Devolution and the Modern Scottish Poem — Part One: Introduction, Political Background and Home Rule between 1880 and 1914

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I. Introduction

On September 11th, 1997, some three hundred years after its dissolution, the Scottish people voted by an overwhelming 74% for the reinstatement of their Parliament after three centuries of uneasy political union with England, and over a hundred years of fruitless devolutionary debate at Westminster. In November 1998, the Scotland Act became law, thus making provision for a devolved assembly in Edinburgh, which sat for the first time on May 12th of the following year, and was officially opened by Dr Winnie Ewing on July 1st, 1999 with the simple pronouncement, "the Scottish Parliament, which adjourned on 25th March, 1707, is hereby reconvened." The ceremony included a rendition of Burns' 'A Man's A Man for A' That' with its stirring defiance of "the coward slave," its allusions to "toils obscure" and the man "o' independent mind," and the assured victory of the common good over self-interested oppression:

Then let us pray that come it may,
    As come it will for a' that,
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth
    Shall bear the gree, an' a' that,
For a' that, an' a' that,
    Its comin yet for a' that,
That Man to Man the warld o'er,
Shall brothers be for a’ that. — 2)

Written in the final years of Burns’ life, this poem might serve as an anthem for all those peoples who are looking towards political and cultural redress in today’s post-colonial world. To the Scots, almost all of whom would have sung this song in their schooldays and many of whom would have its sentiments inscribed on their hearts, it was prophecy come true — a rare refutation of the oft-expressed idea that the Scots either lack political nerve, or that they have a “feckless habit of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.” 3)

It seems appropriate, then, to survey the Scottish literary scene once more at this important stage of the country’s history, not only to highlight the central role played by its writers in bringing about this new state of affairs, but also to think about the cultural implications of greater political autonomy. I shall outline some of the political, cultural and literary issues that have dominated the devolution years for Scottish writers, limiting the discussion to the sphere of poetry since Scotland’s poets have perhaps been the most vigorously and variously engaged both in the devolution debate and the literary renaissance.

It should be stated right from the start, however, that any post-colonial discussion about Scotland is bound to be problematic. These problems arise from its unique political situation, combined with various economic and cultural implications. Since it lost full autonomy in 1707 by surrendering its Parliament and moving its representatives to Westminster, it has often been claimed that Scotland’s political status has been compromised. During “those stateless centuries,” Scotland was neither a colony of its powerful southern neighbour nor a self-governing state. On the one hand, it was an active and highly successful limb of British imperialism; on the other, it retained its own systems of law, education and religion, as well as certain distinct ‘national’ characteristics — the “ayebydan (abiding) values” and “strong Scotch accent
of the mind"⁴) that Robert Louis Stevenson highlights. Thus for centuries Scotland existed as a kind of 'shadow state': at once an integral and, excluding the two Jacobite insurrections of 1715 and 1745, a largely peaceful part of the United Kingdom, but also something quite obviously distinct. Tom Nairn has put the situation thus:

Scotland is not a colony, a semi-colony, a pseudo-colony, a near-colony, a neo-colony or any kind of colony of the English. She is a junior but (as these things go) highly successful partner in the general business enterprise of Anglo-Scots imperialism. Now that this business is evidently on its last legs, it may be quite reasonable for the Scots to want out. But there is really no point in disguising this with heroic iconry. After all, when the going was good, the world heard very little of the Scots' longing for independence.

This situation has led, in turn, to claims that the Scots are a self-divided nation: spiritually unsettled within the Union, and yet not sufficiently focussed to forge nationhood for themselves. In particular, it has been seen as the dilemma between heart and head, pride and fear, spiritual and material comfort. A traditional portrayal of this political, cultural and economic dilemma is captured in the following quotation from Andrew Marr's *The Battle for Scotland*:

Malcolm Rifkind, the Conservative politician, is fond of analysing the history of Scottish nationalism as a perpetual battle between Scotland's aspirations and Scotland's interests, in which its interests tend to win over its aspirations.⁶)

And it is perhaps only since the post-Thatcher years of New Labour that the whole seems to be starting to come together and working confidently to-
wards a renewed Scottish state possessed of a vibrant economy and a thriv-
ing indigenous culture.

