

11 From Print Culture to Parliament? Writing the ‘New Scotland’ into Reality

Scott Hames

In 1967, a Fife schoolboy entered a Scottish newspaper competition with an essay describing Britain at the turn of the millennium. ‘By 2000’, it confidently projected, ‘Scotland can, for the first time in history, have found her feet as a society which has bridged the gaps between rich and poor, young and old, intellectual and labourer’. Gordon Brown was 16 and had entered the University of Edinburgh by the time the prize money reached him. ‘A new generation is being born’, declared his winning essay for the *Scottish Daily Express*, and its distinctive national traditions and institutions ‘make Scotland ideal for pioneering the society which transcends political systems’.¹

Just as these phrases seem pregnant with the thinking of the later Prime Minister – as Paul Routledge observes, the teenage Brown ‘is already talking of “our people” like a politician, while rejecting political systems’² – the essay anticipates a whole universe of hopeful ‘New Scotland’ writing. The idealism of this vision, imagining a future Scotland apparently ‘beyond’ politics, would be carried forward into a considerable industry of writing and publication connected to the movement for devolution (both advocating it, ‘covering’ it and studying it). Central to the self-image of the young parliament opened in 1999, ‘New Scotland’ thinking would leave its mark beyond the world of journalism, commentary and scholarship, and come to shape the actual institutions of a reconstructed national politics. This chapter explores how New Scotland print culture helped to crystallise the norms, aspirations and alliances of Scottish devolution across the 1970s–90s. Long after the rise of broadcast media and television politics, it was newspapers, small magazines and a densely networked publishing scene – centred on universities and the radical/entrepreneurial print culture of a single

¹ Quoted by Paul Routledge, *Gordon Brown: The Biography* (London, 1998), p. 36.

² *Ibid.*

university campus – which did most to project a different Scottish politics into being.

Gordon Brown is an ideal guide to this terrain, being a key figure in Scottish politics since the mid-1970s, as well as an industrious writer and editor whose early political career emerges directly from the world of print. During his long stint at Edinburgh, Brown was a daring editor of *Student* newspaper and a leading figure on the Edinburgh University Student Publication Board (EUSPB), locus of a busy periodical scene which saw students (and staff) produce magazines ranging from cultural reviews to experimental literature and revolutionary theory. It was from this inky and influential perch that Brown launched his first political campaign in 1972, to become student Rector of the university, and in 1975 he edited *The Red Paper on Scotland*. Published by EUSPB, this was a landmark in the fusion of socialist and nationalist thinking which helped to define and galvanise the case for devolution. As with many political volumes, the connections and alliances forged in the course of producing the book were as important as its content. Although it became a shibboleth in later decades, at the time of its birth the *Red Paper* mainly signified the considerable achievement of corralling its 29 authors – all of them men – into the same cheaply printed book.

This chapter traces two stories: the emergence and influence, in Scotland, of a burgeoning culture of independent political print in the post-1960s period; and the genre-like qualities and norms of this New Scotland political writing, a vast but loose body of prose concerned with retailing, documenting and institutionalising a process of democratic rebirth. After sketching the rise of devolutionary nationalism in the 1970s–80s, moving in tandem with the growth of Scottish political publishing, journalism and academic study, we turn to examples from the 1990s–2000s, the period in which devolution made the transition from debate to concrete reality. By the 1990s, bolstered by nationwide Scottish opposition to Thatcherism, the promise of a *distinctive fresh start* had become central to the case for devolution: a change in political culture and institutions would transform the nation itself. An August 1991 *Scotsman* editorial demanded an 'Agenda for a New Scotland' from Neil Kinnock's Labour: 'The whole concept of a distinctive Scottish political future is certain to prove a crucial element of the election debate. It is only with the development of such a programme that the Labour Party will be in a position to appeal to the vast majority of Scots.'³ These arguments and ideas first gathered salience and

³ 'Agenda for a New Scotland', *The Scotsman*, 19 August 1991.

institutional clout on a much smaller scale, centred on the student publishing scene of the University of Edinburgh in the 1970s. We will come to recognise the tightly woven alliances that delivered a Scottish Parliament as being constructed on a prior layer of New Scotland print culture: a galaxy of writers, editors, novelists and columnists who had, by the time of New Labour, become Scotland's devolved elite-in-waiting.

New Scotland and/as Genre

This volume conceives genre 'across two vectors of categorisation', centred on publishing format (form; e.g. pamphlet) and text-type (content; e.g. satire). This framing is centred on properties of individual texts, and the legibility of 'family resemblances' between them. As the introduction notes (citing Mark Salber Phillips), modern literary criticism has largely moved away from genre for classification, to consider how the shifting norms and expectations of genre interact with factors outside the text. 'Abandoning the notion of genres as fixed classes', writes Alastair Fowler, 'criticism moved on in the 1980s and 1990s to discussing them as coded structures or matrices for composition and interpretation'.⁴ Widening the aperture of genre in this way opens the possibility of connecting with broader analyses of culture and society. In our own century, literary theorists increasingly 'conceive genre as social formations on the model of social institutions, such as the state or church, rather than on the model of biological species'; we come to speak of genre as 'a set of constitutive conventions and codes'.⁵ These structures are highly pertinent to the study of political communication and play an important role in the reproduction (and reframing) of political authority. In this sense, New Scotland print culture displays qualities of genre emphasised by the Australian literary theorist John Frow, who sees genre as 'doing' rather than classifying: a means of enacting cultural values and dispositions developed across time. 'In thinking about genre as a process', Frow argues, 'it becomes important to think about the conditions that sustain it Genres emerge and survive because they meet a demand, because they can be materially supported, because there are readers and appropriate conditions of reading'.⁶ This aspect of genre is strongly interdependent with the institutional matrix of 'print culture':

⁴ Alastair Fowler, *Remembered Words: Essays on Genre, Realism and Emblems* (Oxford, 2021), p. 184.

