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Gaelic Barbarity and Scottish Identity in the Later Middle Ages

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One point of reasonably clear consensus among Scottish historians during the twentieth century was that a 'Highland/Lowland divide' came into being in the second half of the fourteenth century. The *terminus post quem* and lynchpin of their evidence was the following passage from the beginning of Book II chapter 9 in John of Fordun's *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, which they dated variously from the 1360s to the 1390s:¹

The character of the Scots however varies according to the difference in language. For they have two languages, namely the Scottish language (*lingua Scotica*) and the Teutonic language (*lingua Theutonica*). The people who speak the Teutonic language occupy the coastal and lowland regions, while those who speak the Scottish language live in the mountainous regions and outer isles. The coastal people (*maritima gens*) are docile and civilised, trustworthy, long-suffering and courteous, decent in their dress, polite and peaceable, devout in their worship, but always ready to resist injuries threatened by their enemies. The island or mountain people (*insulana sive montana gens*) however are fierce and untameable, uncouth and unpleasant, much given to theft, fond of doing nothing, but their minds are quick to learn, and cunning. They are strikingly handsome in appearance, but their clothing is unsightly. They are always hostile and savage not only towards the people and language of England, but also towards their fellow Scots (*proprie nacioni*) because of the difference in language. They are however loyal and obedient to the

¹*Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, ed. W. F. Skene and trans. Felix J. H. Skene, 2 vols. (Edinburgh 1871–2) [*Chron. Fordun*] i, 42; ii, 38; *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, gen. ed. D. E. R. Watt, 9 vols. (Aberdeen/Edinburgh 1987–98) [*Scotichronicon*] i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 184–7. The translation has been taken from the latter, with amendments to clarify some important points of terminology.

king and kingdom, and they are easily made to submit to the laws, if rule is exerted over them.

Fordun's testimony was accepted at face value, and justified through a panoply of arguments whose most commonly voiced rallying-cry was 'the emergence of the Highlander'.² Since Fordun stood as the fountainhead of a lineage of commentators who basically echoed his refrain for 200 years, it followed that the Highland/Lowland divide remained an ever-present and inescapable reality in Scotland throughout the later middle ages. This way of thinking reached its zenith—or nadir—in a passage in Gordon Donaldson's *Scotland: James V–James VII*.³ Here, the Fordunian strain of evidence was entwined with other elements—a racialist reading of the Scottish past which properly belonged to the nineteenth rather than the later twentieth century; the mindset and empiricism of the institutional historian; and, perhaps, a dash of personal prejudice—to present a late medieval Scotland fissured by apartheid. The Highland Line separated two races, and 'one way of life from another'; the institutions (and, presumably, what they represented) of the Lowlands were almost wholly absent in the Highlands; monarchy and church alone were capable of crossing the divide.

Fordun's text has been often quoted but little studied. It was not until 1994 that serious flaws were pointed out in the English translation in Skene's edition.⁴ Indeed, the account may have achieved an iconic status which almost puts it beyond the reach of

²I. F. Grant, *The Social and Economic Development of Scotland before 1603* (Edinburgh and London 1930), 149–58, 472–8; T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People 1560–1830* (Glasgow 1969), 39–46; Jane Dawson, 'The Gaidhealtachd and the emergence of the Scottish Highlands', in *British Consciousness and Identity: The making of Britain, 1533–1707*, edd. B. Bradshaw and P. Roberts (Cambridge 1998), 259–300.

³Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland: James V–James VII* (1965; Edinburgh 1990), 3–4.

⁴Alexander Grant, 'Aspects of national consciousness in medieval Scotland', in *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past*, edd. Claus Bjørn, Alexander Grant, and Keith J. Stringer (Copenhagen 1994), 68–95, at 76–7.

critical scrutiny. Despite assembling a body of evidence at odds with the stark and simple opposites that predominate in Fordun, Geoffrey Barrow nevertheless felt compelled to acknowledge the latter's version as the product of 'first-hand testimony', seeking to represent things as they were.⁵

The argument advanced below that this passage may have been written in (or before) 1285⁶ means that henceforth we shall refer to its author as 'Fordun', and represents one way of questioning to what extent it is rooted in 'first-hand testimony'. If the later fourteenth century seems remarkably early for the existence of a sharply etched and fully fledged Highland/Lowland dichotomy, what price the later thirteenth century? Another is to contextualise the passage by considering what immediately follows it, and constitutes the rest of Chapter 9:⁷

Solinus the historian in describing the character of the ancient people of the Scots says:

The Scottish people were always rough and warlike with barbaric customs. For when baby boys were born to them, their fathers followed the practice of offering their first food to them on the point of a spear, so that they would wish for no other death than to die in battle fighting for freedom. And when they grow up and are skilled in fighting, they celebrate a victory first of all by drinking the blood of those slain, and then smearing it over their faces. They are a noble people, frugal in food, savage of spirit, fierce and stern in expression and rough in speech. They are however courteous and kind to their own countrymen, devoted to games and hunting, preferring leisure to work.

Isidore says:

⁵G. W. S. Barrow, 'The lost Gàidhealtachd of medieval Scotland', in *Gaelic and Scotland: Alba agus A' Ghàidhlig*, ed. William Gillies (Edinburgh 1989), 67–88, at 79.

⁶See chapter 2, at 000

⁷*Chron. Fordun* i, 42; ii, 38; *Scotichronicon* i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 184–7.

The Scottish people are in origin the same people that were formerly in Ireland, and resemble them in everything including language, customs and character. They are a fickle people, haughty in spirit, fierce towards their enemies, almost always preferring death to enslavement, regarding dying in bed as cowardice, but thinking it glorious and manly to kill or be killed on the battlefield by their enemies, a people with a frugal way of life, able to endure hunger for a long time, and seldom indulging in food before sunset. They are content with meat and dairy produce, and although for the most part they are by nature a people of handsome appearance and fairness of face, their appearance is largely spoiled by their characteristic dress.

To my knowledge this section has been coupled with its illustrious sibling by only one modern historian.⁸ The reluctance of others to follow suit may stem from their desire to present 'Fordun' as a contemporary analyst of the social realities of later fourteenth-century Scotland. Isidore, the seventh-century bishop of Seville, and Solinus, the third-century early Christian encyclopaedist, might appear unlikely authorities to be invoked as prime witnesses by such an analyst. Yet that 'Fordun' is seriously engaging with them is made instantly clear by the substantive points of contact between their accounts and his: innate physical attractiveness undermined by slovenly apparel (*deformis/deformat*); delight in leisure and idleness (*ocium/ocio*); wildness of disposition and behaviour bordering on the inhuman (*ferina gens/inhumano ritu/gens saeva/gens ... animo ferox*); the stylistic device, borrowed from Solinus, of an upbeat conclusion (*tamen ... fidelis et obediens/tamen affabilis et benigna*). It follows that Fordun's meaning can only be elucidated by investigating the nature of that engagement more fully.

Professor Smout and others have noted that even though this is the earliest developed account of late-medieval Lowland attitudes to

⁸Edward J. Cowan, 'The discovery of the Gàidhealtachd in sixteenth century Scotland', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness [TGSi]* 60 (1997–8) 259–84, at 262–3.

the 'Highlander', it is already a 'mature example'.⁹ Viewing chapter 9 as a whole, this maturity is not to be wondered at, given that it had been a millennium and more in the making. 'Fordun' is consciously identifying himself with the time-honoured and universal topos of civilised versus barbaric man, specifically as it had been applied to Celtic-speaking peoples since classical antiquity.¹⁰ That he and those who came after him were able to draw upon a fully fledged tradition and a portfolio of developed motifs, complicates our efforts to understand the relationship between what they say and the *actualité* of late-medieval Scotland. If most or all of the raw material they required was readily available to them on the literary shelf, then it would not be difficult to reconfigure the template to meet their own agenda, which in itself might of course be influenced by a multiplicity of factors such as personal experience, political affiliation, philosophical orientation, and literary intent. Hence it would be wrong-headed to view shifts within this body of evidence as necessarily and exclusively synchronised to real changes taking place on the ground. For instance, the endurance and dietary moderation of the *primeva Scotorum gens*, noted in Solinus and strongly emphasised in Isidore, is shrunk by 'Fordun' to the single descriptor *paciens*, which he applies to his *gens maritima*. Yet Hector Boece was happy to look back beyond Fordun to earlier models, ultimately Livy, and not only resurrected this trait in spectacular style, but also associated it primarily with the Gaelic Scots of his own time. The expansion and contraction of the significance of the topos, and its ability to change sides, invite explanations grounded elsewhere than in shifting patterns of frugality among ancient, medieval or late-medieval Scots.

The vision of the Scottish literati, then, had elsewhere its origin, and was in the first instance a product not of the map but of the

⁹Smout, *History of the Scottish People*, 40. Cf. Alexander Grant, *Independence and Nationhood: Scotland 1306-1469* (London 1984), 200-1; Dawson, 'Gaidhealtachd', 284-5.

¹⁰See in general W. R. Jones, 'The image of the barbarian in medieval Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13 (1971) 376-407.

mind, rooted in the primal human urge to assert difference and superiority. Its subsequent crude imposition upon the Scottish landscape inevitably resulted in the sort of topographical anomalies noted by Geoffrey Barrow.¹¹ However, it would be anachronistic of us to dismiss the Lowland literati as the inhabitants of a continuum of cultural stereotyping which debarred them from engaging with their own times, or to look to them for the sort of precise and literal truths which would have required them to be out pacing the late-medieval Scottish landscape, map in one hand and socio-linguistic questionnaire in the other. Within the conventions of their own historiographical tradition, it would be perfectly possible to make the contemporary scene, in terms of either perceptions or actualities, a criterion—though only one—for the invocation of the stereotype *per se*, and for the particular form of its invocation. Indeed the very longevity and ubiquity of the stereotype may have furnished a palette of established motifs extensive enough to endow the identikit portrait with a degree of finesse and individuality.

Viewed in its entirety, Book II Chapter 9 of *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* becomes an outstanding case-study of the process of adaptation.¹² The literary challenge was to create a bi-polar Scotland from undifferentiated source materials. ‘Fordun’ does so by equating *primeva Scotorum gens* with contemporary Gaels, assigning the language and most of the characteristics of the former to the latter. That he has sources for them doubtless dictates why he spends twice as long upon Gaelic Scots: the traits he gives to ‘Teutonic’ Scots may be nothing more than simple reflexes of his own devising. In terms

¹¹Barrow, ‘Lost Gàidhealtachd’, 67.