It should be noted early on that because Scottish affairs are complex, the
application of post-colonial terminology to her case must be undertaken with
extreme care. For instance, are the Scots to be allowed to have a foot in
both camps, as it were — both as imperialists and as a people seeking re-
dress from imperialism? It would seem that no other stance can do justice to
her case; nevertheless, it would be easy to be either over- or under-critical, or
to cast her, over-simplistically, into either one camp or the other.

At times, special terminology may even be required, as we see, for exam-
ple, in the use of the politically and culturally delicate word 'devolution', which
is the term most favoured to cover her efforts to gain greater autonomy.

According to some interpretations, the term 'devolution' attempts to ex-
press the process leading to the partial reinstatement of independence after
hundreds of years of unionist government centred, some would argue, abroad.
But according to others, it is a means to preserve small national identities
within larger structures. In the present context it is defined simply as, “the
passing of the power of authority of one ... body to another.” All the same,
one only has to put it beside the word 'evolution' to gain some idea of how it
might be considered potentially condescending. Biologically, it represents a
kind of evolutionary regression, or degeneration. There is a definite pejor-
itive nuance to the term which reflects a mentality that exists on both sides
of the border — that a return to Scottishness could, or does, signify regres-
sion. Such undertones were reinforced by the anti-climax that was the 1978
referendum. Marr, for example, writes that, “Devolution reeks of failure —
failure of leadership, failure of nerve.” The pejorative nuance appears to
have stuck to a certain extent.

On one level, this paper is a critique of yet another Commonwealth litera-
ture striving towards self-sufficiency against the backcloth of an explosion in
'alternative englishes' (with a small 'e') in today's post-colonial era. But
looked at from a different angle, it is what Hugh MacDiarmid called the "crusade against spiritual atrophy" and "the tragedy of an unevolved people." It is the story of a culture that has preserved an almost 'national' distinctiveness, but which is at the very tail end of Commonwealth moves towards political independence, if that is where Scotland is going. Historically, Scotland's unique status has led to the recognition of its semi-indigenous culture, but it has also led to cultural neglect. Her case has often been passed over.

No truer is this than in the study of its literature. In the year 1919, for instance, it was possible for T. S. Eliot to write an article entitled, 'Was There a Scottish Literature?' in *The Atheneum*, which contains the following pronouncement:

> And finally, there is no longer any tenable distinction to be drawn for the present day between the two literatures (of Scotland and England).\(^{11}\)

Of course, political and literary attitudes have greatly changed since 1919, and Eliot modifies his views on regionalism by the time he comes to write his 1946 *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, in which he argues for a balance between the local and the national, but as Douglas Dunn observes in a recent essay, 'Language and Liberty',\(^{12}\) "Eliot's 1919 views expressed not simply the opinion of a radically conservative young poet whose criticism emphasized the importance of an absorbed European tradition, but also the status quo of intellectuals and literati both north and south of the border." The impact of Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' was also immense, as we can see at a later stage with regard to Edwin Muir's contribution to the debate, *Scottish Journey* (1935) and *Scott and Scotland* (1936), in which he argues respectively that the Scots are living in a kind of cultural limbo, and that Scottish writers have no choice but to absorb the English tradition.

Whereas writers in North America, the Caribbean, Africa, India, the Antipodes, and Ireland, have all forged a distinctive label for themselves in the
modern mind, the term 'English literature' continued to cover Scottish writing until quite recently, despite the fact that much of it remains unintelligible, and hence unread, by the English-speaking world (the universal exception being Burns.) With the pressure that English culture has exerted in Scotland through what some have considered "sinister" educational legislation since 1872 and before, many Scots have come to regard Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden and Wordsworth as a part of their own literary heritage. Burns songs were learned in music class, but for a long time a lot of Scottish writing was regarded as somehow parochial and therefore not worthy of serious attention in school. The struggle for the survival of local language, and the sense of identity that it affords, as against centralized educational and governmental policy is, therefore, one of the most important themes that will be discussed.

