# *Introduction*

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## CHANGING THE AXIS

To compare modern Irish and Scottish poetry is to change the critical axis. It is to unsettle categories like the 'English lyric' or 'Anglo-American modernism'. We might begin with two Irish-Scottish poetic encounters a century apart. The Rhymers' Club, which foregathered in 1890s London, laid crucial foundations for modern poetry in English, and established the prototype for later avant-garde coteries. The club's make-up was strikingly 'archipelagic': a term that will recur in this introduction. The Rhymers' Club marks a space where literary and cultural traditions from different parts of the British Isles came into play; where late nineteenth-century aestheticism met Celticism; and, more materially, where Irish, Scottish and Welsh poets competed for metropolitan attention – W. B. Yeats with particular success. In 'The Tragic Generation' (1922), his memoir of the 1890s, Yeats recalls how he once outmanoeuvred the Scottish poet John Davidson:

> An infallible Church, with its Mass in Latin and its mediaeval philosophy, and our Protestant social prejudice, have kept [Ireland's] ablest men from levelling passions; but Davidson with a jealousy which may be Scottish, seeing that Carlyle had it, was quick to discover sour grapes. He saw in delicate, laborious, discriminating taste an effeminate pedantry, and would, when that mood was on him, delight in all that seemed healthy, popular, and bustling . . . He, indeed, was accustomed . . . to describe the Rhymers as lacking in 'blood and guts', and very nearly brought us to an end by attempting to supply the deficiency by the addition of four Scotsmen . . . I can remember nothing except that they excelled in argument. He insisted upon their immediate election, and the Rhymers, through that complacency of good manners whereby educated Englishmen so often surprise me, obeyed, though secretly resolved never to meet again; and it cost me seven hours' work to get another meeting, and vote the Scotsmen out.[1]

In contrast, Seamus Heaney's poem 'Would They Had Stay'd' mourns the absence of four Scottish poets: Norman MacCaig, Iain Crichton Smith, Sorley MacLean and George Mackay Brown. Attaching a symbolic deer to

each dead poet, and evoking images from their work, Heaney holds them in a collective elegiac embrace. The poem ends:

> What George Mackay Brown saw was a drinking deer
> That glittered by the water. The human soul
> In mosaic. Wet celandine and ivy.
> Allegory hard as a figured shield
> Smithied in Orkney for Christ's sake and Crusades,
> Polished until its undersurface surfaced
> Like peat smoke mulling through Byzantium.[2]

What do these encounters suggest about relations between modern Irish and Scottish poetry? On the one hand, we might read them as unique occasions. 'Would They Had Stay'd' primarily expresses personal sorrow; Davidson later conceded that Yeats possessed 'blood and guts'; and any opposition between macho Scottish and 'effeminate' Irish poetics must reckon with the Celticist literary transvestism of the Scot William Sharp, pen-named 'Fiona Macleod'. On the other hand, Ireland conditions the terms in which Yeats and Heaney respond to Scottish poet-contemporaries. Thus Yeats contrasts Scotland's 'levelling passions' (implicitly ascribed to non-conformism) with Irish traditionalism (explicitly ascribed to Catholicism and Anglo-Irish/Anglican hauteur). Davidson's poetry, as in 'Thirty Bob a Week', often has a socialist or social-realist cast. Voiced by an underpaid clerk, the poem may hit at Yeats: 'With your science and your books and your the'ries about spooks, / Did you ever hear of looking in your heart?'[3] As much a manifesto of the 1920s as a memoir of the 1890s, 'The Tragic Generation' sets symbolic 'intensity', pursued by Rhymers like Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons and Yeats himself, against all 'popular' verse. Davidson personifies the latter since he extroverted his talent, never acquired 'conscious and deliberate craft', and so 'lacked pose and gesture'.[4] Yet Scotland is more deeply at issue. Not only had Yeats a broad anti-Scottish bias that extended to Presbyterian Ulster,[5] he always blamed Walter Scott, even Burns sometimes, for debasing the currency of poetry during the nineteenth century. As for the future: Davidson, whose London scenes and voices influenced T. S. Eliot, stands at the beginning of emergent poetic trends to which Yeats was opposed. Eliot recalls: 'I found inspiration in the content of ["Thirty Bob a Week"], and in the complete fitness of content and idiom: for I also had a good many dingy urban images to reveal . . . The personage that Davidson created in this poem has haunted me all my life.'[6]