¹²There is scope for a more detailed analysis than is given here. It is clear that ‘Fordun’ has reworked his sources considerably, a prime reason being to tone down the more negative aspects of their portrayal of the first Scots: *Scotichronicon* i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 341–3. Further complications are the fact that his excerpt from Solinus ‘is based on the interpolated text found in several MSS’, while its conclusion comes from a different but unidentified source (*ibid.* i, 343); and that Isidore is not the author of the passage attributed to him (see below, pp. 13–14). The treatment of sources in chapter 9 might also be compared to the discussion of topography and land use in Highlands and Lowlands in chapter 8: *ibid.* i, 341–2.

of specifics, he seems to have directed a preliminary editorial strike against the passage he cites from Solinus, deleting from it a 'strong suggestion of pagan beliefs and practices'.¹³ Presumably this is explained by his overall strategic aim of championing the Scots as early and consistently orthodox adherents of Roman Christianity,¹⁴ although a trace of Solinus may resurface in the contrast silently implied by the reference to the *gens maritima* as 'devout in their worship'. Endurance, as we saw, goes to 'Teutonic' Scots. Where ancient Scots were friendly to one another, Gaelic Scots are now hostile to 'Teutonic' Scots. Finally, there are in his treatment of Gaelic Scots touches unknown to his stated sources, perhaps therefore attributable to 'Fordun' or indeed Fordun himself: propensity for plunder; mental agility and cunning; the striking emphasis upon fidelity to king, kingdom and law if governed effectively,¹⁵ and a linguistic and ethnic 'nationalism' which sees him refuse to refer to the speech of 'Teutonic' Scots as English, and accept that the *gens maritima* and *gens montana*, for all their differences, together form *nacio Scotorum*.¹⁶

Whatever the motives which induced 'Fordun' to formulate the stereotype precisely as he did, it could certainly be argued that by invoking it at all he sought to assert a fundamental truth, a momentous shift which he observed in his Scottish present,

¹³ *Ibid.* i, 343.

¹⁴ William Ferguson, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation: An Historic Quest* (Edinburgh 1998), 98–105; Roger A. Mason, 'Civil society and the Celts: Hector Boece, George Buchanan and the ancient Scottish past', in *Scottish History: The Power of the Past*, edd. Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay (Edinburgh 2002), 95–119, at 112–13. Paganism lost its force as a marker of barbarity within the Christian Europe of the central middle ages, and was superseded by a greater emphasis upon moral, social and cultural distinctions: 'the condescension of some Europeans towards others who seemed less advanced or refined'. Jones, 'Image of the barbarian', 394.

¹⁵ For arguments relating this to the political context of the later fourteenth century, see Stephen Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings: Robert II and Robert III 1371–1406* (East Linton 1996), 4 and n. 13, 6, 8 and n. 37, 21 and n. 108, 86–8.

¹⁶ For arguments relating this to 'the realities of fourteenth-century Scotland', see Grant, 'Aspects of national consciousness', 77.

whenever that may have been. ‘Fordun’ posits a continuity between past and present which is to our eyes dramatic, but also—and this must have been what truly mattered to him—partial. He presents the *gens montana* of the Scottish present as the living remnant of how all Scots had been in the time of Solinus or Isidore. It follows that he would have been surprised to learn that future historians would use his account as the basis for arguments about ‘the emergence of the Highlander’. For him what counted was the ‘emergence of the Lowlander’: what was new was that some Scots (*gens maritima*) had changed their language, and thereby moved on and ‘got civility’. It is a moot point whether this stasis of the Gaels in Scotland was for ‘Fordun’ a genuine state of affairs flowing inevitably from continuity of language, or rather a convenient rhetorical benchmark. It may be noted that, in their ability to learn, and to respond to good rule, he endows them with the potential for change. Nevertheless, the *gens montana* becomes a monolith by which the progress of the *gens maritima* can be measured. In both his account and those of his models, the assertion of superiority emanates from the side of those who believe themselves to possess or have acquired it, through civility.

The most recent editors of Book II Chapter 9 note that the passage which ‘Fordun’ there ascribes to Isidore is actually taken from Bartholomaeus Anglicus, ‘Bartholomew the Englishman’, the Franciscan whose highly influential encyclopedia, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, was completed *ca* 1245.¹⁷ Further investigation suggests that Bartholomew’s influence upon ‘Fordun’ did not end there.¹⁸ He

¹⁷*Scotichronicon* i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 341–3; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edd. H.C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 61 vols. (Oxford 2004) iv, 161–2.

¹⁸For first pointing this out, and discussing Bartholomew’s influence upon ‘Fordun’ with me, I am much indebted to Dr Dauvit Broun; see further chapter 2. In his description of Scotland in *De regionibus*, the famous Book XV of his encyclopedia, Bartholomew begins with the passage which ‘Fordun’ has borrowed but attributed to Isidore. As with the passage he ascribes to Solinus, ‘Fordun’ seems to have made changes designed to reduce the severity of the strictures on the first Scots; *Scotichronicon* i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 343. Bartholomew

continues:¹⁹

But in the present time many Scots have changed the manners of the original race in considerable measure and for the better, as a result of intermixture with the English. However the wood-dwelling Scots (*silvestres Scoti*) and the Irish take pride in following in the footsteps of their fathers in dress, language, sustenance and other habits. Indeed in a sense they reject the ways of others in preference to their own.

Here surely resides the genesis of Book II Chapter 9, and confirmation of its true meaning, long obscured by alterations 'Fordun' has made. He has dislocated Bartholomew's straightforward sequentialism and logic both by reversing the chronology, moving from the present, much elaborated, to the past; and by expunging Bartholomew's explanation for the distinction between past and present, English influence. This is consistent with the 'nationalist' sensibility already adumbrated, and is a point to which we shall return.

Analysis of 'Fordun' has served to generate some ground rules which I now propose to apply to the views held by other late-medieval Lowland Scottish literati towards Gaelic Scots down to the end of the

then has a sentence about the Scots' propensity for painting and decorating their bodies, and cites Isidore, correctly, as his authority. 'Fordun' omits it, but may have assumed that Isidore was the source, not of this last sentence alone, but of all that had appeared in Bartholomew's account of Scotland thus far; hence the false attribution to Isidore. Bartholomew then gives the passage cited in the next note.

¹⁹*Mores autem primeve gentis multi ex eis ex admixtione cum anglicis in maxima parte his temporibus in melius mutaverunt. Silvestres tamen Scoti et Hybernici in habitu et in lingua et in victu et in aliis moribus paterna sequi vestigia gloriam arbitrantur. Immo aliorum consuetudines respectu suarum quodammodo aspernantur.* I have consulted the early printed edition by Berthold Ruppel (Basel 1472×80), checked against two manuscripts held in Glasgow University Library, Special Collections, MS Hunter 389, and MS Hunter 391. For an English version see *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, edd. M. C. Seymour et al., 3 vols. (Oxford 1975–88) ii, 812–13.

sixteenth century.²⁰ The principal figures to be considered are Wyntoun, Bower, Holland, Blind Harry, Dunbar, Mair, Boece, Leslie, Buchanan and Montgomerie.²¹ While much of this material is, like the 'Fordun' text, familiar through citation, scope still exists for a more systematic analysis, as a contribution to the clutch of

²⁰The scope of this discussion largely excludes perceptions recoverable from the writings of English and continental commentators and the records of central government, as well as those emanating from the Gaelic side; and the issue of how far the literati's views can be held to be representative of Lowland society as a whole.

²¹In the following editions: Andrew of Wyntoun, *The Originale Cronykil of Scotland*, ed. D. Laing, 3 vols. (Edinburgh 1872–9) [Wyntoun, *Originale Cronykil*]; *Scotichronicon*, gen. ed. Watt; *Longer Scottish Poems I: 1375–1650*, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt and Felicity Riddy (Edinburgh 1987) [*Longer Scottish Poems I*, ed. Bawcutt and Riddy]; *Hary's Wallace*, ed. Matthew P. McDiarmid, 2 vols. (Scottish Text Society: Edinburgh and London 1968–9) [*Hary's Wallace*, ed. McDiarmid]; *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt, 2 vols. (Glasgow 1998) [*Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt]; Ioannes Maior, *Historia Maioris Britanniae, tam Anglie quam Scotie* (Paris 1521) [Mair, *Historia*]; John Mair, *A History of Greater Britain, as well England as Scotland*, ed. and trans. Archibald Constable (Scottish History Society: Edinburgh 1892) [Mair, *History*]; Hector Boece, *Scotorum Historiae a Prima Gentis Origine* (Paris 1527) [Boece, *Scotorum Historiae*]; *The History and Chronicles of Scotland: written in Latin by Hector Boece, canon of Aberdeen; and translated by John Bellenden*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh 1821) [Boece, *History*]; *De Origine, Moribus, et Rebus Gestis Scotorum Libri Decem ... Authore Ioanne Leslaeo, Scoto, Episcopo Rossensi* (Rome 1578) [Leslie, *De Origine*]; John Lesley, *The History of Scotland from the death of King James I in the year 1436 to the year 1561*, ed. Thomas Thomson (Bannatyne Club: Edinburgh 1830) [Lesley, *History*]; *The Historie of Scotland written first in Latin by the most reverend and worthy Jhone Leslie, Bishop of Rosse, and translated in Scottish by Father James Dalrymple*, ed. E. G. Cody and William Murison, 2 vols. (Scottish Text Society: Edinburgh 1888–95) [Leslie, *Historie*]; *Rerum Scotticarum Historia Avctore Georgio Buchanano Scoto* (Edinburgh 1582) [Buchanan, *Rerum Scotticarum Historia*]; George Buchanan, *The History of Scotland*, trans. James Aikman, 4 vols. (Glasgow and Edinburgh 1827–9) [Buchanan, *History*]; *The Cherrie and the Slae by Alexander Montgomerie*, ed. H. Harvey Wood (London 1937) [*The Cherrie and the Slae*, ed. Wood]; *The Poems of Alexander Montgomerie*, ed. James Cranstoun and George Stevenson, 2 vols. (Scottish Text Society: Edinburgh and London 1887 and 1910) [*Poems of Alexander Montgomerie*, ed. Cranstoun and Stevenson].

recent studies of aspects of the corpus.²² The challenge of teasing apart image, reality and motive exemplified by the 'Fordun' text remains as we survey that broader landscape whose most conspicuous landmark it is. For the Scottish historian the challenge is compounded by the lack of the archival resources which enable the historian of late-medieval Tuscany, for example, to subject the behavioural traits assigned by Tuscan literati to their own Highlanders to systematic quantitative analysis, and expose them as cultural and ideological stereotypes pure and simple.²³ The record does afford us ample means to question the existence of a late-medieval Scotland compartmentalised into Lowlands and Highlands by a 'Highland line' that crippled interaction between them.²⁴ Yet it also leaves open plenty room for debate on issues such as the place of the MacDonald Lordship of the Isles within the late-medieval Stewart kingdom;²⁵ with which we could couple the observation that

²²See U. Morét, 'Gaelic History and Culture in Medieval and Sixteenth Century Lowland Scottish Historiography', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Aberdeen 1993); Dawson, 'Gaidhealtachd'; Cowan, 'Discovery of the Gàidhealtachd'; Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, c 1600–c 1800* (Cambridge 1999), 123–45; Ulrike Morét, 'Historians and languages: medieval and humanist views of Celtic Britain', in *Freedom and Authority: Scotland c. 1050–c. 1650. Historical and Historiographical Essays presented to Grant G. Simpson*, edd. T. Brotherstone and D. Ditchburn (East Linton 2000), 60–72; Mason, 'Civil society and the Celts'.

²³See chapter 4. For a partial attempt to compare the relative wealth of late-medieval Highlands and Lowlands using tax records and crown rentals, see Ranald G. Nicholson, 'Domesticated Scots and Wild Scots: the relationship between Lowlanders and Highlanders in medieval Scotland', in *Proceedings of the First Colloquium on Scottish Studies* (University of Guelph, Guelph 1968), 1–16, at 6–7.