⁵ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms, Seventh Edition* (London, 1999), p. 109.

⁶ John Frow, *Genre* (London, 2006), p. 137.

the material, technological and social supports (which are also prompts) of political writing as it reaches and shapes its audience. New Scotland writing, journalism, publishing, criticism and scholarship is a rich example of this interdependence. Put simply, a novel set of political norms and aspirations was embodied and circulated in print, and then revised and reinforced over time. My focus here is on the 'conditions of reading' – conditions written and published into existence – which guide the attachments, aspirations and political horizons of the Scottish reader, and which shape the 'dimensions' and scale of a political project seeking to institutionalise a neo-national register of futurity. In the correct circumstances – embedded in the right networks of power and publicity – New Scotland writing could begin to crystallise the discursive norms of a new political culture.

Those congenial circumstances are, broadly, a liberal and self-consciously progressive project of national political renewal, at one rhetorical remove from political nationalism as such. The most distinctive quality of New Scotland writing is its soaring rhetoric of change and rebirth combined with a more limited vocabulary of self-government. Devolution is ultimately a unionist project, designed to prevent rather than deliver Scottish independence, but it developed its own form of small-n (or devolutionary) nationalism premised on representation and recognition (of Scotland's value and esteem within the UK). It thus involves a series of trade-offs and tightropes, premised on the intolerable condition of Scotland within an un-devolved Britain (with its 'democratic deficit', whereby Scottish votes are often immaterial to the outcome of UK general elections), and the unpalatable risks of independent statehood. As an unromantic discourse of the middle course, it lacks the charm and bravado of outright nationalism, but for this very reason feels compelled to make extravagant and emotive claims about its transformative capacity. Once we are in the thick of New Scotland discourse, it can be difficult to recall that devolution is essentially an *anti*-nationalist political strategy, intended to stymie and demobilise the electoral threat posed by the Scottish National Party. That strategy involves the development of a quasi-nationalist vocabulary and narrative in which parliamentary devolution could be treated as a bold reform of the British state and a 'fresh start' for Scottish political life.

Agenda for a New Scotland

We begin at the end, with the young Scottish Parliament (and new devolved order) affirming its credentials and flexing its potentialities. In 2005, the SNP MSP Kenny MacAskill edited *Agenda for a New Scotland: Visions of Scotland 2020*. It featured essays from politicians,

academics and commentators reflecting on the new devolved order established in 1999.⁷ This volume fits in a long chain of New Scotland books which position the country on the cusp of dramatic change, with a vastly different national future within reach.⁸ This habit of futurology (envisioning Scotland in 2020) is one of the most consistent strands in national political discourse since the 1960s, and gradually renders ‘Scotland’ as a trope of aspiration and deferral, even as its new political reality was becoming fully concretised (the parliament’s angular new home was formally opened in October 2004).

The collection’s preface by George Reid MSP – Holyrood’s sitting Presiding Officer, akin to Speaker of the House of Commons – welcomes the discursive openness of the volume, which ‘may make uncomfortable reading for those raised within rigid party structures’.⁹ The new Parliament is intended to stimulate a new politics, and Reid reminds us that the expensive new building ‘is not grand, or patrician’, but ‘built to facilitate the participative principles on which Holyrood is founded’, being designed (in the words of its Spanish architect) for ‘conversation’ and not ‘confrontation’.¹⁰ The semi-formal process by which the future parliament’s powers and procedures were thrashed out in the early 1990s, the Scottish Constitutional Convention, placed a strong emphasis on the new institution ‘doing politics differently’. The differences seem all the more ambitious in retrospect. The Convention scheme, which finally emerged in November 1995, included a proportional voting system and a serious aspiration (if not an enforceable mechanism) for achieving gender equality in the new Parliament.¹¹ But the coalition-making of the Convention was only possible because of a prior phase of public campaigning to which writers and editors made a key contribution.

⁷ Kenny McAskill (ed.), *Agenda for a New Scotland: Visions of Scotland 2020* (Edinburgh, 2005).

⁸ Other examples would include the TV tie-in Kenneth Cargill (ed.), *Scotland 2000: Eight Views on the State of the Nation* (Glasgow, 1987) and Gerry Hassan, Eddie Gibb and Lydia Howland (eds.), *Scotland 2020: Hopeful Stories for a Northern Nation* (Edinburgh, 2005). In a sense, the career of New Scotland futurology can be traced in miniature through its publishers: from the shoestrings of student publishing in the 1970s to the realm of powerful London think-tanks operating close to New Labour.

⁹ George Reid, ‘Foreword’, in McAskill (ed.), *Agenda for a New Scotland*, p. 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Brian Taylor, *The Scottish Parliament* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 45–59. The resulting blueprint, *Scotland’s Parliament, Scotland’s Right*, was jointly endorsed by Labour and the Liberal Democrats. (The SNP chose not to participate in the Convention, fearing a Unionist trap.) Before feeding into the Scotland Act 1998, this blueprint had still to enter Labour’s UK manifesto (in 1996, which added the requirement of a referendum endorsing both the Parliament and its tax-raising powers). In September 1997, a few months after the New Labour landslide, that referendum strongly ratified the Parliament (74% in favour).

