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## Afterword: 'A Wrong-Resenting People': Writing Insurrectionary Scotland

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**AFTERWORD**  
**“A WRONG-RESENTING PEOPLE”:**  
**WRITING INSURRECTIONARY SCOTLAND**

*Christopher A. Whatley*

“The Edinburgh populace was noted, during many ages, for its readiness to rise in tumultuary fashion, whether under the prompting of religious zeal, or from inferior motives.” So said the writer and publisher Robert Chalmers in 1824, commenting that this sometimes armed “impromptu army” had been marshalled on several occasions over the course of the previous four centuries. These included the riots directed against the introduction of the service book in 1637; those in support of the Revolution of 1688—an event not unlike “Paris in our own times,” Chalmers judged; the “unexampled violence” of the Union “mobs”; and the Porteous disturbances of 1734.<sup>1</sup>

Had his scope not been restricted to Edinburgh, Chalmers could have included other insurrectionary episodes from Scotland’s history. The Reformation was a decade-long, Europe-wide “revolutionary upheaval.” In Scotland it severed the nation’s centuries-old relationship with Rome, and the Pope; it was also a revolt against the crown (represented by Mary Stuart, of Guise).<sup>2</sup> Similar impetuses lay behind the “second” Reformation, which encompassed the Covenanters’ armed uprisings of 1666 and 1679 and their conventicling across much of Lowland Scotland. There were the near endemic attacks on customs and excise officers in the immediate post-1707 decades, including Glasgow’s Malt Tax riots, that caused some contemporaries to declare Scotland ungovernable.<sup>3</sup> The Jacobite insurgencies of 1708, 1715, 1719 and 1745 represented serious challenges

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Chambers, *Traditions of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers, 1869 ed.), 200-201.

<sup>2</sup> Keith M. Brown, “Reformation to Union, 1560-1707,” in R.A. Houston and W.W.J. Knox, eds, *The New Penguin History of Scotland From Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Allen Lane, 2001), 182.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher A. Whatley, “How Tame were the Scottish Lowlanders?,” in T.M. Devine, ed., *Conflict and Stability in Scottish Society 1700-1850* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), 6-11.

to the respective regimes, especially those of 1715 and 1745 when "the Jacobites were able to form armies with which to confront [with considerable success] the regular troops of the Crown" and threatened to overturn the new, far from secure Hanoverian establishment.<sup>4</sup> Later came the radical risings of the 1790s and 1820 (to be discussed later); the militant trade unionism that followed; Chartism (perhaps) and the Crofters' War. Historians of the twentieth century might point to the militancy of the women's suffrage campaigning in the years prior to World War One, the Rent Strikes of 1915 in which, again, women were in the vanguard, the so-called Battle of George Square in 1919 (now the subject of revisionist investigation), the General Strike of 1926 (another subject in this symposium) and, possibly, the anti-Poll Tax riots of 1989.<sup>5</sup>

Few historians nowadays would agree—without substantial reservations—with Christopher Smout's argument in his seminal *History of the Scottish People* that the "uninflammable character of the Scottish populace," provides part of the explanation for what he and many others before him (and since) depicted as an exceptionally orderly, peaceable society.<sup>6</sup> Religious fissures, political ideologies, dynastic and political divergences, working class and other movements, gender, protest, counter cultures and popular cultures have been all been explored in recent decades, revealing a much more troubled, divided and conflict-prone society than was once depicted.

Yet we should not assume that every disorderly occasion involving large-ish groups of apparently irate, sometimes crudely armed people posed a threat to the existing order. There were riots that united communities against outsiders such as Roman Catholics or, as in 1915, German shopkeepers.<sup>7</sup> During burgh elections rival mobs had the tacit if not the explicit approval of the competing candidates—usually men of elite standing. In early modern Edinburgh rioting was endemic, and multi-causal.<sup>8</sup> In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries fierce sectarian battles

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan D. Oates, *The Jacobite Campaigns* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> On George Square 1919, see Gordon J. Barclay, "'Duties in Aid of the Civil Power': The Deployment of the Army in Glasgow, 31 January to 17 February 1919," *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 38.2 (2019): 261-92.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher A. Whatley, "An Uninflammable People?," in Ian Donnachie and Christopher A. Whatley, eds, *The Manufacture of Scottish History* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), 51-71.

<sup>7</sup> Catriona M.M. Macdonald, "May 1915: Race, Riot and Representations of War," in Catriona M.M. Macdonald and E.W. McFarland, eds, *Scotland and the Great War* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999), 145-72.

