

Jacobism and Romanticism: Bonnie Prince Charlie and the '45

Ryan Burns

The field of Culloden Moor was eerily quiet on the morning of 16 April 1746 as the ancient spirit of Scotland emerged for one final showdown with the forces of modernity. A courageous army of Scotsmen clad in classic highland kilts and tartans faced a force of heavily armed British regulars until the deafening roar of bagpipes sounded a massive charge toward the British lines. The independence and national identity of Scotland hung in the balance as the two armies clashed in furious hand-to-hand combat. The first column of regulars collapsed before the onslaught and retreated in disarray toward the second row of defenders, and the battle seemed to sway in Scotland's favor. However, the second line unleashed a deadly wave of musket fire that decimated the advancing forces and turned the tide of the struggle. Scotland's ancient culture faded in the aftermath of the battle as the country integrated with its modern southern neighbor. By the closing years of the eighteenth century, the country was a mere shadow of its former self.

Sir Walter Scott adopted this romantic image of Scotland in *From Montrose to Culloden*, the fourth volume of his famous book *The Tales of a Grandfather*. As the title suggests, Scott intended to tell the story of Scotland's past in the fashion that a grandfather would captivate a small child. Nevertheless, his portrayal of the Battle of Culloden has dominated the popular imagination for nearly two centuries and evokes a warm nostalgia throughout contemporary Scotland for the glory of its ancient past. Yet is

the portrayal of Culloden accurate? This battle was the last in a series fought during the famed Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, in which Bonnie Prince Charlie, a young claimant to the British throne, sought to replace the Hanoverian monarch George II and reestablish the Stuart dynasty. The uprising became shrouded in legend during the romantic period of literature, in which numerous poets and novelists revived popular interest in Scotland through their depiction of the country as a noble, ancient society. They were especially fascinated with the '45 because it was seen as the last chance to preserve this pre-modern lifestyle. Historians are confronted with the difficult task of separating myth from fact when interpreting the '45 and generally adopt either an anti-Jacobite stance and reject the romantic literature on the subject as mere nonsense or accept it in its entirety as an accurate depiction of the struggle.¹ However, these arguments fail to note the complexity of the Jacobite Rebellion and its romantic interpretation. Was the uprising really a culture clash between a primordial society and the forces of modernity? Jacobite sentiment was certainly not limited to the highlands, as many historians have claimed, but did it possess the dimensions of a national rising? Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns would answer this question with a resounding 'yes,' but they also created many aspects of the Scottish national identity. After countless hours of research, I have concluded that while the romantic poets and novelists invented many aspects of Scottish culture and mythologized the Jacobite Rebellion as a struggle between the antiquity and modernity, their interpretation of the '45 as a national rising is accurate.

¹ Arthur Herman refutes the romantic depictions of the Jacobite Rebellion in his book *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* and argues that it was merely an attempt to replace the Hanoverian monarchy and the Parliamentary system with the old Stuart dynasty: 11, 13. However, Murray Pittock portrays the '45 in her book *The Myth of the Jacobite Clans* as a national rising in which the noble spirit of Scotland valiantly confronted its mortal enemy in a last-ditch effort to avert the destruction of Scottish culture: 7-8.

Contentious debates filled the chamber of the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh during the autumn of 1706 as an Act of Union with England was considered. The legislature was divided along party lines between the Court Party, which advocated the Union between the two countries and the Jacobites, the Country Party, and the splinter New Party, who passionately argued for Scottish independence.² The treaty promised the opening of English colonial markets to Scottish merchants and the incorporation of the Scottish economy into the far wealthier English economy. However, the passing of the Act of Union required the acceptance of the Act of Settlement, which forbade a Catholic from obtaining the crown.³ Therefore, the Catholic Stuart dynasty that had ruled Scotland since the fourteenth century was officially barred from the throne, provoking outrage among the population. Scottish Member of Parliament (MP) Sir John Clerk of Penicuik estimated that fewer than one percent of that population actually supported the treaty and riots; demonstrations became an everyday occurrence outside the House of Parliament.⁴ However, the Article that established the Union was passed on November 4 with a majority of 32 MPs, and the other articles were passed in succession with a similar voting pattern.⁵ When the ratification of the treaty was accomplished on January 16, 1707, the Scottish nation ceased to exist as an independent kingdom.

The romantics harshly condemned the Act of Union as a vile act of treachery in which greedy landowners traded their independence for English wealth. Poet Robert

² Magnusson, Magnus, *Scotland: The Story of a Nation* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 546
The New Party preferred to be called the *Squadron Volante*, or the “Flying Squad.”