Before going more deeply into these various and complex issues, however, I shall outline in brief the political background up to the Home Rule movement in the late nineteenth century.

II. The Political Background: "the Auld Enemy," the "vessel with a double keel," and "a strong Scottish accent of the mind"

A cursory survey of the history of the British Isles reveals the deep division that lies at the heart of Anglo-Scottish relations. The island of Great Britain was first divided in A.D. 122 when the Romans built Hadrian's Wall to keep a wild northern people called the Picts out of their empire. Eventually the two constantly warring kingdoms of Scotland and England emerged: the former a complex network of Celtic clans, the latter a more unified Anglo-Saxon nation with an aggressive expansionist policy. England soon absorbed Ireland and Wales in the early Medieval period, but Scotland resisted. The animosity that the Scots felt towards their southern neighbours is cap-
tured, for example, in these lines from 'The Complaynt of Scotland (1549)'

There is nocht tua nations vndir the firmament that as mair contrar and different fra vthirs nor is Inglismen and Scottismen, quhoubeit that thai be within ane ile and nychtbours and of ane langage. For Inglismen ar subtil and Scottismen ar facile. Inglismen ar ambitius in prosperite and Scottismen ar humain in prosperite. Inglismen ar humil quhen thai ar subieckit be forse and violence, and Scottismen ar furius quhen thai ar violently subieki. Inglismen ar cruel quhen thai get victorie, and Scottismen ar merciful quhen thai get victorie. And to conclude, it is onpossibil that Scottismen and Inglismen can remane in concord vndir ane monarche ar ane prince, because there naturis and conditions ar as indefferent as is the nature of scheip and woluis.

Even today many Scots foster a historical grievance against the English, and speak of their southern neighbour as "the Auld Enemy."

However, through royal marriage, the monarchies of the two countries merged in 1603 when Elizabeth I of England died without heir. A hundred years later, after the trauma of civil war, and the ousting of the Scottish Stuart Kings who had inherited the English throne, their respective parliaments followed suit. Full political union was achieved amidst widespread rioting and anti-union petitioning amongst the Scots in 1706 and 1707. Many Scots felt that, having effectively lost their monarchy, they were now about to lose their parliament and hence the right to self-definition. What rubbed salt into the wound was that it was their own nobility who had betrayed them into this state of affairs, enticed to London by the prospect of seats of power at Westminster:

Our Duiks were deills, our Marquesses wer mad,
Our Earls were evills, Our Viscounts yet more bad,
Our Lords were villains, and our Barons knaves
Who with our burrows did sell us for slaves. ¹⁴)

Satirist, Jonathan Swift, described the newly-established Union as a "vessel with a double keel" in his poem 'Verses Said to be Written on the Union', which describes the new Union from quite a different perspective:

The Queen has lately lost a part
Of her entirely-English heart,
For want of which, by way of botch
She piec'd it up again with Scotch.
Bless'd Revolution! which creates
Divided hearts, united states!
See how the double nation lies
Like a rich coat with skirts of freize;
As if a man in making posies
Should bundle thistles up with roses. ¹⁵)

If the Act of Union was an attempt to release tension between the two states and avoid war, it was certainly a failure in the short term. The Jacobites — mainly disaffected Scots, but also English and Irish Catholics who supported the dispossessed Stuart monarch — rebelled in 1715 and then again in 1745. The newly united kingdom was thus plunged twice into civil war. This particular episode in British history ends with forty years of political and cultural suppression of the Highland Gaels and the collapse of a distinctive society — the clan system. When Dr. Johnson, who had vehement Jacobite sympathies, made his highland tour in 1773, he remarked that nothing remained to the Highlander but his language and his poverty. And, if the loss of political autonomy is a recurring theme in the Scottish debate, the loss of cultural identity which accompanied it is perhaps an even more acute
issue.