MacAskill's introductory chapter to *Agenda for a New Scotland* reconstructs the creation of a 'Caledonian Consensus' in favour of devolution:

From petitions to journalism to poems to legislation and referendum ballots, the story of Scotland's democratic renewal can be traced through an enormous profusion of writing. This writing is not just a galaxy of paper 'messages' or statements pressing the issue; it also constructed the 'issue' and the arena in which it was debated, and helped to affirm and establish them as fixtures in national life.¹²

This nicely captures how devolution became a presence and factor in Scottish political life while remaining only an aspiration and goal – a 'constructed issue' and horizon of expectations largely written into reality, around which other constructions and alliances gradually took form. It was in the year of Brown's schoolboy essay – 1967 – that Scottish politics changed, with the emergence of the SNP as a credible electoral force in the Hamilton byelection. The Glasgow solicitor Winnie Ewing won Labour's safest Scottish seat that November, inspiring a frenzy of excited speculation about the rise of nationalism. James Mitchell notes the glee with which the Scottish press embraced the campaign even before the blockbuster result. In its closing week, journalist Magnus Magnusson wrote 'that "everybody – and use that term very loosely – wants the Nationalists to win". What he meant was that there was widespread support amongst Scottish journalists for an SNP victory. This was not a commitment to self-government but a desire for more excitement in what was seen as the stale world of Scottish politics'.¹³

National Media, National Politics

The appetite of Scottish journalists (and scholars) for a good local story has been an important factor. In his 1994 study of the Scottish press, Maurice Smith observed:

We are a nation without a Parliament, without a 'real' capital in terms of having a genuine seat of power. Yet all of us — Unionists and nationalists, socialists and liberals, and those with no distinct opinion — make an important distinction about our identity as Scots rather than Britons (and certainly not Englishers)....

¹² Kenny MacAskill, 'Romanticism to Realism – Creating a Caledonian Consensus', in MacAskill (ed.), *Agenda for a New Scotland*, pp. 15–25 (p. 15).

¹³ James Mitchell, *Hamilton 1967: The By-election that Transformed Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2017), p. 97.

That need to proclaim our difference as Scots is channelled through our press, and not just in the editorial opinion columns or letters' pages.¹⁴

In editorial terms, the Scottish press has always been dominated by pro-Union voices, but a tacit and 'structural' nationalism exerts a powerful force in civil society. It is less a patriotic 'pro-Scotland' consensus than a media whose structures, branding and distribution of attention reinforce a 'frame of reference which accepts Scotland as the national unit which national economic management and national politics are about'.¹⁵ In the period that national identity began to be politicised and mobilised in new ways, this structural framing was conjoined to a juicy and long-running political story. Writing in a period of sustained Labour dominance, Smith reports that 'many senior journalists concede their vested interest in an SNP which threatens to upset the political apple-cart. Bluntly, the SNP adds the paprika to the stew of Scottish politics, making them interesting, as well as "different"'.¹⁶

New Scotland on the News Stand

The added spice provided by the Hamilton shock was first registered on the Unionist side of Scottish politics, while Labour decided how to respond. It was Ted Heath's Conservatives who first pledged their support for some scheme of Scottish devolution, in the 'Declaration of Perth' in May 1968. The excitement of a serious third-party challenge meshed with other narratives of 1960s progress and reinvention. In the same month, a new magazine entitled *New Scotland* was launched by Esmond Wright, the new Tory MP for Glasgow Pollok.¹⁷ Copy advertising a special *Scotsman* feature in January 1969 captures this excited atmosphere and its commercial possibilities:

Scotland is in the midst of a period of great and exciting social, political and economic change and progress. To analyse, record and project this upsurge in our national life, *The Scotsman* is publishing a major two-part review under the title of 'State of the Nation'.... This comprehensive and authoritative survey of

¹⁴ Maurice Smith, *Paper Lions: The Scottish Press and National Identity* (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 1–2.

¹⁵ Steve Kendrick, 'Scotland, Social Change and Politics', in David McCrone, Stephen Kendrick and Pat Straw (eds.), *The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 71–90 (p. 82).

¹⁶ Smith, *Paper Lions*, pp. 103–4.

¹⁷ 'Scots review launched by Tory group', *Scotsman*, 14 May 1968. *New Scotland's* demise was reported a few months later (*Scotsman*, 8 November 1968), and Wright shortly left politics for a distinguished career as a historian of the United States.

the new Scotland should be in the hands of all who are concerned with the STATE OF THE NATION.¹⁸

Almost precisely the same pitch would appear in various newspapers in each of the devolving decades, from the 1970s to the 2000s (most successfully with the launch of the *Sunday Herald*, 1999–2018). It was especially prominent in the founding of short-lived periodicals such as *Question* (or *Q*) magazine (1975–77), and *7 Days* (1977–78). These responded eagerly to the prospect of cultural as well as political change accompanying devolution, and perhaps even Scottish independence. The prospect of national re-invention seemed almost limitless, and was both captured and stimulated in a variety of lively new publications. 'Scotland was having its 1960s in the 1970s', observes Owen Dudley Edwards,

and beyond established newspapers there were a variety of irreverent student prints and light-hearted academic confections. Bob Tait (another *Red Paper* contributor) had begun the decade with editorship of *Scottish International*, a far-ranging, free-wheeling challenge to all forms of Scottish conventionalism. Alexander McCall Smith, the future best-selling novelist, was the (Liberal) mastermind directing a hilarious, nationalist weekly *Q – Question* which resulted in Norman Buchan MP taking to epic poetry in reply. But as Buchan's case indicates, however hard the political hitting, many of these figures secretly knew that below their shiftings and flytings lay a common awareness in having Scotland come back to some self-respect.¹⁹

A common pattern in these titles is the leveraging of national representation into a sense of power and influence – by talking-up Scotland and its exciting future, these writers could feel themselves participating in the making of a different society.

Scottish International

One of the most influential and successful of these periodicals was *Scottish International* (1968–74), a creation of the Scottish Arts Council devised prior to the SNP breakthrough, but which made its debut just a few weeks after Hamilton.²⁰ First edited by Bob Tait, a 24-year-old graduate student fascinated by Marshall McLuhan, this cosmopolitan

¹⁸ 'State of the Nation', *Scotsman*, 17 January 1969.

¹⁹ Owen Dudley Edwards, 'From the *Red Paper* to Now', in McAskill (ed.), *Agenda for a New Scotland*, pp. 29–28, 32–33.

