

REVIEWS

Michael Fry, *The Union: England, Scotland and the Treaty of 1707*
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UNION ON THE ROCKS?

‘The next necessary thing’, wrote Clifford Geertz in *The Anthropologist as Author*, ‘is to enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another in interest, outlook, wealth and power, and yet contained in a world where, tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other’s way.’ New nationalisms are part of that connection, and part of the resultant structures of evasion, or ‘identity’. Mongrels need new rules. And *all* nations are becoming mongrels, hybrids or foundlings, in the circumstances of globalization.

This is the overall impression left by Michael Fry’s definitive new book, *The Union: England, Scotland and the Treaty of 1707*—both a careful history of the Treaty of Union, detailing in particular the years from 1698, and a polemical argument for its repeal, and for the resumption of Scottish independence. Note, ‘resumption’ rather than ‘claiming’. Its appearance could hardly be more timely. May 1st, 2007 will mark the 300th anniversary of the ‘United Kingdom of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland’. This elderly piece of multiculturalism has endured alternative titles, ‘Britain’ and ‘Great Britain’ for example, all intended to make it sound more united than it ever was. People appear to be getting used to the idea of Iraq disappearing, divided between Kurdistan and one or more Muslim-Arab states. But an analogous fate may overtake Britain’s faltering Union, if Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland opt for new directions at the May 2007 elections to their ‘devolved’ assemblies. In that case a new acronym may soon

come into play, the 'RUK' ('Rest of the UK'). This would be mainly England of course, though now with the curious sense of 'Little England' plus London—a cosmopolis with nothing little about it, outside of Westminster and Buckingham Palace.

About twenty years ago Eric Hobsbawm, annoyed by my own connections with what then seemed the hopeless cause of Scottish nationalism, reminded me sharply that it was the Scots who really made the British Union in the 18th and 19th centuries. He was implying that to withdraw from the UK would be a retrograde move, and that to try and reform it made more sense. Whatever is now thought of that political recipe, Hobsbawm's historical judgement was surely right. Though the British Kingdom unites a surprising number of countries and cultures, ranging from Wales to the micro-nations of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, its backbone remains the link with Scotland. That rapport, in turn, rests formally upon one thing. This is not an idea, or a sacred code or emblem, or even what sociologists call a 'habitus'. It is a sheaf of papers.

I recall vividly the first time I set eyes on the Treaty, at a court hearing in the 1980s on Scottish protests over Mrs Thatcher's Poll Tax. Some Scottish lawyers maintained that a head-count tax might be incompatible with the 1707 Treaty of Union, and hence illegal under Scots Law. The presiding judge testily decided that a copy of the Treaty was required, and dispatched a clerk to make a photocopy from the Signet Library archives. Some hours passed before he returned with a handful of folded sheets—the nearest thing to a written constitution that British statehood has ever attained. A few days later the verdict came. There were no grounds for thinking the Poll Tax incompatible with any clauses of the Treaty, and Scots would have to put up with it. The Treaty hadn't saved them. The same miserable old sheets would be included, unchanged, in Blair's 1998 legislation on devolution. So the restored Scottish parliament was to go on being hamstrung by them, exactly like its ancestor of 292 years before.

This and many other absurdities can be made more sense of in the broader perspectives of *The Union*. Fry's close scrutiny of the motives for the 1707 Treaty underlines its unique character. It involved neither colonization nor forced assimilation—of the sort displayed earlier in Wales and Ireland—but an international agreement between two frequently battling kingdoms. They had been united under the same monarchy since 1603, but even this had grown precarious. Scottish in origin, the Stuart dynasty constantly threatened an armed come-back after twice being evicted, during the civil wars of mid-century and again in 1688. (The question would not be finally resolved until forty years after the parliamentary Union, at the Battle of Culloden in 1746.) In 1707, Queen Anne's English parliament was demanding more serious political reform, a single assembly located

(naturally) in London and supporting the new Protestant monarchy, forerunner of today's Windsors. Their hope was for a more united Anglo-Scots ruling class, which would be easily dominated by the English aristocracy. At that time, poor and thinly-populated Scotland represented only a small part of the main island's population, and even less of its resources.