<sup>8</sup> Rab Houston, *Social Change in the Age of Enlightenment: Edinburgh 1660-1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 290-331.

represented deep divisions within several central Lowland towns.<sup>9</sup> Even so, those historians who have been inclined to present Scottish society as relatively stable concede that the “people below” were far from apathetic or naturally submissive to established authority.<sup>10</sup> Telling too is that those in positions of power—in London, Edinburgh, the counties and larger towns—were sufficiently convinced of the insurrectionary potential of the major outbreaks of crowd violence in Scotland from the Union to the 1770s that they requested the help of the [British] army to restore order.<sup>11</sup> This was true even of some of the many less well-known disturbances that took place over the same period, local insurrections that terrified the otherwise defenceless burgh magistrates. Individual landowners were often subject to the same challenges. Lowland landlord terror probably peaked during the so-called Levellers Revolt in the south-west in 1724, when the dykes around large cattle enclosures built by Jacobite-supporting landowners were pulled down by well-drilled, armed resisters who overwhelmed what forces the local heritors could raise, necessitating the intervention of the Earl of Stair’s Dragoons.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed to all intents and purposes, Scotland prior to, during and in the aftermath of the 1707 union and then through to and beyond the Jacobite risings, was a militarised zone.<sup>13</sup> The regime-changing Revolution of 1688-90 was in every sense an insurrection. Led by far from reluctant Presbyterian radicals, it involved the rabbling by angry mobs of curates of the Episcopalian church establishment and, before long, widespread armed conflict. It was a seminal moment in Scotland’s history. Those Whigs or “true blue” Revolution men and women who adhered to its principles (socially levelling democracy within the Presbyterian church, opposition to Roman Catholicism and divinely-appointed kingship and, in their stead, a limited form of constitutional monarchy, and economic modernity), continued to staunchly defend it on the battlefield, in the pews and on paper through the following century and beyond.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Elaine McFarland, *Protestants First: Orangeism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (London: Allen Lane, 1999), 199.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher A. Whatley, *Scottish Society 1707-1830: Beyond Jacobitism, towards industrialisation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 162.

<sup>12</sup> Alistair Livingston, “The Galloway Levellers—A Study of the Origins, Events and Consequences of their Actions” (unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> “Occupation” is the term Murray Pittock uses—justifiably—for the period from 1746, in his *Culloden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 99-116.

<sup>14</sup> See Jeffrey Stephen, *Defending the Revolution: The Church of Scotland 1689-1716* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Christopher A. Whatley, “Reformed Religion, Regime Change, Scottish Whigs and the Struggle for the ‘Soul’ of Scotland,

It was over the portrayal of the Covenanters that John Galt and less nuanced writers of the time such as the widely-read Rev Thomas M'Crie reacted against and responded to Sir Walter Scott's *Old Mortality* (1816).<sup>15</sup> Amongst other objections, Galt had taken umbrage at the levity with which Scott had treated the Presbyterians.<sup>16</sup> And in part responding to M'Crie's criticism of Scott for not paying sufficient attention to the oppressive conditions in which Covenanting militancy had developed, Galt has his central character narrate his tale autobiographically. Thereby he was able to reveal—not by trying to write history but rather by Ringan's "bearing witness"—the press of circumstances which led Ringan to become a Cameronian zealot who in November 1696 shoots and kills Claverhouse.<sup>17</sup> Galt's book ends with a postscript that takes the Cameronians and what Padma Rangarajan in this symposium rightly calls the "vitality of its principle" from the fringes of Scottish history to its centre. The implication is that the Revolution was in keeping with what distinguished the liberty-loving Scottish people, characterised by Galt as a "wrong-resenting race" (a theme that will run strongly through the rest of this essay). Notwithstanding Galt's referencing of the Scots' "natural" attachment to monarchy, there had been periodic demonstrations, stretching back to what is now the seven centuries old Declaration of Arbroath of 1320, of his countrymen's preparedness to challenge hereditary right when the power invested in it was abused.<sup>18</sup> Indeed prominent Covenanting leaders may at least in part have been influenced by both the Declaration (which, significantly, was first published in English in 1689), and George Buchanan's resistance theory. This embodied the "right of an individual to kill a tyrant," articulated in what for Restoration governments and some royalists was Buchanan's seditious and rebellion-inducing *De Iure Regni*

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c.1688-c.1788," *Scottish Historical Review*, 92.1 (April 2013): 66-99; Caroline Erskine, "George Buchanan and Revolution Principles, 1688-1788," in Caroline Erskine and Roger Mason, eds, *George Buchanan: Political Thought in Early Modern Britain and Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 289-306.

<sup>15</sup> Colin Kidd, "Assassination Principles in Scottish Political Culture: Buchanan to Hogg," in Erskine and Mason, *George Buchanan*, 282-8.

<sup>16</sup> John Galt, *The Literary Life, and Miscellanies* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1834; repr General Books, LLC, 2009), I: 121-2.

