regarding plague as a largely urban phenomenon by this time. He also points out the need to examine the impact on trade of the travel bans instituted as plague control measures, and argues for the need for more local studies to test some of the conclusions of his broader work. His essay reminds us that the religious, political, and cultural transformations of the period need to be placed in their wider social and economic context.

Plague formed the backdrop for the Bannatyne Manuscript (1564–68) which was "written in tyme of pest." Reid-Baxter closely analyzes one particular text, Pont's paraphrase of Psalm 83, from this voluminous manuscript "dewly devydit"²⁵ into different poetic genres. Close textual analysis is used in other articles to elicit a deeper understanding of broader social and political contexts: for example, in Reid's analysis of Andrew Melville's neo-Latin poetry and in Goodare's attempt to uncover Spottiswoode's role in the events of 1596–97 from his later history of those events. Several other essays use poetry as evidence, including Sir Richard Maitland's poem on Border disorder and Robert Henryson's poem on the pest. Exploration of the neo-Latin poetry of Pont and Melville brings welcome attention to a corpus of poetry neglected by conventional literary studies but which remains of profound importance for a full understanding of the linguistic and cultural depth of Renaissance Scottish poetry.²⁶ It has been argued recently that scholars need to expand their definitions of the canonical and to include in the literary production of the age "the scholarly writer, versed in the practicalities and controversies of philosophical, theological, forensic and historical writing."²⁷ In line with this suggestion, this special issue includes analyses of not just poetry, but histories, psalms and paraphrases, royal letters and legislation, and plague treatises. Indeed the 1587

Edinburgh procession, it could be argued, is a text, albeit a dramatic one, and may have been read in different ways by participants, organizers, and observers; recent work by John McGavin illustrates how important insights can be gleaned by understanding the interrelationships between dramatic and political culture in this way.²⁸ Scottish Renaissance culture seems especially to lend itself to an approach which is generically and modally diverse: indeed, the rich eclecticism of the Bannatyne Manuscript is echoed in subsequent manuscript anthologies of the period, such as the Maitland Folio and Quarto, which include powerful poems of political, social, and moral complaint against various forms of disorder and transformation.²⁹

Two of the essays focus on their subject's writings in order to uncover insights into their character and motivations. Andrew Melville's poetry has been the subject of disparaging criticism, but Reid argues that the "roughness of Melville's work is precisely why it is valuable for gaining insight into his character. His poems give the impression, on the whole, of being rushed and rarely edited afterwards, fired off as the thought took him." In contrast, the writings of John Spottiswoode examined by Goodare were written decades after the events of 1596–97 and in the changed political and religious circumstances of the 1620s. Goodare attempts to "peer behind the veil" drawn by his subject over his earlier Presbyterianism. It is important to look at how seventeenth-century historians, writing from conflicting Presbyterian and Episcopal perspectives, have represented the events of the sixteenth century, as their works have exercised a tremendous influence on later histories of the period.³⁰

Texts are also illuminating in the ways in which they can reveal their authors' perceptions about contemporaries. The legislation and letters dealing with the Borders in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries demonstrate the tendency of the central government to stigmatize those in the peripheries, especially the Highlands and the Borders, as disorderly and even barbaric. It was not only the crown which articulated these views: "Robert Pont, veteran of the Reformation of 1560, branded papists, highlanders and borderers as obstacles to the civility and security promised by the union of the crowns."³¹ John Spottiswoode was also active in the disorderly Borders in 1608, being employed to plant kirks there with ministers.

There were several other manifestations of disorder in Scotland 1550–1650, some of which have received intensive scholarly attention in recent years—of these, the witch-hunt is perhaps the most recognized, and it continues to generate a large scholarly literature. There is also increasing work on the topic of crime. The contributors to this special issue have pursued less well-studied aspects of what can broadly be termed early modern Scottish disorder. As they demonstrate, disorder can be

transformational in very different ways. However, in focusing on a particular manifestation of such disorder, whether political, social, economic, religious, or cultural, each essay reveals the way in which each of these facets is often inseparable from the other. Furthermore, the individual historical figures, texts, and places explored within the essays make more specifically meaningful the way in which, to return to Maitland's words used earlier, "rewe and ordour" can be exiled. In so doing, they help paint a more particularized picture of the larger, dynamic transformations which shaped Scotland in the period.

Notes

1. David Moysie, *Memoirs of the Affairs of Scotland M.D.LXXVII–M.DC.III* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1830), p. 63. See Anna Groundwater's essay in this issue and Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch, "James VI: Universal King?" in *The Reign of James VI*, ed. J. Goodare and M. Lynch (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), pp. 4–5.
2. For example, K. M. Brown, *Bloodfeud in Scotland, 1573–1625* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986); J. Goodare, *State and Society in Early Modern Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Goodare and Lynch, ed., *Reign of James VI*.
3. See, for example, *Royal Subjects: Essays on the Writings of James VI and I*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).
4. In our own attempts to create some transformative disorder, we have purposely eschewed both the traditional date of 1560 as the start of our century and the Regnal Union as a point of closure; in addition, we have not imposed a timeframe dictated by regnal periods.
5. Sir Richard Maitland, "Quhair is the blythnes [tha]t hes bein" (line 72), in *The Maitland Folio Manuscript*, ed. W.A. Craigie, 2 vols (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1919–72), vol. 1, p. 39. The most recent general histories are *Scotland: A History*, ed. Jenny Wormald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and *Scotland: The Making and Unmaking of the Nation c.1100–1707*, Volume 2: *Early Modern Scotland: c.1500–1707*, ed. Bob Harris and Alan R. MacDonald (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2007). For a more detailed examination of the period to 1587 see Jane Dawson, *Scotland Re-formed 1488–1587* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007). A general history focusing on the economic and social aspects is *The New Penguin History of Scotland*, ed. R.A. Houston and W.W.J. Knox (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 2001).
6. Michael Lynch, "A Nation Born Again? Scottish Identity in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Image and Identity: The Making and Re-making of Scotland through the Ages*, ed. D. Broun et al. (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1998), p. 86.
7. See *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, ed. W. Tod Ritchie, Scottish Text Society, 4 vols. (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood and Sons, 1928–34). On the political and reli-