²⁰ This precis of *Scottish International* reproduces some (of my own) material from *Flyte*, the project magazine of the AHRC Scottish Magazines Network, published in 2022. <https://campuspress.stir.ac.uk/scotmagsnet/flyte/>

cultural review was wary of introverted nationalism but deeply interested in Scottish political change. Beginning on the cover of the launch issue, the magazine's first editorial claims that

independence from a large centre of power and influence is necessary for any people who have their own ways and want to communicate among themselves and to the outside world their particular image and likeness. This can be a problem for those north of Hampstead as for the people north of the Tweed.... We believe that people need their own publications through which they can create a presence for themselves and, perhaps, some influence too.²¹

This self-representing, self-determining impulse is a mainstay of the independent print culture that has followed in its wake. *Scottish International* published articles by politicians alongside critical meditations on contemporary nationalism by key figures, including Tom Nairn and Stephen Maxwell. A magazine of ideas rather than tactics, perhaps its strongest political contribution came in a major three-day conference held at the University of Edinburgh in April 1973. The 'What Kind of Scotland?' event featured a who's who of Scottish culture and politics, and is best remembered for the exhilarating debut of John McGrath and the 7:84 Theatre Company's *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil*. The prospect of constitutional change stimulated a range of fresh debates among socialists, nationalists and academic speakers, and was extensively covered in the magazine itself. As Rory Scothorne explains, *Scottish International*

sought to place Scottish culture in an international context and set international cultural trends – such as concrete poetry – in a Scottish one. It was clearly *national*, and represented an effort to create a distinctly national public for an intelligentsia whose cosmopolitan interests were already assumed. An increasingly radical, cosmopolitan intelligentsia, rooted in the universities, were thus identifying with the Scottish nation, and claiming it for themselves.²²

But public opinion did not keep pace with the dynamism of this print culture, and none of the titles mentioned by Edwards found a sufficient audience outside the intelligentsia who wrote for them. Lamenting the closure of *Q*, Neal Ascherson, one of the star journalists of this scene, observed that 'reviews and periodicals are the blood-vessels to the brain in a changing society with fresh political prospects'.²³ The trouble was

²¹ Editorial, *Scottish International*, 1 (January 1968), cover.

²² Rory Scothorne, *The Radical Left and the Scottish Nation: Print-Cultures of Left-Wing Nationalism, 1967–1983* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2021), p. 88.

²³ Neal Ascherson, 'Lament for Our Lost Reviews', *Scotsman*, 28 December 1977. Cited by Scothorne, *The Radical Left and the Scottish Nation*, p. 235.

that insufficient oxygen (of public interest) could be transmitted to the national brain (Scotland's rising political class) by the sluggish flow of stop-start publications, which mirrored the painfully slow legislative progress of devolution in the 1970s. Responding to the threat of the SNP, Wilson's Labour government launched a Royal Commission on the Constitution in 1969. The Kilbrandon Report of 1973 finally established some parameters for legislative devolution, just as the SNP's sporadic progress received another surge in the Govan byelection of that November, but by 1975–76 the threat of Scottish (and Welsh) nationalism paled beside various monetary and industrial crises engulfing the Labour government

Red Paper on Scotland

It was in this depressed atmosphere that Gordon Brown produced the most celebrated piece of writing and publication in the forging of McAskill's 'Caledonian Consensus': *The Red Paper on Scotland* (1975). In truth, the miniscule type of the book's 368 pages made its content less consequential than its masthead. The introduction to this volume emphasises the networks and relationships which underpin and enable political writing, and the *Red Paper* illustrates the importance of 'who' over 'what' in striking terms. Few of the book's arguments made a strong impression even at the time; its lasting achievement was Brown's feat of canny alliance-making, as bitter political foes found a space in which to advance, or at least recognise, elements of a common agenda. Owen Dudley Edwards – Brown's former tutor at Edinburgh – traces the book's impact to the radical print culture from which it emerged: 'The *Red Paper* had many contributors who were not in the Labour Party, but its most obvious political effect lay in converting – or, to be historically accurate, in reconverting – the Labour Party in Scotland to some form of Scottish nationalism. It also confronted the rising Scottish National Party, in the spring tide of its Westminster election surge of 1974, with insistence on eradication of poverty and pursuit of equality as goals never to be postponed'.²⁴ Rather than separatist nationalists and devolutionists operating in rival camps, a constructive ambiguity became increasingly possible, and congenial, in nascent New Scotland publishing. A left-nationalist intellectual milieu was printed into existence, in which key ideological differences could be suspended or postponed. This process itself was stimulated by writing published within the same campus scene: 'Gordon

²⁴ Edwards, 'From the *Red Paper* to Now', p. 30.

Brown had been converted to the unifying of socialism and nationalism when the poet-folklorist Hamish Henderson got him to terms with Gramsci, and fathered a student-led conference on the question, which produced a publication of relevant Gramsci writings in the EUSPB-published *New Edinburgh Review*.²⁵ The tiny student print culture from which Brown emerged – and to which he lent considerable dynamism, discipline and political skill – would in later decades become the pivotal literary imprint in modern Scottish literature. Scottish fiction of the post-war period divides neatly into before and after James Kelman, whose first novel *The Busconductor Hines* was published by Polygon – EUSPB’s literary imprint – in 1985. That story would require a whole other chapter, but alert readers will notice that many of the sources cited in this chapter were published either by EUSPB or Polygon.²⁶

Brown’s own contribution to the *Red Paper* is a piece of stirring and cogent rhetoric that mounts a strong socialist argument for devolution:

The irresistible march of recent events places Scotland today at a turning point – not of our own choosing but where a choice must sooner or later be made. A resurgent nationalism which forces on to the agenda the most significant constitutional decisions since the Act of Union is one aspect of what even the *Financial Times* has described as ‘a revolt of rising expectations’. But proliferation of industrial unrest and the less publicised mushrooming of community action bears witness to the sheer enormity of the gap now growing between people’s conditions of living and their legitimate aspirations.²⁷

While the stakes and expectations are high, Scottish party politics have shrunk from the challenge. Brown continues:

Yet the great debate on Scotland’s future ushered in by the Kilbrandon report and precipitated by North Sea oil and Britain’s economic crisis has hardly been a debate at all. Dominated by electoral calculations, nationalist and anti-nationalist passions and crude bribery, it has engendered a barren, myopic, almost suffocating consensus which has tended to ignore Scotland’s real problems.²⁸

Many of the *Red Paper* essays combine a rhetoric of possibility and untapped potential with bitter criticisms of the narrowness, cynicism and bad faith of the political process. Devolution is both bold and timid, huge and depressingly meagre. But if we can raise it above the narrow trenches of Scottish party politics, several authors suggest, devolution

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 30–31.