³ *Ibid.*, 538

⁴ *Ibid.*, 545. Sir John Clerk was described by his contemporaries as a ‘neutral’ who was divided between his love for an independent Scotland and his reasoning that better opportunities awaited his countrymen under the Union.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 550.

Burns perhaps best summarizes these sentiments in his famous poem “Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation”:

O, would, or I had seen the day
That Treason thus could sell us,
My auld grey head had lien in clay
Wi' Bruce and loyal Wallace!
But pith and power, till my last hour
I'll mak this declaration :—
'We're bought and sold for English gold'—
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!⁶

Burns' nationalist account of the signing of the treaty is accurate, for the commissioners who negotiated the treaty were personally chosen by Queen Anne for their ardent support of the Union and were amply rewarded by a grateful British government for their efforts.⁷

The Jacobite movement became the principal outlet for the opposition to the Union following the ratification of the treaty. The term “Jacobite” is derived from the Latin word for James, “Jacobus,” and was created in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, in which the Catholic King James Stuart VII & II was deposed in favor of the Protestant William of Orange.⁸ The Jacobites emerged as a prominent political party in Scotland and entered a more militant phase after 1707 to restore the independence of the country. While the Stuart monarchy in exile desired to rule both England and Scotland, James VII & II “instructed his son James Edward Stuart not to contemplate any such union between Scotland and England.”⁹ The stage was set for a confrontation.

⁶ Ed. Noble, Andrew and Hogg, Patrick Scott. *The Canongate Burns* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Limited, 2001), 394.

⁷ Herman, Arthur, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World and Everything in It* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001), 38-40

⁸ Lenman, Bruce, *The Jacobite Diaspora 1688-1746: From Despair to Integration* <<http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=4857401>>.

⁹ Roberts, John L., *The Jacobite Wars: Scotland and the Military Campaigns of 1715 and 1745* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 8.

Opposition to the Union increased throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, especially after 1714, when the German Hanoverian monarch George I ascended to the British throne.¹⁰ A deep disconnection was felt between the king and his subjects, with nationalist sentiment in Scotland for the return of its medieval dynasty becoming paramount. James Edward Stuart announced on October 25, 1715 that he intended to free the Scots “from the hardships they groan under and to restore the Kingdom to its ancient free and independent state.”¹¹ This declaration was followed by two unsuccessful rebellions in 1715 and 1719 respectively, and discontent with the Hanoverian monarchy continued to resonate throughout the country.

In 1743, Charles Edward Stuart, the famed Bonnie Prince Charlie, was officially declared the prince regent by the aging James Stuart and immediately began preparations for a Jacobite rising in the highlands of Scotland.¹² He landed on the west coast of Eriskay and officially raised his banner at Glenfirman on August 19, 1745.¹³ The highland response to his call to arms was initially hesitant, and after nearly a week the ranks in his army only numbered about 1600 men.¹⁴ However, Bonnie Prince Charlie quickly advanced toward Edinburgh and captured the city without bloodshed.¹⁵ The ranks of the “Young Pretender” swelled as news of his success spread, and the famous Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 had begun in earnest.

The first true military engagement of the rebellion occurred at Prestonpans, in which the main British force in Scotland, under the command of General John Cope, was

¹⁰ Magnusson, 562.

¹¹ *Declaration of King James VIII, October 25, 1715* <<http://www.jacobite.ca/documents/17151025.htm>>.

¹² Magnusson, 585.

¹³ Sallnow, John, “Final Conflict” *Geographical* 68 (1996) <<http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=9604070650>>.

¹⁴ Roberts, 83-85.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

routed by the famous highland charge. The entire country was essentially liberated from English control, and Bonnie Prince Charlie held court at Holyrood for a month before embarking on an invasion of England. He wished to restore the Stuarts to the English throne as well and promised his soldiers French supplies and reinforcements. In addition, word had spread about an imminent uprising of Englishmen that had grown dissatisfied with the Hanoverian monarchy; the Jacobites, then, wished to capitalize on the situation. The army marched through the northwest portion of the country and into the future industrial heart of Great Britain before reaching Derby, a mere 130 miles from a seemingly defenseless London.

However, the Jacobites suddenly turned around and retreated to the highlands because the general staff was unwilling to continue the southward march after no French help arrived and the English support amounted to a mere 300 volunteers. They wanted to decide the struggle on their native soil, and Bonnie Prince Charlie reluctantly caved to their demands. The following months witnessed a few battles between the two opposing forces until April 1746, when Jacobism faded into the blood-strewn field of Culloden Moor.

