

Scotland's Three Tongues in Australia: Colonial Hamilton in the 1860s and 1870s

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They speak in riddles beyond the Tweed,
The plain, poor English they can deftly read;
Yet when without the book they come to speak,
Their lingo seems half English and half Greek.

(Leighton 1868, 4)¹

The town of Hamilton, Victoria, is situated inland from Portland, the port through which white settlement of that state commenced in the 1830s. Lying in the centre of a rich pastoral area known as the Western District, Hamilton has long had a reputation as a Scottish settlement with many large grazing leases to the east of it being pioneered by Lowland Scots. Some of the Highland and Island Emigration Society's settlers came ashore at local ports and the first issue in 1857 of the Australian Gaelic-language newspaper, *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*, notified its readers that circulation agents for the paper had been appointed in Portland and Hamilton, bearing witness to the presence of Gaelic speakers in the district. A local estimate in 1864 claimed that three-quarters of the population of the district came from north of the Tweed.² This paper looks at the written legacy of these Scots in the years 1860 to 1875, principally through the pages of the local newspaper, the *Hamilton Spectator*, in the first fifteen years of its life.

It might be expected, in view of the make-up of the population of the area, that the Scottish voice would have coloured much of the day-to-day life of the region. To some extent it is hardly correct to speak of 'Scots' as though they constituted a unified group. Both Highland and Lowland Scots were present, as well as those who arrived in the district after long periods of settlement overseas or in other Australian colonies such as Tasmania. This diversity created the opportunity for a variety of opinions and differing, if not directly conflicting, attitudes towards certain common issues such as religious worship and other aspects of Scottish culture. We have few examples of the day-to-day relationships between English and non-English-speaking

Scots, but the glimpses we do have show the problems relating to inter-communication and the depth of affection held by those from the Gaidhealtachd for their native culture.

In such a context, it is of interest to see how the Scottish voice represented in its three major forms—English, Lowland Scots and Gaelic—through the medium of the popular press. Those Scots whose writings appeared in the local newspaper addressed literary, community and specifically Scottish matters. As all reveal themselves fully literate in standard English and competent in its use, some attempt is made here to examine why the different authors chose, on occasions, to make use of Gaelic and Lowland Scots.

THE LITERARY VOICE

Hamilton Scots employed each of their three tongues in order to address 'Scottish' local issues such as fraternal associations and their own ecclesiastical affairs. They sometimes resorted to Lowland Scots when they sought to inject notes of satire or humour into their discussion of broader community matters such as local and state politics. Another area with which some Scots concerned themselves in the pages of the local newspaper was the writing of original pieces of literature. In this they had at least tacit editorial encouragement, for in deference to the large Scottish component of its readership, the *Hamilton Spectator* ran a number of articles on Scottish culture and history including such items as: a reprint of *Mercurius Caledonius* from 1660-61 (2 Nov. 1872, 4), 'Peculiarities of the Scotch Marriage Law' (6 July 1872, Supplement, 1), 'The Sea Serpent in a Scottish Loch' (2 Nov. 1872, Supplement, 1), and 'The Songs of Scotland' (12 Sept. 1868, Supplement, 1). Verse and song from the motherland was also reprinted, just as this and other newspapers acknowledged the presence of other ethnic groups in the district by carrying very occasional pieces in the language or dialect of these groups.³ The preponderance of Scottish items appearing would seem to reflect the prevailing demographic realities at the time.

However, care was taken to include humorous pieces among these non-English and dialect offerings. Two examples of such items are the story of the English lady bemused by a Scots maid's offer of a 'pig' to warm her bed, and the tale of the non-comprehending Englishman, whose response to having a simpleton described by his Scots informant as 'wanting tippence like', was to hand the boy a sixpence (25 Sept. 1863, Supplement:ff.7; 10 Sept. 1870, Supplement, 2). Inclusion of such pieces sought to ensure that Scottish cultural material printed in the journal would be read in a tolerant and genial spirit by the general (i.e. the English) readership. One reader who obviously did so was the Englishman and local poet who used the pen name 'Mount Sturgeon'. One of his poems, 'To Mary', is inscribed, 'An English Attempt in Scotland's Vernacular' (24 April 1863, Supplement, 3), and in it he

abandons his usual diction to enter into the spirit of all this 'Scottishness'. The first stanza reads:

O' a' the lasses I hae read,
 In story brave, or dour, or dool;
 What spears ye?—jist cam' in my head,
 But Mary—ance o' Warrnambool.'

The editorial hand can sometimes be seen at work, too, ensuring that 'Scottish' matter was read in an appropriate context. The poem, 'What Ails Ye At The Organ, Grannie?' by James Smith (5 July 1873, Supplement, 1), is described as a 'humorous Scotch poem' on a 'subject which just now seems to be giving some of our Presbyterian friends a world of trouble'. As will be seen later, the reference was to local attempts at introducing music into Presbyterian church services. Thus, general readers were alerted before they read them that lines like these related to a particular church controversy which, although an easy target for fun, was a serious enough issue for a certain section of the community.

