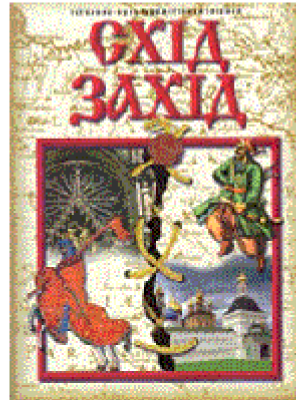

The British Image: Self and Other in a United Kingdom

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Схід-Захід: Історико-культурологічний збірник.

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При використанні матеріалів статті обов'язковим є посилання на її автора з повним бібліографічним описом видання, у якому опубліковано статтю. Дана електронна копія статті може бути скопійована, роздрукована і передана будь-якій особі без обмежень права користування за обов'язкової наявності першої (даної) сторінки з повним бібліографічним описом статті. При повторному розміщенні статті у мережі Інтернет обов'язковим є посилання на сайт Східного інституту українознавства імені Ковальських.

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THE BRITISH IMAGE: SELF AND OTHER IN A UNITED KINGDOM

One of the simplest, most frequent and most misleading errors which is made not only in conversation and the media, but also in scholarly work, is the conflation of England, Britain and the United Kingdom. As Norman Davies points out convincingly in *The Isles* (1999), there is a deep-seated semantic confusion concerning these words going far beyond the level of casual carelessness into the highest reaches of intellectual and official definition: «the inability of prominent authorities to present the history of our Isles in accurate and unambiguous terms.» As Davies points out, innocent sources of linguistic confusion reach back to the very name of a Roman province, Britannia, which never covered more than a quarter of Scotland and for most of the time included none of it, nor all of England either. Subsequent rationalizations of «Britain» from Scottish and Welsh sources never effectively contested the English ownership of a term which had its roots in the English as successors in Britannia to the Romans, and like the Romans, descended from Aeneas by virtue of the Brut-myth, popularized by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *History of the Kings of Britain*. Historians still frequently make what should be called the Galfridian error when they write about a mediaeval «Britain» as if such a place ever existed. Such terminological confusion indicates the continuing prevalence of an Anglocentric image of Britain that ignores its very heterogenous nature.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, even the post-Pocock «new» British history (Pocock 1975) shares many of the features of traditional Anglo-British historiography, notably the use of England as the normative model, deviation from which becomes a statement of difference, and of an «otherness» certainly peculiar and perhaps reprehensible. Whereas a Scottish mediaeval historian might compare the country's trade, economy, culture and government to those in small northern European states around the Baltic, the «new» British history continues unfailingly to use the British image wherein England is the measure of all things. A classic example of this can be found in the introduction to Bradshaw and Morrill's collection *The British Problem c. 1534-1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago* (1996), where the

«Pocockian»subtitle should not divert our attention from the teleological presumption of its claims of «formation:» «Both England and Scotland for centuries consisted of an Anglo-Norman core with a bare and fluctuating control over the mountainous wholly Gaelic-speaking borderlands to the North and West, and the Norse fastnesses beyond these borderlands.» (p.7)

Here the English example is the Scottish model, with the insinuation that Scotland is really English («*Anglo*-Norman» rather than «Norman»), and a site of ethnic conflict (note how «Gaelic» and «Norse» are examples of ethnic division *pertaining to Scotland alone*). As history, this is clearly anachronistic because it assumes a demographic and political domination of Scotland by the «core» that was by no means clear in early times: even as late as 1750, half the country's population still lived north of the Tay- very different from the situation in pre-industrial England. Thirdly, the English model postulates Gaelic as something remote, whereas it was the language of «core» royal Fife shire into the fifteenth century, and continued to be spoken in central Scotland well into the twentieth century. Moreover, almost all of Scotland's monarchs spoke it until 1513: hardly the case with any Celtic language in the core English polity. Fourthly, the Norse were not just in «fastnesses... beyond borderlands:» the crucial battle of Largs in 1263 took place only twenty-five miles from Glasgow. Fifthly, Scotland's cultural centres were far more widespread than England's: universities at Aberdeen and even briefly at Fraserburgh were as far from Edinburgh as York was from London. Sixthly, whereas the wealthiest eight dioceses in England as assessed for the crusade tithe of Nicholas IV in 1292 were all in the south-east, in Scotland the wealthiest five stretched 225 miles from Banff to the Tweed. Such examples could be multiplied: but the important point is that the «new» British history inherits to a great extent the paradigm of the old: that becoming «Britons» (i.e. English) was the inbuilt teleological tendency for the «minorities» of these islands, who otherwise would relapse into «ethnic» struggle. As Gwynfor Evans expressed it in 1981:

What is Britishness ? The first thing to realize is that it is another word for Englishness; it is a political word which arose from the existence of the British state and which extends Englishness over the lives of the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish. If one asks what the difference is between English culture and British culture one realises that there is no difference. They are the same. The British language is the English language. British education is English education. British television is English television. The British press is the English press. The British Crown is the English Crown, and the Queen of

Britain is the Queen of England. The British Constitution is called by Dicey: 'the English Constitution' ...Britishness is Englishness.

There are two main discourses by which the British image has been sustained historically. First, in recent years there has been a growing consensus, found in books as diverse as Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973), Martin Wiener's *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (1981) and John Osmond's *The Divided Kingdom* (1988) that the expression of English identity was strongly bound up with concepts of essential national worth found in an idealized and well-ordered rurality; «the cottage small/Beside a field of grain,» of the song «There'll always be an England ,» or the more sensitized tones of Ivor Gurney's «Do not forget me quite/O Severn meadows,» Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*, the poetry of John Betjeman or the political speeches of Conservative leaders from Stanley Baldwin to John Major. It can be found as far back as the early seventeenth century at least , and was associated in the century that followed with Jacobite values, later toned down into the image of country life as a bulwark against improvement and revolutions in manners, such as is found in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814). This «ruralist essence» is regarded to exist in its most perfect form in southern England, whose core terminological status is seen in the phrase «Home Counties», first introduced in the wake of the late Victorian agricultural crisis. This southern ruralism fuels a paradoxical inferiority complex, wherein the richest area of the country is seen as an ideal victimized by parasitical outsiders.

Wiener (1981) argued that the value placed on the ideal of the country gentleman undermined economic growth in Britain using Donald Horne's idea of «the Southern Metaphor:» the dominant, essential centre of British ruralist value was in the south of England. Some writers, notably Mrs. Gaskell in *North and South* (1853) and, more simplistically, D.H. Lawrence in the title story of *England, My England* (1922) criticized the soundness of this ethic, but many other artists as well as much popular culture gave this presumption of value a ringing endorsement. Fashionable when it appeared, Wiener's linkage of British ruralism with economic decline is increasingly controversial with some seeing it as a source of energy rather than etiolation (Mackenzie 1986).

Whatever the truth of this, what has often been overlooked is that ruralist essentialism has particular relevance in the operation of the British image in Scotland. If the country and the city in the south could be divided in *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* terms, how much more was this true of Scotland, which, even more than the Lake District or Snowdonia, became the key rural