²⁴See Barrow, 'Lost Gàidhealtachd', for the fourteenth century; and Martin MacGregor, *Gaelic Scotland in the Later Middle Ages* (forthcoming), for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

²⁵John Bannerman, 'The lordship of the Isles', in *Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Jennifer M. Brown (London 1977), 209–40; A. Grant, 'Scotland's "Celtic Fringe" in the late middle ages: the Macdonald Lords of the Isles and the kingdom of Scotland', in *The British Isles, 1100–1500*, ed. R. R. Davies (Edinburgh 1988), 118–41; N. MacDougall, 'Achilles' Heel? The earldom of Ross, the lordship of the Isles, and the

such interaction can readily co-exist with ‘failure to establish goodwill or even understanding ... especially perhaps on the political plane. It may be possible for two communities or two nations to enrich each other’s cultures significantly, at several levels, and yet to view each other with mutual hostility’.²⁶

In a situation where the limited and contested nature of the evidence inhibits the establishment of independent benchmarks, the only methodological recourse would seem to be internal cross-analysis of the writings of the literati, paying particular attention both to the degree of uniformity, and to the variations, inconsistencies and omissions, which they exhibit. The results can then be further compared with external points of reference such as that of Tuscany. There are three parts to the analysis: firstly, the chief behavioural characteristics assigned to Gaelic Scots; secondly, the terminology used to identify them and their language; and thirdly, a discussion of the possible relationships between these two sets of data.

The literati associate with Gaelic Scots three external characteristics which are inseparable from their behavioural traits. Firstly, the landscape they inhabit is ugly and unattractive. According to Fordun, ‘in the upland districts, and along the highlands ... the country is there very hideous, interspersed with moors and marshy fields, muddy and dirty’.²⁷ To Leslie, the Gaels occupy *horridiora regni loca*, or ‘the more horrible places of the Realme’.²⁸ Furthermore, the medieval mind could readily associate the northern habitat of the *gens montana* and *Scoti transalpini* with

Stewart kings, 1449–1507’, in *Alba: Celtic Scotland in the Middle Ages*, edd. Edward J. Cowan and R. Andrew McDonald (East Linton 2000), 248–75.

²⁶John Macinnes, ‘The Gaelic perception of the Lowlands’, in *Gaelic and Scotland*, ed. Gillies, 89–100, at 89.

²⁷*Chron. Fordun* i, 41; ii, 37; *Scotichronicon* i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 182–3.

²⁸Leslie, *De Origine*, 53; Leslie, *Historie* i, 86.

evil and devilry. In Dunbar's 'Off Februar the fyiftene nycht', when the Devil calls for a 'heleand padyane':²⁹

Syne ran a feynd to feche Makfadyane
Far northwart in a nuke.

From at least as far back as Aristotle behavioural distinctions had been drawn between the peoples of north and south, whereby the former were seen as naturally stronger, braver and more attractive, and at the same time less cerebral, than the latter, and hence conspicuous for martial prowess and violent conduct. Bower, commenting on conflict in Strathnaver in 1431, says: 'our fellow-Scots across the mountains, living as they do on the border or boundary of the world, experience little of the scorching summer heat or the sun's blaze by which the blood as a friend of nature might be dried up: it is for this reason that, compared with the other nations of the world, they have been found to be naturally more stout-hearted'.³⁰ To John Mair, 'they are not less, but rather much more, prompt to fight, and this, both because they dwell more towards the north, and because, born as they are in the mountains, and dwellers in forests, their very nature is more combative'.³¹

The language of Gaelic Scots is an absolutely critical marker, giving voice to all the key internal characteristics. Both Fordun and Mair—the latter here presumably influenced by the former—begin and end their most detailed discussions of the Gaels with difference in language, seeing this as the root of behavioural distinctions between Highlanders and Lowlanders, and of the hostility of the Gaels to both Lowland Scots and English.³² Bower begins to list the names of the chiefs captured by James I at Inverness in 1428 but

²⁹ *Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt i, 152.

³⁰ *Scotichronicon* viii, ed. D. E. R. Watt, 266–7. Bower goes on to cite supportive testimony from the *De Re Militari* of Vegetius.

³¹ Mair, *History*, 49; cf. *ibid.*, 32, 40–1, and Arthur H. Williamson, *Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI: The Apocalypse, the Union and the Shaping of Scotland's Public Culture* (Edinburgh 1979), 163–4.

³² *Scotichronicon* i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 184–5; Mair, *History*, 48–50.

then gives up, since the names ‘might engender tedium to a person ignorant of them by reason of their barbarousness’.³³ For Buchanan, the harsh sounds of Gaelic linked it to a primitive phase in Scottish development best left behind: ‘for if, in this transmigration into another language [Latin], it is necessary that we yield up one thing or another, let us pass from rusticity and barbarism to culture and civilisation’.³⁴ In ‘Off Februar the fyiftene nycht’, the cacophonous sound of the Gaels deafens the Devil, prompting him to smoor them ‘in the depest pot of hell’.³⁵ In *The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie*, Dunbar links Gaelic utterance to treachery (‘thy treachour tung hes tane ane Heland strynd’; ‘dissaitful tyrand with serpentis tung vnstable’), blasphemy (‘baird blasphemmer’) and rebellion (‘rebald rymyng’).³⁶ In *The Buke of the Howlat*, and in ‘Ane Anser to Ane Helandmen’s Invective’ attributed to Montgomerie, we see parodies of Gaelic speech, while its perceived harsh sounds result in the regular characterisation of its speakers as rooks, ravens, and perhaps ptarmigans and cormorants.³⁷ Attempts by Gaels to speak Lowland Scots are also targeted: in *The Buke of the Howlat* the bard is mocked for his use of the third person feminine singular, in place of the first person singular, pronoun; in the ‘Flyting’ Dunbar asserts that he can speak better ‘Ingly’s’ than Kennedy ‘can blabber with thy Carrick lippis’.³⁸

Responses to the Gaels’ appearance exhibit greater variation. Fordun’s faithful repetition of Isidore’s dictum about physical attractiveness spoiled by unsightly dress cuts little ice with Dunbar, who unleashes an unstoppable scatological assault upon Kennedy’s bodily repulsiveness and corruption; ‘Evill farit and dryit, as Densmen on the rattis, Lyk as the gleddis had on thy gulesnowt

³³*Scotichronicon* viii, ed. D. E. R. Watt, 260.

³⁴Buchanan, *History* i, 9.

³⁵*Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt i, 152.

³⁶*Ibid.* i, 202

³⁷*Longer Scottish Poems I*, edd. Bawcutt and Riddy, 76; *The Cherrie and the Slae*, ed. Wood, 86–9; *Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt i, 152, 202, 206; ii, 388, 432, 437.

³⁸*Longer Scottish Poems I*, edd. Bawcutt and Riddy, 337; *Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt i, 204.

dynd ... Laithly and lowsy, als lauchtane as ane leik'. Elsewhere Dunbar represents the Gaels as dressed in 'tag and tatter', and equips Kennedy with a 'polk breik' or meal-bag, 'rilling' or rough hide shoes, and wholly inadequate trousers.³⁹ Much of this is echoed in briefer compass in 'Ane Anser to Ane Helandmanis Invective'.⁴⁰ The perspective of the sixteenth-century historical tradition is very different. Mair has a characteristically sober account of the dress of the Gaels in time of peace and war.⁴¹ Boece, Leslie and Buchanan, who share an approach predicated upon continuity between 'ancient Scots' and the contemporary Highlands, are similarly non-judgmental or positive.⁴² According to Leslie:⁴³

Lykwyse the maner of cleithing and leiving, that ald forme thay unchanget aluterlie have keipet. In this sik a reverend feir and dreid thay have leist thay offend in things of honestie, that gif thair Princes, or of thair Nobilitie, visit the kingis court, thay aray thame selfes of a courtlie maner, elegantlie, quhen thay returne to thayr cuntrey, casteng aff al courtlie decore, in al haist, thay cleith thame selfes of thair cuntrey maner, excepte thay wil incur al manis danger and havie offence.

Turning to behaviour, five principal traits or stereotypes stand out, some of which find personification or embodiment in archetypes. Arguably most fundamental is barbarity, although the word itself, while occasionally applied to language, is seldom found. Instead the lexicon turns upon wildness, commencing with the *ferina gens* of 'Fordun' and the 'wyld Scottis men' of Wyntoun.⁴⁴ Walter Bower preferred the term used by Bartholomew, *silvestres*, literally 'wood-dwelling', which he uses in tandem with

³⁹*Ibid.* i, 201–8.

⁴⁰*The Cherie and the Slae*, ed. Wood, 86–9.

⁴¹Mair, *History*, 49–50, 359.

⁴²Boece, *History*, lvi; Leslie, *Historie* i, 93–4; Buchanan, *History* i, 41.

⁴³Leslie, *Historie* i, 95–6.

⁴⁴*Chron. Fordun* i, 42; Wyntoun, *Originale Cronykil* iii, 55, 63. For confirmation of wildness as the defining characteristic of Gaelic Scots in the eyes of English and continental observers, see Nicholson, 'Domesticated Scots and Wild Scots', 3–4.

indomabiles, and in contradistinction to *urbani*, *eruditi* and *domestici*. *Silvestres* remained the staple Latin descriptor until at least the later sixteenth century, and it is clear that the connotation of wildness was paramount.⁴⁵ After 1500, however, we encounter some equivocation on this score. In his famous passage on Highlands and Lowlands, Mair claimed that *silvestres* was how foreigners identified Gaelic Scots, whereas to lowlanders they were simply ‘men of the high land’.⁴⁶ Sensitive to the pejorative flavour of *silvestres* Mair may have been, yet not sufficiently so to prevent the word coming naturally to him everywhere else in his history.⁴⁷ Leslie’s Latin text of 1578 took the same formal line: to foreigners Gaelic Scots were *feri* and *silvestres*, but ‘we call them *montani*’.⁴⁸

Their wildness marks out Gaelic Scots as a people apart not merely in the locational sense implied by their northern habitat ‘across the mountains’. They also live beyond civilisation, lacking the understanding of ‘the nature of a civil polity’ possessed by their Lowland counterparts.⁴⁹ Central to their incivility is their attitude to the law. Thus Leslie’s Scots’ text can describe Gaelic Scots as ‘outlawis and wylde peple’,⁵⁰ while in a significant passage Bower broaches the impossibility of achieving legal homogeneity in a Scotland composed of *Scoti silvestres et urbani*.⁵¹

⁴⁵*Scotichronicon* ii, edd. John and Winifred MacQueen, 422–3; *ibid.* vii, edd. A. B. Scott and D. E. R. Watt, with Ulrike Morét and Norman F. Shead, 360–1. *Silvestres* (*gens silvestra*) is used of the Irish by Gerald of Wales, perhaps following the lead of classical authorities such as Cicero; Jones, ‘Image of the barbarian’, 395–8. For its longevity in the sense of ‘wild’, note the reference in Caithness in 1564 to *hibernica patria inter ferros et silvestres scotos*; *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, edd. J. M. Thomson and J. B. Paul, 11 vols. (Edinburgh 1882–1914) [*RMS*] iv, no. 1669.