Sic hurdy-gurdy trash, Jamie,
 Shall ne'er get my guidwill, my man,
 An sae ye needna fash, Jamie.

Nae drones, wi' dismal twang, Grannie,
 Were heard when David sang, Grannie.

A Scots voice, appropriate for the narrowly Scottish subject, is made instructive and palatable to a wider readership with a modicum of adroit editorialising.

The fact that they originated in Scotland, and were printed for the delectation of a Scottish readership, seems to have been sufficient warrant for the paper to include a number of relatively unadulterated Lowland Scots poems. These included 'Caller Herrin' (11 June 1870, 2) which at least had the advantage of being well known because of its popularity as a song, but there were other pieces, reprinted from Scotland, which may have been quite taxing for the non-Scot. For example, two verses of the unattributed 'My Luggie' (27 July 1864, 4) read:

Then cam the threshin' jist to please, 'twas exchange for her jaw,
 Poor Tam was cuffed an' clouted sare for keeping nature law;
 Then sent 'quick march' to cripple Bob's for bottle o' his ale—
 On comin' hame the cork flew out, but luggie was his pail:
 The froth puffed up like reeking lowes till luggie was run owre,
 It fizzed an' spart in spite o' Tam jist like an April shower.

Tam threw the empty bottle down,
 An' hame wi' luggie fu';
 The whole house swore I was a loon,
 An' aff to Bob's they flew.

Back to the house wi' vengeance cam, and cudgelled me right sair,
 Then pured the ale out luggie's hold, but guidness what a stare
 When out came swimmin' sparrows twa, that very morning kittled,
 My grannie's specks flew owre her crown, my mither's nerves were nettled;
 The swipes were thrown in my face, poor luggie to the door—
 'Nae deil was ever born like Tam' the whole house loudly swore.

I owre my waesome sparrows cried,
 A bankrupt beggar stood;
 Stock gane-by every friend belied,
 As ane o' reptile brood.

This is not just pseudo-Lowland Scots, English vocabulary rendered into what was regarded as Scots spelling. There are sufficient genuine Scots terms here which, combined with a certain disjointedness in the narrative, would have rendered these verses quite difficult for the non-Scot. Similarly, the article 'The Scotch Psalms' (8 March 1873, Supplement, 2), with its sample of P. H. Waddell's Scots version of the Psalms must have sent many rushing to the King James text of the 'Old Hundredth'.

1. Skreigh till the Lord, the haile yirth, maun ye:
2. Beck till the Lord wi' blytheheid an' a'; ben afore him, wi a sang o' glee.
3. Ken ye fu' weel, the Lord he's God: himlane, *it was*, made us; oursel *made* na we: his folk are we syne, and eke o' his hirsle the fe.
4. Ben till his yetts wi laud; till his faulds, wi' a lilt saw hie; lilt ye laud till himsel; an' that name o' his ain, bless ye.
5. For gude is the Lord; his gude-will's for ay; an' frae ae life's en' till anither, that truth o' his ain, it *sal be*.

The largest single category of Lowland Scots verse found in the Hamilton newspaper speaks of the homesickness of Scottish emigrants and of their nostalgia for the land of their birth. One of the finest such pieces to appear was 'Farewell to Edinburgh' by Harriet Miller Davidson (4 May 1872, Supplement, 2). The writer was currently a resident of Adelaide and the poem had already appeared in the Scottish press. It depicts Edinburgh as a 'queenly leddy', beloved for her 'bridal veil o' snaw' in winter, for the 'radiant, ruby light' with which her windows shine during the summer sunsets, and for the thousand lamps 'twinkling in every street and square' at night. Departure from the city was painful, and hopes of eventual return were cherished:

Oh, my bonny, bonny leddy!
I'm fain to bide with thee

There's nane o' a' thy mony bairns
Has ever loved thee mair
Than I who now maun leave thee
Wi' weary heart and sair.

Oh, keep some wee bit corner
In thy grand auld heart for me,
Where, when I'm auld and weary,
I may creep back to dee.

Sentiments such as these were common enough in colonial newspapers. The Scots accent employed in this poem was an act of choice directed towards the original readers in Scotland. Though it was also common for Irish and Scots writing nostalgic verses in Australia to write them in accented English, evocation of the voices of 'hame' enriched the memories and pictures so dear to the homesick authors. The paucity of the appearance of such material in this local Hamilton paper thus needs some attempted explanation.

The *Hamilton Spectator* was a commercial enterprise, so it is no surprise that 'Scots' verse, original or reprinted, was the exception rather than the rule and we can consider several reasons for this. Authentic Lowland Scots could be heavy going for the non-Scottish reader and newspaper proprietors had circulation figures to consider. In the period 1861-1875 the actual amount of material in Scots averaged out at one piece per year. Even poems in imitation of Burns such as 'Higho! The Lassies O', by A. McLean (19 June 1869, 1), and the unattributed 'A Girl's a Girl for a' That' (28 August 1869, 1), are written in the standard English poetic diction of the nineteenth century. In this regard, the *Spectator* was not typical of the rest of the state. Original poetry in Lowland Scots was a decided feature of the Melbourne newspapers such as the *Port Phillip Patriot* from their beginnings in the early 1840s, a situation repeated in many other provincial journals. The organ of the Victorian Scottish Union, *The Scot at Hame an' Abroad*, continued to publish verse and prose in Lowland Scots from its origin until its demise in the 1930s. There obviously was no shortage of this kind of writing and what made its way into print would thus only have been a fraction of what was actually submitted. Another reason why the Hamilton press did not publish material in Lowland Scots more frequently may simply have been the enormous popularity of the prevailing (English) poetic diction of the day. Sentimental, nineteenth-century verse style was certainly no less fashionable at this populist level in the provinces than we know it to have been in the more urbane 'literary' circles!