<sup>17</sup> Alison Lumsden, "Commemorating the Covenanters in *Ringan Gilhaize*," in Gerard Carruthers and Colin Kidd, eds, *The International Companion to John Galt* (Glasgow: Scottish Literature International, 2017), 77-9.

<sup>18</sup> See Edward J. Cowan, "*For Freedom Alone*": *The Declaration of Arbroath, 1320* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2003); for an up-to-date study of the Declaration, see Klaus Peter Müller, ed., *Scotland and Arbroath 1320-2020* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020).

*apud Scotos* (1579).<sup>19</sup> Ironically it was partly loyalty to clan chiefs, the Stuart line of kings, and an alternative vision of the Scottish nation that combined to create the Revolutioners' nemesis, namely the Jacobite cause. In its turn this inspired the popularly-supported, nationwide insurrections (in 1715 and 1745) mentioned above, at the sharp edge of which were well-equipped armed forces that were met with and broken by the superior military power of the British state.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1790s, with government increasingly alarmed by the revolutionary situation in France, what were feared to be insurrectionary crowds—some but not all inspired by Thomas Muir and his reformer allies—were also met with what could be brutal military force and in the case of Muir and others, draconian treatment by the courts.<sup>21</sup> Paradoxically, the arrival of soldiers within a community in the process of protesting about a particular local matter could induce further disorder, their presence being viewed as an illegitimate intrusion into a matter to be resolved internally in accordance with unwritten rules the warring parties understood.<sup>22</sup> Adding further to tensions were a series of sharp rises in food prices. Unpopular measures such as the Militia Act of 1797 had heightened inter-class tensions at a time when bodies such as the United Scotsmen were fomenting unrest in several districts and towns.<sup>23</sup> The stabilising features within Scottish society had become less effective by the 1790s. No longer was the Kirk the bastion of stability that it had formerly been. Having said that, the Church of Scotland itself was the locus of countless riots directed

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<sup>19</sup> Caroline Erskine and Roger Mason, "George Buchanan: Influence, Legacy, Reputation," in Erskine and Mason, *George Buchanan*, 5, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Murray Pittock, *The Myth of the Jacobite Clans: The Jacobite Army in 1745* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 163-81 especially; Stuart Reid, "The British Army at Culloden," in Tony Pollard, ed., *Culloden: The History and Archaeology of the Last Clan Battle* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2009), 62-86.

<sup>21</sup> See Gerard Carruthers and Don Martin, eds, *Thomas Muir of Huntershill: Essays for the Twenty-First Century* (Edinburgh: humming earth, 2016); Ewen A. Cameron, "Internal Policing and Public Order, c.1797-1900," in Edward M. Speirs, Jeremy A. Crang and Matthew J. Strickland, eds, *A Military History of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 436-9; Whatley, *Scottish Society*, 284, 291.

<sup>22</sup> Bob Harris, "Political Protests in the Year of Liberty, 1792," in Bob Harris, ed., *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2005), 56-59.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher A. Whatley, "Roots of 1790s Radicalism: Reviewing the Economic and Social Background," in Harris, *Scotland*, 23-48.

at new ministers and the lairds who had appointed them without consulting parishioners.<sup>24</sup>

The contributions to this symposium provide us with an opportunity to explore further some of these issues as well as to emphasise the symbiotic nature of the relationship between literature and insurrectionary activity in Scotland. A symposium that has combined the disciplines of history and literature is to be welcomed; too often we work along parallel but separate lines, thereby ruling out the deeper understanding of the topics under investigation that cross-fertilisation in such close proximity can provoke. Often, songs or ballads written at or around the time of a particular conflictual event constitute a relatively unmediated body of contemporary evidence; carefully read, such texts, almost uniquely, through their verse forms, language and tone, often blending the codes of polite literature and the vernacular, reveal the sincerity and unexpurgated feelings of the writers concerned (and of their communities).

In fact, where insurrection is concerned, the division of academic expertise is especially artificial. Poets, balladeers and writers were often involved not simply as recorders of insurrectionary moments, but as actors. This was so long before the later nineteenth century when, it was once argued—prior to the publication of the seminal researches of Tom Leonard and others—that songs or ballads containing anything which could be construed as threatening language were rare.<sup>25</sup> Contemporary Jacobite verse, often seen in broadsheet form, and heard in ale houses and on the streets, is a case in point, to be distinguished from the later sentimental effusions in which “Bonnie” Prince Charlie often features.<sup>26</sup> Yet, as Carol McGuirk has shown in her essay, there was a sharper edge to some of the works of the popular Jacobite song writer and sympathiser Carolina Oliphant (Lady Nairne) than is often assumed.