⁴⁶Mair, *Historia*, Lib. 1, fos. xv^v–xviⁱ: *hos altae terrae: reliquos ime terrae viros vocamus. Apud exteros priores Scoti silvestres, posterior res domestica vocantur.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, Lib. 1, fo. xii^r; Mair, *History*, 31 nn. 2, 39.

⁴⁸Leslie, *De Origine*, 53.

⁴⁹Mair, *History*, 49.

⁵⁰Leslie, *Historie* i, 85 (final footnote).

⁵¹*Scotichronicon* ii, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 422–3.

No law can be established except by the unanimous will of some nation (*gens*), because a nation which is on the one hand impious in itself and on the other mixed (that is derived from different and diverse kinds) will never agree in establishing law, because, just as they are by nature composed of different varieties, so also will they be diverse in their wishes. And on that account it is very difficult for a very mixed nation of different blood (*gens multum commixta de diverso sanguine*) say composed of Scots and English or of country and town Scots (*de silvestribus Scotis et urbanis*) to agree on establishing anything or observing it in practice, because in such a community a man loves himself and no-one loves his country (*republicam*) ...

Gaelic Scots' natural propensity for violence, whether amongst themselves or against others, is a prominent theme. For Mair, 'they are full of mutual dissensions, and war rather than peace is their normal condition'.⁵² Violence as a preferred solution has roots in linguistic intolerance and northern locale, but is doubtless also a condition of incivility, particularly the status of Highlanders as a people beyond the law; and linked to a predisposition to theft and plunder. In the Lowland lexicon the term which came to epitomise Highland violence was 'cateran', and responsibility for this would seem to rest squarely with Walter Bower, who uses it as a synonym for 'Highlander', giving a lead to such as Dunbar in the *Flyting*.⁵³

Equally ubiquitous, though subject to greater variety of interpretation, is the theme of Highlander as rebel and traitor, which almost comes to serve as a litmus test by which the calibre of individual Stewart monarchs is ultimately judged. Fordun's positivist dictum that 'they are however loyal and obedient to the king and kingdom, and they are easily made to submit to the laws, if rule is exerted over them'—which has been taken as a thumbs down to

⁵²Mair, *History*, 49.

⁵³*Scotichronicon* i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 48–9: *ac etiam inter Scotos transalpinos et silvestres quos catervanos seo ketheranos vocamus*, vii, edd. A. B. Scott and D. E. R. Watt, with Ulrike Morét and Norman F. Shead, 359–61: *catervani silvestres, transmontani et insulani*; *Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt i, 205.

Robert II's Highland policy⁵⁴—has its polarity rudely reversed by Bower, for whom Gaelic Scots 'appeared always to be almost untameable and rebels against the kings and law-makers of Scotland'. Thus it was David II's crowning achievement that 'he united to their fatherland by means of one legal contract Scots speaking different tongues, both the wild caterans and the domesticated men with skills'.⁵⁵ For Bower, rebellion and barbarity are united by his preoccupation with the law: those who are beyond the law will break it, and demonstrate lack of respect for it through rebellion. More mixed in its messages is Leslie's analysis of the breakdown of order in the Highlands after the death of James V:⁵⁶

Heir is to be considerate the wyld, unquiet and unstabill natour of the Irichemen duelling in the Hielandis and Ilis of Scotteland, who was als obedient to the lawis of the realme, and kepit als gret quietnes in thair cuntreis, with ressonabill justice as in ony uther pairt of the Law landis, so lang as King James the fyfte was on lyf; bot not long eftir his death, thay hering of the unquiet stait of the realme, the gret devisione nourished amangis syndre factions of the nobilitie, the hoit warris and persuit of Inglande maid thame incontinent foryetfull of thair naturall deuetic, and to returne to thair former wiked behaveour, and exercing thame selffis in raising, steling and oppresseone of thair nyghbouris in all partis of the Hieland cuntreis, and in the Law landis nixt adjacent unto thame.

Leslie's line may represent a softening in a fifteenth-century view, already running strong in Bower, which peaks around 1500, and sees the rebel assume the deeper and darker hue of the traitor, and receive two developed portrayals as such in the poetry of Blind Harry and William Dunbar. Makfadyan(e), the fictional traitor and opponent of Wallace, is in part modelled on Eoin Lord of the Isles.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings*, 86–8.

⁵⁵*Scotichronicon* vii, edd. A. B. Scott and D. E. R. Watt, with Ulrike Morét and Norman F. Shead, 359–61.

⁵⁶Lesley, *History*, 183.

⁵⁷*Harry's Wallace*, ed. McDiarmid i, 157–64; ii, 206–10; Stephen I. Boardman, '“Pillars of the Community”: Clan Campbell and architectural patronage in the fifteenth

Dunbar's Donald Owre, subject of 'In vice most vicius he excellis', is usually equated with Eoin's grandson and the contemporary claimant for the headship of the Lordship, Dòmhnall Dubh.⁵⁸

Horrible to natour
Is ane tratour,
As feind in fratour
Vundir a cowle.

Treachery derives from wickedness, a consistent element in the portrayal from Wyntoun's 'wyked Heland men' to the 'wiked behaviour' of Leslie's Gaelic Scots, 'exercing thame selffis in raissing, steling and oppressione',⁵⁹ and pervasive of thought and word as much as deed. To Bower, their 'hearts [are] full of deceit and wickedness'. From the mouth of the bard in *The Buke of the Howlat* come lies, curses, satire; to Dunbar, Kennedy is a 'baird blasphemar'. To Mair, Highlanders are 'ever prone to do evil rather than good'.⁶⁰ The archetype is again Makfadyan(e), but this time as invoked by Dunbar rather than Blind Harry, in a set piece explicitly linking the Gaels to devilry, as the master of ceremonies who orchestrates the Highland pageant in Hell in 'Off Februar the fyiftene nycht'.⁶¹

Finally, and most pervasive of all, is the Gael as man of leisure and 'subsidy junkie'. Craving a life of ease, and having no desire to work, he supports himself by living off others, if necessary through means which contribute to all other aspects of his characterisation:

century', in *Lordship and Architecture in Medieval and Renaissance Scotland*, edd. Richard D. Oram and Geoffrey P. Stell (Edinburgh 2005), 123–59, at 141–3. Cf. the letter cited by Boece stating that James III, 'while still a mere boy ... subdued the Highlanders, a fierce race, ever delighting in intestine feuds and sedition'; *Hectoris Boetii Murthlacensium et Aberdonensium Episcoporum Vitae*, ed. James Moir (New Spalding Club: Aberdeen 1894), 73.

⁵⁸ *Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt i, 111–12; ii, 348–9, 388.

⁵⁹ Wyntoun, *Originale Cronykil* iii, 55; Lesley, *History*, 183.

⁶⁰ *Scotichronicon* i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 46–7; *Longer Scottish Poems I*, edd. Bawcutt and Riddy, 76–7; *Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt i, 202; Mair, *History*, 358.

⁶¹ *Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt i, 152.

violence, deceit, falsehood and corruption. *How the First Helandman of God was Made*, attributed to Montgomerie, argues that the desire to steal as a means of avoiding labour is an instinct which kicks in at birth: “Sa lang as I may geir get will I nevir wirk”.⁶² ‘Fordun’, following the statement in his source, Solinus, that the original Scots were ‘dedicated to games and hunting and leisure rather than work’, says that the Gael chooses this life because he delights in it;⁶³ and Mair expands upon the theme:⁶⁴

The other part of these people delight in the chase and a life of indolence; their chiefs eagerly follow bad men if only they may not have the need to labour; taking no pains to earn their own livelihood, they live upon others, and follow their ... chief in all evil courses sooner than they will pursue an honest industry.

The personification of Highland indolence is of course the bard, of whom we have developed portrayals in *The Buke of the Howlat* and Dunbar’s *Flyting*.

We can reasonably conclude that over a two hundred year period the Lowland literati of late-medieval Scotland developed and deployed an image of Gaelic Scots which was broadly consistent both in the salient features it depicted, and in its hostile and censorious substance and tone. Homogeneity is cemented by various connective threads running through the canon. Most influential was the Fordunian template, still recognisable in John Mair and, as mediated by Mair, in John Leslie; while Hector Boece’s account of *Scotorum prisici et recentis mores*, ‘the new Maneris and the auld of Scottis’, reconfigured that template for the sixteenth-century historians. On the poetic side, the ‘flyting’ offered a vehicle tailor-made for altercations across the Highland line. ‘Ane Anser to Ane Helandmen’s Invective’ evokes *The Buke of the Howlat* in its use of linguistic parody, and indeed borrows a line of pseudo-genealogy

⁶²*Poems of Alexander Montgomerie*, edd. Cranstoun and Stevenson i, 280–1.

⁶³*Scotichronicon* i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 184–7.

⁶⁴Mair, *History*, 49; cf. *ibid.*, 359.

from it. The ubiquitous Makfadyan(e) surfaces here, as in Blind Harry and Dunbar.

The coherence of the late-medieval image also stands out when it is set beside its post-1600 incarnations. The omission or downplaying of traits which come to prominence then suggests that it was capable of bearing the impress of its own era. Emphasis upon clans or kinship, or the despotism of clanship, is negligible, and this could readily be explained by the general significance of kinship, and the existence of broadly similar forms of lordship, across late-medieval Scotland.⁶⁵ Only in Dunbar's *Flyting* is Gaelic poverty prominent, or advanced as an alternative root cause of the parasitic lifestyle, and this would bear out the known late-medieval view, from 'Fordun' onwards, that emphasised the natural wealth and potential productivity of the Highlands.⁶⁶ Other omissions and skewings applied with regularity are rather concerned to distort an understanding of the contemporary Gàidhealtachd which at times is clearly respectable, in the interests of formulating a stereotype. Most glaring is gender, for the portrait drawn by the literati is almost

⁶⁵Cf. *Clan Campbell Letters 1559–1583*, ed. Jane E. A. Dawson (Scottish History Society: Edinburgh 1997), 9. On kinship, see the spurious pedigree perhaps vaunted by the rook-bard in *The Buke of the Howlat*, and which contributes to the bathos of his characterisation; *Longer Scottish Poems I*, edd. Bawcutt and Ridy, 76, 337. For Walter Kennedy's use of kinship to undermine Dunbar, see *Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt i, 208–9; ii, 428. The writer with most to say on clanship, and on clanship and servitude, is John Mair. 'There is kinship of blood among these tribes; their possessions are few, but they follow one chief as leader of the whole family, and bring with them all their relations and dependants'. Of the chiefs imprisoned by James I at Inverness, he says: 'those men, all low-born as they were, held in utter subjection some seventy or eighty thousand others; and in their own particular tracts they were regarded as princes, and had all at their own arbitrary will, evincing not the smallest regard for the dictates of reason'. Mair, *History*, 358–9. Cf. Leslie, *Historie* i, 96: 'naturallie thay ar bent mair willinglie and vehementlie, gif thair maistir commande thame, to seditione and stryfe ...'.