London's new urgency was fueled by international problems. An expanding colonial empire could no longer tolerate home-island dissent, least of all from a regime that was showing alarming signs of wanting its own colonies and foreign policy. Scotland had often been allied with France, the dominant great power of the time and England's chief competitor. The Stuarts were in exile in France, and counting on diplomatic and military support from Louis XIV. At the same time, the condition of the Scottish economy had become pitiable. No-one will ever be sure what percentage of the population starved to death during the terrible 1690s, a period to which Fry pays great and deserved attention. In these circumstances, the Edinburgh political elite sought an over-ambitious remedy: launching a colonial enterprise of its own, by occupying the Isthmus of Darien (today's Panama).

A joint counter-attack by England and Spain defeated this venture in 1698–99 but, as Fry recounts, simultaneously emphasized the need for London to close the northern 'back door'. After the assimilation of Wales and Ireland, a different solution had to be found for the Scots. In contemporary terms, 'security' called for a political deal, rather than the dangers of occupation and repression. The English knew they could defeat Scotland's formidable clannic armies. They had done so already in Cromwell's time, but at huge cost; in today's world, comparable perhaps to recent assaults on Afghanistan. A much better solution was to buy off the northern aristocracy and warlords (including some compensation for their humiliation over Darien).

The Union is an updated retelling of the whole story, enlivened by the historian's own passionate and political involvement with the country that emerged. (Fry has described in a December 2006 *Prospect* essay his transition from pro-devolution Conservative parliamentary candidate—he joined the Tory party in 1966—to Scottish nationalist.) Such emotions aren't concealed by his conclusion, where the recent phase of devolution is dismissed as 'a flawed outcome' that has ignored 'deeper problems of the nation, of redefining its character and purpose'. He goes on to suggest that 'there may indeed be no satisfactory halfway house between the state of the nation as it was before 1603 and . . . as it was after 1707', so that today 'we are travelling back from the destination reached at the Union, if along a less bumpy route.' The question, then, is 'whether we should not make greater haste to the place where we started, as an independent nation'.

The Union deal was brokered before democracy and nationalism assumed anything like their modern forms. In the early-modern era, popular approval was not required—fortunately for the upper classes favouring the changes. Fry enjoys recounting the episodes of lower-class indignation and near-insurrection that accompanied the parliamentary debates of 1706–07, and makes extensive use of the reports compiled by an English journalist and spy, Daniel Defoe, better known today for later writings like *Robinson Crusoe*. Arriving in Edinburgh, Defoe was surprised

to find a nation flying in the face of their masters, and upbraiding the gentlemen, who managed it, with selling and betraying their country, and surrendering their constitution, sovereignty and independency to the English.

Edinburgh was at that time poorly paved, with streets and alleyways that provided ample ammunition for the traditional form of protest: ‘pebbling them wi’ stanes’. Had the contents of the Treaty been better known, Defoe observed, few parliamentarians ‘would have dared go home without a guard to protect them’.

Yet the pre-democratic, feudal-estates assembly of 1706–07 was by no means a contemptible body, as Fry several times underlines. Some did sell their votes, but many refused. Among the pro-Union ranks, some genuinely believed in their cause, and argued that short-term sacrifices would be justified by longer-term gains, more enduring peace and stability. In addition, he argues: ‘The vigour of the Scots’ existing traditions and institutions let them shape the Union too, for good or ill: it was a genuine choice in 1707, not just a factitious product of English expansionism.’ All over Europe, small countries and city-states were coming under similar pressures to amalgamate and form larger units—a good example is Catalonia, whose assimilation to all-Spanish rule was in part forced (ironically) by a Scottish army under the Duke of Berwick. By contrast, the Scots were able to retain or even reinforce important native institutions, including the legal and educational systems. Surrender of the state did not entail that of their ‘civil society’ (to use a later term coined in Scotland). And it is of course the latter that has survived into the present, and reacted to Iraq and other failures of New Labour.

Survival of the nation was one thing; tolerable survival and popular acceptance quite another. Fry also enjoys retelling the astonishing tales of bribery that punctuated the Scottish parliamentary debates and vote, finally made on January 16th, 1707 (though not formally celebrated until May 1st). On that day the Duke of Hamilton, himself one of the most dubious figures in the aristocracy, commented: ‘And so the darkest day in Scotland’s history has finally arrived. The point of no return has been reached, and nothing is left to us of Scotland’s sovereignty, nor her honour or dignity or name’.

Buying the elite was one thing, but convincing the rising middle classes and stane-pebblers took far longer—well over half a century on most accounts, punctuated by both political and military revolts until 1746.