paradise, a mirror in which outsiders could see themselves as they «really» were— and better than this, as «superior» to the primitive inhabitants of the place they were visiting. If the rural south is a place of childhood and recreation where the true Briton can meet him/herself in «our villages ... with their roots [but not our present] in the Heptarchy» (Bell 1995), then the spaces identified by Primitivism in the eighteenth century as reflective of sublimity are so in part because of the gratifying distance between the viewer and the viewed. Just as the Roman arena confined the barbarous world of savage beasts and uncivilized tribes which the Romans saw as encircling their world within the countervailing circuit of the amphitheatre, Scotland north of Forth, whose inhabitants had threatened the very existence of the British state in the Jacobite period, became the controlled space in which the visitor could at once see a reflection and evince a superiority. Scotland's status as an «unspoilt wilderness,» of course, arose from major economic change: 10% of the country was given over to deer at the end of the nineteenth century, to say nothing of other recreational sporting use, which allowed the visiting Briton to participate in a Primitivist reflection of «preindustrial vigor and strength» (Haldane 1990). But what was important in this reflection were not these economic and social structures, which are the building-blocks of historicity, but the consistent message of Primitivist essentialism (what Scotland truly «is» is prehistoric, out of time, beyond the reach of world events, an Ossianic dream (a guidebook in the 1830s referred readers to a 1693 description of Orkney as «probably still accurate»). It was a mirror of sentiment: while the (male) Anglo-Saxon Briton had created a *Staatsnation* to humble the globe, his wifely reflection provided the *Kulturnation* which proved his own authenticity. Scottish historic valour was absorbed in British pluck and spirit, while its enduring cultural and political life was depoliticized.

Such reflections, it has been argued, continue even in contemporary Scotland: hence the tension between «white settlers» and locals —bifurcated as heroic reflections or «sly rustics... backward and degenerate roughs» (Jedrej and Nuttall 1996). The incomers expect to acquire a space which reflects their tastes and identity as country folk who have escaped from a city which was not their natural habitat; at the same time, they expect to see the reflection of their own superiority in the community which admits their presence, and of which they wish to know little. Frequently they do not read the national Scottish press or listen to Scottish radio, and remain ignorant of developments in the country in which they only wish to see themselves reflected. In this, they are like the Spanish officials in Latin America cited by Benedict

Anderson: «A colonial creole might read a Madrid newspaper ... but it would say nothing about his world ... many a peninsular official, living down the same street, would, if he could help it, *not* read the Caracas production. An asymmetry infinitely replicable in other colonial situations.»

Incomers, initially attracted to see their own reflection in Scottish space by a tourist industry which stresses the existential encounter with one's true self in «the last wilderness in Europe,» frequently develop their own tourist facilities in the community they enter, thus feeding the process which brought them there. If such developments (e.g. «heritage trails» through cleared land, as was proposed in Sutherland in 1992) meet with hostility from the locals, the incomer's initial praise of aboriginal folkways often gives way to the obverse of Primitivism, which stresses the laziness and intractability of the «savage.» Once again, the failure to reflect the priorities of the incomer and instead to accentuate difference, leads to caricature and belittlement. Difference is welcome only when it is a cultural practice confirming the superiority of what it reflects. Thus incomers in late twentieth-century Scotland can term those who work crofts but also have other jobs as not «real» crofters, since only full-time crofting is a «true» activity, reflecting a primitive (but authentic) rural identity. The image of antique peasant poverty reflecting the inmost spirit of the country-loving British spectator is spoilt by a crofter who drives a taxi. The mindset which in the Romantic era searched for the reflection of its « true» self (as in the Cambridge-educated Wordsworth's praise of the «emotions of men in a state of vivid sensation ?») in the unsophisticated culture of declining rural localities, has its descendants in the tourism and counter-stream migration of today.

The second key discourse in the development of the British image was that of empire, which internationalized the space occupied by Britishness to an extent now often overlooked: a «modification of the revolutionary gospel of the rights of man into the Victorian gospel of the rights of Englishmen.» This image was shared in some degree by New Zealander, Canadian and Scot .and to a lesser extent Indian and African conformist elites: as Anthony Barnett said: «to be English is to be English; to be British is to be in English in the world.» To be «British» in this context was to be part of an international family of politics and manners, wherein a framework of common law, diplomacy, government and military power, animated by the stiff upper lip, pluck, amateurism and a love of games, bound together a patchwork of colourful localisms. Empire Tours, Cadet Corps and latterly Boy Scouts (who were to be, in Baden-Powell's definition, honourable, loyal, useful, obedient,