If we turn to a particular Hamiltonian poet we can find another specific reason for the relative local neglect of Lowland Scots as a poetic voice. Ossian Macpherson had twenty-seven poems accepted for publication by the *Hamilton Spectator* between 1861 and his death in 1875. Although he wrote verse in Gaelic (he won prizes for this in Melbourne and Geelong for five consecutive years before moving to the Hamilton district), none of these verses appeared in the paper, and only two of the twenty-seven of his offerings in the Hamilton press were in Lowland Scots. These were his very first piece printed there, and a reprint of his poem 'Shinty', which had been written while in London in 1842. Macpherson confesses to having been an itinerant and no stranger to poverty. Around Hamilton he had tried to make his living as a private tutor and rural schoolmaster, as well as serving as an area correspondent for the newspaper. Anything from his pen expressed in a manner which could be construed as 'vulgar' would have had the potential to harm his professional standing in the eyes of local parents and thus threaten his livelihood.

If this was the case, it makes it difficult to understand why Macpherson chose to announce his arrival in Hamilton in 1861 with a poem strongly marked by Scots vocabulary. This piece, 'To My Mither at Hame' (4 May 1861, 2), consisted of five eight-line stanzas of rhyming couplets. It reminisces about the sorrow of the emigrant's parting, and goes on to become consciously autobiographical. 'I did na' come here, mither,/mindfu' o' wealth,/But to seek once again the sweet blessing of health.' (In another place Macpherson tells us he was in Madeira in 1848, an invalid waiting to die). The lines 'Aft houseless and hameless, wi' travel fit sair,/Pinch'd wi' hunger and thirst', confirm his later prose avowals that he had had first-hand experience of the rigours of the lifestyle of bush swagmen. Readers know, of course, that a narrative persona might bear either a close or a distant relationship to the biography of the poet in question. The author can win praise for inventing a personality; it is not always assumed that he bares his own soul. Thus, when Macpherson's persona says, for example, 'mid poverty's blicht, I am glad and content', or 'An' my heart in its language sae hamely and rude,/Pours forth in its fullness a puir gratitude', the Scots spelling serves to stress the fact that this is the voice of the exile, albeit one who is content with his current lot in life. To the mother overseas, this voice would be reassuring—neither time nor distance has changed her son—while to the poor emigrant in Australia, despairing of ever obtaining land of his own, the vernacular familiarity of the voice would help render palatable the implied moral contentment with one's present position in life.

But such examples are rare in Macpherson's published work. Although he wrote many poems on Scottish themes for the *Hamilton Spectator*, these reveal very little resort to the form of Lowland Scots. Poems describing Highland legends, like 'The Black Captain' (31 August 1861, 3), and Scottish history such as 'Cluny's Lament', which dealt with Cluny Macpherson of the '45: the attainted, long-secreted, and ultimately in-exile chief of Clan Chattan (18 Feb. 1865, 4), and 'Queen Mary's

'Murder' (1 Jan. 1870, 1), might seem obvious occasions for the employment of Scots. This approach Macpherson declined to take. The loyalty, courage and dignity of the individuals in these poems is presented entirely through English, perhaps because these are Scots in whose lives and sufferings he saw a universalised significance. The title of the poem 'Queen Mary's Murder' leads us to anticipate a certain historical bias, and this is confirmed in the author's note attached to the poem. This declares that 'the reign of that wretched woman [Queen Elizabeth I, was] a veritable calendar of horrors'. The judgment of history, which he presumes to announce concerning Mary's execution, 'That gory blot on England's name', is presented as though it were more than a simple parochial Scottish judgment, and the deliberate eschewing of a narrowly Scottish voice would seem to reflect this wider purpose:

And curst shall be, by lips unborn
The butchery of that winter morn.

The deliberative manner in which Ossian Macpherson selected the tongue most appropriate for ends in the poems discussed thus far continued to be evident in the many other poems he wrote with Australian settings or themes. The local newspaper contains nationalistic poems by him ('Arm Ye Australia', 30 Nov. 1864, 1), sentimental ones ('The Australian Babes in the Woods', 11 Jan. 1865, 2), occasional verse ('On the Attempted Murder of Prince Alfred'), and a large number of poems on the death of people known to him (not the least of which is 'In Memory of Adam Lyndsay Gordon', mourning the death of a well-known colonial poet of Scottish descent, 13 May 1871, Supplement, 1). None of these poems listed, nor the numerous unlisted ones, employs a Scots voice in the use of vocabulary. Possession of three tongues and the developed ability to versify in each meant that Macpherson had considerable flexibility. When writing verse for an English-language newspaper he employed Gaelic not at all, and Lowland Scots sparingly. When he wrote of Australia he felt little need to speak in a specifically Scots voice. The issues he raised, the deaths and tragedies he mourned, the events he celebrated were, or were positioned by his poetry as though they were, matters which touched the lives of the wider citizenry and not just those of his brother Scots.