John Davidson haunted Hugh MacDiarmid too. When Davidson (in 1909) did his bit for intensity by committing suicide, the 17-year-old

MacDiarmid 'felt as if the bottom had fallen out of [his] world'.[7] In his poem 'Of John Davidson' elegist and elegised converge:

> . . . something in me has always stood
> Since then looking down the sandslope
> On your small black shape by the edge of the sea,
> – A bullet-hole through a great scene's beauty,
> God through the wrong end of a telescope.[8]

MacDiarmid criticises Davidson for not realising that Scots was the right language for his (distinctively Scottish) concerns, but praises his politics, 'anti-religion', grasp of modern thought and the modern city: 'What Davidson, alone of Scottish poets, did was to enlarge the subject matter of poetry, assimilate and utilise a great deal of new scientific and other contemporary material . . . and, above all, to write urban poetry.'[9] Robert Crawford refers to MacDiarmid's 'nurturings of [a] Davidsonian encyclopaedic Muse'. Edwin Morgan (at times) and the so-called 'Informationist' poets also belong to this Scottish line.[10] While Yeats and Davidson both admired Nietzsche, Davidson never subscribed to Yeats's Goethe-derived maxim that 'the poet needs all philosophy, but . . . must keep it out of his work'. He also held the un-Yeatsian creed, approvingly cited by MacDiarmid, that poets should reject Matthew Arnold's 'vaunted sweetness and light' and read the newspapers, because '[t]he poet is in the street, the hospital. He intends the world to know it is out of joint . . . Democracy is here; and we have to go through with it.'[11] Formally, Davidson veers between relatively tight ballad modes and the discursive blank verse of his bombastic 'Testament' poems. 'Conscious and deliberate craft' is hardly absent from modern Scottish poetry (witness early MacDiarmid), but discursive freewheeling seems more prevalent than in Irish poetry (witness later MacDiarmid). In 1931, introducing MacDiarmid's *First Hymn to Lenin*, AE (George Russell) reacts to him as Yeats to Davidson: 'instead of the attraction of affinities, I began to feel the attraction which opposites have for us . . . a sardonic rebel snarling at the orthodoxies with something like the old Carlyle's rasping cantankerous oracular utterance. It was no spiritual kinsman of mine who wrote *Crowdieknowe*.'[12]

Beyond stereotype, from which Yeats and AE are not free, the 'affinities' and 'opposites' traced in this book crisscross Irish and Scottish poetry in many directions. Meanwhile England, still (up to a point) a poetic meeting-place or clearing-house, certainly a publication hub, hovers on the horizon. Yeats not only celebrates an Irish victory over Scotland: he also sidelines the English as poetic standard-bearers. The title and other elements of Heaney's

'Would They Had Stay'd' derive from Shakespeare (if from his Scottish play), and the poem is initially set in an Oxford 'meadow', in 'fritillary land'. The speaker commands: 'Norman MacCaig, come forth from the deer of Magdalen' (68). Calling the deer 'Heather-sentries far from the heath', he continues: 'Be fawn / To the redcoat, gallowglass in the Globe' (68). This imperative affirms Irish–Scottish poetic solidarity together with its challenge to the political and literary order signified by Hanoverian redcoats and Shakespeare's Globe. Iain Crichton Smith adds linguistic solidarity: 'Englished Iain Mac Gabhainn / Goes into linked verse – / Goes where the spirit listeth – / On its perfectly sure feet' (68). 'Linked verse', a term for the collaboratively composed Japanese *renga*, 'links' Crichton Smith's Gaelic and English poems, his English translations of the former, and Irish bilingualism. As a (rather polemical) landscaping of archipelagic poetry, 'Would They Had Stay'd' opposes the English 'meadow' to Highland heaths and tilts the terrain northwards. The speaker mentions Crichton Smith's sequence 'Deer on the High Hills', and hails Sorley MacLean as 'A mirage. A stag on a ridge / In the western desert above the burnt-out tanks' (69). The felt incongruity between stag and tanks may have an Irish inflection: see Peter Mackay's chapter here on poetry of the Second World War.