What made the real difference was not the Union Treaty, but the empire. Scots of all classes discovered that overseas expansion in the later part of the century, first to North America and then to many other countries, furnished opportunities greater than their own abortive colonization of 1698 could ever have done. To a great and sustained movement of population was added a striking cultural expansion, the Scottish Enlightenment. As Fry concedes, this first successful phase of Union (from David Hume's time up to 1832) 'saw glorious intellectual achievement, the one thing that gives Scottish history any universal significance, and it ill behoves us now to complain about it.' The intelligentsia that had renounced its own statehood compensated by imagining a universal realm of progress, liberated from borders and inherited constraints. One of the most telling parts of Fry's Chapter 7, 'Fair Words—After the Union' is an account of Adam Smith's father, the 'Comptroller of Kirkcaldy', in Fife, for whom 'the Union proved a bit of a disaster'. But of course his son, Adam Smith Junior, would react to the miseries of the Customs Inspectorate with a theory about a tariff-free world: *The Wealth of Nations* (1776).

Contrary to some conventional views, it was almost certainly the Scots who headed the European emigration tables for the 19th and 20th centuries—a phenomenon Fry touches on, having produced a comprehensive account in his 2002 *The Scottish Empire*. Emigrants came from the rural lowlands and the towns and cities, not from the most traditional areas of clannic culture and less developed agriculture, as happened in Norway, and in Ireland after the 19th-century potato famine. The massive outflow came from all regions and classes, and continued for two centuries. The overall effect of such wide and enduring emigration was to constitute something like a 'haemorrhage society' at home—a nationality reconfigured by emigration, rather than just affected by it. The advantages for innumerable individuals had to be set against a mounting and decisive loss for the community, mourned by later writers like Edwin Muir, who complained in 1935 of seeing a country 'gradually being emptied of its population, its spirit, its wealth, industry, art, intellect and innate character'. The mythologies of nationalism are well known; but they should more often be set against those of migration and internationalism, still headier concoctions that rarely pause to measure this darker side of the process they extol.

It is, after all, that other side that partly explains the lateness of Scottish political nationalism, at which Fry's new history is directed. For all too long, the enterprising spirit of post-Union society was enthralled by the outward-bound impulse, which had plenty of time to itself become a tradition, and

seem part of Scotland's 'innate character'. It was not just the absence of military occupation or police repression that distinguished post-1707 Scotland. Important as this was—when compared to Ireland, for example—there was also the positive sense of large-scale contribution and achievement made possible by imperialism. *The Union* describes the national shames accompanying the Treaty; but these were to be eclipsed by the greater, more structured opportunities that favoured one generation after another, until quite recently. The predominantly successful saga of emigration in turn encouraged a deeply conservative mind-set. Investment by all classes in the process made it practically 'unthinkable' to alter course against the 1707 Union bargain.

True, the empire finally shrank and converted itself into a relatively meaningless Commonwealth, nowadays a venue for sport rather than politics. However, the phasing out of imperial attitudes and 'Greatness' was a lengthy business which, after pulling out of India in 1948, took the form of many relatively minor disgraces and humiliations. These generated cumulative depression rather than wishes for a break—that English mixture of melancholia and ironic resignation, perhaps best conveyed in the postwar poetry of Philip Larkin. The defeats were not big or meaningful enough to force revolt: everyone put up with decline, Scots included. 'Decline' was nothing like the fate inflicted on France in 1940, or on the losers of World War II, or upon the Soviet domains of the 1980s. To an indurate general conservatism, such retreat could always be presented as something other than terminal. And it was compensated for by second-rung material prosperity, as well as by vaguer hopes of redemption. Union cohabitation obviously grew less appealing as a social option, and following World War I a growth of nationalism in Scotland and Wales reflected that. But surely nothing too disastrous or final could overtake it?

And indeed it did not—until now. For the order at which Fry's book is aimed is one currently undergoing collapse. Each day brings the crash of another wall or roof beam. On 12 January 2007, the *Daily Mail* (rumoured to be Prime Minister Blair's preferred breakfast reading) appeared with the banner headline: 'Union In Jeopardy: Majority of Scots See Independence as Inevitable'. More astonishing still was the second heading, pointing out that most English opinion apparently agrees with them: 'more than half', according to the opinion survey used. And the United Kingdom's life-expectancy? Five years or so, with luck and some prevarication. The doleful prognosis is if anything supported by the paper's editorial page, a compilation of half-dead clichés about 'losing clout', as well as the Security Council Seat, the throwing away of proud inheritances and 'constitutional vandalism'. One can almost hear them toiling away down in the Middle England boiler room, striving to raise some steam.