Perhaps the best example of poet-activism is the body of Gaelic verse collected, edited and discussed by Donald Meek deriving from the clearances in north-west Scotland and the crofter-led, anti-landlord Land Wars of the 1880s. Frequently these poems and songs were nothing less than verbal weapons, no less effective than the sticks and stones utilised by

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<sup>24</sup> Callum G. Brown, “Protest in the Pews: Interpreting Presbyterianism in Fracture During the Scottish Economic Revolution,” in Devine, *Conflict and Stability*, 83-105.

<sup>25</sup> See Tom Leonard, ed., *Radical Renfrew: Poetry from the French Revolution to the First World War* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> See Murray G.H. Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and William Donaldson, *The Jacobite Song: Political Myth and National Identity* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988).



ferocious mobs, and deployed by community poets such as Donald Baillie in Sutherland, John MacLean of Mull, and William Beaton on Skye in undisguised anger, unambiguously targeted towards landlords and their factors.<sup>27</sup>

But poets and songwriters who had first-hand experience of oppression of one kind and another and played an active part in resistance movements were not confined to the Highlands and islands. Rights of way were a major issue in the nineteenth century, and inspired a veritable army of poet-activists, some of whom were involved in campaigns that merit inclusion in Scotland's catalogue of insurrections. A case in point is the battle over "Harvie's Dyke" in Glasgow in 1823 where the radical one-time weaver poet Alexander Rodger led an armed protest against the erection of a newly constructed wall that blocked a popular walkway along the bank of the river Clyde.<sup>28</sup> To protect the owner and his estate, a military presence was required for some time after the initial devastating assault on Harvie's property.

In smaller places, there were many more similar demonstrations that only with the benefit of hindsight can we see amounted to an ongoing nation-wide, class-based issue which again, aroused the ire of poets, most of whom were self-taught and found inspiration and their voice as disciples of Robert Burns.<sup>29</sup> The commercialisation of common land (or commonties) within or on the boundaries of the burghs was not infrequently met with resistance on the part of those who would henceforth be denied the right to graze animals on it, gather firewood or berries, dig turf, hold fairs or even play.<sup>30</sup> The change of use was carried out in the name of improvement—the ideology that underpinned so much economic, social and cultural change in eighteenth century Scotland and the process by which customary rights and usages were ridden over roughshod and which John Galt captures so ably in *The Provost*.<sup>31</sup> In this symposium, Alexander Dick re-visited the seminal moment in Highland history when protesters drove some 10,000 cheviot and blackface sheep from Ross-shire southwards towards Inverness: *Bliadhna nan Caorach*, The Year of the Sheep, 1792. This remarkable event, the first of several insurrectionary

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<sup>27</sup> Donald Meek, ed., *Tenants and Landlords* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1995), 10-40, 314-318.

<sup>28</sup> On Roger, see Brian Maidment, ed., *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-taught Poets and Poetry in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1987), 27.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher A. Whatley, *Immortal Memory: Burns and the Scottish People* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2016), 52-75, 124-142.

<sup>30</sup> Andy Wightman, *The Poor Had No Lawyers* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2011), 51.

<sup>31</sup> Christopher A. Whatley, "The Insider's Eye in the Age of Improvement, Urbanisation and Revolution," in Carruthers and Kidd, *International Companion to John Galt*, 82-97.

movements in the Highlands, was a struggle over land, following the transition of clan chiefs into landlords more concerned with pecuniary gains than the age-old paternalist traditions of kinship.<sup>32</sup> It was one of a series of unrelated protests in Scotland in 1792 that in the eyes of the authorities had a unifying and unsettling core, but was also part of a continuum of resentment throughout much of rural Scotland about the impact of capitalist farming that privileged profit over the lifestyles of ordinary people. Dick's identification of an ecological aspect to the rioters offers a fresh perspective which is documented not only in travel and observational literature of the time but also popular poetry which provides us with an experiential dimension which historians can struggle to appreciate and articulate. Thus in the Borders in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Robert Davidson, was, like Robert Burns, a ploughman. He also adopted Burns's poetic models, such as the "Twa Dogs," a conversation between two dogs representing respectively a laird and a cotter. But in his "Sim and Sandy," Davidson is less discursive than Burns. He directs his ire at the "croft converted to a sheep walk wild,/ Where twenty separate harvests smiled," and, confirming the validity of Dick's environmental observation, regrets the loss of former country dwellers to the crowded towns, leaving only "shapeless heaps, with hemlocks wild between" which "mark the spot where cottages have been."<sup>33</sup>

Across Scotland, after the repeal of the newspaper tax in 1855 which meant that they could be sold for a half-penny, newspapers were a critically important vehicle for the productions of the nation's copious autodidacts like Davidson. Consequently, material that might beforehand have been transmitted orally or in single paper copies was not lost and is now being recovered by cultural historians.<sup>34</sup> So too are broadsheets and chap-books.<sup>35</sup>

Well-known songs and tunes were frequently adapted for more immediate purposes, as in the case of the ubiquitous and generally harmless spinning song, "Nid Nid Nodding" (and other variants), which in 1825 was re-worked by the female spinners in Dunlop & Co's Broomward cotton mill in Glasgow into an hard-nosed warning to blacklegs (one of

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<sup>32</sup> See Robert Dodgshon, *From Chiefs to Landlords: Social and Economic Change in the Western Highlands & Islands* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Whatley, *Immortal Memory*, 70-2.