To argue that English became the literary language of choice for the Scottish-born poets of provincial Hamilton because they fell victim to the all-pervasive fashion for Victorian poetic diction, or to maintain that they opted to write in English so frequently simply because, of the languages at their disposal it was the one most appropriate to the vast majority of the subjects they chose, is to over-work each of these causal factors, important though they were. A smattering of 'braid Scots' certainly would not have been inappropriate in Macpherson's poems. Judiciously used it could have enhanced both the effect and the local colour of

works such as the graphic 'The Black Captain' and the angry 'Queen Mary's Murder'. It seems that one other factor was at work in the district which has to be brought into this discussion. Those Scots who penned verse still had Scots available to them as a literary medium, its accents still marked their own everyday speech. But the events and experiences of their Australian environment were beginning to impinge upon the moral and cultural values they had brought from Scotland. As this mingling progressed, Scottish poets in the Hamilton district appear to have opted less frequently for the use of a Scots tongue. A Scottish voice may still be detected in their work, but they tend to move away from narrow linguistic affirmation of 'Scottishness'. Its presence may still be detected, of course, but it takes on other forms.

It has already been noted that the district newspaper ran quite a number of articles and verses dealing with Scottish culture. Obviously, for many Scots, pieces like Robert Buchanan's 'The Lead Melting' (29 April 1871, Supplement, 1), which describes some of the customs by which a future spouse could be foreseen, would have served to keep alive the memory of old traditions:

Twas clear, cold, starry, a silver night,
And the old year was a-dying,
Three pretty girls, with melted lead,
Sat gaily fortune trying.
They dropt the lead in water clear,
With blushing palpitations,
And as it hissed, with fearful hearts,
They sought its revelations.

It is also true that many Scots settlers made active attempts to keep such inherited customs alive in the new land, as Ossian Macpherson found when he visited a neighbouring township, Konong Wootong, at the end of October 1864, and of which he wrote in his poem 'An Australian Halloween' (12 Nov. 1864, 3):

I passed that night at Wootong Halloween

The poet tried his nuts, with anxious gaze,
And picturing one form amid the blaze;
Perhaps he thought the emblems might be true,
Alas,—his nuts were cracked ere half burnt through.
And when blindfold, before each fairy plate,
He wished—his fond desire—for gentle mate,
His hand thrice grasped the platter that was clean!
No wife for him at Wootong Halloween.

At first such transplantation of customs may have strengthened the old values, making over Australia in Scotland's image, as it were:

Bard of all coming time, immortal Burns,
 Couldst thou have dreamt that ever would have been
 Another Scotland *here* and Halloween. (*Ibid*)

But four years later this same poet's 'A Few Lines for Home' (26 Dec. 1868, 4), although tinged with sadness because of the separation from loved ones at the festive season, values the Australian landscape for what it is, not for the imported culture it nurtures. The poet is comfortable in the Victorian outdoors and expends as many lines on it as he does on 'memory Scotland':

When snow falls fast, and frost is keen,
 And scarce one verdant spot is seen,—
 When skies look dark, with anger scowl,
 And winds without discordant howl,—
 When Christmas fires, with radiant [*sic*] glow,
 Their cozy welcomings bestow—
 And gathered round, the loved and dear,
 Think of us, friends,—think of us here.

While wand'ring mid our fields of bloom,
 While bright the sun, soft the perfume;
 Or gazing on the ocean blue,
 Sparkling in all its summer hue;
 Or 'neath the gum-tree's welcome shade,
 Our forms in lazy comfort laid:
 Our hearts will with you be today—
 We think on you, friends, far away.

We all filter the new through the old, referring immediate and unfamiliar experiences to the value systems and traditions with which we are familiar as we attempt to incorporate and make sense of novelty. It is natural that settlers in the Hamilton district who resorted to names like Sir Robert Bruce, Royal Charlie, and Highland Donald for their farm stallions (18 Dec. 1863, 6) and equally evocative names for their farms and geographical features, would seek to understand strange and new aspects of their Australian environment through appeal to the cultural traditions of their homeland. Thus, to take one example, when the Highland Scot, James Grassie, sought to come to terms with local (and, of course, non-literate) aboriginal civilisation, the understanding he reached clearly owed something to forms and traditions ultimately derived from the vernacular heroic literatures of

western Europe. These lines purport to be an aboriginal epitaph and Grassie penned them under this title, 'Translation of an Aboriginal Epitaph' (18 Sept. 1863, 4):

Stay, chieftain stay!—and drop a tear!
Coup Carrip's bones lie sleeping here:—
Coup Carrip, bold, who wedded fame,
And handed down a deathless name
To future years, the white man's foe—
He laid the pale intruders low.
Here in peace his ashes lie;
But his deeds can never die.