But there is no longer anything there. Defeat in the Middle East is the trigger, but it should be remembered that it is happening at a moment when all other recourses have proved disappointing, or failed. Thatcherism has been followed by Blairism; that is, over twenty-five years neither the Right nor the Left of Britain's political spectrum has managed to restore anything like the previous age of global distinction and domination, or redeem the old sense of meaning and self-confidence that 'Britishness' used to depend upon. Bizarrely, Gordon Brown—currently preparing for prime-ministerial takeover—launched an unprecedented campaign to boost not just New Labour but *British identity as such* at a Fabian conference in January 2006. Should he become Prime Minister, the 'Save Britain' movement threatens to raise US-style flagpoles in Ukian front gardens for the restored Union flag; 'Britain Day' could soon succeed the former 'Empire Day'. But if Brown believes that old-style Britishness can be conjured up from the dead, he is mistaken.

From 1979 to the present, foreign policy has grown ever more crucial for London—the era of the South Atlantic War, a protracted (and unresolved) debate over European Union, and NATO's Balkans crisis, as well as of the advance of globalization. Status and a global presence have shown themselves to be more important to the all-British identity than the postwar welfare state, or the conventions of liberal legalism. In the end, it is foreign-policy fixations and delusions that have dragged the state into the present abyss. A feared subordination to Europe has turned into actual subservience to George W. Bush's American neo-conservatism, and condemned the UK army (with its large Scottish contingent) to the Iraqi charnel-house, and the hopelessness of Afghanistan.

But over exactly the same period, globalization has been changing everything in quite different ways. A profound shift of outlook has encouraged aspirations for change and new starts—'tumbled as they are into endless connection', in Geertz's phrase, great powers and poor devils alike. For all its pitfalls, the one world thrown up remains an authentically wider and expanding one; and bound, therefore, to resonate particularly strongly in a culture like Scotland's. In some ways Scottish society may have become over-committed to outflow and identity-switches—pathologically outward-looking, as it were. However, this same inclination may have attuned it to the new totalizing perspective, and to both the secular and religious belief-systems that have accompanied it. Globality is a disconcerting successor to foundering imperialism. But however much the former must distance itself from the latter, the line of descent should not be occluded.

The UK posture under both Thatcher and Blair has been as a vocal leader of an unreformed global imperium, one that bases itself on the Cold War's conclusion. The descent upon Iraq should have been a victory

for that would-be new, US-led world order. It has turned into an infamous and gory failure of the old, in which Great Britain's role has lapsed into a despicable mixture of bleating apologist and camp guard. Could any contrast be greater, or less controllable in its repercussions? In the old-Brit two-party system, both Tories and Labour supported the American neo-imperial adventure; but neither imagined that failure might impose intolerable strains, not simply on those in office, but on the grander system whose axis remains the 1707 Treaty of Union.

Fry's history crowns an ongoing debate about British identity and inheritance that includes Linda Colley's *Britons, Forging the Nation*, Thomas Smout's *History of the Scottish People*, Neal Ascherson's *Stone Voices* and Christopher Harvie's *Mending Scotland*. In Scotland at least, it looks as if popular instinct and response are now overtaking such 'history wars'. I cited above the question Fry concludes with, of 'making greater haste' to return to independence; and answers are already being given, by one opinion poll after another. In November 2006 the *Scotsman* published a survey,

showing a clear majority of Scots favour independence, and illustrating a significant swing from Labour to the SNP. The *Scotsman* ICM poll found 51 per cent now favoured full independence with only 39 per cent against—the biggest level of support for separatism for eight years. The poll also forecasts major gains for the SNP at next year's Holyrood elections with the party on course to win enough seats to form Britain's first nationalist-led government.

In the run-up to the May 2007 elections for the devolved parliaments in Scotland and Wales—two days after the 300th commemoration of the Union, for the Scots—and with the worst of the Iraqi tail-end still to come, a majority is looking forward to independence. As in all similar surveys, only a section of the emergent majority can be regular voters for the Scottish National Party, though their support is now steadily rising from its normal 25 per cent. In other words, a broader movement including Liberal-Democrats, Greens, Socialists and many Labour rank-and-file supporters is already in existence, and likely to be allies of the Nationalists next year. Fry's book is in effect an argument for a reformed Scottish Conservatism to join them, and secure an independent platform for separate democratic advance.