⁶⁶*Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt i, 205.

purely masculine.⁶⁷ Prominent social characteristics such as militarism and hospitality, to cite the two most obvious examples, are inflated and simplified to become crude universals, so that all Gaels are presented as caterans and parasites. Linguistically, this involves what were technical terms in the Gaelic context being stripped of these meanings on being borrowed into Scots, and applied pejoratively and indiscriminately, as with *bard* and *cateran*.⁶⁸ Cross-comparison within the corpus itself exposes one instance of exaggeration in the cause of caricature. The *cateran*, to Walter Bower simply a synonym for Highlander, is to John Mair ‘the wildest and most lawless of the Highlanders’.⁶⁹

Homogeneity allied to fundamental negativism might suggest that this phenomenon arose from one root impulse or ‘big idea’. Such a case can be made, yet needs to be informed from the outset by a spirit of scepticism and constraint. It will not do to envisage those who followed ‘Fordun’ as self-consciously and single-mindedly harnessing the topos of Celtic primitivism to serve a solemn ideological project; to reduce their perceptions to pit-stops upon a highroad leading with teleological inexorability to *Basilikon Doron* and the Highland policies of James VI. The need for scepticism is a consequence partly, we shall argue, of the nature of the root impulse itself, and partly of the tradition upon which the literati drew, whose very deep-rootedness rendered it highly malleable. An alternative reading of their invocation of that tradition would emphasise how it could be deployed in a variety of guises, even against itself, to further other authorial objectives; the new departures, and significant variations and fluctuations in substance and tone; the undercurrent of sympathy and understanding.

Dunbar’s poetry offers a case study of variation in microcosm. The tone moves from the high moral sententiousness of ‘In vice most

⁶⁷Marginal exceptions are sundry comments by Boece, Leslie’s on dress, and Dunbar’s on Kennedy’s woman in the *Flyting*: Boece, *History*, lvi–lviii; Leslie, *Historie* i, 94; *Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt ii, 435–6.

⁶⁸*Ibid.* ii, 428.

⁶⁹Mair, *History*, 362.

vicius he excellis' to the range of comic effects in 'Off Februar the fyiftene nycht' and *The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie*—the last described as 'iocound and mirrie' in one of the manuscript sources.⁷⁰ For Dunbar the image of the Highlander can become a means to achieve other ends. 'In vice most vicius he excellis' is a high political piece, seeking to influence the king over the granting of remissions. *The Flyting* depends for its effect upon the fact that Walter Kennedy—learned, landed, multilingual, courtly and urbane—is the walking antithesis of everything that the stereotype says he should be.⁷¹ Anticipating Scott and others 300 years later, Dunbar plays with the stereotype's familiarity to interrogate and subvert it. There may also be a distinction in flavour to be drawn here between the chronicle and verse traditions.⁷² Their contrasting approach to costume has been noted, and one wonders whether the flytings of Dunbar and Montgomerie(?) were echoing or drawing upon a seam of Lowland perceptions already well-established at a genuinely demotic level, and which owed more to ritualistic ribaldry and the burlesque—acted out, perhaps, as a part of the street life of many a late-medieval burgh—than they did to *saeva indignatio*.⁷³

1500, the time around which Dunbar was writing, seems to be a pivotal point in the development of the genre. Thereafter, the naked antagonism which characterises Wyntoun, Bower and Blind Harry

⁷⁰*Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt ii, 428.

⁷¹*Ibid.* ii, 427–8. Cf. Priscilla Bawcutt, 'The art of Flyting', *Scottish Literary Journal* 10 (1983) 5–24, at 18–19.

⁷²Although space precludes exploration of the question here, a similar distinction may exist between on the one hand the Latin texts of Boece and Leslie, and on the other the Scots versions by Bellenden and Dalrymple, which in places seem more in tune with the vernacular verse tradition.

⁷³In 1574 parliament legislated that 'na Irische and hieland bairdis and beggaris be brocht and ressavit in the lawland be boittis or vtherwayis', while those already resident were to be deported: *The Acts of the Parliament of Scotland*, edd. T. Thomson and C. Innes, 12 vols. (Edinburgh 1814–75) [APS] iii, 89. This was the latest in a string of measures against itinerants stretching back to 1449, although the act of that year concentrated its fire on 'ony that makis thaim fulis that ar nocht bardis'; *ibid.* ii, 36.

in particular lessens perceptibly. In its wake come treatments which are cooler, detached, even abstract; and which, if still essentially condemnatory, nevertheless resurrect the willingness of 'Fordun' to acknowledge positive traits. It is with the rhetoric of the reign of James VI that undiluted rancour returns.⁷⁴ Such a trajectory for Lowland perceptions can be demonstrated in the apparent fading of the motif of Gaelic Scot as traitor, *ca* 1500; in some aspects of the sixteenth-century construct of Gaelic Scot as ancient Scot; and by contrasting the stances of Walter Bower and John Mair. The latter has been construed as a voice of unmitigated hostility,⁷⁵ yet when set beside Bower he emerges as the soul of discrimination and objectivity. Mair attempts to revise Bower's usage of *silvestres*, and dissents from his definition of 'cateran'. He can identify an element of the 'Wild Scots' who 'yield more willing obedience to the courts of law and the king', even if it is only to safeguard their property. He acknowledges their musical prowess, and can state that 'at the present day almost the half of Scotland speaks the Irish [Gaelic] tongue, and not so long ago it was spoken by the majority of us'. On what has become a yardstick for the prejudices of generations of historians, the outcome of the battle of Harlaw, Mair is scrupulously non-committal.⁷⁶

Hector Boece's *Scotorum Historiae*, and Bellenden's Scots version, followed hard on the heels of Mair, but marked a new departure. The route hinted at in 'Fordun' does not quite reach explicit fulfilment, but comes close enough to stand as the first sustained exploration of the idea that within contemporary Scotland,

⁷⁴For different interpretations, see Arthur H. Williamson, 'Scots, Indians and Empire: the Scottish politics of civilisation 1519–1609', *Past and Present* 150 (1996) 46–83, at 59–62; and Mason, 'Civil society and the Celts', 95. The view offered here holds elements in common with Cowan, 'Discovery of the Gàidhealtachd', esp. 263 and 282, n. 8, but differs in its estimation of both the extent and nature of the sixteenth-century 'rapprochement'.

⁷⁵Williamson, 'Scots, Indians and Empire', 61; Roger A. Mason, *Kingship and the Commonweal: Political Thought in Renaissance and Reformation Scotland* (East Linton 1998), 53–5; Mason, 'Civil society and the Celts', 103–4.

⁷⁶Mair, *History*, 48–50, 362.

the Gaels retained characteristics and practices now lost to the Lowlands.⁷⁷ Moreover, Boece's dissatisfaction with 'the corruptit maneris of the warld now present' contributed to a very different vision: humanist, Livian, patriotic and seemingly, as far as Gaelic Scots were concerned, unequivocally positivist. When he says that, 'in sindry partis of this realme, remanis yit the futsteppis of mony auld virtewis usit sum time amang our eldaris', it is clear that he has in mind particularly Gaelic Scots, whom relative isolation has kept 'nocht corruptit, nor mingit with uncouth blude'. Their temperance—the fontane of all virtew—and ingenuity—expounding upon the *docilis* of 'Fordun'—made the Gaels moral exemplars who could act as the catalyst for national self-renewal.

Boece's thesis left him radically at odds with several by now canonical views. Continuity of language was the root, not of barbarity, but of continuing purity of manners, in stark contrast to the corruption engendered in southern Scots by contact with the English since the time of Malcolm III: 'be frequent and daily cumpany of thaim, we began to rute thair langage and seperflew maneris in oure breistis; throw quhilk the virtew and temperance of our eldaris began to be of litil estimation amang us'.⁷⁸ Nor was there an automatic association between barbarity and latitude:

Thair is na region in the warld sa barrant nor unfrutfull, be distance fra the sonne, bot, be providence of God, all maner of necessaryis, to the sustentatioun of man, may be gottin plesandly in it, gif thair war sic pepill that culd laubour it, effering to the nature thair of.

⁷⁷See the views of present-day Gaels in the 'Cosmographe and Discription of Albion', and of 'old Scots' in 'Ane prudent doctrine maid be the Auctore, concerning baith the new Maneris and the auld of Scottis'; and, in the latter, the almost unconscious shift from 'old Scots' to contemporary Gaels and back 'to the maneris of our anciant freindis': Boece, *History*, xxvi, liv–lxii, where all subsequent citations can be found. For the original Latin, which Bellenden follows closely in 'Ane prudent doctrine', but less so in the 'Cosmogrophe', see Boece, *Historiae*, '*Scotorum Regni Descriptio ...*', fo. 5v; '*De Scotorum priscis recentibusque institutis ac moribus ...*', fos. xvii^v–xx^v.

⁷⁸Cf. Boece, *History*, lix (Boece, *Historiae*, fo. xix^v): 'the Hieland hes baith the writingis and langage as thay had afore, mair ingenius than ony othir pepill'.

The herbal knowledge which underpinned the Gaels' excellence in medicine was, like the *curach* or coracle, symptomatic of rapport with their environment, and facility in adapting it. Their propensity for hunting, so recently condemned by Mair as tantamount to 'a life of indolence', was for Boece precisely the opposite, an essential component of their physical and moral well-being: 'howbeit thay had peace with thair ennimes, thay sufferit nocht thair bodyis to be corruptit with sleuth; bot wer exercit in continewall hunting; for in that game was gret honour amang our eldaris'. Finally, treacherous instincts do not register with Boece, for whom the Gaels 'kepis thair faith and promes with maist severite and constance', just as the old Scots, '[i]n all battallis assailyeit be thaim ... socht nevir victory be treason, falset, nor slicht ... [t]hay held it for gret febilnes to revenge ony displeseir, hatrent, or slauchter, be treason'.

Boece's vision was presumably coloured to some degree by his well-attested personal contacts with the Gaelic world.⁷⁹ In these he was not unique among the literati. The satirical simulations of Gaelic speech in *The Buke of the Howlat* and 'Ane Anser to Ane Helandmen's Invective' both presuppose some degree of understanding of the language, and of attendant cultural and social practices, on the part of sir Richard Holland and (assuming his authorship) Montgomerie.⁸⁰ The effect may smack more of feistiness than po-faced disapproval, but nevertheless does enough to align them with the hostile mainstream of a tradition whose fitful sympathetic undercurrent Boece elevated to an unparalleled high

⁷⁹M. MacGregor, 'The view from Fortingall: the worlds of the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 22 (2006) 35–85, at 68–71.