<sup>34</sup> Kirstie Blair, *Working Verse in Victorian Scotland: Poetry, Press and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Edward J Cowan and Mike Paterson, eds, *Folk in Print: Scotland's Chapbook Heritage 1750-1850* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007).

whom was young John, or “Jock,” Cameron) of the consequences of their actions:

Mr Dunlop how do ye do  
 How many Nobs have ye,  
     if your fifth flat were fu'  
 Blin' Jocks blin, & blin may he be  
 He'll ne'er quit his nobbing  
     till he'll lose his t'other 'ee.

The equally venerable “Weary Pund o’ Tow,” otherwise known as “The Rock and the Wee Pickle Tow,” one of five or six “Nob Songs” reportedly sung during this episode, was transformed too, from a dirge on the drudgery of hand spinning, into a confident declaration of craft pride and a warning that the ostentatious rich would get their just rewards in the course of time.<sup>36</sup>

This of course was a local dispute and, while fear-inducing in its threat of direct action against blacklegs or strike breakers and uncomfortable for the Dunlop family (the employers who were in the vanguard of mill-based, machine-spinning performed largely by females and younger workers), in itself the incident was not insurrectionary. Yet the Broomward mill woundings were one element amongst a tsunami of unrest that in part owed its origins to the radicalism of the early 1790s, and which swept through much of Scotland from the second half of the 1810s until the crushing defeat of the Glasgow cotton spinners in 1837. This was virtually the last in a line of major victories for employers across the board—backed by the military on the orders of Archibald Alison, Tory sheriff of Lanarkshire who for much of his adult life was in dread of insurrection from below and directed much of his time and effort to countering it.<sup>37</sup> The subsequent trial and workers’ defeat did much to reshape and calm labour relations for the next half century and longer.<sup>38</sup> It is a mistake therefore to treat incidents like the Harvie’s dyke disturbance or what happened at Broomward mill in isolation. Often they had a back story—Broomward mill for instance had been mobbed before, while in January 1820—a notable date—an attempt had been made to set it on fire.<sup>39</sup> There was a wider dimension too, with other cotton mills in Scotland being attacked at the same time. Equality misleading is to focus on particular trades—weavers, coal miners, calico

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<sup>36</sup> Christopher A. Whatley, “Sound and Song in the Ritual of Popular Protest: Continuity and the Glasgow ‘Nob Songs’ of 1825,” in Edward J. Cowan, ed., *The Ballad in Scottish History* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 142-60.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Michie, *An Enlightenment Tory in Victorian Scotland: The Career of Sir Archibald Alison* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997), 32-4, 70-91, 130-41.

<sup>38</sup> W. Hamish Fraser, *Conflict and Class: Scottish Workers, 1700-1838* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), 167-70.

<sup>39</sup> *Glasgow Courier*, 19 January, 1 February 1820.

printers and others—when they were in fact united in defence of, say, their right to form combinations (or early trade unions). During such insurrectionary acts as did take place (as over Harvie's dyke), they would march together as members of their communities, gathering adherents as they went from village to village.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, sometimes the same personnel can be identified with what at first sight appear to have been unconnected incidents.<sup>41</sup> James Wilson, for example, first came to light as a radically-inclined weaver in 1792, but played an active part in the rising in April 1820, leading to his execution.<sup>42</sup>

The best known of the potentially insurrectionary moments in the first three decades of the nineteenth century is the rising in April 1820 planned by the unambiguously named Committee for Organising a Provisional Government. The so-called "Radical War," two hundred years ago, still shines beacon-like in the annals of Scottish radicalism. Following the cry of "Liberty or Death," a national strike involving tens of thousands of workers was complemented with a march to Carron Iron Works in search of weapons.<sup>43</sup> The march ended in defeat for the insurgents at Bonnymuir, where they were confronted by the combined forces of local volunteers, a troop from the 10<sup>th</sup> Hussars and men from the Stirlingshire Yeomanry, although by no means was this the end of the affair.