The Union was ultimately sustainable, though, both because it entrenched considerable guarantees for the Scots (an independent legal system and national Church, to give just two instances); and because it did bring substantial benefits. Uneasy as some have always found it, single nationhood did lead to less conflict overall and, in this sense, union can be regarded as much more successful north of the border than across the Irish Sea.

Scotland benefited immensely from access to English markets, facilitating expansion that would not have happened otherwise, and making Scotland what has even been claimed to be the richest 'nation' on earth at the beginning of the twentieth century. Many commentators have attributed the extraordinary and unbroken history of Scottish achievement from the golden age of the Scottish Enlightenment onwards to partnership with the English.\(^{16}\) And even if revisionist claims are partially or even substantially true in suggesting that the Enlightenment had its roots "in the social soil of Scotland itself and its long established cross-fertilization with mainland Europe," relative stability in Anglo-Scottish relationships cannot be ignored. For better or for worse, the economic factor has had a major impact on Scottish affairs ever since, as we saw in the quotation about Malcolm Rifkind in the introductory section of this essay.

The following centuries are the centuries of British imperial history. On the one hand, Scotland experienced an explosion of self-confidence and, as a result, a strong national identity emerged. On the other, centralized government meant the ascendancy of English-style politics and with it, English sensibility. The dual process of assimilation and attrition was insidiously erasing Scottish distinctiveness and the responsibilities that come with independence. Gradually a complex feeling of proud deference worked its way deep into the Scottish psyche — "the old contradiction between self-assertion and self-distrust"\(^ {17}\) as it has been called.

Another notion that was engendered by partnership with England was
the notion of the 'shadow state'\textsuperscript{18} or, to put it in cultural terms, Stevenson's "strong Scotch accent of the mind." These are concepts that attempt to express a range of residual feeling or loyalty associated with the loss of political autonomy; and although it is often passed off as sentimental nostalgia, it should be noted that it is a notion that has proved surprisingly resilient and meaningful to those who embrace it, for in many ways it defines what it means to be Scottish today.

And if, as Hugh Kearney argues, the British Empire created a kind of 'Britannic melting pot,'\textsuperscript{19} the rise of 'ethnic politics' and withdrawal from empire were to follow. In politics this is known as 'the devolution revolution,' and culturally it is covered by the terms 'renaissance' or, more lately, 'post-colonialism,' (although strictly speaking the use of this particular term does not really cover Scotland's peculiar circumstances). Either way, it is the counter-narrative to three centuries of union.

Scotland in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century:

Because it has invariably been overshadowed by the more urgent issue of Home Rule for Ireland, it is seldom remembered that devolution for Scotland has been firmly on the Parliamentary agenda since William Gladstone’s second term of office, which began in 1880. Indeed, the Liberals' slogan of "Peace, Retrenchment, Reform" extended to Gladstone's belief that all the colonies should be self-governed. He advocated as little military involvement in the affairs of others as possible, and a reduction of government expenditure and intervention across the board; in short, he emphasized the political rights and freedom for all. Naturally this was in stark contrast to the imperial vision of Queen Victoria's favourite, Benjamin Disraeli. As such, the 1880 election was perceived as a moral, as much as — or even more than — a political battle.
The late nineteenth century produced a great deal of poor quality Scottish poetry — third rate imitations of Burns dripping with romantic sentimentality for a rural Scotland that had never really existed anyway, and quite ignoring the real issues of the day. The school was derogatorily dubbed the 'Kailyard,' or cabbage patch. And although the title of Agnes Stuart Mabon's 1887 volume of poems, *Hamely Rhymes*, smells suspiciously of cabbage, it does contain a number of light political pieces that make interesting comment on the 1880 election. Marvelously deflatory, these twin pieces voice a particularly female, and a particularly Scottish skepticism about the politics of both party leaders. Before the election she writes:

But now 'tis thought that Bill will get
What he so long has wanted;
For though his body's weak and frail,
His spirit is undaunted.
Poor Benny, too, though quite worn out,
Must not be underrated,
He'd do — I wonder what he'd not —
Just to be reinstated.

and after the federalist Liberals have won:

The burnies a' 'ill rin wi' milk,
The public wells wi' wine,
An' legs o' mutton grow on trees;
O! wull na that be fine?