Heaney's symbolism revises an old trope. Poetic encounters between Irish and Scottish poets tend to occur on Highland, Jacobite, Gaelic ground where differences can be collapsed even as national claims are staked. In *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930) MacDiarmid invokes an Irish author of Jacobite *aislingi* (dream vision poems): '*Aodhagán Ó Rathaille sang this sang / That I maun sing again; / For I've met the Brightness o' Brightness / Like him in a lanely glen*'.[13] For MacDiarmid, Irish poetry itself becomes a kind of *aisling*: '*The great poets o' Gaelic Ireland / Soared up frae the rags and tatters / O' the muckle grey mist o' Englishry*'.[14] Invocations of another country's poets are always, at some level, for internal consumption. Yeats damns Davidson as he does the 'popular' Young Ireland ballads. MacDiarmid recruits Ó Rathaille for his Scottish (and Scots) political muse. Heaney's elegy reinforces aspects of his own aesthetic, as when he attaches MacCaig's poetry to Sutherland rather than Edinburgh, or subverts Yeats by likening George Mackay Brown's Orkney poems to 'peat smoke mulling through Byzantium' (68).

A poem is not a critical article any more than Yeats's memoirs are reliable. Yet both Heaney's sense of affinity and Yeats's sense of distance point to the fact that connections or disconnections between modern Irish and Scottish poetry have been more assumed than analysed. Since 1922 literary-critical, as

well as constitutional, relations have fallen between 'national' and 'international' stools: the power of the national paradigm in Irish and Scottish literary studies is elaborated below. On the international front, the Anglo-American London coteries that succeeded the Rhymers' Club would prove more effective than their archipelagic prototype in securing an academic afterlife. This book encompasses different views as to how, where or whether the terminology of 'international modernism' applies to Irish and Scottish poetry. Or perhaps, if less critically segregated, these national traditions might modify the terminology: not all problems are resolved by talking about 'Irish' or 'Scottish' modernism. Yeats, for instance, is often swept into aesthetic generalisations that overlook his quarrels with T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, let alone his archipelagic posterity. Patrick Crotty's chapter pulls the origins of modern poetry further back by stressing Yeats's and MacDiarmid's common Romantic matrix. And Cairns Craig shows that the edition of John Donne, which the Scottish scholar Herbert Grierson published in 1912, did not only affect Eliot's poetic structures or affect poetic structure only in the way that Eliot advertised.

Eliot, with his metropolitan eye on 'the main current',[15] helped to occlude Ireland and Scotland. In 1919 he reviewed G. Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* and Yeats's *The Cutting of an Agate*, which includes the essay 'Poetry and Tradition' (1907). Both books influenced Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', which simultaneously displaced their influence. Smith, to quote Cairns Craig, unwittingly supplied ammunition for Eliot to depict Scottish literature as exemplifying 'the *failure* of tradition'.[16] This review bears the title 'Was There a Scottish Literature?' Eliot's Yeats review is headed 'A Foreign Mind'. In all these writings Eliot assumes the role of spokesman for unified tradition, for '[a] powerful literature with a powerful capital', and inclines to the first-person plural: 'In English writing we seldom speak of tradition.'[17] Robert Crawford shrewdly notes that, as an American poet making his way in London, Eliot is conscious of other 'provincial' claims to cultural authority. Crawford tries to square the circle between Eliot and Smith by arguing a case for 'Modernism as Provincialism'.[18] But, to Eliot then, some provincialisms were clearly more provincial than others.