But the period as a whole represented an insurrectionary challenge to the social and political values, priorities and practices of those committed to the establishment of a new, avowedly capitalist, commercial, market-led, orderly, increasingly industrialised and urbanised Scotland. The ruling elite—primarily the landed classes and their associates who had most to lose—recognised the enormity of the danger this profound and relatively rapid transformation posed, with a host of writers utilising their literary skills in defence of the social and political *status quo*. The horrors of revolution were graphically outlined by Professor John Wilson ("Christopher North," but also writing as "Emerus") and, in more scholarly fashion, by Sir Archibald Alison, another contributor to the Tory *Blackwood's Magazine* and notorious scourge of the west of Scotland's more militant worker combinations.<sup>44</sup> Privately, Sir Walter Scott was profoundly concerned about the dangers posed by post-Napoleonic War Radicals, "a set of

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<sup>40</sup> Whatley, *Scottish Society*, 310-11.

<sup>41</sup> Whatley, *Scottish Society*, 314, 327.

<sup>42</sup> T.J. Dowds, "Muir's 'Good Cause' in 1820," in Carruthers and Martin, *Thomas Muir*, 249-51, 260-1.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Berresford and Seamus Mac a' Ghobhann, *The Scottish Insurrection of 1820* (London: Pluto Press, 1970), 147-78.

<sup>44</sup> On Wilson as "Emerus," see Whatley, *Immortal Memory*, 40-3; on Alison, Fraser, *Conflict*, 155.

blackguards a hundred times more mischievous ... than our old friends of 1794 and 1795.”<sup>45</sup> Less directly, more subtly but equally effectively he had in *Old Mortality*, an historical romance freighted with political purpose, exposed the dangers associated with the master-less mob—hot-headed, unthinking, bigoted proletarians. Scott’s exemplars were the Cameronians, the Covenanting body whose number included “the fanatical Ephraim Macbriar and the maniac, Habbakuk Mucklewarth.” The names are instructive. They are depicted as grim, dishevelled individuals, armed with both guns and the Bible. Their early nineteenth century equivalents were the masses who in the aftermath of the wars with France and the ensuing economic recession Scott feared might be led by radical agitators to disturb the peace, rebel and even foment a revolution of the sort experienced by France in 1789. Scott’s fears were not without foundation. Presbyterian theological works, with their contractarian thrust underpinned by the principle of the people’s right to resist state tyranny (and even to assassinate tyrants) as first articulated by George Buchanan and John Knox and subsequently re-voiced by their more extreme proselytisers, were widely read in eighteenth century Scotland and informed the thinking of some Scottish radicals in the 1790s.<sup>46</sup>

Historians’ assessments of the Radical War differ enormously, from those who have dismissed it as a pathetic failure to Marxists who have interpreted it as challenge “to the very foundations on which Scottish society rested.”<sup>47</sup> What evidence we have in the form of popular poetry, written by plebeian poets who lived and worked in the localities in which both rebels and informers were active, tends to support the latter proposition. John Gardner’s contribution to this symposium draws on their writings, including those of the extraordinary people’s poet Janet Hamilton (1795-1867), of Langloan in Lanarkshire, to reveal that members of the Scottish clergy acted as government spies as the radical assault reached its climax.<sup>48</sup> The palpable antagonism of those involved is captured in some of the verse written by the aforementioned Alexander Rodger, and by another poet-participant, Allan Barbour Murchie. “Dark Bonnymuir,” evidently

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<sup>45</sup> H.J.C. Grierson, Davidson Cook, *et al.*, eds. *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, 1819-21* (London: Constable, 1934), 1-3, 16-18, 29-33, 38-47.

<sup>46</sup> E. J. Cowan, ‘The Covenanting Tradition in Scottish History’, in E. J. Cowan and R. J. Finlay (eds), *Scottish History: The Power of the Past* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2002), p.126; L. McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Tuckwell Press, East Linton, 2002), pp.17-37.

<sup>47</sup> James D. Young, *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 60.

<sup>48</sup> On Hamilton, see Florence S. Boos, ed., *Working Class Women Poets in Victorian Britain: An Anthology* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2008), 47-109.

written some months later, is a record of the skirmish, a paean of praise for "the sons of Scotia," the martyred leaders "the great [John] Baird and [Andrew] Hardie" and the "great patriot [James] Wilson" who were later executed, as well as a call to arms against "tyranny" in the future, and in support of apparently modest aims: "freedom, homes, rights, peace and plenty."<sup>49</sup>

Jim Hunter's account of a food riot in Pulteneytown in 1847—one of the last in Scotland—is compelling, as is his book, *Insurrection: Scotland's Famine Winter* (2019), from which the Pulteneytown incident is extracted. In much of mainland Europe from the sixteenth century, food riots had been endemic; in Scotland they tended to be sporadic. Almost always the disturbances took place in burghs from which meal—the everyday food of the common people—was being sent by farmers and merchants in search of higher returns either elsewhere in Scotland, coastwise to England or overseas. For the authorities in the localities in a country which after 1707 was governed from London, such occurrences could appear to pose a serious threat to the orderly conduct of business, to the magistrates' authority and indeed to the market system as promoted by Adam Smith—the right of producers of and dealers in grain to sell where they wished and at what price. In Scotland it was a struggle that had its roots in the later seventeenth century and continued through until 1847. Hunter's series of riots on Scotland's north-east coast mirrors a similar but arguably more serious outbreak that occurred early in 1720 in coastal burghs stretching from Kincardine, through Fife and north to Montrose. The geographical spread and months' long duration of this episode were unusual, but such were the numbers of rioters involved, including some fatalities, and the extent of the largely uncontainable violence against town officers, soldiers and property, that the authorities declared it "a General Insurrection agt ye Government."<sup>50</sup>