²⁶ See Scott Hames, *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution* (Edinburgh, 2020).

²⁷ Gordon Brown, ‘Introduction: The Socialist Challenge’ in Gordon Brown (ed.), *The Red Paper on Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1975), pp. 7–21 (p.7).

²⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

might be redeemed by treating it as a kind of imaginative pilot project – a piece of prefigurative politics set to defy convention and lead to some new break in the dominant order. For David Gow, devolution is both a miserable sham ('I consider the debate to have been undertaken overwhelmingly in self-interested, narrow, cosmetic terms that mask the heart of the matter') and a golden opportunity ('Scottish socialists have a unique chance of forging new models of theoretical development and beginning to try these out in practice').²⁹ Repeatedly, the uninspiring 'content' of devolution – a grudging reform of the British state and its electoral machinery – is shrugged aside in preference for the intellectual possibility it can be made to represent. Several generations of Scottish intellectuals would effectively appropriate devolution (and its democratic warrant) to mean something much grander than the Wilson or Callaghan governments ever envisioned.

But these larger possibilities only extended so far, and to only half the population. To revisit the *Red Paper* in 2022, Lesley Orr observes, is to 'enter a world in which the monopolization of public space and discourse by white men is a given – barely worthy of remark, far less critique. There is certainly some trenchant analysis of the ills besetting Scotland, and yet the prevailing tone is surprisingly optimistic and confident about the prospects for a socialism shaped around notions of a traditional unionized industrial working class and a statist planned economy'.³⁰ For all its emphasis on fresh prospects and new challenges, the fundamental outlook of the book (Orr argues) was already outdated:

The absence of feminist voices is emblematic of this book's narrow channels and underlying nostalgia. For all its vaunted openness to creating a forum for articulating alternative visions of a socialist nation, the overall impression remains of a pretty homogenous group of men, at ease in their unexamined masculinist privilege, operating with taken-for-granted statist assumptions about the enduring nature of class, labour, work and the dynamics of power in a fast disappearing industrial economy, at the fag-end of Empire. The silences resound.³¹

The limits and omissions of Scotland's 'new' horizons are striking. But within the cosy precincts of Scottish print, progress and unity were the

²⁹ David Gow, 'Devolution and Democracy', in *The Red Paper on Scotland*, pp. 58–68 (pp. 60, 67).

³⁰ Lesley Orr, 'Reflections on revisiting *The Red Paper on Scotland*', *Bella Caledonia*, 16 May 2022. <https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2022/05/16/reflections-on-revisiting-the-red-paper-on-scotland/>

³¹ *Ibid.*

themes. Edwards credits the (historically conservative) Scottish press with a highly constructive influence in expanding the 1970s debate:

‘The *Scotsman* played a crucial role. Its own tradition had been fairly firmly Unionist since 1886, when it broke with Gladstone over Irish Home Rule, but it showed some of the most receptive rethinking in or out of party ranks. [Gordon] Brown’s personal friends and admirers included its Education editor (and future editor of the *Glasgow Herald*) Henry Reid; the paper’s Nationalists acquired the forceful voice of Colin Bell; Neal Ascherson’s return to Scotland brought a deeply sensitive and cosmopolitan listener, ready to give positive response to new Scottish ideas, where justified.’³² ‘Never before had a newspaper flown its colours from the nationalist mast with such enthusiasm’, writes Maurice Smith. ‘[*Scotsman*] editor, Eric Mackay, once thumped the table at a BBC Governors’ function in Edinburgh’s upmarket Prestonfield House Hotel and declared to his baffled English hosts: “My job is to unite Scotland!”’³³ Edinburgh politics lecturer Henry Drucker noted the commercial dimension of this pattern across the 1970s, as ‘devolution became and remained a major public issue’, feeding a virtuous cycle for greater press attention, and the consolidation of constitutional change as the central drama of Scottish politics and its coverage in the media.³⁴ But the enthusiasm of journalists, magazine editors, academics, poets and theoreticians takes you only so far.

Political Wreckage and New Beginnings

By late 1976 the ailing Callaghan government was forced to accept amendments to its Scotland and Wales Bill which made the creation of Assemblies in Cardiff and Edinburgh conditional on referendums in both countries. By January 1978, after the loss of Labour’s majority and further headwinds within the party (opponents of devolution being led by future leader Neil Kinnock), Callaghan was forced to accept the infamous Cunningham amendment which required not only a majority of voters but 40% of the total electorate to support the Assembly schemes proposed in forthcoming referendums in Scotland and Wales. The result, in March 1979, saw a small majority of Scottish votes in favour, but falling well short of the 40% threshold (32.9%). (In Wales the Assembly was rejected comprehensively, with a vote of 80% against.)

The reaction in New Scotland print culture was close to despair. Writing in the *Scotsman*, Neal Ascherson was elegiac for the promises dashed by the voters:

³² Edwards, ‘From the *Red Paper* to Now’, p. 32. ³³ Smith, *Paper Lions*, p. 32.

³⁴ Henry Drucker, *Breakaway: The Scottish Labour Party* (Edinburgh, 1978), p. 32.