In the following decade, district whites were still 'seeing' aboriginal Australia through their own cultural norms. Despite the editorial introduction, which seeks to relate the story to Germanic tradition ('It is somewhat singular that a tribe of savages should have conjured up a superstitious fancy so closely related to the Ellmaid legend of elegant German literature'), this unattributed versification of a local aboriginal legend seems to have been constructed with the Kelpie and other aspects of the Celtic supernatural in mind. The aboriginals' Coorg was a spirit to be found in the bush around a certain water-hole and was incorporated into a poem entitled 'Coorg' (23 April 1870, Supplement, 1):

Hark to the spirits of Scaith—how she screams,
And the bittern responds in fear
And the herdsman starts in his midnight dreams,
And trembles when Coorg is near.

She has lights to lure the swagman bushed
From his path to her grotto lone,
And music to her are the accents wild
Of the bushman's lost and benighted child,
Or its mother's expiring groans.

Oh, traveller, traveller, shun her sands,
And head for the Snizort plain.

As experiences peculiar to Australia became the subject of emigrants' literary productions, Scottishness is to be sought not in the direct narrative voice of a poem, but rather in the perspectives and assumptions which underlie the words spoken by the narrative personae. The Scots of Western Victoria showed considerable panache in selecting from their three languages a tongue and an accent suitable for the

immediate purpose they had in mind, were it civic or literary. Whatever the level of vocal dexterity and literary artistry employed in their individual epistolary and literary effusions, we can usually detect the basal voice of Scottish culture underneath the particular tongue or accent employed on a given occasion.

THE PUBLIC VOICE

Gaelic made its first published appearance in a letter to the *Hamilton Spectator* in May 1861. The correspondent was sparing in his employment of the language, using it for his title ('Clann Na Gael, 'An Guilibh Na Cheile'), pen name ('Na Bean Ri Cat Lamhin'—presumably a slightly defective allusion to the Macpherson motto) and to interpolate two phrases within the English text of the letter (11 May 1861, 2). Nevertheless, these traces were enough to attract editorial commentary half as long as the letter itself. The writer declared himself a newcomer to the district, delighted to find such a strong Scottish presence there, but disappointed to learn there was no Caledonian Society in the neighbourhood, a situation which he compared unfavourably with Melbourne and provincial centres such as Geelong, Ballarat and Buninyong. Lowland Scots also made its prose debut in this same letter. The writer declared that his heart 'gaed a loup o' delight', for example, at finding so many Scots in residence, and he rejoiced in the 'blythesome faces of the many bonnie burdies' daily encountered in Hamilton. Why were these two tongues used to ornament a letter in English, the plain sense of which was evident without them? It is clear that this author was fully literate in English, as were all the others to be considered here. Use of Gaelic or Lowland Scots phraseology or spellings constituted acts of conscious choice, deliberative interpolations placed within letters written primarily in English. Subsequent correspondents provide answers to this question.

This epistle drew a response from another Highlander who first of all chided him for his bad Gaelic spelling, but supported his fraternal aim (18 May 1861, 2). This new correspondent, signed 'Highlander', also used two tongues in his letter. Writing mainly in English, he nevertheless supported the proposal for founding a local Caledonian Society by quoting from a Gaelic poem evocative of the strength of Highland feeling and cultural identity. What Highland heart, asks the writer, can fail to be stirred by the naming of the hero?

Co as t'Albanach nach teid air bhoil,
S' nach teid a' chridhe na chliabh, air ghoil,
Mar bhras, fhairge dol troimhe chaol,
An fuair chluinneas' e' ainm sar ainm an laoch.

The baton was taken up by another correspondent signing himself as a son of

Mull, 'An Gille Muilach' (18 May 1861, 2). He, too, lends his support. 'To us Highlanders', he says, this issue was an important one, and he wrote to stir his brethren to action that the world might know that they were 'Mic Sheann Albainn gun Cul'—true sons of old Scotland. In making the effort to found a society, local Scots would be behaving like true Gaels, 'A bhi gualain ri gualain,/Anns gach cruadal a's gabhadh.'—standing together, shoulder to shoulder, to face the present difficulties.

The writer goes on to ask: 'Is there no influential Gael who will take on himself to call *Clanna na'n Gael ri Cheile?*' He would be delighted, he adds, to see one of the many influential local Gaels stepping forward to call together Highlanders of the area, just as Highlanders were led to outstanding victories on the Slopes of Alma and the Heights of Balaclava:

Sliochd na'n cuirdhan calma,
 Nach pilleadh sa gharbhchatch,
 Dheanadh slinntrich a's tailmrich,
 Car armabh troimh fheoil
 Agus braithran na'n Armuin
 Choisinn buaidh air uchdach Alma,
 Sair airdan Bhalaclabha,
 Cha d'fhag iad aon beo.