This book seeks to repair critical sins of omission. It is the outcome of a collaborative research project based in the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen's University Belfast, and attached to the AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen. Northern Ireland makes an apt vantage-point from which to pursue Irish–Scottish comparative studies; from which to conceive poetry in an archipelagic

frame; from which to broach MacDiarmid's vision of a literature 'broad-basing itself on all the diverse cultural elements and the splendid variety of languages and dialects, in the British Isles' (now more diverse and various).[19] The project was developed through symposia that brought together critics, poets and poet-critics. These lively occasions ensured that perspectives on 'relations and comparisons', across the past century, would be informed by Irish and Scottish poetry of the present moment.[20]

## NATION AND ARCHIPELAGO

Poetry is at once central and peripheral to Irish and Scottish literary studies: central because both fields derive from the cultural nationalism of Yeats and MacDiarmid, itself founded on poetry; peripheral because, as these poets discovered in different ways, poetry does not always march with the nation. Even so, excessive weight on 'Scottish' or 'Irish' before 'poetry' still obstructs more strictly literary readings.

Yet such weighting reflects the struggle to assert a distinctive Irish literature or depose 'English Ascendancy in British Literature':[21] a struggle that has had to be renewed. During the mid-twentieth century little was done in indigenous Irish and Scottish criticism either to theorise national canons or to contest Anglo-American ascendancy in modern literature. In my chapter on poetry magazines, I find that pleas for 'better criticism' were a shared Irish/Scottish theme (p. 305). Meanwhile, Eliot's influence helped to precipitate 'the collapse of a whole conception of English literature to which Scottish writers like Hume, Burns and Scott were central'.[22] Some Irish writers (Burke, Moore) were once equally integral to what might be termed a 'unionist' canon. Conflict between unionist and nationalist criticism remains an underrated shaping force behind (perhaps still within) the archipelagic literary academy. Yeats's most powerful literary-critical antagonist was the Irish unionist Edward Dowden, Professor of English at Trinity College Dublin; and, despite inspiring MacDiarmid to write in Scots, Gregory Smith was a unionist who rubbished the Irish Revival and feared that Scotland would follow suit: 'Had the northern partner busied herself with a "Renaissance", harped on the sorrowful Deirdres and eloquent Dempseys ... and out-tartaned Kiltartan, she might have had readier recognition of "nationality" in literature – or opera-bouffe.'[23] But, as in other spheres, the conscious, if often fraught, unionism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries gave way to an Anglocentrism that either ignored Scottish and Irish writers or subsumed them into Eliot's 'main current'. Thus, when Irish and Scottish literary studies began to take off

during the 1970s, their broad tendency was nationalist. Critics were less inclined to think of the archipelago than to kick away the Irish or Scottish props sustaining English literature's illusion of its organic unity. This tendency was accentuated by the Northern Ireland Troubles (from 1969), and by the lost referendum on Scottish devolution (1979).

The two-volume *Cambridge History of Irish Literature* (2006) and three-volume *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* (2006–7) exemplify the critical mass attained by Irish and Scottish literary studies during the past four decades. These works might also seem to consolidate a kind of apartheid. Yet they are unconscious twins. The *Cambridge History* editors, who asked contributors to be 'sensitive to the existence of differing cultural, political and literary traditions', define Irishness 'on an inclusive island-wide basis'.[24] For the *Edinburgh History* editors, Scottish literature is 'a continuous and multi-channelled entity', 'best understood as an inclusive, not an exclusive, term'.[25] The historical migration of Scots to Ireland, of Irish people to Scotland, is actually a key reason for protocols that rephrase national questions (not that these have gone away) as identity politics: 'A fundamental theme of this *History* is the role of literature in the formation of Irish identities.'[26] 'New Identities' appears in the title of the *Edinburgh History*'s third volume. But editorial efforts to orchestrate a pluralistic history are shadowed by unresolved tension between nationalist and revisionist (or unionist or archipelagic) models: 'inclusiveness' is itself double-edged, and may reinstate the nation. The *Cambridge History* editors, who repeat the word 'authoritative', seem unduly anxious to control the Irish literary brand. Meanwhile, poetry, however revisionist in implication, still shoulders the national burden: 'Contemporary poets have played a prominent recent role in both public and political life. In doing so, they have helped to generate a much needed sense of optimism and aspiration about the future direction of Scottish identity.'[27]