We are talking about a national tragedy. At last, after the dead years, the Assembly project was beginning to bring the Scots out of their passivity and resignation. However cynically devolution was conceived, its approaching glow was beginning to melt the ice of a century. Faces were turning towards this promise, minds were aligning themselves to this possibility.... The mound of wreckage is also a monument to years when the Scots began to realise what they might do for themselves, with Britain, with Europe. Its very size changes the political landscape, which means that it has thereby changed our future.³⁵

This final image is the most telling, where even the thwarting of the projected future has achieved an irreversible change. But the initial response in the cultural reviews and poetry magazines of the period was bitter self-recrimination. *Crann-Tàra* – predecessor of *Radical Scotland* – castigated 'a drowning nationality clutching at a straw, a peasant culture wallowing in its own defeat, enjoying the attention of other people's scorn'.³⁶ But within months of the failed referendum, new journals and reviews were launched from the disaster's ground-zero in Edinburgh. Later in 1979 EUSPB would publish *Cencrastus*, a brainy Scottish cultural review created by graduate students with assistance from English lecturer Cairns Craig, intended to counter 'both a deep political pessimism and crisis of confidence in Scottish culture at that moment'.³⁷ In 1980 emerged the short-lived *Bulletin of Scottish Politics*. This assembled an (all male) dream-team including Tom Nairn, Neal Ascherson, poet Edwin Morgan and the SNP intellectuals Christopher Harvie and Jack Brand, and sought to unify Scottish civil society behind a new campaign for Scottish devolution. Alliance-building was central to the task, as the discursive bridge-building of the 1970s gave way to more overt coalition-making.

Radical Scotland

A later magazine printed by EUSPB played a leading role in the social and ideological makeup of this coalition.³⁸ *Radical Scotland* (1982–91) would become the most influential title focused on reviving devolution as a political possibility in the 1980s. It took up the mantle from *Crann-Tàra* in the summer of 1982, and after a 1983 relaunch, was produced in

³⁵ Neal Ascherson, 'Goodbye to All that', *Scotsman*, 21 June 1979.

³⁶ 'After the 79' [Editorial], *Crann-Tàra* 8 (Autumn 1979), p. 2.

³⁷ Eleanor Bell, 'Magazines, Devolution and Makars – Institutions of Scottish Literature', in Gerry Carruthers (ed.), *A Companion to Scottish Literature* (Hoboken, NJ, 2024), pp. 324–35 (p. 331).

³⁸ This precis of *Radical Scotland* reproduces some (of my own) material from *Flyte*, the project magazine of the AHRC Scottish Magazines Network published in 2022. <https://campuspress.stir.ac.uk/scotmagnets/flyte/>

Edinburgh by a co-operative under the editorship of Kevin Dunion (1983–85) and then Alan Lawson (1985–91). Many of its leading figures were members of the SNP's 79 Group – a left-wing faction advocating class politics and 'Scottish Resistance' to Tory rule – who were proscribed from the SNP in the autumn of 1982. Though drawing on SNP-aligned thinkers and arguments, *Radical Scotland* mirrored the logic of the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly (founded in 1980) in seeking common cause with the electorally dominant Labour party, thus crossing the most bitter divide in Scottish politics. Its opening editorial (in the 1983 relaunch) declared that '*Radical Scotland* should appeal to devolutionists in the Labour Party, left-wing nationalists, and other elements of the radical left'.³⁹ Bridging divides between rival parties and traditions, *Radical Scotland* aimed to construct an irresistible pro-devolution consensus in Scottish politics, speaking notionally from the socialist left but aiming to shape mainstream public opinion.

Figures in its orbit, which saw a remarkable degree of co-operation and co-ordination across party lines, understood the agenda-setting power of the national 'frame' all too well. In an October 1980 strategy letter (advising the newly formed Labour Campaign for a Scottish Assembly), Neal Ascherson urged pro-devolution Labour MP George Foulkes to 'be on the lookout for every chance of emphasising the Scottish dimension':

Anything which heightens the profile of Scottish politics is almost bound to have spin-off effects creating a climate of opinion more favourable to an Assembly. The substantial support for an Assembly in 1974/78 was built largely on the sheer publicity level of Scottish, as distinct from British, politics in those years.⁴⁰

Radical Scotland became a key locus of this publicity and the place to be for ambitious Scottish writers and politicians who saw their futures in devolution. The masthead of contributors reads like a who's who of the emerging Scottish elite, and includes major political figures such as Jack McConnell and Alex Salmond (two future First Ministers of Scotland, from Labour and the SNP, respectively), political heavyweights of different generations including Tam Dalyell, Stephen Maxwell and Joanna Cherry, and luminaries of Scottish culture and journalism including Andrew Marr, Billy Kay, James Robertson and Ruth Wishart. *Radical Scotland* published its final issue in the summer of 1991, with Alan Lawson noting that 'the Scottish political situation has developed so

³⁹ 'Editorial: A Hope and a Prayer', *Radical Scotland*, 1 (February–March 1983), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Neal Ascherson, 'Next steps for the LCSA', 16 October [1980]. Scottish Political Archive at the University of Stirling. SPA/GF/LCSA/2.

much in the years of the magazine's existence that the uniqueness of RS and its line has been overtaken by events'.⁴¹ Having largely achieved the strategic goals set out by activist-academic Christopher Harvie in 1983 – cementing the outlook and electoral strategy of a 'Scottish devolutionist left', organising home rule politics as 'a "popular front" against the Tories', and forging 'a Scottish politics so dislocated from Westminster's norms that Scottish representatives are forced into a national role'⁴² – there was good reason to feel the main arguments had been won. Such confidence might seem premature given John Major's electoral victory in April 1992, but the foundation had been laid for a clear pro-devolution consensus in Scottish media and civil society. In these magazines we see freelance writers half reporting and half creating the Scottish political arena in which the renewed demand for Scottish democracy could receive its popular warrant.