Stranger still, this Tercentenary election will itself be a byproduct of New Labour's half-hearted constitutional reforms after its 1997 return to office. Then, the rising autonomist pressures within Labour's ranks in Scotland and Wales made it necessary to experiment cautiously with 'home rule'. It was taken for granted that a semi-proportional electoral system would be the best form for the devolved assemblies. Britannic mythology remained unshakably convinced that proportionality and fair shares are recipes for

democratic anarchy and incompetence—the opposite of ‘sovereignty’, the stable and supposedly omnipotent authority cherished by the 1688 system. Thus a carefully delineated ‘fair go’ might help keep the discontented marginals harmlessly busy, and lessen the prospect of nationalism winning real power.

In fact what it provided was some breathing-space for new ideas to fight their way into Welsh and Scottish public opinion, and eventually into regional office. These powers are cramped, naturally, and counterbalanced by a gross reinforcement of central and increasingly authoritarian rule. But there’s no mystery about this: such reinforcement had been one aim of the devolution strategy itself, from the start—‘a regime of provincial subordination’, as Fry calls it. In that sense, ‘devolution’ can also be interpreted as another version of older historical models like the Soviet imperium of 1946–89: folk-dance as inoculation against serious political independence (and capacity for dissent).

On the constitutional reform front, the radical horizons of 1998 have taken on the dimensions of a disintegrating dog-kennel. In 2005, the ancient Westminster magic returned New Labour to office with a large majority based upon less than 22 per cent of the electoral vote. New Labour then returned the favour by making clear it had no serious plans whatever to farther alter the system that has ‘served us so well’. In 1997, for instance, the preposterous House of Lords was to have been transformed into an at least semi-democratic, electable second chamber. But a decade on, this affront to democracy still awaits its nemesis—the only substantial difference being that by now nobody expects anything better, or indeed takes much interest in the farce. Blair’s collapse has involved his interrogation by the police about an ongoing peerages-for-cash scandal. ‘Modernization’ of this kind has generated a UK climate recognizable enough in many other parts of the neoliberal world: generalized scorn and despair of politics and politicians, and mounting anguish about what the country now *means*, in a shrinking world-web that somehow renders identity more, rather than less, important.

This is of course the background against which more and more Scots (of all shapes and grades) perceive ‘no alternative’ to resuming independence. Not ‘claiming’ it like an ex-colony, but (as Fry describes the situation) merely returning to a long-postponed normality, via renunciation of the Treaty of Union. At the opening session of the devolved Scottish Parliament in 1998, its first Chairperson, Winifred Ewing, simply declared that an assembly abrogated *sine die* in 1707 was back, and about to resume business. In spite of everything, against all the odds, the day had come. And found the nation still there. Her statement of presence was widely ridiculed at the time for its

remote romanticism, and flight from practical reality. Nine years later, we can see that Ewing was merely slightly ahead of the times.

A bell was actually being rung, and not just for the media, or the attendant elite. Whatever the spores that coursed out from that day (other historians will trace them), they seem in the end to have reached and disturbed every obscure, puzzled, tongueless corner of this odd, relatively well-off *and* relatively deprived society: 'developed', and yet seriously lacking in communal will and self-confidence. That will-less void was of course the Union's achievement. And as Fry argues, the process of recovering and peopling it is now unlikely to cease. In other words, Scottish independence is about more than a 'democratic deficit' in general terms. A more specific history and discontent has brought acknowledgment that some democratic *nationalism* is the only way to carry it forward.

But *The Union* also omits, or skates over, several important themes. For all its merits, it remains the work of a thoroughly disgruntled conservative. More precisely, it expresses an unusual anarcho-conservatism: that is, a radicalism of the Right rather than the Left, but with quite similar shortcomings. Fry's forte is caustic impatience with compromises, half-measures, correctness and institutional stuffed shirts. Funny and liberating as this is, it leads him to underestimate the important part that equivocation and piecemeal changes have played in the formation of today's Scottish nationalism.

After the rise of the SNP in the 1970s, an initial referendum was staged on 'Home Rule' in 1979, under James Callaghan's Labour government. It failed, and was succeeded by eighteen years of Thatcherite Conservatism. But throughout these years, movements quietly continued to keep the issue alive, and a left-of-centre Constitutional Convention was set up that planned a better kind of self-government, supposedly distinct from both the Unionist regime and straightforward separation. This won increasing support and respect, and naturally provided much of the content for Blair's Scotland Act in 1997–98. Scots themselves did most of the work for their devolution; and insufficient as it has proved to be, this process nonetheless created real foundations for today's parliament. It is not the case that it has *just* been a 'flawed outcome . . . all dressed up in tartan with nowhere to go', as Fry puts it, 'wasting its time and money on trivialities, on efforts at micro-management of personal lives'.