cheerful, thrifty and «prepared») celebrated its core values of Crown and Country, « reserve, respect for privacy ... modesty, fair play» as one sociologist was to describe Britishness as late as 1975. Sir John Seeley (1834-95) attempted in the 1870s and 80s to develop the concept of a «Greater British» history encompassing the Britains beyond the seas: the British image would be reflected throughout the world as the shape of what was best in human values, though Seeley 's support for imperial federation was not so welcome to the «core,» which preferred the narcissism of its own reflection to the sharing of relationship: « contempt for ... colonial colleagues» being commonplace at the imperial conferences . In World War I, Scottish and dominion troops typically suffered greater proportionate casualties than did those from the British core. About 9% of English soldiers were killed, almost 20% of Scots, 12% of Canadians serving overseas, 18% of Australians, 15% of New Zealanders, 15% of Newfoundlanders and 9% of South Africans. Only South Africans serving abroad had a death rate as low as England's among the colonies quoted above. Britishness might be an international phenomenon, as Roman-ness had once been: but there remained clear suggestions of first and second-class citizens.

The British image certainly received international support in its pretensions to global relevance. In 1897, the *New York Times* went so far as to say that: «We are a part... of the Greater Britain which seems so plainly destined to dominate this planet, « while in Vienna the Emperor Franz Josef wore the uniform of his British regiment in honour of Queen Victoria. Contemporary poetry such as Henry Newbolt's *Island Race* (1896) or Kipling's «White Man 's Burden» (addressed to the «Greater Britain» of the US) extended Britishness in international terms: Anglo-Saxonism could be open to almost anyone, even « an alien legion» like «The Guides at Cabul, 1879,» providing they conformed to the valour and integrity of Britishness as the light of life (Newbolt's «Vitai Lampada»): the source of illumination to be reflected throughout the world:

And England 's far, and Honour a name;
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:
'Play up! play up ! and play the game! «

The internationalism of this Britishness was rooted in the values of a limited social group in its «Home County» core: but it was also one with international scope, of which the Indian or Kenyan Oxford graduate was arguably more a part than was the English Tyneside docker or Irish Belfast Orangeman. Games were a central part of this ethos: Indian aristocracy and

British officers would play side by side in polo matches, even being photographed together in club groups, while cricket remains in essence the colonial game as which it began, played almost nowhere outside the former Empire. Intriguingly, cricket, gaining strength in Scotland in the 1880s, had within a few years succumbed to football, the sport above all others at which Scots have historically rejoiced in English discomfiture. The Britain of Empire subsumed a multitude of local patriotisms, of which Scotland's and Ireland's were two, but all of them merely reflected British ascendancy in local guise, and had no territorial implications: indeed, contemporary advertising perhaps most clearly shows the purely decorative manner in which colonial «difference» was conceived.

Britishness was international and had little space for colonial difference: «all the progress and civilisation in Wales has come from England,» remarked *The Times* in 1866 on an exhibition of Welsh art and industry at Chester. As Lord Rosebery remarked to Edinburgh University students in 1882, England 's wealth and power and population « make her feel herself to be Great Britain, with Ireland and Scotland as lesser gems in her diadem.» India was of course, in tellingly similar language, «the Jewel in the Crown.»

Scotland 's peculiar status as a colonized and colonizing nation arose from its crucially important contribution to Britishness, of which it was the closest and best reflection, and the provider of much of the essential fabric of Empire. James Watt 's steam engine, Adam Smith's economics, the victories of its generals and a host of others were all part of Scotland's British contribution, though this is not to neglect ambivalent responses to Britishness in the imperial period. This was once clearly to Scotland's benefit: indeed, the decline of Britishness as an idea of international value has affected Scotland particularly acutely. In the aftermath of 1945, the centripetal collapse of the global British ideal combined with the homogeneities of nationalisation and the welfare state to intensify the provincialization of Scotland. Before 1945, Scottish history and the novels of Walter Scott were commonplace in the curricula of English schools; the universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh were often more successful in gaining their graduates senior civil service, government and other positions than any other institutions outwith Oxford, Cambridge and London, and Scotland was almost never described as a «region,» a term now commonplace. Even in the eighteenth century, before the integration of Scotland into Britishness was fully developed, of 2500 entries in the *Dictionary of National Biography* who attended university, 14% were graduates of Edinburgh alone, while of 680