The shift from standard English in the first poem to dialect in the second increases the satirical intensity. The Scottish "wifkie" (or housewife) who listens to this exaggerated depiction of a fool's paradise naively takes the poet
at face value, and believes that, as of 1880 and thanks to Gladstone, meat will actually grow on trees.

It goes without saying that the efforts to secure Home Rule, well-intentioned as they were, fell amongst thorns. Thus, although her name will probably not go down in the annals of Scottish literature as one of Scotland's great poets, Mabon's political skepticism deserves attention if only because it displays an effortless smattering of objective female insight amidst a great deal of subjective Scottish pie-in-the-sky.

In the second half of the nineteenth century there was justifiable doubt as to whether or not a distinct Scottish literature existed any more — outside the immensely popular cabbage patch, that is. And if an indigenous literature did still exist, there was deep and widespread pessimism as to its prospects. No-one of international stature had emerged after that literary giant Scott, whose softening from Jacobite to 'tartanism' was, some believe, the very cause of Scotland's literary decline. Robert Louis Stevenson was perhaps an exception, but Stevenson was primarily a novelist. The situation was particularly acute in the field of poetry. Scotland was playing on an empty hand. There was also anxiety about the survival of vernacular Scots. If Scotland was to claim to have a literature, it had to prove that it was linguistically and aesthetically distinct. Otherwise why not regard it as already assimilated into the English tradition? For, as Ian Chrichton Smith has put it in relation to his native Gaelic, "He who loses his language loses his world."22

It should be noted, however, that anxiety about the 'leveling' influence of an increasingly centralized government and the destructive effects this had on local colour was not peculiar to Scotland. Fen poet John Clare, lamented the death of rural England, which he attributed to Westminster's power-swollen policy of land enclosure. Clare insisted on using an idiosyncratic grammar and dialect as his medium for lament. Later on one thinks of Hardy's Dorset and the writers of the Celtic Twilight. The difference, however, was that Scotland seemed to lack a Clare, a Hardy or a Yeats.
These were also the days of that nefarious imperial upstart, standard English. Scottish education was conducted in standard English, albeit with an accent, and the literary texts presented in English classes were predominantly, or wholly, southern. Resistance to this trend is voiced in Charles Murray’s fine dialect poem, ‘The Whistle.’ This piece became very popular amongst Scots with its description, in the Doric of north-eastern Scotland, of the breaking of a homemade whistle by an English schoolmaster. It creates a mood of cultural suppression in a starkly violent and memorable image, and without sentimentality. The local music was being broken and replaced by the insidious "anger of new school."  

He cut a sappy sucker from the muckle rodden-tree,  
He trimmed it, an' he wet it, an' he thumped it on his knee;  
He never heard the teuchat when the harrow broke her eggs,  
He missed the craggit heron nabbin' puddocks in the seggs,  
He forgot to hound the collie at the cattle when they strayed,  
But you should hae seen the whistle that the wee herd made!

He wheepled on't at mornin' an' he tweetled on't at nicht'  
He puffed his freckled cheeks until his nose sank oot o' sight,  
The kye were late for milkin' when he piped them up the closs,  
The kitlin's got his supper syne, an' he was beddit boss;  
But he cared na doit nor docken what they did or thocht or said,  
There was comfort in the whistle that the wee herd made.