At the same time, Yeats and MacDiarmid deserve extraordinary credit, not only in the archipelago, for the fact that poetry retains any communal dimension or purchase or visibility amid modern conditions. Yet, if their nationalism held poetry's ground, they constituted that ground by artistic means. Colin Graham writes: 'Early twenty-first century Irish criticism finds identity everywhere . . . The resultant breadth of what constitutes Irish writing may be newly liberal . . . or it may simply attest to the way in which thinking primarily through an uncritical identity politics has blunted the critical faculties which give a shape to Irish literature.'[28]

It would compound 'uncritical identity politics' if 'Irish–Scottish' literary studies were to update MacDiarmid's pan-Celtic *aisling* rather than engage

in specific cross-readings. Yet the very fact and growth of such studies (although they existed *avant la lettre*) is significant. Perhaps Irish–Scottish studies took off most readily among historians, for whom archipelagic paradigms, if disputed, were already in place: the 'new British history', 'three kingdoms' or 'four nations' history, 'Atlantic' history. In the 1990s, a more particular focus on Ireland and Scotland was ideologically and materially boosted by UK devolution, and by the shift in British–Irish relations that enabled the Northern Ireland peace process. Given the symbolic status of language, this particularly affected Gaelic/Celtic studies and Ulster Scots studies.[29] It was also now becoming normative to configure Irish and Scottish literature where union and empire constituted a shared context.[30] But, as we enter the twentieth century, as literature becomes indexed to the Irish Revival, Irish independence, the Scottish Renaissance and Scottish Nationalism, boundaries harden. Pioneering cross-overs were Fiona Stafford's *Starting Lines in Scottish, Irish, and English Poetry: From Burns to Heaney* (2000) and Ray Ryan's *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, State and Nation 1966–2000* (2004). Yet Ryan and Liam McIlvanney warn, in their co-edited *Ireland and Scotland: Culture and Society, 1700–2000*: 'To advocate an Irish/Scottish context is to establish a political – and in some eyes, a polemical – framework for debate. Within Irish studies, the Irish/Scottish comparison is viewed by some as unionism's answer to postcolonial studies.'[31] This is so because it appears to reconnect the Irish Republic with the UK; to pivot on Ulster (not necessarily the case nor *ipso facto* a bad thing); and to position Northern Ireland, not inside all-island 'inclusiveness', but as a zone where Ireland and Scotland interpenetrate.

From the angle of Scottish literary studies, the politics look rather different – more like nationalism's answer to English ascendancy. The North, compromised by familiar sectarianism, has always been less attractive to Scottish Nationalists (a troubling unconscious, perhaps) than independent Ireland.[32] Lately, too, a pan-Celtic Tiger beckoned. As for academic attraction: thanks historically to Yeats and Joyce, Irish literary studies have the stronger international profile (see Patrick Crotty's chapter).[33] Nevertheless, as *à propos* 'modernism', both countries have more successfully exported individual talents than traditions or templates. That being so, the paradigms best adapted to – or from – either field, let alone both together, remain at issue. On the one hand, literary theory has brought Ireland and Scotland closer since the same theoretical sources tend to sponsor the same findings, as when 'gender' meets 'nation'; or when Joyce, MacDiarmid, linguistic variety, and versions of the postcolonial become 'Bakhtinian hybridity'.[34]

On the other hand, theoretical divergences may have unexamined roots (historical, religious, philosophical) in Irish–Scottish relations, as when Scottish critics flag up the Enlightenment or Irish critics favour postmodernist, neo-Romantic ideas. Hence the faintly reflexive titles of Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* (1995) and Cairns Craig's *Intending Scotland* (2009). In the last chapter here, 'Irish–Scottish studies as an act of translation', Michael Brown ponders the slippery ground on which this book itself is situated.