The '45 certainly did not stray from the minds of both Englishmen and Scotsmen following the establishment of domestic order and peace. However, the literature on the subject was written by Hanoverian historians and reflected the anti-Jacobite side of the argument. The Scottish people needed a voice, and romantic poets and novelists such as Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott emerged as their champions. Writing nearly a half century after the Battle of Culloden, these authors became fascinated with the Jacobite Rebellion and launched a rebirth of Scottish national feeling. The romantics correctly

argued that the Jacobite cause was firmly rooted in Scottish nationalism, and an analysis of some of the features of the rebellion clearly illustrates their assertion.

The nationalist dimensions of the Jacobite movement are displayed by the court activities of Bonnie Prince Charlie following his arrival in Edinburgh. He resided in the famous site of the Scottish monarchy, Holyrood Palace, and arranged for numerous rituals that celebrated the ancient freedom of Scotland and the Stuart royal line. In addition, he addressed his countrymen in a famous decree in which he proclaimed that the “pretended Union of the Kingdoms... [is] at an End.”¹⁶ Many of the anti-Jacobite historians who characterize the rebellion as a simple dynastic dispute assert that Bonnie Prince Charlie intended to rule Great Britain in its entirety and that even if a Jacobite victory had been secured, Scotland would still be under English control. While he wished to obtain the throne of England, Bonnie Prince Charlie openly stated that he would rule the kingdoms separately and the Scots would retain their independence.¹⁷ In addition, the Scots viewed the Stuarts as their national dynasty and believed that Bonnie Prince Charlie was the defender of their country’s interests. The Jacobite soldiers who campaigned with him in 1745 proudly etched the line “Prosperity to Scotland and No Union” on their broadswords and charged into battle for their nation.¹⁸

Another argument against the idea that the ’45 was a nationalist rebellion focuses on the dimensions of Bonnie Prince Charlie’s army itself. The Jacobites are portrayed as backward highlanders whom the more modern lowlanders hated and fought against in great numbers. While lowland soldiers in the British army at Culloden formed a

¹⁶ Pittock, Murray G.H., *The Myth of the Jacobite Clans* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 92.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

significant minority, they comprised nearly sixty percent of the Jacobite force.¹⁹ They also formed an overwhelming majority in the officer corps and general staff. An analysis of public opinion and behavior in the era proves that Bonnie Prince Charlie's opposition to the Union was the principal factor for recruitment.²⁰

While their contention that the '45 was a national rising is accurate, the Romantics also presented a distorted view of Scottish history when depicting the rebellion. They were attempting to cope with the effects of industrialization and looked to the past to find a nobler, simpler time. Their quest brought them to study the history of the Scottish highlands, and they focused on the '45 because it was seen as the last chance to preserve an idealistic primordial lifestyle from the forces of modernity. Sir Walter Scott embodies this phenomenon in his masterpiece *Waverly: Tis' Sixty Years Since*. The story depicts the internal struggle of Edward Waverly, a British officer stationed in Scotland during the rebellion, between his love for the noble but lost cause of Jacobism and his duty to his regiment. He befriends a Jacobite chieftain, Fergus MacIver, and develops a fascination with the "uncombed and wild" highlanders. Waverly falls in love with MacIver's daughter, Flora, and fights alongside Bonnie Prince Charlie at the Battle of Prestonpans. However, he eventually accepts his duty to Great Britain as more important and rejoins his regiment, which I interpret as a metaphor for the victory of modernity at Culloden.

England certainly represented a modern society during the rebellion, but was eighteenth-century Scottish culture actually ancient? The Industrial Revolution was

¹⁹ MacLeod, John, *Highlanders: A History of the Gaels* (London: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1997), 164.

²⁰ Pittock, 92-97.

beginning to spread throughout both countries, and Scottish intellectuals were starting to assert their authority in the burgeoning Age of Enlightenment. Even in the highlands, the most backward region of Great Britain, the chieftains would send their sons to the finest universities and often owned lavish modern houses in Edinburgh or Glasgow.²¹ Bonnie Prince Charlie does not condemn industrialization and modernity in any famous speeches, and the Jacobites who followed him into battle were fighting for their country, not for the preservation of a primordial lifestyle. Therefore, if the '45 did not witness the final flowering of antiquity, the Romantics had to create the ancient traditions of Scotland.