For lyin' lang o' mornin's he had clawed the caup for weeks,  
But noo he had his bonnet on afore the lave had breeks;  
He was whistlin' to the porridge that were hott'rin on the fire,  
He was whistlin' ower the travise to the baillie in the byre;  
Nae a blackbird nor a mavis, that hae pipin' for their trade,
Was a marrow for the whistle that the wee herd made.

He played a march to battle, it cam' dirlin' through the mist,
Till the halflin squared his shou'ders an' made up his mind to 'list;
He tried a spring for wooers, though he wistna what it meant,
But the kitchen-lass was lauchin' an' he thocht she maybe kent;
He got ream an' buttered bannocks for the lovin' lilt he played.
Wasna that a cheery whistle that the wee herd made?

He blew them rants sae lively, schottisches, reels, an' jigs,
The foalie flang his muckle legs an' capered ower the rigs,
The grey-tailed fut't rat bobbit oot to hear his ain strathspey,
The bawd cam' loupin' through the corn to "Clean Pease Strae";
The feet o' ilka man an' beast gat youkie when he played —
Hae ye ever heard o' whistle like the wee herd made?

But the snaw it stopped the herdin' an' the winter brocht him dool,
When in spite o' hacks an' chilblains he was shod again for school;
He couldna soug the catechis nor pipe the rule o' three,
He was keepit in an' lickit when the ither loons got free;
But he aften played the truant — 'twas the only thing he played,
For the maister brunt the whistle that the wee herd made!

More significant were the Scottish dialect poems included in R. L. Stevenson's *Underwoods* (1887). Stevenson notes in his introduction that these pieces were an attempt to embrace the colloquial idiom before it was finally eclipsed by English universalism. It was paying one's last respects, but Stevenson has been credited with daring to "step outside the shadow of Burns" in these poems, and even with creating a kind of "Synthetic Scots" some thirty years before the bold experimentation of Hugh MacDiarmid. A vale-
dictory note is sounded in the poem ‘A Mile an’ a Bittock’ in which three young men see each other home in the moonlight — the poem has been seen as a tender farewell, as it were, to language:

The clocks were chappin’ in house an’ ha’,
Eleeven, twal’ an’ ane an’ twa;
An’ the guidman’s face was turnt to the wa’,
An’ the moon was shinin’ clearly.

A wind got up frae affa the sea,
It blew the stars as clear’s could be,
It blew in the een of a’ o’ the three,
An’ the moon was shinin’ clearly.  

A farewell, it might have been, but critics have seen more than a flicker of hope in this more concrete, more realistic use of dialect.

All the same, anthologists of Scottish verse talked gloomily about the passing away of their national literature, and looked to R. P. to give moral, aesthetic, intellectual and linguistic nourishment. All this was not long before the modernist movement would find British English and its value system exhausted as a literary medium. Nor did the ‘Kailyard,’ the ‘Burns cult,’ or writers of the Scottish limb of the ‘Celtic Twilight’ engender optimism. The poor quality of their verse, their sentimental escapism and intellectual vacuity were seen as inherent weakness: as evidence of what Whittig has called “the deplorable parochialism of (the then) existing Scottish verse.” At this point there was a pressing need to explore and strengthen the Scottish national identity.

As Colin Minton has pointed out, however, later nineteenth century Scottish writing was not the complete cultural wasteland that it is sometimes presumed to be. There were revivalist vernacular movements headed by
figures such as Sir James Murray, whose linguistic studies into colloquial speech were to create a new and vital movement that highlighted the importance of dialect. There were a number of vernacular poets with a popular readership centred mainly in the North-East, whose Doric Scots retained aspects of the ancient tongue and the sensibilities that it expressed. And, in an attempt to break Burns' stranglehold, Logie Robertson was promoting the poetry of Scotland's fifteenth century 'makar,' William Dunbar.

Both Minton and Wittig see poetic stirrings amidst the dross of late nineteenth century imitation verse. Wittig comments:

In retrospect, the generation of the beginning of this century looks as if it were struggling to cast a skin that had grown too tight, as if it were aware of self-imposed limitations, and were getting ready for something greater, more daring to come.  