British scientists listed, 19% went to Cambridge, 17% to Oxford and 13% to Edinburgh. These are impressive figures. In the fifteenth-century William Wallace was the opponent of Angevin tyranny and the potential property of all Whig Britons. As the Earl of Elgin stated at the opening of the Wallace Monument in 1869, it was the struggles of Bruce and Wallace which had won Scotland the right to a free Union with England. Whatever the merits of such a view, it demonstrates that in the heyday of Empire, a dominant international Britishness could tolerate local varieties providing they made no territorial demands. It is important for us to realize that English neglect of Wallace's historic status is as forgetful of their own past as are Scottish claims that he had always been an unequivocal icon of political independence.

Arguably, the provincialization of Scottishness within Britishness is responsible for this, as it is for some of the increasing levels of alienation from Britain in Scotland itself: By 1999, 77% of Scots-domiciled adults chose «Scottishness» and only 17% «Britishness» when faced with an either/or question concerning their identity. Whereas the ruralist projection of the British image has suffered hardly at all from the loss of Empire it has intensified the rhetoricized importance of the English core at a time when its real significance in the world has diminished. It has been argued that the behaviour of English football fans abroad is a means of expressing this lost ascendancy; and, on a more critically political plane, sceptism about EU membership also reflects a rhetoric of self-importance which refuses to build new participative relationships to replace a dominant one, now extinct.

Within Britain, since 1945 this marked increase in the rhetoric of international consequence in the absence of comparable international significance is matched by a defensive response asserting the monolithic homogeneity, rather than colourful localism, of British society. Both these rhetorics have been bolstered by the BBC and the writings of sociologists and cultural critics. Richard Hoggart, one of the most noteworthy commentators in these areas, began a lecture at Aberdeen in 1989 with the words; «When you go into your local branch of W H Smiths,» a store of which there were at that time none in Scotland, while his *The Way We Live Now* (1995), though careful formally to exclude comment on Scotland in its introduction, still in its overarching «We» demonstrated that if « Jock» [English slang for Scot— SV] wants to be different and fail to reflect the British image, then he must be «Them» — in other words, Britishness is to be homogenous, not inclusive. Much similar theorizing goes short on ascertainable fact in order to make comments drawn from the British «core» applicable throughout the Isles. Not

infrequently this leads to completely erroneous statements: in 2000, for instance, *The Guardian* commented in an editorial about «the Scottish A-level fiasco» — seemingly ignorant of the fact that Scotland has never had A-levels as leaving qualifications.

The BBC itself, which only in 1999 issued guidelines which acknowledged the presence of different educational, legal and other processes in Scotland (e.g. procurator fiscal, not Crown Prosecution Service) has played a major role in consolidating a homogenized post-war Britishness via its public sector broadcasting status. Only c. 5% of its budget is spent outside England, and its assumptions of what public service broadcasting should be inevitably reflect a homogenized taste that regards cricket as equally the game of Shetland, Derry and Gloucestershire and treats an escaped tiger in London as a lead story, but one in Belfast as a comedy turn. There is little sign that devolution has had much impact on this. Like the funny escaped tiger in Belfast (a story from early in the 1990s), recognitions of Scottish difference indicate that any divagation from a single Britishness must be of a comic, inferior or absurd kind. This «government of the tongue» has substantively taken the place of the bonds of common purpose in which international Britishness once gloried: sociolinguistic and cultural pressure has intensified in response to the decline of imperial purpose.