What is striking about food riots however is that even though decades could pass without such an occurrence taking place in a particular location, most of them followed a well-established pattern. It is as if there was an unwritten formula that passed through generations of what in certain communities were especially charismatic local leaders, such as the barber, a watchmaker and a weaver whom the contemporary chronicler of Perth, George Penny, identified as being "particularly active" in meal riots

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<sup>49</sup> National Library of Scotland, APS.4.86.4, "Dark Bonnymuir" (c.1820).

<sup>50</sup> Christopher A. Whatley, "The Union of 1707, Integration and the Scottish Burghs: The Case of the 1720 Food Riots," *Scottish Historical Review*, 78.2 (October 1999): 192-218 (192-195).

there.<sup>51</sup> The importance of such individuals is a recurring theme in contemporaneous writing on popular protest and its more serious corollary, community-based insurrection. In eighteenth century Edinburgh Robert Chambers identified “a mighty Pyrrhus,” “General” Joseph Smith, a cobbler, who “might be said to have had ... the command of the Scottish metropolis,” owing to his ability to “subject the rabble to his command.” How he rose to this position was not known, but Chambers supposed it had something to do with his “boldness and sagacity, his strong voice and uncommonly powerful whistle.”<sup>52</sup> Smith too was disabled—“low and deformed”—an attribute shared by other local leaders, including Perth’s “fountains of wisdom.” But imposing figures within their communities continued to play their part during periods of distress and social tension. This is revealed by Paul Malgrati in this symposium in the character of Tam Anderson in Joe Corrie’s *In Place o’ Strife*, although on this occasion Tam’s appeal to his fellow miners as the General Strike gets under way directly challenges their manliness in a way that differs from the manner in which earlier food riots unfolded.

Galt must surely have been drawing on such deeply imprinted aspects of popular memory when in *The Provost* he describes in punctilious detail the course of events in his fictional Gudetown; indeed given the frequency with which food riots occurred in Scotland’s coastal burghs in the 1790s and first two decades of the nineteenth century there is every likelihood he had witnessed one at first hand.<sup>53</sup> In Gudetown, on a market day, “tinkler Jean” was the instigator:

with her meal-basin in her hand, swearing, like a trooper, that if she did na get it filled with meal at fifteen-pence a peck, (the farmers demanded sixteen,) she would have the fu o’t of their hearts’ blood; and the mob of thoughtless weans and idle fellows, with shouts and yells, encouraged Jean, and egged her on to a catastrophe.<sup>54</sup>

Here as elsewhere the catalyst was what may seem like a modest price rise, of just one penny. But this was enough to spark protest if the increase was beyond what had become the norm over a period of years. This was an element of what was defined by the late E.P. Thompson as the “moral economy” of the labouring poor, which enshrined the principle of the right of ordinary working people to be able to obtain sufficient quantities of

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<sup>51</sup> George Penny, *Traditions of Perth* (Perth: Dewar, Sidey, Morison, Peat and Drummond, 1836), 46-7.

<sup>52</sup> Chambers, *Traditions*, 202-3.

<sup>53</sup> Whatley, “Insider’s Eye,” in Carruthers and Kidd, *International Companion to John Galt*, 92-94.

<sup>54</sup> John Galt, *The Provost* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1822), 101-102.

basic foodstuffs at an affordable price.<sup>55</sup> The fear of wage earners with little or nothing to fall back on was that, now or in the near future, they would be unable to afford the oatmeal that was by far the largest food purchase made by the common people, and which provided up to two-thirds of their calorific requirements.<sup>56</sup> Anxiety at the prospect of hunger—of famine even—was acute, and recorded in a poem such as “Gort am Bràigh Athaill” (“Famine in the Atholl Hills”), possibly attributable to the Gaelic poet Ian Lom:

I’m in a house without fire or thatch,  
Without salt and without food,  
Without a door or any hurdle to close it with.<sup>57</sup>

In this instance the poet appeals to his chief for succour, but in the urban context, it was to avoid such a dire situation that local insurrections occurred. That women were typically in the vanguard of such ‘wrong-resenting’ community-based protests, whether over food or access to common land, possibly due to their role as household providers, is recognised in popular literature. A broadsheet poem published after the food riot in Dysart in January 1720, recounts that

The Valiant Wives of *Dyesart*,  
they ought to be Esteem’d,  
They hasted fast to the Shoar,  
Our VICTUAL to Redeem.<sup>58</sup>

It would have been equally appropriate to have capitalised “Our” alongside VICTUALS, in reference to a centuries-old belief in the right of the community to be fed first; only thereafter should others be served, whether in more profitable market centres internally, or in England. In Joe Corrie’s mining village of Carhill, women not only joined in and sustained a street demonstration—in addition to their household roles—but also through the older (and wiser) mother, Jean Smith, offered sage advice as to how better to win an industrial struggle.