Perhaps the best example of the invention of Scottish culture can be traced to one of the greatest literary works of the eighteenth century: the poems of Ossian. In 1760, James MacPherson claimed that he discovered a collection of Gaelic poems written by Ossian, a third-century, blind bard of the highlands. MacPherson presented a translation to his friend John Home, who convinced him to publish the poems in the book *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, collected in the Highlands of Scotland and translated from the Gaelic, or Erse language*.²² A firestorm immediately erupted throughout the country, for there had been no previous record of a great Scottish literary tradition before the eleventh century. MacPherson continued to publish poems attributed to Ossian until doubts began to surface about their authenticity. After repeatedly failing to produce the originals, MacPherson was accused of writing the poems himself.²³ In 1805, Sir Walter Scott denounced the poems as a clever forgery but interestingly noted that the depiction of

²¹ Herman, 124.

²² Ferguson, William, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation: A Historic Quest* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 232.

²³ Herman, 23

Ossian as a blind bard wearing a kilt and tartan was historically accurate.²⁴ However, this image was also a product of the inventive minds of eighteenth and nineteenth century Romantic authors and remains in Scotland and throughout the world as their most successful and celebrated creation

The popular image of a Jacobite soldier consists of a battle-hardened man clad in a kilt and his clan's tartan. While kilts and tartans were indeed worn, the Romantics portrayed these articles of clothing as an integral part of Scottish national identity. The kilt was depicted as the ancient garb of the highlands but was actually invented in 1727 by Thomas Rawlinson, the English owner of an ironworks, so that his workers could have better maneuverability around the machinery.²⁵ Ian MacDonnell of Glengarry soon adopted the garment along with his clansmen, and the kilt was worn throughout the highlands by 1745.²⁶ Therefore, the Romantics identified a product of the Industrial Revolution and portrayed it as an ancient piece of clothing that modernization surely sought to destroy.

The tartan was also celebrated by the Romantics as a national symbol, and the designs and patterns that characterized the regalia were seen as the defining mark of one's clan. While it is certainly older than the kilt, the tartan was worn by highlanders merely as fashion and chose the designs out of personal preference. The vast majority of the army that accompanied Bonnie Prince Charlie throughout his campaign was clad in tartans, which led many to view the costume as an essential component of the highlands (but not Scotland as a nation). When the British pacified the highlands after the Battle of Culloden, they outlawed the tartan in their quest to prevent the future reemergence of

²⁴ Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21-23.

Jacobism. However, the Romantics imaginatively portrayed the tartan as a symbol of Scottish national identity and invented many critical myths about the garb. They conjured the notion of the clan tartan and identified certain color patterns and designs with particular clans. Eric Hobsbawm presents a compelling argument on this phenomenon in his famous book *The Invention of Tradition*, in which he analyzes eighteenth-century depictions of highland clans. He shows that the tartan designs in the paintings of individual clans always significantly differed among the clansmen and demonstrates the absence of a uniform pattern. Therefore, one can reasonably conclude that there were no distinctive clan tartans when Bonnie Prince Charlie arrived in Scotland in 1745.²⁷

Kilts and tartans were only perceived as Scottish national symbols after the famed royal visit of George IV to Edinburgh in 1822.²⁸ Sir Walter Scott organized the event and fashioned the king as a latter-day Bonnie Prince Charlie, persuading the king to clad himself in the garb of ancient Scotland.²⁹ In addition, the gentlemen who attended the Highland Ball were required to wear a kilt and tartan, and the textile manufacturers in Edinburgh and Glasgow inventively responded to the new demand. Clans began to adopt particular designs and pretended that those designs had always been a fundamental feature of their identity. The trend rapidly spread throughout the country, and these garments remain synonymous with Scotland in the popular imagination.

In addition, the clan as an entity became a favorite subject of the Romantic passion for Scottish history, and many myths about them began to surface in the early nineteenth century. The clans were seen as distinct, ancient Scottish tribes through which

²⁷ Ibid., 23.

²⁸ Ibid., 29-31.

²⁹ Ibid., 29-30.

all members could claim a common ancestor; every MacGregor, Campbell, or MacLeod saw himself as part of an extended family. However, as Arthur Herman suggests in his book *How the Scots Invented the Modern World*, “if we want to identify the true prototypes of the Highland warriors who fought for the Earl of Mar at Sheriffmuir or Prince Charlie at Culloden, we should look not to the ancient Picts or Britons, but to the followers of William the Conqueror.”³⁰ Thus, while Scottish nationalism has often been defined by its struggle with England, one of the greatest and most distinct features of its ancient culture is actually a medieval English invention. The highland system was based on feudal land ties, with the social structure broken into the assigned roles of master and servant. The chieftain owned great tracts of land that were farmed by tenants, most of whom adopted the name of their landlord. They could be called into military service at the whims of their master but generally had no blood or family ties with him. Arthur Herman compares the clan families to the infamous Mafia families of the twentieth century to refute their romantic image in the popular imagination.³¹ The quixotic ideal of a Scottish clan of kinsmen is merely a nineteenth-century legend without a strong historical basis.