- gious interconnections of the manuscript, see Alasdair A. MacDonald, "Poetry, politics, and Reformation censorship in sixteenth-century Scotland," *English Studies* 44 (1983), pp. 41–21, and "The Bannatyne Manuscript: A Marian Anthology," *Innes Review* 37 (1986), pp. 36–47. In addition, see Crawford Gribben, "The literary culture of the Scottish Reformation," *Review of English Studies* 57 (2006), pp. 64–82, for a recent account of literary production in this period.
8. Theo van Heijnsbergen and Nicola Royan, "Introduction," in *Literature, Letters and the Canonical in Early Modern Scotland*, ed. T. van Heijnsbergen and N. Royan (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2002), p. x.
 9. Roger Mason, "Renaissance and Reformation: The Sixteenth Century," in *Scotland*, ed. Wormald, p. 107. For the pre-Reformation context of these contacts, see David Ditchburn, *Scotland and Europe: The Medieval Kingdom and Its Contacts with Christendom, 1214–1545* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000).
 10. See, for example, R. D. S. Jack, *The Italian Influence on Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1972).
 11. Marie-Claude Tucker, "Scottish Students at Bourges," in *Literature, Letters and the Canonical*, p. 117.
 12. For other differences between Melville and Buchanan, see *George Buchanan: The Political Poetry*, ed. Paul J. McGinnis and Arthur H. Williamson (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1995), pp. 31–35. This volume also includes a selection of Melville's poetry in Appendix C, pp. 276–97.
 13. Lynch, "A Nation Born Again?" p. 98. See also Roger Mason, "Imagining Scotland: Scottish political thought and the problems of Britain, 1560–1660," in *Scots and Britons: Scottish Political Thought and the Union of 1603*, ed. R. Mason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 3–13.
 14. For James as a "British king" before 1603, see Goodare and Lynch, "Universal King?" p. 22. The Scottish legal system is discussed in Brian Levack, *Witch-hunting in Scotland: Law, Politics and Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2008), chapter 2.
 15. For discussion of the "new British history," see essays in *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, ed. A. Grant and K. Stringer (London: Routledge, 1995).
 16. Jenny Wormald, "The Reign of James VI: 1573–1625" in *Scotland*, ed. Harris and MacDonald, p. 18.
 17. For further discussion, see Alan R. MacDonald, *The Jacobean Kirk, 1567–1625: Sovereignty, Polity and Liturgy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998) and James Kirk, *Patterns of Reform: Continuity and Change in the Reformation Kirk* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989) Kirk also considers the issue of Spottiswoode's change of mind in chapter 11, especially pp. 434–36, but in much less detail than Goodare here.
 18. Mason, "Imagining Scotland", p. 6.
 19. John Witte Jr, *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 85. For these ideas, see especially chapter 2.
 20. Wormald, "Reign of James VI", p. 18.

21. Levack, *Witch-hunting in Scotland*, p. 5.
22. Boardman and Lynch, "State of Scottish History," p. 49.
23. Keith Brown, "Reformation to Union, 1560–1707," in *New Penguin History of Scotland*, p. 223. The most detailed examination of feuding in this period is Brown, *Bloodfeud in Scotland*. For a summary of crown-magnate relations debates, see Boardman and Lynch, "State of Scottish History," pp. 46–48.
24. Ian Whyte, *Scotland Before the Industrial Revolution: An Economic and Social History c.1050–c.1750* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 112–13, 122–23.
25. *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, vol 2, p. 1, line 11.
26. The major exceptions are James MacQueen, "Scottish Latin Poetry," in *The History of Scottish Literature*, ed. Cairns Craig, 4 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987–89), vol. 1, ed. R. D. S. Jack (1988), pp. 213–26, and J. MacQueen, "From Rome to Ruddiman: The Scoto-Latin Tradition," in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, ed. Ian Brown et al., 3 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), vol. 1, pp. 184–208.
27. van Heijnsbergen and Royan, "Introduction," pp. xxi–iv.
28. John J. McGavin, *Theatricality and Narrative in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
29. See *Maitland Folio*, and *The Maitland Quarto Manuscript*, ed. W. A. Craigie (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1920). These manuscripts are associated in terms of authorship, compilation, and transcription with Sir Richard Maitland of Lethington (c.1496–1586) and his family.
30. Lynch, "A Nation Born Again?" pp. 90, 95–6.
31. J. Goodare and M. Lynch, "The Scottish State and Its Borderlands, 1567–1625," in *Reign of James VI*, p. 188.