Comparison sharpens self-consciousness. Irish and Scottish literary studies have more work to do in conceptualising their own history, in historicising their own concepts; and it might advance matters if some of this were done in tandem or on an archipelagic basis. In *Archipelagic English* (2008), John Kerrigan argues that the Anglocentric bias of 'English' studies has often obscured the 'expansive, multilevelled, discontinuous, and polycentric' aspects of 'the literary and cultural field', and overlooked the archipelago's capacity to 'foster fusions and transformations'. His own chapter here, 'Louis MacNeice among the islands', explores a poetic instance of the latter. Kerrigan also stresses that relations vary between the 'interactive', the 'ubiquitous' and the 'fixed'; noting that 'the appropriate unit of enquiry might be the nation or a locality'.[35] Comparative study of modern Irish and Scottish poetry helps to identify 'the appropriate unit(s) of enquiry' in specific cases. Archipelagic literary studies complement rather than usurp nation-based studies. They can expose internal disconnections – like the partition of Irish poetry by the Second World War – and transnational connections. And they can replace *a priori* assumptions with readings that elicit what is truly distinctive in national or literary terms.

## HISTORIES, LANGUAGES, AESTHETICS

Why Ireland and Scotland? Our focus does not rule out other archipelagic permutations or wider horizons: the chapters by Justin Quinn and Christopher Whyte make comparative use of the latter. But, besides the historical rationale outlined below, the canonical ring-fences around modern Irish and Scottish poetry cry out for critical probes: most studies continue to be organised on a national basis.[36] Irish–Scottish comparisons bring aesthetics as well as paradigms into the foreground. They rearrange the poetic field by outflanking, not only English myopia, but also the distortions that stem from Irish or Scottish political fixation on England (an extreme case is *Inventing Ireland* where England and Ireland figure as Self and Other and Scotland does not figure at all). It is time to unpack

'poetry from Britain and Ireland': the diplomatic formula current since Seamus Heaney addressed a corrective *Open Letter* to the editors of *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1982).

Poetic contact between Ireland and Scotland begins with an island: Iona. The first datable Gaelic poem, 'Amra Choluim Chille' by the Irish poet Dalánn Forgaill, is a tribute to St Colm Cille/Columba who died in 597. After going into Scottish exile and starting his Christian mission, Colm Cille, perhaps a poet himself, briefly returned to secure the survival of Irish *filí* (the poetic class) by getting them to curb their numbers and power. Gaels from Ireland had started to 'colonise' Scotland during the fifth century. In *Divided Gaels* Wilson McLeod argues against the view that this created a unified cultural province, which spanned *Sruth na Maoile* (the Sea of Moyle) for a thousand years. McLeod paints a more fluctuating picture of 'ambiguous connection', subject to developments within each country. Even so, during the high bardic period (*c.* 1200–1600), literary connection was constant: a 'supra-national' learned class shared a common literary language and trained in the same schools. By the same token, the collapse of the Irish bardic order 'deeply splintered' the Gaelic world.[37] To quote from Máire ní Annracháin's chapter here: 'vernacular Irish and Scottish Gaelic became increasingly separate . . . accelerated by the loss of a common written standard' (p. 105). The Reformation had already ensured the loss of a common religion. A further splinter was the clash between Scottish and Irish antiquarians over James Macpherson's *Ossian* (1760–5). This 'modern fantasia on fragments and themes from a much older [oral] tradition' laid a Scottish claim to legendary materials that circulated in Scotland, but had originated in Ireland, and for which the countries had different national uses.[38] If Colm Cille/Columba is the patron saint of Irish/Scottish poetry, Oisín/Ossian is the equally 'ambiguous' patron pagan. It's no coincidence that Yeats announced his poetic debut with 'The Wanderings of Oisin' (1889). This Celtic Twilight epic might be seen, in turn, as inaugurating the symbolic guises that the Irish/Scottish island would assume (as for MacNeice) during the next century.

Peter Mackay calls *An Guth* (*The Voice*) 'the first international poetry journal linking the Irish and Scottish Gaidhealtachdan'.[39] Launched in 2003, *An Guth* builds on the fact that: 'Communication between the realms of Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry was re-engaged . . . in the late sixties and early seventies following more than two centuries of almost total mutual indifference.'[40] Re-engagement began with the 'Bardic Circuit' whereby poets and musicians toured the other country in alternate years. Yet Mackay asks how deep reciprocity goes, since it is mainly *An Guth*'s editor, Rody