As the Empire declined, the BBC almost alone among British institutions persisted in its mission to «thwart ... parochial broadcasting and ... to unite national and world audiences through imperial ritual.» As British homogeneity becomes more necessary to maintain self-confidence at a time of international decline, the reported peculiarities of localities become less a matter of the global variety of Britishness and more a statement of humorous or inferior divagations from national homogeneity. The paradigmatic British image sees only itself as free of ethnic peculiarity.

Any sustainable renegotiation of Britishness must move away from the core's historic requirements for inferior reflection and comic or sinister difference: the narcissistic absorption of outlying space on the one hand, and the rejection of «otherness» as subhuman or at least subBritish on the other. From the beginning, critics of the core's vision of a Britishness undevolved into imperial federation or Irish Home Rule have understood the necessity of the real shedding of power to the release of different potentials from the imprisonment of the British image. As the Scottish patriot Fletcher of Saltoun said presciently in his *Account of a Conversation* (1704):

...if the people of Yorkshire or Devonshire were not obliged to go farther

than York or Exeter to obtain justice, and consequently had no occasion to spend money out of those counties, how soon should we see another face of things in both? How soon would they double and treble their present value ? That London should draw the rules and government of the three kingdoms to the south-east corner of this island, is in some degree as unnatural, as for one city to possess the riches and government of the world.

The economic growth evident in Edinburgh since 1997 is evidence enough for Fletcher's view; but too often, a perceived need for change is lacking. As T.S. Kuhn says: «the study of paradigms... is what mainly prepares the student for membership in the particular... community in which he will later practice.» The application of this in politics can lead to the normalization of criminal acts within the state and brutal foreign policy outside it, for to question these is to cease to be a paradigmatic patriot. The British image is by and large more benign: but original thinking about Britishness is notably absent at the highest levels of British politics, media and other institutions because these are the «community» of British practice, whose own status is a function of their absorption of the paradigm. That is why highly able politicians can talk quite nonsensically about «Britain» having had «common laws and common language» for a thousand years. Reference to taking Britain «out of the shadows of failure,» becoming «a world leader» (Margaret Thatcher) or promising «the golden future of the British people,» (John Major), all capitalize on the perceived international reach which is Britain' s perceived right, and which any challenge to its rhetoricized internal homogeneity would further endanger.

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РЕЗЮМЕ

***Мюррей Пітток** / Британський вигляд : свої та чужі у Сполученому Королівстві /*

Переважаючий імідж “Британії” з сімнадцятого століття, якщо не раніше, є англоцентричним. Багато хто помилково ототожнює його з Англією та Сполученим Королівством. У рамках цього іміджу шотландці, валійці та ірландці виглядають лише такими, що поділяють англійські цінності та погляди, котрі окреслюються як “британські”. Ті, хто дивиться на Британські острови з точки зору цього усталеного іміджу “Британії”, ігнорують окремішність шотландців, валійців та ірландців або зображують її в карикатурному вигляді, як провінційну, принижуючи їхній внесок до “британськості”.

У XIX ст. національна впевненість, що базувалася на імперській гордості, дозволяла ставитися до окремішності більш толерантно і навіть асимілювати певні аспекти неанглійської культури до “британськості”, але лише до тих пір, поки неанглійці зберігали політичний спокій і не висували вимог щодо зміни територіальних кордонів або власного статусу. Традиційний імідж Британії був поширений англійськими політиками та письменниками, які звичайно ототожнювали Англію та її цінності з Британськими островами та Британською імперією в цілому.

Шотландці, як колонізовані, так і колонізатори, дістали чимало користі від перебування в Імперії; єдиною їхньою втратою, поряд з

політичною централізацією, було те, що Шотландія стала більш провінційною в загальному контексті Британії, ніж це було раніше. Чутливі до цих змін, які зробили звичним вживання поняття "регіон" щодо Шотландії - терміну, який ніколи не вживався в цьому контексті до 1939 р. - дедалі більше шотландців критично ставляться до поширеного іміджу "Британії" та починають наполягати на його зміні.