'Be up and stirring' is the slogan this son of Mull draws from these lines for neighbouring Highlanders. Then, lapsing once more into Gaelic verse, he urges them to gird their loins as though for battle and to take heart in the face of the issue at hand:

Croisabh bhur leasra,
 Is treise na'n Gaidheal
 Nach gabhadh bonn geilte
 Romh fheachdamh a'n namhaid.

He concludes his letter with a poetic exhortation in Gaelic to local Gaels, urging them to raise the Highland standard in the colony, and to continue the traditions which form their birthright:

A Chlanna na'n Gael
 Tha 'n tamh ann san tir seo
 Horo togamh an airde!
 Bithibh ullamh s ealamh fearal a's fìorghlic
 Caranta [?] cruadalach uasal n'ar inntinn,
 Gu Comunn na'n Gael;

Theiradh blas do mo chri'sa
 Shuidhachadh mar bu dual da
 De [?] suaichantas Rioghal,
 Horo togamh an airde!

It is possible to determine the object which the writer of this letter had in view from his English prose alone. However, the importance he attributed to the formation of a Caledonian Society, and the context in which he placed such fraternal association, was revealed only to those who could read Gaelic. In a follow-up letter (8 June 1861, 2), the same correspondent appealed to the spirit of Ossian in his efforts to stir his countrymen into action. He cannot believe that the feelings of those from 'Tir na'm beann na'n Gleann s na'n Gaisgeach'—the land of mountain, glen and heroes—would fail to be stirred when faced with the challenge of establishing a society of Gaels like the brotherhood of heroes of old. Lethargy in regard to this call, he writes, would find the spirit of Ossian, 'King of Gaelic Bards', pointing the finger of reproof at the 'lukewarmness' of his fellow Gaels.

Encouragement came, too, in the other language of the Scot. Ossian Macpherson, the local bard mentioned earlier, competent at composing and translating Gaelic poetry, used his other voice, Lowland Scots, 'to influence a Highland Gathering in Hamilton' (24 Sept. 1864, 3). Drawing on one of his earlier compositions, 'Shinty', the poet sought to evoke the spirit and excitement of Highland sports as a means of commending a Caledonian Society to Scots of the neighbourhood:

Get up, up, ilk Hielan' wight:
 The magpie coos, the morn is bright:
 Seize the camac: grasp it tight,
 An' hasten awa' to shinty.

Then drain the quaich, fill again,
 Loudly blaw the martial strain,
 An' welcome gie wi' micht an' main,
 To guid auld Hielan' shinty.

After relating the details of a keenly fought game, the poem turns to the post-match hospitality, another aspect of Highland culture:

An' now wi' social mirth and glee,
 To end the sport we a' agree;
 Wi' usquebagh or barley bree,
 We'll drink to Hielan' shinty.

Quick, piper, quick: mair loudly blaw!
 We'll keep it up, baith great an' sma';
 We'll dance it out till morning craw,
 'Tis a' for Hielan' shinty.

The individual game, and its consequent festivities, may draw to an end but, as the poet goes on to show, the tradition remains. Each meeting is a renewed pledge to continue the spirit of Highland culture:

But may we a' who now are met,
 Till nature claims her final debt:
 Be aye resolved ne'er to forget
 Our ancient Hielan' shinty.

The use of the three voices available to Scots residents in this part of Victoria proceeded without creating any serious tensions between the various sections of the community. However, on occasions, some disquiet could show itself. It was suggested by another Scottish correspondent that the games, to be an annual feature of the Caledonian Society's activities, could include 'other national sports' as well as those of Scotland. The 'Saxon and the Gael', he continued, 'as members of the same community', would see such a development as 'welcome' (6 July 1861, 2). This suggestion brought to the surface some of the depth of feeling among Gaels towards their own culture. A mixture, as had been suggested, would mean dilution and dilution could destroy the distinctiveness of this aspect of that culture. 'An Gille Muilach', for example, was one who took issue with the idea of incorporating non-Gaelic activities within a Celtic sports day (5 Oct. 1861, 3). It was, he wrote, a recipe for the death of any Gaelic society. He supported his argument by citing the fate of the Australian Gaelic-language newspaper, *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*, which, he said, had failed after a few months because it was 'a conglomeration of English and Gaelic'.⁶ Gaels had refused to support it because of its English content, especially in regard to those matters which would have been dear to them in their own tongue. Had it appeared entirely in the Highlanders' 'own language', he asserted, they would have supported it.

To avoid making the same mistake with a 'proper Comunn na'n Gael, or Caledonian Society', the correspondent proposed keeping it strictly Gaelic. All of its business should be conducted in Gaelic, though English translations of such things as minutes should be supplied, and a separate English-speaking committee could be formed if necessary. Sporting activities 'should consist of all the games peculiar to the Celts' and prizes should be awarded for 'piobrachds [*sic*] and Gaelic poetry'. 'An Gille Muilach' went on to urge the foundation of a Gaelic journal and to declare that while he had life he would 'honour and revere the Gaelic'. He justified

his enthusiasm for his 'mother tongue' by quoting the Gaelic verse which hailed the antiquity of the language and which traced its origin to the earliest biblical times:

Do gach iomadh canan,
Bho linn Bhabel fhuair
A'Sliochd sin Adhamh,
Si Ghaelig a thug buaidh.