⁸⁰*Longer Scottish Poems I*, edd. Bawcutt and Riddy, 76, 336–9; *The Cherrie and the Slae*, ed. Wood, 86–9, where 'poik breik' (l. 2) is the 'poc(a) breac' or meal-bag' also found in Dunbar, and for 'cunary' (l. 3) read 'cun(n)art', 'danger'. Montgomerie may have lived in Argyll during his formative years, giving rise to his designation as *equus montanus*, 'the Highland trooper'; and subsequently in Galloway: *Poems of Alexander Montgomerie*, edd. Cranstoun and Stevenson i, xiv–xvii. Prof. Priscilla Bawcutt has pointed out to me that in the *Flyting* between Montgomerie and Polwart, Montgomerie is portrayed as a Highlander, and made the butt of the sort of insults Dunbar applies to Kennedy.

watermark. While John Leslie and George Buchanan both followed his lead in coupling ancient Scots with contemporary Gaels, and indeed did so more explicitly, the motives and outcomes were very different.⁸¹

As is well known, Buchanan saw Gaelic Scotland as a continuum offering evidence of elective succession and conciliar government that contributed significantly to his case for contractual monarchy and the legitimate deposition of the tyrannical ruler. Writing in the shadow of the Reformation, his treatment of religion broke new ground, latching onto the *Céli De* or Culdees of the early Celtic church as a prototype for Scottish presbyterianism. Yet in general Buchanan's attitude is utilitarian and detached. Acknowledgement of virtues such as these inspires no atavistic longing for a wholesale return to the Gaelic past. On the contrary, he endorsed the need for the Gaelic language to die out as part of the transition from 'rusticity and barbarism' to 'culture and civilisation'.⁸²

The relevant section in Leslie takes much of its substance from Boece, but gone is the premise of an effete and debased Lowland present. Instead, Leslie reworks his raw material within an interpretative framework inherited from John Mair, fully accepting of superior Lowland sophistication and political maturity, and conventional in its equation of civility with the south:⁸³

⁸¹Leslie's reworking of Boece is titled, in Dalrymple's Scots version, 'The Ald Scottis Maneris and Present Lykwyse, chieflie of thame quha occupis the Montanis called Hebrides', and includes the following: 'Behaulde now the maneris, with quhilkes the Scottis of ald war induct, bot quhy say I of ald? quhen thay, quha this day with vs speik the ald scottis toung, planelie have the selfe sam maneris. For quha this day ar, have hithirto keipet the institutionis of thair elderis sa constantlie, that nocht onlie mair than 2 thowsand yeirs thay have keipet the toung hail vncorrupte; bot lykwyse the maner of cleithing and leiueng, that ald forme thay vnchanget aluterlie have keipit' (Leslie, *Historie* i, 89, 95). For the Latin, see Leslie, *De Origine*, 56, 59. Buchanan's superior linguistic skills enabled him to say that the inhabitants of the Western Isles, 'speak the ancient Gaelic language a little altered' (Buchanan, *History* i, 42).

⁸²Mason, 'Civil society and the Celts', 110–18; Buchanan, *History* i, 9.

⁸³Leslie, *Historie* i, 97; Leslie, *De Origine*, 60.

Lykwyse gif ye behald another, ye and a far bettir parte of the realme ye sal undirstand; thair to be a people, nocht only in tounge bot in habit, eftir the politik maner [*rei politicae ordine*], and in conditionis and maneris of civilitie thay differ far from that vthir people. For as in speiche thay differ nocht far from thair nychtbouris the Inglise men, in cleithing, evin sa, and leiveng thay differ nocht verie far from tham of Ingland, of France, and of Flandiris ...

The marriage of Boece and Mair generates a degree of tension, even contradiction, but the overall effect is corrective. Many of the elements about which Boece rhapsodised survive, albeit usually in more muted form: ingenuity, artifice, and harmony with nature; moderation of diet, dress and fleshly pleasures (the last more prominent); rejection of idleness and vanity. The quality most emphasised is constancy, both as an absolute, and in the particular spheres of language and manners, to which Leslie, in the wake of the Reformation, and in contrast to Buchanan, can add religion. But here too the tone is guarded, the authorial standpoint sceptical.⁸⁴

Quhilke thing, in sa far, can nocht be laid as a faute to thame, that a certane singular prais of constancie thay appear justlie to have preueinit [surpassed] al natiounis with; thair constancie quhilke this day thay have keipit, is nocht worthie of sobir and slicht prais, chieflie that in the catholik religione far les thay defecte, and far fewar than vthiris of the mair politick sorte amang vs.

Whereas Boece's ancient Scots regarded warfare as a patriotic duty, and a showcase for their virtue and chivalry, Leslie dwells rather on how it was incessant among them, how it governed their dress, their lives during peacetime, and the raising of their children, and how it was fuelled by an unhealthy obsession with revenge, in which 'they war worthie of al correctione'. He traces continuities with the natural predeliction among modern Gaels for strife and sedition, which is 'to thair commoun weil maist pestilent'; and with their value systems, social structure, and overweening pride: 'they had levir [rather] be esteimed al nobilis, or at leist balde men of weir,

⁸⁴Leslie, *Historie* i, 96; Leslie, *De Origine*, 60.

albeit nevir sa pure [poor] they war, than housband men, or honest men of crafte, albeit nevir sa rache.’⁸⁵

Leslie’s conclusion, if somewhat cryptic and compressed, is very revealing.⁸⁶ In effect he issues a health warning about the very activity in which he has been engaging. Some unscrupulous writers have seized upon particular faults of the ancient Scots to blacken not only their character as a whole, but also (so the logic seems to run) that of all modern Scots: ‘thay accuse the hail Scottis men’. Leslie counters that this ignores the mixture of vice and virtue inherent in ancient Scots, and that it will not do to tar the contemporary and manifestly superior Lowlands with this brush. Used with discrimination, therefore, the ancient Scot topos can define Lowland progression through Highland stasis, but in the wrong hands, it can have the opposite effect, dragging the Lowlands down. This passage may thus offer a rationale for Leslie’s attempted reconciliation of Boece and Mair. Counterpointing Lowland sophistication with Highland barbarity might have its attractions, but the risk that it might rebound upon the former meant it should not be overcooked. Furthermore, an ultimate Gaelic ancestry for all Scots, if reprehensible, was also inescapable. A version of the same dilemma inherent in late-medieval Lowland articulations of Scottish origins⁸⁷ may have been equally relevant to portrayal of manners, and engendered a predisposition not to denude the first Scots, and by extension their present-day Gaelic counterparts, of all virtue.

This was particularly true of religion. The need to assert the historic independence of the Scottish church and its special relationship with Rome meant that those working in the chronicle tradition down to the Reformation, and in Leslie’s case beyond, sought to portray ancient Scots and their church as unwaveringly orthodox. The acceptance that Scottish Christianity had been

⁸⁵Leslie, *Historie* i, 90–6; Leslie, *De Origine*, 56–60.

⁸⁶Leslie, *Historie* i, 96–7; Leslie, *De Origine*, 60. Leslie may be taking as a loose model the chapter in which Mair scrutinises charges against the Scots made by earlier writers: Mair, *History*, 40–7.

⁸⁷Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism*, 123–45.

nurtured in a Hebridean cradle brought reflected glory to contemporary Gaels.⁸⁸ Hence the fact that, with the exception of Dunbar's diabolical tour de force, the wickedness which the canon ascribes to contemporary Gaels is secular in strain, and does not extend to charges of heresy or heathenism. That would seem to be a phenomenon born after 1560, and notably in the reign of James VI and I, which is rich in rhetoric condemning the Highlands as a spiritual void inhabited by Scotland's pagan aboriginals: 'these vnhalloved people with that vnchristiane language'.⁸⁹

The corpus of texts characterising late-medieval Gaelic Scots is also our richest source for another phenomenon, namely shifts in the terms used to identify the two main vernacular languages of late medieval Scotland, Scots and Gaelic, and their associated speech communities. This parallelism is suggestive of a link between them, and the primacy accorded by the literati to language in determining behaviour has already been noted. In asking what deeper explanations, if any, underlay the portrayal of Gaelic Scots in these texts, consideration of the data they furnish on identities is an avenue requiring exploration.

The phenomenon is of course well known and much commented upon, but has perhaps not been discussed before explicitly in relation to the stereotype.⁹⁰ To 'Fordun' Gaelic Scots—*gens insulana sive*

⁸⁸ *Letters of James V*, edd. Robert Kerr Hannay and Denys Hay (Edinburgh 1954), 162; Mason, 'Civil society and the Celts', 112–17; Cowan, 'Discovery of the Gàidhealtachd', 278.

⁸⁹ *Highland Papers*, ed. J. R. N. MacPhail, 4 vols. (Scottish History Society: Edinburgh 1914–34) iii, 302. See also above, n. 14.

⁹⁰ David Murison, 'Linguistic relationships in medieval Scotland', in *The Scottish Tradition*, ed. G. W. S. Barrow (Edinburgh 1974), 71–83, at 81; J. Derrick McClure, *Scots and its Literature* (Amsterdam 1995), 44–7; Charles W. J. Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland 1698–1981: The Geographical History of a Language* (Edinburgh 1984), 22–4; Michael Lynch, 'National identity in Ireland and Scotland, 1500–1640', in *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past*, edd. Bjørn, Grant, and Stringer, 109–36, at 129; Dawson, 'Gaidhealtachd', 283–4; Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism*, 125.

montana—are *Scoti*, and they speak *lingua Scotica*. Translation of *Scoti* and its cognates can of course be problematic. But since this and the preceding chapter's frames of reference are unambiguously Scotland the physical entity, and *nacio Scotorum* of which Gaelic Scots form a constituent *gens*, it must be that 'Scots' and 'the Scottish language' are what 'Fordun' intends.⁹¹ There is no evidence of departure in Wyntoun, or in Bower's verbatim rendition of this chapter. Elsewhere, however, in a passage apparently of his own authorship, Bower refers to Gaelic in Argyll as 'the Scottish and Irish language'.⁹² In entries for 1452 and 1455 respectively, the *Auchinleck Chronicle* applies Irish to the language of Gaelic Scots, and 'ereschery' or Irishry to Gaelic Scots themselves.⁹³

These shifts are confirmed in Dunbar, with Gaelic Scots, and their language, now both referred to as Irish. Beyond Dunbar, the uncomplicated Fordunian model mushrooms into a hydra, virtually all of whose heads are visible in Leslie and his Scots translator Dalrymple come the end of the sixteenth century. The language of Gaelic Scots is nowhere simply Scottish: it is Irish, or the ancient Scottish language, or 'Gaelic'. Their identity as Scots, of the sylvan variety, survives, but has been joined by Irish, ancient Scots, and 'Gael'.⁹⁴ The sixteenth-century corpus hints at a more consistent

⁹¹Pace David Horsburgh, 'When was Gaelic Scottish? The origins, emergence and development of Scottish Gaelic identity 1400–1750', in *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000*, edd. Colm Ó Baoill and Nancy R. McGuire (Aberdeen 2002), 231–42, at 232. The approach of 'Fordun' therefore stands in contrast to the excerpt from Solinus which he cites, where the possibility of *Scoti* meaning Gaels, and of *Scotia* as referring to or including Ireland, is of course present. However, note that the passage in Bartholomew which 'Fordun' mistakenly attributes to Isidore treats unambiguously of Scotland, not Ireland, and opens by stating that *Scotica gens* is 'in origin the same people that were formerly in Ireland'.

⁹²*Scotichronicon* iii, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, and D. E. R. Watt, 388–9: *linguam ... Scoticam scilicet et Hibernicam*.

⁹³Christine McGladdery, *James II* (Edinburgh 1990), 166, 168.