Cottage Industry: Studying Scottish Politics

Running alongside this interplay between Scottish politics and media, each reinforcing the other, was an emerging scholarly industry for studying the Scottish Question. Reviewing a spring tide of Scottish political writing in 2001 – no fewer than 10 books on the new parliament – James Kellas observed that 'devolution was a turning-point not only for British politics but also academic studies and journalism. Research grants suddenly became available to study Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the regions of England, and soon the fruits of that research were being added to publishers' lists'.⁴³ Kellas would know, having made his own name with a classic study of *The Scottish Political System* much earlier in the same process (1973), when the rise of nationalism and prospect of Scottish self-government (in whatever degree) stimulated a strong demand for new scholarship on these topics.⁴⁴ As we have seen, in a real sense the Scottish Political System was written into existence during this period – not only in Royal Commissions and legislation, but in the continual accumulation and reproduction of arguments *why* it should exist (or already did exist), which gradually became the sinews and nervous system of a living political culture.

⁴¹ 'Why This Is the Last Issue' [Editorial], *Radical Scotland*, 51 (June–July 1991), p. 3.

⁴² Christopher Harvie, 'Tasks for Self-Governing Socialists', *Radical Scotland*, 2 (April–May 1983), p. 16.

⁴³ James G. Kellas, 'Scotland: Politics and Devolution', *Parliamentary Affairs* 54.3 (July 2001): 550–52 (p. 550).

⁴⁴ James G. Kellas, *The Scottish Political System* (Cambridge, 1973).

This applied to the subject's academic institutionalisation across the 1970s–90s. One year after Brown's *Red Paper*, EUSPB published *Our Changing Scotland: A Yearbook of Scottish Government 1976–77*, the work of enterprising political scientists from across George Square. Published as the annual harvest of Edinburgh University's new Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland, this yearbook series would gradually evolve into the country's leading academic journal focused on public policy and current affairs (*Scottish Affairs*, 1992–present). The introduction to its opening number (published 1976) captures the shift from discourse into institutions, along with an accompanying irony:

Scotland is in a perplexing place at present. It is on the threshold of a major constitutional reform which will greatly enhance its political life and which will change the course of its history in unpredictable ways. The debate about the nature of this change must rate as one of the most important since the Union. A basic assumption of the debate seems to be that devolutionary settlement is inevitable – and certainly no political party is committed to anything else. Given this, it is difficult to generate excitement about what is being publicly contested – namely, institutional arrangements and relationships. And until the institutions are formed there is no real forum for the discussion of political issues in a Scottish context.⁴⁵

In the gap between expectancy and established institutions, it fell to writers, editors and academics to erect the scaffolding for a devolved civic order. This problem became more acute after the failed 1979 referendum, when the 'inevitable' was suddenly cancelled. A few months later, the editors of the 1980 edition note that 'all our previous Yearbooks were written when there was a prospect that a directly elected Assembly would sit in Edinburgh to control the Scottish Office. This prospect was the central political concern of Scottish Government [from 1974–79].... This hope or spectre is now passed', but there was still much for sociologists and political scholars to analyse, and a striking number of them played an active role in later pro-devolution civic activism.⁴⁶

'Writing about Scotland Became Itself a Form of Nationalism'

An explosion of Scottish literary and historical scholarship in the 1980s – much of it both published and reviewed in small magazines such as

⁴⁵ C. H. Allen and H. M. Drucker, 'Our Changing Scotland', in C. H. Allen and H. M. Drucker (eds.), *Our Changing Scotland: A Yearbook of Scottish Government 1976–77* (Edinburgh, 1976), pp. 5–16 (p. 5).

⁴⁶ N. Drucker and H. M. Drucker, 'Scotland: Back into the Closet?', in N. Drucker and H. M. Drucker (eds.), *Scottish Government Yearbook 1980* (Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 1–10 (p. 1).

Cencrastus, *Radical Scotland* and *Edinburgh Review* – expanded the field of academic research while linking it productively to a growing 'non-party' campaign to revive the cause of self-government. 1979 had proved to be a stimulus, not a terminus. In 1981 T. C. Smout and T. M. Devine – twin giants of their respective eras in Scottish historical scholarship – founded the journal *Scottish Economic and Social History*, which later became the *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* (2004–present). In the Series Preface to Polygon's seminal *determinations* series – the main publishing outlet for this wave of writing into the 1990s – Cairns Craig observed that 'the 1980s had proved to be one of the most productive and creative decades in Scotland this century – as though the energy that had failed to be harnessed by the politicians flowed into other channels. In literature, in thought, in history, creative and scholarly work went hand in hand to redraw the map of Scotland's past and realign the perspectives of its future'.⁴⁷

In this 1970s–80s period, according to Edwards, 'Scottish history was transformed from sparse outcrops of aridity and kitsch into an inspirational abundance all the more valuable for disputation over what seemed every inch'.⁴⁸ Even participating in this growth of debate reinforced its framing, and cemented its legitimacy both inside and outside the universities:

One very healthy result was that where it had looked as though professional history would be negative, priding itself on destruction of nationalist or socialist myth, the act of writing about Scotland became itself a form of nationalism. False nationalist myths were still the most appropriate targets; but even Unionist historians realised that the subject itself asserted the importance of being Scottish. History in Ireland had found itself taught chiefly in protest against official myths. History in Scotland found that it flourished because people were no longer ashamed to discuss the subject.⁴⁹

This pattern extended into the 1990s and beyond, with the success of the *determinations* series and the outstanding growth of scholarship on Scottish art, music and literature.⁵⁰ David McCrone's *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (1992) sparked almost a new discipline, while taking up some myth-busting threads of earlier historical and cultural commentary.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Cairns Craig, Series Preface to the Polygon *determinations* series (1989–1994?), cited here from Tom Gallagher (ed.), *Nationalism in the Nineties* (Edinburgh, 1991).

⁴⁸ Edwards, 'From the *Red Paper* to Now', pp. 32–33. ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Landmarks include Cairns Craig's (general editor) four-volume *History of Scottish Literature* (Aberdeen, 1987–88); Duncan Macmillan, *Scottish Art 1460–1990* (Edinburgh, 1990); John Purser, *Scotland's Music* (Edinburgh, 1992).