Such separatist feeling in relation to the sporting programme to be conducted by a Caledonian Society did not, however, become the local norm. The variety of societies which came to be established in and around Hamilton seemed to conduct sports days which reflected a happy combination of Highland games and wider, community-based contests and activities, reflective of the interests of both Celtic and English settlers (15 March 1865, 2). The bard responsible for 'The Caledonian Society's Gathering, 1869',⁷ still pictured this event about to take place in a neighbouring town, in the heroic terms evoked by the correspondents who resorted to Gaelic verse and traditions to urge the formation of bodies to conduct such contests, but for him it was to be a communal occasion, not a specifically Highland one:

Children of Scotia! Bold and brave!
Sons of the land beyond the wave,
Awake! and to the field! away!

Children of Erin! gallant band!
Sons of sore and stricken land,
Think upon its wrongs today.

Children of Albion! generous, free,
Join ye the glorious rivalry!

The local popular press was a convenient and regular outlet for Scots writing in a variety of forms. While, as has been shown, some of the published material that made use of Lowland Scots was taken from other journals, there was also a supply of prose and some poetry which originated from local sources. In a variety of voices, Scots were prepared to make comment in satirical, comic or serious vein on community issues. Margaret Auld, or rather the person purporting to be a 'puir auld widow' who wrote under that pen name, regularly used Lowland Scots in 'her' letters of complaint about various local problems. In response to an editorial on the subject of thistles, condemned locally as a nuisance weed, 'Margaret Auld' resorted, in a letter (11 Jan. 1865, 2), to this form of Scots, some humour and a certain amount of cheek, to take the editor to task:

'Awhile ago in your leader, "leader?" my certy? why is't caud leader? A ne'er could tell, unless it was that meant to lead folk astray—you spack aboot bad farming, an' said that some o' the fields were nothing but sow-thistles. Weel, mon, since then I looked owre to my neebour's ground and there what shud I see bit the hale lond covered a' owre wi' them: sae I geest spack dacently to Johnson—that's my next neebour's name—so he says to me (and he was verra light in his manner, a thing I canna bear frae ony mon body). I'll take a sythe tomorrow and soon make pigs and whistles o' them.

'I didna like this mode of talking and trying to put me off. I felt it was not becoming to him; sae I said, "Mr Johnson, if ye think because I'm a lone woman I'm gawn to stan't and see my garden littered wi' yoor sow-thistles yer far wrang. I'll write to the *Spectator* about it". Wi' that, Mr Editor, he turned on his heel and muttered, "Horrid old boar". Sic an expression set my bristles up. What me! Margaret Auld! to come 16,000 miles frae hame tae be cawd an ald boar! I couldna speak—least I was afeert tae—sae I geest clinched my neeve, gaed in the house, sat down in the spence, and had a good greet tae myself.

'Mr Editor, help, and keep an old woman frae insult. Your "leader" brought it on!'

In an earlier letter (6 July 1864, 2), the same correspondent, in mock upset at being identified not as an old widow but as one of the townfolk in disguise, again launched forth at the editor in the same spirit and tongue-in-cheek seriousness:

'Noo dinna be feared, I'm no guain tae bother ye wi' ony mare o' my clavers. But really, Mr Eeditor, I canny stan', an a winna, that's mare, to be miscawed, as my O... tells me I hae been (and he's a weel tae do callant, my sister Lissy's bairn he's in one o' yer shops in the toon), syne I wrate ye aboot the birkies after the hoonds. Some say that I, Peggy Auld, am the baker o' baps and cookies, some that I'm Donald that hauds the roupes, and ethers that I'm nae less than our worthy meer. (Losh, man, isn't it aufoo tae caw a Christian man as if he was a powny; what for canny they caw him a provast or the lord provast; man wise I'm shure.) Noo, I like a' three o' them very weel—especially when the het water's handy—but it's no jest right tae the memory o' my paer auld man that's deed and gone this sax years come Candlemass, that I, a lane woman, should be ta'en for a man, just because I write a when letters to you.'

But Scots did more than write in this vein in order to provide entertainment. In among the attempts at humour lie some genuine social complaints. That Margaret Auld wrote for a specific purpose is revealed in a letter purporting to be a response to someone who had recognised her as a neighbour from Scotland. As most of the letter is written in standard English, the touch of Lowland Scots demonstrates that a Scots voice was deliberately chosen and used, depending on the situation, to create particular effects. The correspondent met Margaret and asked her why she wrote to the newspaper and Margaret, in another letter (23 July 1864, 2) offered an explanation:

'Eh, my wee bairn, I dinna ken,' she replied. . . . 'Wherever I am placed in life I feel it my duty to take an initial interest in the locale of my habitation, and either directly or indirectly do what I can to improve and benefit the place or people. . . . These are the only reasons I can give for my public appearances.'