⁹⁴The sixteenth century sees the earliest coinages for Gaels and Gaelic, applied specifically by Scottish literati to Gaelic Scots. Mair, *History*, 361, refers to the territory 'of the Gaels' (*de Galeis*); Boece to *lingua Gathelia* or 'Gatelic' (Boece, *Scotorum Historiae*, fo. iiiii: cf. Mason 'Civil society and the Celts', 102, and McClure,

and concentrated use of 'Irish' with reference to language rather than people. Mair never describes Gaelic Scots as Irish, but always describes their language thus. This could suggest that the shift took place first with language: that Gaelic Scots came to be labelled Irish because they were understood to speak Irish. This would again be consistent with language as the prime determinant of behaviour.

This linguistic shift has naturally been explained in terms of another one, by which the language spoken by non-Gaelic Scots, named *lingua Theutonica* in 'Fordun', and 'Inglis' in vernacular contexts, steadily assumed greater social and political prestige between 1350 and 1500, as the preferred language of aristocracy and government. In 1494 it is apparently referred to for the first time by one of its speakers as 'Scottis', and in 1513 was lauded by Gavin Douglas as 'the language of the Scottis natioun'.⁹⁵ The substitution had taken time, nor was it yet complete. Dunbar, Mair and Leslie all continue to use 'Inglis' of the speech of Lowland Scotland.⁹⁶ Is the timescale indicative, not only of ambivalence concerning Scots' status vis à vis English, but also of a consciousness of Gaelic as the existing *lingua Scotica*, and of this as a reality or obstacle only gradually overcome? Certainly there is a sense of a 'changing of the guard' in the way in which the shifts in the terms applied to each language mesh chronologically, with *ca* 1500 as the point of transition. A passage in Blind Harry's *Wallace*, apparently adopting the perspective of the point of composition *ca* 1476 rather than of the War of Independence, links Gaelic and Scottish, while an Argyll charter of 1497, and a crown charter of 1505, use *Scotice* of Gaelic.⁹⁷ In 1498 Don Pedro de Ayala, Spanish ambassador at the court of

Scots and its Literature, 47) and Buchanan, *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*, fo. 9^r, to their speaking 'the ancient Gaelic language, a little altered' (*vetere Gallorum sermone paulum vtuntur*).

⁹⁵Murison, 'Linguistic relationships in medieval Scotland', 80–1; McClure, *Scots and its Literature*, 44; Jenny Wormald, *Court, Kirk and Community: Scotland 1470–1625* (London 1981), 59–62.

⁹⁶*Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt i, 204; Mair, *History*, 18, 48; Leslie, *Historie* i, 85.

⁹⁷Murison, 'Linguistic relationships', 78–9; *RMS* ii, nos. 2385, 2873.

James IV, noted that the king's 'Scotch language is as different from English as Aragonese from Castilian. The king speaks, besides, the language of the savages who live in some parts of Scotland and on the islands. It is as different from Scotch as Biscayan is from Castilian'.⁹⁸ Thereafter the evidence suggests the consistent application of Irish to Gaelic in Scotland, both by non-Gaelic and Gaelic speakers. Kennedy, perhaps taking his cue from Dunbar, does so; returning to Argyll in 1547 we find Gaelic as *Hibernice*; a Trossachs deed of 1564 involving Gaelic and non-Gaelic speakers uses Irish of Gaelic and Scots of the Lowland vernacular.⁹⁹ Acknowledgement of Gaelic as the 'national' language of Scotland now emanates from a consciously historicist perspective, in Mair's belief that 'not so long ago it was spoken by the majority of us', and in the assertion of Kennedy:¹⁰⁰

Bot it suld be all trew Scottis mennis lede.
It was the gud langage of this land,
And Scotas it causit to multiply and sprede.

The sixteenth century was not the first to employ 'Irish' as a label for Gaelic Scots and their language. The same was true of Thomas Grey (of language) and John Barbour (of people) in the second half of the fourteenth century. In neither case does the usage seem to bear any connotation other than that of a convenient descriptor.¹⁰¹ What was different come 1500 and after was the universality of the

⁹⁸*Early Travellers in Scotland*, ed. P. Hume Brown (1891: Edinburgh 1978), 39–40.

⁹⁹Dunbar, ed. Bawcutt i, 211; *Argyll Transcripts* made by 10th Duke of Argyll, in Glasgow University Scottish History Department, 10 July; National Register of Archives, *Breadalbane Muniments*, GD112/1/155. McClure, *Scots and its Literature*, 46, is in error in suggesting an instance of Gaelic as 'the Scottish tongue' in the mid-sixteenth century; see John Bannerman, 'Literacy in the Highlands', in *The Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland*, edd. Ian. B. Cowan and Duncan Shaw (Edinburgh 1983), 214–35, at 220.

¹⁰⁰Dunbar, ed. Bawcutt i, 211; Mair, *History*, 50.

¹⁰¹See chapters 2 and 3. The instance in Grey occurs in a context involving Ireland, while those who speak Irish in Scotland 'are called Scots'. For Barbour's use of 'the Irschery ... Off Arghile and the Illis', and of 'the Irschery off Irland', see *The Bruce*, ed. and trans. A. A. M. Duncan (Edinburgh 1997), 521, 689.

application, especially to language, and the parallel if far less clear-cut process involving the relabelling of 'Ingly's' as 'Scots'; suggesting that some kind of watershed in the articulation of Scottish identities had been reached. Otherwise, there seems little to differentiate the approach of John Mair from Thomas Grey. Gaelic is Irish, and its speakers in Scotland are Scots, with Irish denoting strictly and simply the linguistic community with whom the language originated. It was presumably in such a sense that speakers of Gaelic in Scotland referred to their language as Irish, in written Latin or Scots contexts.

Nor is a watershed particularly discernible in terms of representations of Ireland's role in Scottish origins. Down to the War of Independence, the Irish origin of the Scots was a commonplace, and intellectually unquestioned. Although the exigencies of war with England spawned some attempts, notably in the Declaration of Arbroath, 'to promote Scotland rather than Ireland as homeland of *Scoti*', the Irish orthodoxy and the matter of Dalriada remained substantially unchallenged by 'Fordun' or his successors, remaining as the bedrock of Scottish sovereignty and parity with England (the latter especially important after 1603), and of Scottish institutional distinctiveness in church and state, down to Father Thomas Innes's *Critical Essay* of 1729.¹⁰² Mair, followed by Buchanan, may have been highly critical of aspects of the traditional origin legend of the Scots, dismissing the Greek and Egyptian elements represented by Gathelus and Scota as spurious; but he accepted without hesitation, as did Boece, Leslie and Buchanan, that 'we trace our descent from the Irish'.¹⁰³

Unbroken consensus on Ireland's status as the original homeland of the *Scoti* did not debar some of the literati from loaded commentary on the trajectory of more recent Irish history. 'Fordun'

¹⁰²Dauvit Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Woodbridge 1999), 198; Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism*, 123–45.

¹⁰³Mair, *History*, 50; Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism*, 125; Mason, 'Civil society and the Celts', 102–3.

associated the onset of contemporary Irish decay and corruption with Ruaidhri Ó Conchobhair, last high-king of Ireland (d. 1198), 'who most improperly for a Christian king wished to have six wives at the same time', and whose lecherous polygamy had alienated both church and people:¹⁰⁴

So he was despised by them all. They refused to obey him in future, and to this day they decline to obey any king at all. Therefore that kingdom for long distinguished in the days of our ancestors is now, as you see, miserably divided into thirty or more kingdoms ... Was not the Irish nation (our neighbours and of the same race as ourselves) formerly wealthy and strong, observing laws and pursuing justice, the mother and foster mother of many saints, to hear whose wisdom, as is related in true histories, many men came from distant lands? After the lapse of a short time when it had spurned virtues of this kind, paralysed with indolence and given over to vices and idleness, not content with one king but through contempt of the laws and their allegiance recognising many kings, it was immediately thrown out of its prosperous cities and towns to the barren and waste regions in the remotest parts of its own kingdom, where it wretchedly lurks to this day in woods, rocks and caves, scarcely possessing food or clothing.

While aspects of the portrait recall what is said in Book II chapter 9, the emphasis there upon the instinctive loyalty of Gaelic Scots to their king creates the clearest of blue water between them and the Irish. Walter Bower, with his far more jaundiced view of Gaelic respect for law and authority, proved more willing to make the link, rewriting a passage in 'Fordun' eulogising the purity of Ireland's soil to comment sourly on the contrast with its people—'hearts full of deceit and wickedness with such a propensity for theft, plundering

¹⁰⁴*Scotichronicon* iii, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, and D. E. R. Watt, 6–7; *ibid.* ii, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 288–93. Cf. Seán Duffy, 'The Anglo Norman era in Scotland: convergence and divergence', in *Celebrating Columba: Irish-Scottish Connections 597–1997*, edd. T. M. Devine and J. F. McMillan (Edinburgh 1999), 15–34, at 15–16.

and murder’—who to him were indistinguishable in their behaviour from Gaelic Scots.¹⁰⁵

poisonous deeds are perpetrated to such an extent among the Irish and among highland and wild Scots (*Scoti transalpini et silvestres*) whom we call *catervani* or *ketherani*, that as it is written, ‘They lie in wait for someone’s blood. They hide their snares against the innocent for no cause; seizing anything of value they fill their caves with spoils and contrive deceit against their own lives’.

Some of Bower’s sixteenth-century successors made explicit the equation of Gaelic Scots and Irish, although they saw less need to retain his rancour. Where Bower may also be anticipatory is in his scepticism about the possibility of achieving a *res publica* grounded in the unanimous adherence of all its subjects to an agreed code of law, if that community diverged ‘in blood’ as sharply as did Scots and English, or, in the Scottish context, Gaels and non-Gaels. Mair, echoed closely by Leslie, asserts that it is ‘with the householding Scots that the government and direction of the kingdom is to be found, inasmuch as they understand better, or at least less ill than the others, the nature of a civil polity’.¹⁰⁶ Mair may have shared with Bower a belief that the only viable Scottish polity was a Lowland polity. Yet he eschewed Bower’s shrill anti-Gaelicism, while neither thought or chose to articulate this state of affairs by employing ‘Irish’ to deny Scottish Gaels status as Scots.

Articulations of Scottish identity exhibited a series of paradigm shifts across the middle and later middle ages, the cumulative effect being to alter the relationship between ‘Scottish’ and ‘Gaelic’; to gnaw away at the capacity of the terms *Scoti* and *lingua Scotica*, and their vernacular equivalents, to be used in the Scottish present to refer in whole, or in part, or at all, to ‘Gaels’ and ‘the Gaelic language’. Whereas for the older authorities drawn upon by ‘Fordun’ the *Scoti* of Scotland were Gaels, speaking Gaelic, to ‘Fordun’ himself—

¹⁰⁵*Scotichronicon* i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 46–9.