⁵¹ David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London, 1992).

As a field of research and object of analysis, ‘Scotland’ itself had been discursively transformed: both expanded and reinvented through the industry of writers, journalists and editors working in tandem with political developments. This ‘Scotland’ was a horizon of possibility and deferral which never quite needed to come true, and operated most effectively as a mobilising dream or pledge – for further discourse, greater dialogue, and ‘more research needed’.

An imaginative gap began to open between the New Scotland of scribblers’ dreams and the less inspiring features of really existing Scotland revealed by social scientists. By the time devolution had been fully achieved, New Scotland discourse was cemented into the everyday frame of reference of Scottish society, but also consecrated into a soaring national mythos. On the day of the first elections to the new parliament, the *Scotsman* editorial heralded ‘The defining moment for a new Scotland’:

We need not talk any longer of our potential. We must realise it We have agreed, no matter which political party we plan to support, that life will be better when our unique place within the British system is formally recognised. Recognition is here. It is our duty to use it. ... This is the first day of the rest of our history. *The Scotsman* hopes it will see the delivery of a resounding vote in every part of the country. That alone can produce the confident relationship between Westminster and Holyrood which will reward Scotland and strengthen the United Kingdom.⁵²

This final and crucial point – whereby the realisation of the New Scotland will strengthen rather than extinguish the United Kingdom – may jar in the ears of contemporary readers more accustomed to a nationalism of sovereignty (not ‘recognition’). It is a telling illustration of the devolutionary pattern combining a stirring rhetoric of national destiny and rebirth, and the more limited character of the constitutional reform at issue.

New Scotland: A Renewable Aspiration

The gap between promise and reality brings us back to Gordon Brown. Writing in the New Labour years, Owen Dudley Edwards contrasts the freedom and idealism of 1970s student politics with the Blair–Brown government’s introduction of tuition fees:

It is an indictment of the Chancellor and his colleagues that [today’s] students will find it much less easy to draw together the crowd of student printers,

⁵² ‘The Defining Moment for a New Scotland’, *Scotsman*, 6 May 1999.

journalists, artists, visionaries, cranks, polemicists, votaries, sidekicks, groupies, new-worlders, neo-traditionalists, jokers, zealots, &c, &c, who had brought into being and maintained the Edinburgh University Student Publications Board. The Board is defunct; the publication wing, ultimately branded as Polygon, was sold ten years afterwards to Edinburgh University Press, who resold it over fifteen years later to Birlinn; and students today have neither time nor money for such achievement, deprived as they are of their grants, forced into frequently demeaning jobs while getting themselves through their university courses. It is from that point of view that the *Red Paper* mocks its original maker in his present existence.⁵³

But the dreams of the 1970s were also aspirations, and never free from personal ambition. The bohemian print culture Edwards evokes was also a ladder to power and success. Maurice Smith observes that 'with the home rule debate emerged a new generation establishment, of liberal, anti-Tory hue. It is the same generation which now runs many of Scotland's cultural and political institutions, including the Scottish press. Back in the 1970s, its members were ambitious and youthful; for many, a devolved Assembly represented the chalice from which all future power might be imbibed'.⁵⁴ It was through writing and publishing that they constructed their power, as part of a wider societal process for reconstructing a national political culture, and – with it – new sources of national political power and prestige. For Brown this path led to London and British politics, where the New Scotland – or at least, a new Scottish Parliament – was delivered as an electoral pledge of 'New Labour, New Britain'.

And in 'New Scotland' itself? There is now a daily newspaper in favour of Scottish independence, *The National*, but it was founded to extend and consolidate a mobilisation which preceded it (that of the Yes movement of 2012–14).⁵⁵ The website (and occasional newspaper) *Bella Caledonia* (2007–) has closer links to New Scotland print culture (its initial tagline was 'fresh thinking for the new republic'), and it has a more critical orientation to the Scottish cultural establishment (though many of its readers and contributors can also be found in the mastheads of the 1980s and 1990s).⁵⁶ A quarter-century into devolution, kindly and cosmopolitan aspiration remains the central trope of Scottish politics, especially under the most bookish of First Ministers.⁵⁷ Surging to power

⁵³ Edwards, 'From the *Red Paper* to Now', p. 29. ⁵⁴ Smith, *Paper Lions*, p. 33.

⁵⁵ *The National*, www.thenational.scot/

⁵⁶ *Bella Caledonia*, <https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/>. See also, Mike Small (ed.), *Bella Caledonia: An Anthology of Writing from 2007–21* (Edinburgh, 2022).

⁵⁷ This concluding section draws on Scott Hames, 'The Politics of Scotland's Bookishness', *New Statesman*, 12 March 2022.

with the defeated Yes movement of 2014, the high progressivism of Nicola Sturgeon's government often recalled New Scotland thinking of the 1980s and 1990s. Grand pledges to end child poverty, vanquish educational inequality and achieve carbon neutrality by 2045 (five years ahead of England) set ambition to maximum verging on utopian, and well beyond the powers of Holyrood. Framed by the open-ended dynamic of devolution (established in the print culture of a previous generation), these promises are more about aspiration than delivery, inviting voters to travel hopefully on the indefinite journey toward Scottish independence.

Lacking the muscle (or borrowing powers) of Whitehall, the Edinburgh government uses image and ethos to conjure a futurity beyond its own powers. We are closer here to 'cultural development' than the heavy lifting of the (truly transformative) developmental state described by David Edgerton in his studies of a post-1945 New Britain.⁵⁸ In 2020s Scotland, progress is measured by cultivating the right values and humane capacities: not change itself but the desire to dream well. In this respect, 'New Scotland' continues to authorise a politics of imaginative deferral, a congenial environment for the creative and projective powers of writers, journalists and scholars.

⁵⁸ David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation* (London, 2019).