The author maintains that there can be 'no satisfactory halfway house' between region and true nationhood. Possibly; but an unsatisfactory halfway house may also have prepared the way for something better. Its emergent political class are no more all 'mediocrities' than were the parliamentarians of 1706–07 whom Fry describes. And its very existence has injected some confidence into a nation confined for three centuries to the most limited 'low politics' of town and county councils. Here, Fry's radicalism of the right

seems almost as astigmatic as that of the left-wing enthusiasts he has so often (and with reason) criticized. He has confidence that a more distinctive Scottish conservatism will emerge, and be another plus for independence. But its formation too is bound to depend on gradual development, involving both alliances and contrasts with other movements of a new Scottish left and centre.

There is another absence from *The Union's* police-station line-up: 'ethnicity'. The term has become inescapable, and at a time of recently revived nationalism and conflict is especially important. In spite of its novelty (the 1960s), 'ethnic' is today routinely applied to both separatist and minority situations: being 'ethnic Albanian' or an 'ethnic Kurd' has become indispensable for deciphering respective problems, while multiculturalism has come to haunt every metropolitan language. For Scots it is even more significant: as I said earlier, they have become a nation of emigrants inhabiting a world configured by such stereotypes. And one response has been the general adoption of what Tom Devine, author of *The Scottish Nation* (1999), calls 'Highlandism': an exceptionally visible mixture of tartan plaid, bagpipe music, folk-dance and the cult of Robert Burns. Like many others, Fry may despise this ethnic mythomania, but in a work so focused on the meaning of 1707 for the present (and immediate future), more should have been said about it.

It is crucially important to stress the drastic variance of both history and contemporary politics in Scotland from nearly all of what that mythology implies. There is no single or even majority 'ethnos' among the Scots: the nation is irretrievably composite in origin, and to a striking extent unified more by institutions and past statehood than by either language, customs or culture. In the conclusion to his *Scottish Nationality* (2001), Murray Pittock stresses that deciphering complexity is the difficult central task of anyone working in the field, frequently against pressures from the London-based media. In November 2006, the *Economist* carried a cartoon depicting Gordon Brown, of all people, dancing about in a kilt with a discarded claymore at his feet. As Pittock observes,

Cartoons in *The Times* and the *Guardian* . . . continue to show the exponents of Scottish nationality in the claymore-wielding, poverty-stricken garb of the Jacobites thus caricatured 250 years ago. Both elements feed each other: the self-congratulation of elements in a local elite are identified as provincial *braggadocio* by the metropolitan eye, which as a result sees no reason to alter its own perspective.

Everyone in Scotland knows in advance that each move towards a resumption of independence will be treated to this kind of abuse: parochialism, call of the blood, instinct taking over from reason, 'ethnicity' for its own sake—and so on, and on. Only the previous week Lisa Vickers, the United States

Consul in Scotland, contributed to the knee-jerking when she announced that Americans will always stick by England-Britain. The same hostility is quite normally voiced as fear of a North Sea Bosnia, or as misguided opposition to the healthy style of globalization represented by President Bush and Blair's New Labour. That is what the 'Greatness' business is about—whether in Washington DC, or among its bedraggled camp-followers in Whitehall and elsewhere. And 'ethnicity' is by contrast inherently narrow, a betrayal of greatness-defined progress: a mortal menace to the present, therefore, or a hopeless retreat into the past—or preferably both. Globalization is meant for Greats, not tomfool left-overs and ethnic nostalgics. It's G8 stuff, nothing to do with West Papuans, Kurds, Chechens, Scots, Burmese Karens, Tibetans, Welsh, Québécois, left-out Muslims, Basques, Montenegrens, and all the rest.