¹⁰⁶Mair, *History*, 49; Leslie, *Historie* i, 97.

apparently building upon Bartholomew—*Scoti* equally meant non-Gaels, speaking *lingua Theutonica*. A *Scotus* no longer needed to speak *lingua Scotica*. By the sixteenth century *lingua Scotica* or ‘Scottis’ referred exclusively to something other than Gaelic, the capacity of *Scoti* to refer to Scottish Gaels had been dissipated, and Gaels in Scotland could be described as inhabitants of *hibernica patria*.¹⁰⁷

Presented thus, the shifts in terminology seem to signify the sort of self-conscious determinism present in David Murison’s formulation, coined with reference to the linguistic situation *ca* 1500: ‘by ignoring the Highlands, state and speech after more than four hundred years had found unity, in the King’s Scots’.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the tentative and far from universal adoption of ‘Scottis’ rather than ‘Inglis’ suggests no sudden triumphalist annexation.¹⁰⁹ The matter at hand—the birth and growth of a Lowland Scottish identity, and what to call it—proceeded along lines which were primarily organic rather than manufactured, without the sense of drive and definition which would imply a single governing dynamo. The nearest candidate on view was a Stewart court to which several of the literati—Bower, Dunbar, Montgomerie—had connections, and whose attitudes towards Gaelic Scotland may also find expression in the observations of foreign emissaries such as Froissart and de Ayala, and in ritual enactments such as James IV’s tournament featuring the Black Knight, or, more blatantly, the baptism of James VI.¹¹⁰ Yet the Stewart dynasty’s attitudes and policies towards Gaelic Scotland before the reign of James VI and I sent out signals which were mixed and intermittent rather than constant and expulsive, and hence subversive rather than supportive of the carving out of a high road to Scottish statehood in the later middle ages. Nor did the labour pains

¹⁰⁷*RMS*iv, no. 1669.

¹⁰⁸Murison, ‘Linguistic relationships in medieval Scotland’, 81.

¹⁰⁹McClure, *Scots and its Literature*, 7–8.

¹¹⁰Louise Olga Frandeburg, *City, Marriage, Tournament: Arts of Rule in Late Medieval Scotland* (Madison, Wis. 1991), 237–40; Michael Lynch, ‘Queen Mary’s triumph: the baptismal celebrations at Stirling in December 1566’, *SHR* 69 (1990) 1–21, at 6–7.

find form as an ideological war of words waged across the Highland line over copyright control of ‘Scotland the brand’, for the only evidence in this vein is that generated by the flyting genre, and in neither register nor weight is it capable of bearing such an interpretation. Rather, struggle was internalised, as ‘Fordun’ and his successors grappled with the uncompromisingly Gaelic template which was their historiographical inheritance.

When it came to rationalising the transition from a scenario where all *Scoti* were Gaels, to one where it was questionable whether any *Scoti* were Gaels, the inherited orthodoxy of Scottish origins left very little room for manoeuvre, generating pressures and setting limits that endured across the later middle ages and beyond. These non-Gaelic *Scoti* could hardly be a different *gens* of separate origin: they could only be Gaels who had ceased to be Gaels.¹¹¹ How had this happened, and, if superiority came with it, whence did that superiority derive? In Scottish terms the obvious answer—contact with the ‘civilised’ south—effectively meant the absorption of English language, custom, personnel. While saying this was unproblematic for Bartholomew the Englishman, the nature of the case for Scottish sovereignty, and the climate of Anglo-Scottish antagonism which prevailed down to the Reformation, made it very hard for the native literati to own up to, a point confirmed by the counter-arguments of Kennedy and Boece, for whom the canker spreading from the south had involved the subversion of the original Scottish language. ‘Fordun’ is at pains to emphasise that his non-Gaelic *Scoti* do not speak ‘English’ and are not English. Come the sixteenth century John Mair had no qualms in saying that Lowland Scots spoke English—or that until relatively recently most Scots spoke Gaelic. The prophet of Anglo-Scottish Union’s own

¹¹¹However, there seems to be some evidence of manipulation of the Scottish origin legend as a response to this very problem. For the suggestion that a passage in ‘Fordun’ (*Scotichronicon* i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen, 46–7) draws a distinction between the followers of Gathelus and Scots in order to foreshadow or explain the two *gentes* of late medieval Scotland, see Nicholson, ‘Domesticated Scots and Wild Scots’, 5–6. Cf. Morét, ‘Historians and languages’, 60–1.

understanding of the Scottish past precluded the option of dismembering Scotland by positing an ethnic bond between Lowland Scots and English.¹¹² Beyond the Reformation, John Leslie followed Mair in emphasising cultural commonalities with the south based in the first instance on language: ‘the Ingles men, evin as the mair politick Scottis, vses that ald Saxone tounge ... quhilke is now called the Ingles tounge’.¹¹³ It was a tendency which made both men naturally sensitive to the need for simultaneous defence of the ancient Scots, a reflex already detectable in ‘Fordun’.¹¹⁴ Acceptance of southern superiority in manners still ran the risk of justifying English superiority in terms of political and ecclesiastical sovereignty, and the faint stirrings of Anglo-Scottish rapprochement did not put an end to the dangers inherent in this proposition. More fundamentally, neither ancient Scots nor contemporary Highlanders could be condemned or rejected outright if both were in some sense representative of Lowland Scots, as their primal and present-day ancestors respectively; the progenitor or *doppelgänger* looking out of the mirror which was the Highland line.

Yet within this aspect of the ‘Gaelic dilemma’—how to square a rigid template of Scottish origins with the dynamic course of subsequent history—lay a way out of the dilemma as a whole.¹¹⁵ It

¹¹²Pace Mason, ‘Civil society and the Celts’, 104.

¹¹³Leslie, *Historie* i, 85.

¹¹⁴Mair, *History*, 40–6; Leslie, *Historie* i, 96–7; above, nn. 12, 18.

¹¹⁵Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism*, ch. 6, argues that a diversity of contemporary *gentes* as in Scotland presented no dilemma for early modern constructions of nationhood, since these depended upon institutional continuity rather than ethnocentrism. Hence Lowland Scottish political culture would have been unaware of any contradiction between, on the one hand, its belief that Scottish sovereignty and distinctiveness in church and state derived from a Gaelic past, and, on the other, its espousal of a virulent anti-Gaelicism in the present. The view taken here is that in the Scottish case at least it is difficult to segregate ethnicity and national identity, since the Scottish origin legend dictated that people no less than institutions were Gaelic in origin. This generated a need to explain the subsequent fissuring of the *gens Scotica* in a way that would not jeopardise institutional integrity; a dilemma most neatly resolved by presenting contemporary Gaels as ancient Scots. Walter Bower for one clearly believed that ethnic diversity could fatally compromise legal homogeneity

was Hector Boece who formally opened up the interpretative avenue which gave vital room for manoeuvre to himself and his successors. This is not to agree with Cowan that Boece's elevation of ancient Scots paved the way for the wholesale rehabilitation of contemporary Gaels by the sixteenth-century historians. It is potentially significant that Boece stops short of stating outright that contemporary Gaels are role models incarnate for their effete southern cousins, whose only hope of regaining their original virtue lies in their re-Gaelicisation. It is hugely significant that his rehabilitation takes place within the confines of his introductory material. Once the narrative commences, as Morét has observed, the Gaels are accorded a thoroughly conventional censoriousness, or silence.¹¹⁶ There was a precise limit to the Boecian historiographical revolution: the point where his preface ended and his history proper began.

Cowan notes that 'Leslie's *Historie* contains very few specific references to the Gaels'; that Buchanan's *Historia* 'does not contain a disproportionate amount of information on the Gàidhealtachd, particularly in the more strictly historical period ... overall, to judge from his silence, the affairs of the north and west were largely irrelevant to his major concern with politics and religious reformation'; that Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie 'barely mentions the Gàidhealtachd at all in his *Historie* ... in all of the histories surveyed above surprisingly little attention is paid to the Highlands and Islands'.¹¹⁷ There is no call for surprise, for this was the real legacy Boece bequeathed his successors. Buchanan and Leslie did explicitly identify ancient Scots with contemporary Gaels, as Boece had not, but coupled this to a much more calculated and qualified

to the point of ruling out a unified Scottish polity (*res publica*), unless one could count on the sort of superhuman royal intervention he ascribes to David II.

¹¹⁶Morét, 'Historians and languages', 61–2. See also Boece, *Vitae*, 99, on Elphinstone seeking out 'the antiquities of the Scottish people, especially in the Hebrides, where are preserved the sepulchres of our ancient kings and the ancient monuments of our race'.

¹¹⁷Cowan, 'Discovery of the Gàidhealtachd', 273–4, 276–8.

conceptualisation of the virtues of the former. They followed Boece in treating the Gaels as preparatory matter, not part of the main text. It is difficult to follow Cowan's line that this elision carried the positive implication that the Gaels had ceased to be regarded as inveterate troublemakers.¹¹⁸ Such remained their role on the rare occasions the narrative acknowledged them. The rest was silence, a silence eloquent beyond words. The sixteenth century witnessed the coming to maturity of what had already been hinted at in Bower and Mair. A line was closing around a self-contained Scottish polity which was synonymous with the Lowlands, and looked to the Highlands for legitimisation of origins and validation of progress. Within Scottish historiography an orthodoxy had taken root which has gone largely unquestioned ever since. Gaelic Scots were a *sine qua non* for the Scottish past, an irrelevance to the Scottish present. They could not be party to the course of Scottish history 'in the more strictly historical period' when this was not their natural habitat. They were present in the past, absent in the present.

As Cowan has also noted, all of this has the look and feel of a dress rehearsal for an age yet to come.¹¹⁹ Both the literati and the policy makers of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries share a commonality of approach to the Highlands which seems too compelling to be accidental.¹²⁰ Did the common root lie in the political sphere: the suppression of the MacDonald Lordship of the Isles, and of Jacobitism? The extent to which the Lordship really was a dagger aimed at the heart of Stewart kingship remains debatable, while its final expiration in the person of Dòmhnall Dubh in 1545 makes for perhaps over-seductive symmetry with the beginning of

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 277–8.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 278–9.

¹²⁰H. M. Hopfl, 'From savage to Scotsman: conjectural history in the Scottish Enlightenment', *Journal of British Studies* 17 (1978) 19–40; *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge 2003), 263. On parallels between the Scottish historians of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, see Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment: the Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh 2001), 44–5.

the end of Jacobitism exactly two centuries later. Yet the vision of the sixteenth-century literati lends some substance to the symmetry in the waning of the motif of ‘Gael as traitor’ in the face of paradigms at once more benign, dismissive and exploitative, and based on the strategic and symbolic benefit of Gaels to a polity which they were no longer deemed to threaten. Foreign potentates courted James IV and V with one eye upon the Gaelic military might they seemed to command: at the intersection of English, Irish and Scottish politics around 1600, James VI sought to harness that might in the interests of a greater British imperium. James’s reign also anticipated the British Fisheries Society in its prescription of economic rationalism for the west through the commercial exploitation of the fruits of the sea, and the concomitant establishment of burghs. The Statutes of Iona envisioned an enlightened self-sufficiency for the Isles which bears comparison with the coming of the political economy to the north and west in the form of the crofting system. Long before the Hanoverians embraced Highlandism, the sixteenth-century Stewarts, notably James V and Mary, were dabbling in dressing themselves and their courts in aboriginal attire.¹²¹ Two centuries before Ossian and Adam Smith, the contemporary ancestor was already afoot on Scottish soil. But the first sowing of the stadialist seed, and the birth of Lowland—more properly, non-Gaelic—Scottish identity, takes us back beyond Fordun, at least as far as ‘Fordun’ and Bartholomew the Englishman, three centuries earlier still.

¹²¹Dawson, ‘Gaidhealtachd’, 288–9; *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis*, ed. the Iona Club (Edinburgh 1847), 28–9.