In Galt’s Gudetown (as along the Angus and Fife coasts early in 1720) there ensued a major riot, with sticks, stones and makeshift weapons being used by the objecting crowd. To restore order, the provost and magistrates

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<sup>55</sup> E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century,” *Past and Present*, no. 50 (1971): 76-136.

<sup>56</sup> A.J.S. Gibson and T.C. Smout, *Prices, Food and Wages in Scotland 1550-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 236.

<sup>57</sup> Ronald Black, ed., *An Lasair: Anthology of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), 2-3, 363-4.

<sup>58</sup> National Library of Scotland, Ry.III.c.36 (141), “An Exact List of the Battle of Dysart” (Edinburgh, 1720).



had to call for military assistance. Half a century or so later, this is almost exactly what transpired in Pulteneytown: literature and history conjoin.

There were numerous other occasions when the numbers of women participants in protesting crowds were either substantial or, less often, in a majority.<sup>59</sup> An occasion when apart from a few male supporters from the sidelines the protesters comprised women only was Dundee's now largely-forgotten "Insurrection of Maids" in 1872. The maids' unprecedented stance is a telling instance of Galt's observation that "servile loyalty is comparatively rare among us." News revealing the limits of Scottish servility was broadcast far beyond Dundee and Scotland, with information about the maids' action being eagerly followed in the rest of Britain and over the Atlantic in the USA.<sup>60</sup> The incident also provides a useful summary of the essence of the long tradition of Scottish insurrection in history and as this was reflected in popular literature.

Dundee's ill-paid domestic servants had for some years been agitating over a number of grievances. These included over-long working hours, irregular (and little) leisure time, a bar on "followers," onerous rules about how to behave—always with due deference to their mistresses, and the insistence of their middle class employers that they wear a uniform that included a cap, which they found degrading. Their situation, according to some, was akin to slavery, a point made in verse by "J.C.," a sympathetic male who wrote of the maids' "ceaseless toil, their paltry fee." The fourth stanza of his poem "The Scottish Servant Maid," in the *People's Journal*, reads:

We pity sore the sable face,  
Denounce the slaving trade,  
But not a word of comfort cheers  
The Scottish Servant Maid.<sup>61</sup>

More direct and written in Dundee dialect following reports that the maidservants had met and formed a union, was "To the Domestic Servants," by "Matilda." The first two stanzas run:

Ye servants in an' roun' Dundee,  
Ye noble band o' wenchies,  
Ye've let the haughty "Madams' see  
Nae mair ye'll thole their pinches.  
  
Nae mair ye'll stand their snash an' brag,

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<sup>59</sup> Whatley, "Sound and Song," 149.

<sup>60</sup> Jan Merchant, "'An Insurrection of Maids': Domestic Servants and the Agitation of 1872," in Christopher A. Whatley, Bob Harris and Louise Miskell, eds, *Victorian Dundee: Image and Realities* (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2000), 112-3.

<sup>61</sup> Kirstie Blair, ed., *Poets of the People's Journal: Newspaper Poetry in Victorian Scotland* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2016), 56-7.

Or mind their lang palaver;  
 Nae mair ye'll wear that silly "Flag" [*cap*],  
 Or ony sic like haver.<sup>62</sup>

The dispute was local, but the issues were much wider, universal even. They included working conditions and hours—of men and women, and the rights and status of women. At stake too was “sweet freedom” and what another poet on the agitation called the “palm of liberty”—that distinguishing Scottish concern identified by Galt, which recurred during insurrectionary episodes throughout the period covered by this symposium.

Liberty of course is, like freedom, a slippery concept, the meaning of which has changed over time.<sup>63</sup> And it was not simply a Scottish aspiration. Even so, like opposition to tyranny (loosely interpreted, and at local as well as national level), that a commitment to liberty was a Scottish principle, articulated at Arbroath in 1320 and by the Radicals of 1820, is worth cherishing—and celebrating—in this anniversary year of these two foundational moments in Scotland's history.

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<sup>62</sup> Blair, *Poets of the People's Journal*, 106-7.

<sup>63</sup> See, e.g., Robert Crawford, *Bannockburns: Scottish Independence and Literary Imagination, 1314-2014* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).