It is quite true that a widespread and often unpleasant attitude surfaces among Scots: 'anti-Englishness'. This bears little relation to textbook ethnicity or blood-line inheritance. It is, in truth, anti-Britishness: something like latter-day anti-Americanism, a resentment of overweening state power and assumed superiority. Though Fry provides many examples of the mentality at work in 1706–07, and is good at situating the strange story of the Union in the broader framework of European history, he says little directly about England in this sense. The absence is all the more noticeable because of the book's urgently contemporary bearing. He reveals his own conversion to Scottish independence, but says next to nothing about the English nationalism this is bound to confront. However, *The Union* exposes how a placid assumption of England's ingrained universality ('ancient' even then) dominated the negotiations three centuries ago. Even before it assumed formal existence, 'Britain' was taken to mean Anglo-Britain, an imperially open society which all others should naturally accept, and indeed welcome. Such leadership was not to rest upon brute force, but 'hegemony'.

What harm can there be, after all, in a Great Power shepherding the way towards civilization, along roads that all must, in the end, imitate and follow? The United Kingdom's hegemonic role (or 'burden') may have been merged into that of the United States, as Consul Vickers now reminds impatient Scots. But England's essence will remain true to the outgoing mission—as if the Protestantism of earlier Britons had now mutated into the neoliberalism of post-1989 victory. New times, however, call for a quite different style of outreach, beginning with emancipation from the paleo-imperialism of the Bush–Blair North Atlantic. Just as free trade was impossible without assorted forms of protection and barriers, so globalization will only work via renewed forms of nationalism and identity conservation. I think the Scots know as much, if not more, about the outward-bound mentality. And they may be more aware of its pitfalls and

temptations. Why else is the contemporary scene dominated by an ever-growing list of battling nationalist and irredentist claims, and ‘rediscovered’ identity concerns? Neoliberal correctness put these all down as fossils. But since consciousness-raising too is part of globalization, the relics can’t help growing more aware of their plight. And a self-conscious ‘relic’ is a nationalist dilemma. So far the burning-glass of Iraq has generated or concentrated three of them. Mobilized nationalities would not submit to high-command imperatives in the 20th century; they are surely even less likely to do so in the 21st. Seen in this way, Scotland’s situation is typical rather than exceptional; and England’s turn will surely come—‘turning inward’ is only a part of doing this, necessary for any remedy.

Even so, outside observers are bound to ask: isn’t *some* intermediate or compromise arrangement possible, among nationalities so long conjoined, and sharing so much—even with all the shortcomings of the Union? For example, a federal or confederal British polity where England, Scotland, Wales, one part of Ireland, and the micro-states, obtain equality of status and agree on common rules and norms, and shared representation where this is appropriate? As things stand right now, the answer has to be: ‘no’. While such formulae are easy to imagine, they are difficult to sustain for long in practice because of one factor: ‘England’—at once the largest component of any such state, yet without any separate political identity or institutions whatever and still so merged into a discredited Britain that few will even contemplate de-merger; or if they do, only via the shudder of a deprived, somehow shrunken ‘little England’. New Labour’s ‘Council of the Isles’ disappeared within months, when it became obvious that it could never function without more serious reform of the central power-apparatus, including its electoral system. In practice, therefore, the current turning away from Britishness has no alternative except straightforward independence, or separation—or (for the Scots) reversion to nation-state business as usual.

The move is depicted by Anglo-American leaders and Consuls as ‘radical’, extremist, and so on, but such phrases are self-serving rhetoric. To anyone like myself, following events from far away and returning only now and then for re-immersion, something else is far more noticeable. This is what I can only describe as mounting matter-of-factness. From the sixties through into the nineties of last century, most debate on nationalism was conducted in a furnace of mutual loathing and recrimination. Passions could hardly have been more intense—especially on the side of threatened Britishness. In Scotland, this led to institutional hatreds and vendetta-like feuds between SNP nationalists and British-Labour loyalists. Now, however, the returning native finds relative composure, and even a degree of resignation. ‘Pros’ and ‘cons’ are today—which now does

mean almost every single day—listed and contrasted quite equably, in an atmosphere occasionally testy or bitter, but quite free from the explosive incriminations and lifetime sentences of a decade ago.

The passion of ‘Britishness’ has lost all weight and gravitas, except in Gordon Brown’s sermons, or in strained liberal attempts to promote a civic patriotism supposedly inseparable from Britishness. As a consequence, a real openness has appeared, much more favourable to independence. This is why the Scottish Catholic electorate (about 17–18 per cent, Scotland’s biggest cultural minority) has been drawn to vote for nationalism—and, of course, why Cardinal O’Brien appears so reconciled to independence ‘before too long’, as the *Scotsman* reported in October 2006. It is also why (as Fry’s book and *Prospect* piece suggest) Conservatives are finding themselves in an analogous situation. Few now expect Great Britain to make a phoenix-like reappearance at the next UK general election; but nobody at all expects Cameron’s neo-Toryism *not* to win in England.