And so, the nineteenth century comes to an uncertain close both politically as well as poetically. In 1887, Gladstone outlined what was to become an unsuccessful agenda for a remodeled, federal Britain in the following terms:

It is the recognition of the distinctive qualities and the separate parts of great countries and empires which constitutes the true basis of union, and to attempt to centralize them by destroying those local peculiarities is the shallowest philosophy and the worst of all political blunders.

Between the 1880s and the First world War there was a stream of Home Rule Bills for both Ireland and Scotland. Whilst her militant neighbours were firmly impressing themselves upon the Liberals, the Scots waited peacefully in favour of the federal plan to come to fruition of its own, and by and large without militant force. Westminster's system of 'checks and balances' was allowing the Lords to frustrate popular Liberal policy time and time
again. But despite such setbacks, Home Rule seemed inevitable. And in the field of poetry there were those few faint sparks from the dying fire.

Robert Crawford (b. 1959) looks back at this period in Scottish history in his poem 'Scotland in the 1890s.' Crawford's poem depicts a wealth of Scottish talent removed from its spiritual homeland, but producing groundbreaking work — Frazer of *Golden Bough* fame at Trinity College, Cambridge, Andrew Lang the Oxford classicist and folklorist who "translate(d) Homer in his sleep," Stevenson in Samoa, Carnegie in America, and James Murray, pioneer dialectician and editor of the first *O. E. D.* exiled between London and Oxford. All are seen by the poet as displaced, and without them, Scotland feels barren:

James Murray combs the dialect from his beard,
And files slips for his massive *Dictionary.*

The poem ends with James Barrie of *Peter Pan* fame, in lines that reflect the sadness of the successful exiled Scot and of his creation — a boy unable to grow up, living in limbo — the shadow of a man in the real world, a mere boy in a shadow state:

James Barrie, caught in the pregnant London silence,
Begins to conceive the Never Never Land.

And so it was to be. In May 1912, Asquith delivered the following speech to the House of Commons, outlining his vision of what was wrong with Britain:

We start ...... from a congested centre. We start from a Union ...... which has this peculiarity: that while for common purposes its constituent members can deliberate and act together, none of them is at liberty to deal with
those matters which are specially appropriate and necessary for itself without the common consent of all.

The Home Rule Bill for Scotland came before the House in 1914, passed its second reading in the Commons and, on the verge of becoming law, was abandoned because of the outbreak of war in Europe. War did not stop the Irish. In Ireland “a terrible beauty” was being born. In Scotland, it was a sigh and Never Never Land.

Notes:
1) A detailed discussion of the Scotland Bill can be found in Devolution and the Scotland Bill, C. M. G. Himsworth and C. R. Munro, W. Green (Edinburgh), 1998.
6) Ibid., pp. 17-8.
7) The phrase ‘home rule’ was coined earlier on in the political debate.
8) from The Oxford English Dictionary; devolution: (i) the passing of the power or authority of one ... body to another (ii) rolling down ... falling with a rolling motion (iii) Biol. (opposed to EVOLUTION): Degeneration
9) Here it is important to note the subtle distinction made by Hugh MacDiarmid’s phrase an “unevolved people.”
10) Marr, p. 163.
11) T. S. Eliot, ‘Was There a Scottish Literature?’ The Atheneum, 1 August, 1919.
13) from ‘The Complaynt of Scotland (1549),’ in Dunn, Scotland — An Anthology, p. 152.
14) ‘Verses on the Scots Peers 1706,’ lines 1-4; in The Penguin Book of Scottish Verse, ed. Tom Scott (London), 1981, p. 274. This anthology contains two of the many anonymous pasquils written at this time against the Treaty of Union and posted in pub-
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18) Marr, p. 44.


21) Ibid. p. 205.


26) R. L. Stevenson *Underwoods*, (Edinburgh), 1887, p. 105-6


30) Marr, p. 2.


32) *Ibid*.