While I have sought to prove that many of the emblems of Scottish identity are nineteenth-century inventions, I am not urging patriotic Scots to discard their kilts and tartans in favor of more historically accurate dress, for these garments are a profound symbol of contemporary Scotland. However, we should not assume, as many people do, that the status of such clothing as national icon means that they have always been worn or

³⁰ Herman, 122. The Earl of Mar led the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715 and met defeat at Sheriffmuir. He had originally been a supporter of the Union but became one of its staunchest foes after falling out of favor with the court of George I.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

that they always fulfilled their assigned functions. In 1995, Randall Wallace released the film *Braveheart*, which depicted kilt-wearing highlanders defending their freedom against English invaders in the thirteenth century. We thus have a portrayal of the kilt as a national symbol long before it existed, and the popular imagery of Scotland's past remains distorted as a result. To truly understand the history of this great country, we must separate fact from fiction and accurately interpret past events.

Nevertheless, historians should not yield to the temptation of rejecting the Romantic interpretation of the Jacobite Rebellion simply because of the pervasiveness of legend. Numerous scholars, such as Arthur Herman, have adopted a decidedly anti-Jacobite stance, portraying the struggle as a mere dynastic dispute. I have demonstrated that the Romantics accurately interpreted the '45 as a nationalist uprising that went far beyond a simple dynastic struggle. Yet they also greatly misrepresented its significance and portrayed it as a great culture clash between antiquity and modernity. In doing so, they created our contemporary image of Scotland's past and fostered a sense of nostalgia for a lost age of heroism among her people. While a modern scholar must recognize this fact, should he or she condemn the Romantics in the process?

I believe that the Romantic movement was a positive phenomenon that truly benefited the Scottish people, for it rekindled national pride and prevented the disappearance of the country within the larger entity of Great Britain. Many Scots had forgotten their roots by the end of the eighteenth century in favor of a new British identity. They were even beginning to call themselves "North Britons" in order to demonstrate "that any remaining difference between the two peoples was merely

geographic.”³² The Romantics saved the Scottish nation from an ignominious fate, and I certainly applaud them for their feat. Scottish history may be shrouded in myth and legend, but we recognize its uniqueness. A magnificent ancient culture spread from the peaks of the highlands to the valleys of the lowlands, and thousands of Scotsmen joined Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745 in a final effort to preserve it from the driving force of modernity. Adopted by Sir Walter Scott in his novel *Waverly*, this image of the rebellion and of the country itself led to the rebirth of a distinct Scottish consciousness.

This image represents a distortion of reality, for the rising was a national one that sought to release the country from English domination rather than a last attempt to frustrate the path of modernity. The primordial traditions these Scotsman were seen as protecting were invented by the Romantics themselves. Nevertheless, contemporary Scots are indebted to the Romantics, for their country has greatly benefited from the imaginative minds of a few nineteenth century poets and novelists.

³² Herman, 115.

Works Cited

Declaration of King James VIII, October 25, 1715. <<http://www.jacobite.ca/documents/-17151025.htm>>

Ferguson, William. The Identity of the Scottish Nation: A Historic Quest. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.

Herman, Arthur. How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How in Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World and Everything in It. New York: Crown Publishers, 2001.

Hobsbawm, Eric. The Invention of Tradition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Lenman, Bruce. The Jacobite Diaspora 1688-1746: From Despair to Integration. <<http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=4857401>>

MacLeod, John. Highlanders: A History of the Gaels. London: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1997.

Magnusson, Magnus. Scotland: The Story of a Nation. New York: Grove Press, 2000.

Noble, Andrew and Hogg, Patrick Scott, eds. The Canongate Burns. Edinburgh: Canongate Books Limited, 2001.

Pittock, Murray G.H. The Myth of the Jacobite Clans Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995.

Roberts, John L. The Jacobite Wars: Scotland and the Military Campaigns of 1715 and 1745. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002.

Sallnow, John. "Final Conflict" *Geographical* 68 (1996) <<http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=9604070650>>

Scott, Sir Walter. Waverly: 'Tis Sixty Years Since. London: Penguin Books, 1985.

(Original Publication: 1814)