Fry’s book brings to mind a particularly revealing incident in recent Scottish history. In December 1992, when the European Council heads of government were meeting in Edinburgh, a big demonstration was organized in the heart of the city, the Meadows Park. Its aim was to remind delegates that a nation was missing from the assembly, one that wanted to be heard again. An open-top double-decker bus was used as a platform among the trees, and novelist William McIlvanney gave from there what became the most memorable address of the day. Neal Ascherson has provided an equally memorable account of it in *Stone Voices*:

And then, in a tone of tremendous pride, he said this: ‘We gather here like refugees in the capital of our own country. We are almost seven hundred years old, and we are still wondering what we want to be when we grow up. Scotland is in an intolerable position. We must never acclimatize to it, never! Scottishness is not some pedigree lineage. *This is a mongrel tradition!*’ At those words, for reasons which perhaps neither he nor they ever quite understood, the crowd broke into cheers and applause which lasted on and on. What survives from those moments on the Meadows are his proclamation of Scotland the mongrel, and the joy these words released.

I was present at the event, and can recall the sensation vividly. It is true that nobody quite understood the thrill that made every nerve in the Meadows tingle. But that was because McIlvanney had touched something far deeper than the terms and conscious aspirations that had brought the crowd together, and still formed the official discourse of the day. He had broken through onto some unclaimed terrain, and given provisional voice to a pack of mongrels by rejecting the very idea of a pedigree ‘lineage’ (or ethnicity). He was speaking for people in a field or on a hillside, from nowhere or

anywhere, with mud on their shoes and rain in their faces—yet some kind of different covenant in their hearts.

That was only three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and globalization was still in its infancy. But in retrospect, wasn't it already fostering something different, far beneath the official chorus-lines of free trade and deregulation? Mongrelhood is also the asymmetric obverse of the older, uniformed identities of state and nationhood. In the Scottish context, it is also curiously like the positive assertion of what had been lacking since 1707: 'self-confidence', whose desolating absence was somehow converted into a virtue, even a sort of strength. The joy came from that acknowledgment of something real, the sudden awakening of a feeling that Scottish half-life was no longer fate—plus the obscure sense that altering circumstances might yet favour this change, rescuing it from the confines of pedigree and repetition. In Emma Rothschild's very apt phrase, a world of 'foundlings' was already on the rise, to which even a disabled country might hope to belong. Globalization does not make all nations disappear, or become equally small. But it does make some permanently and irreversibly 'smaller', in the sense of rendering older styles of imperium and domination impossible. At bottom, the reason may be quite simple: in the new global dimension, not only are there vastly more mongrels than pedigree hounds—this was of course always the case—but the former cannot help acquiring voice and presence. Hence a process of democratic warming is going on, alongside global warming. And on that foundation, 'anti-globalism' is less an opposite than a modification of globality, and of the distinct yet open societies that will alone make the global tolerable. The '-ism' was the trouble, not the opening-up.

And new foundlings may be particularly useful in formulating these. In his account of the origins of modern Scotland, Fry several times makes the interesting point that Scottish anti-Union parliamentarians were not arguing for pedigree-preservation and protection, or the erection of new barriers, in 1706–07. On the contrary, some were demanding free trade, equal treatment and openness, and others a solution like the Netherlands United Provinces—with both perceiving the retention of national identity as necessary for such answers. The Union, on the other hand, stood for something simpler: 'incorporation' (the unvarying watchword of its devotees). That is, cementing troublesome diversity into one increasingly successful but quasi-mercantilist system: the armed imposition of laws convenient to its leadership, prosperity and empire.

The Union describes the process, and ends by arguing that it is time for our little country to de-incorporate itself. All genuine mongrels will agree with Fry on this. There is also a case for the more general and theoretical redefinition of what could be called the scale of nationhood. After a long

period during which bigger was in some ways better, with the initial rise of industrialization and the diffusion of global commerce, globalization may have inaugurated another, in which smaller is, if not better, then at least just as good (and occasionally with the advantage over the erstwhile great, the muscle- and hidebound). The age of the body-builders has ended, as that of dinosaurs once did; that of smaller mammalian fitness is still being worked out. Is it really surprising that the United Kingdom should be one prime site for this to happen?