We can see this form of civic responsibility at work in another of Margaret Auld's letters, written in her form of Lowland Scots (20 July 1864, 2), complaining about the poor state of roads in the town:

'As ye ken . . . I'm no very often in your braw toon, but the ether nicht I cam in . . . I had a letter to post for my sister Lizzie; so away I went, stapping owre the street, to what I thocht should be the pavement at the Post-office, when sough! in I got, sough! sough! owre the kuits amang the glaure, and the mair I struggled the waure I got, until I was quite demented, and not owre amiable in my feelings, as ye may weel jalouse. Noo, wha's to blame for this? Is it your Toon Council? Is it Parliament? Or is it Mr Rogers [the Postmaster] I dinna care what is to blame, but it's a disgrace to yer toon to hae yer Post-office crossing in sic a state, and the sooner it's mended the better, or I'll no come ony mair to pit my letter to ye. . . .'

Remedial action brought a quick response from her (30 July 1864, 3).

'Margaret Auld's complemints to Mr Rogers o' the Post-office, and desires to thank him for the bit brigg he's made o'er the slough. He's a dacent douse body is Mr Rogers, an' a better man than a' the Coouncil, Parlelament, or the Government pit thegither.'

A couple of months later Margaret returns to the fray, raising what was a common complaint about public thoroughfares in the early days of town councils i.e. lack of signposts (14 Sept. 1864, 3). After setting out on a journey from Dunkeld to Hamilton, she had ended up in Cavendish, a township situated in quite a different direction:

'I ken fu's weel ye maun hae plenty to pit intae the paper frae *men?* and etless gomerals—without my auld wif's clavers, still I canna but think ye'll try to gee a wee nook to the complaints o' a puir auld widow woman like me. Weel, "to mak a long story short", what I have to noo to compleen of is, the awfoo dangerous state of yer bush roads. I dinna mean to sae much aboot there being fu' o' ruts and holes enough to break a' the gigs in the kintry. Gae me an honest Scotch gig, Mr Editor, and no' thae kittle-looking buggies that hae na mare solidity aboot them than the kintry they cam frae—a' pooter and smoke, and brag. The danger I mean in yer roads is, that ye never ken whar ye'r gauen! ye gang awa' as ye think straight for yae place, but lo! and behold! after two hours fetching thro' the mud, ye fin' ye'r on the wrang tract, and ye hae gist to gang back again . . . I'm

sure it wu'dna' cost muckle tae pit up a wheen posts, an' hae printed on a boord a notice like this, which I think very explicit: THIS IS NO' THE ROAD TO CAVENDISH, BUT IT IS THE ROAD TO HAMILTON.'

One long continuing problem, especially in the rural areas of the colony, was land tenure. An Act of Parliament came into force in 1865 opening up large areas of crown land for purchase in relatively small lots. Smallholders could pay for their lots in instalments, provided they resided on the land they received and made specified improvements to it within a certain time. There were many problems with this Act, much newspaper space was consumed by discussion of its operation, and several years passed before it began to work in something approaching an equitable way. One of the major problems was that the large-scale graziers ('squatters') who already held much of the land in question under special grazing licences, were able to use 'dummies' to obtain land on their behalf and various other sorts of chicanery to prevent smallholders making selections on their runs. It is this topic which Scot 'Sandy Sneck' addressed in a letter (30 Dec. 1868, 3), using both Lowland Scots and a play on the word 'leasing' in order to make a very serious point⁴:

'I am a plain Scotchman, no muckle acquainted wi' Land Rackets and Land Leasing, although I hae heard about them since I hae been in this country. So, you see, being in Hamilton on my ain business (which is naebody else's business), I went to the house whereon is the sign painted "Office of Crown Lands and Survey". But though the building is said to belang to the Crown of England, it is just a decent kind o' weatherboard building, gude enuch to have a dance in, or ony other kind o' amusement, on a public scale. Weel, there were people there who had ridden far and near to come to this kind o' affair which they call having a sale o' lands open for leasing. Now, the auld Scotch word for telling lies is "leasing". And to the astonishment of everybody, two-thirds o' the lands said to be open for leasing were shut up against everybody, and the names o' the lands crossed out wi' blue ink. If this is no real "leasing" I leave ony body to judge. Some folks had come as far as frae Lake Wallace, and they were clean disappointed: and mony a growl there was at what they called "the sell" . . . there was great grumbling at this roup o' lands open for leasing. There is something wrang, Sir, depend upon it—something wrang! There should be mair public announcement, and as much care as possible should be taken not to bring folks on a gowk's errand.'

Lowland Scots also found its way into local dramatic effusions, another instance of the use of the Scots tongue in the service of satire. In the following skit, one that made its way into print, a local playwright debunks a newly knighted politician ('Sir James Jingle'), who is shown in conversation with Queen Victoria. The sketch, reproduced here, rounds off the wide range of community issues which Scottish settlers, living in and around Hamilton, addressed through the medium of Lowland

Scots. From local chit-chat we moved to town potholes and the absence of signposts, then to the dubious manipulation of land sales in the colony and finally to the politics of Empire (30 April 1870, 3). The issue raised was the contentious one of increased immigration to the colony of Victoria in a bid to rid England of some of her unwanted over-population:

Vic.: Well, Sir James, how do you like the handle to your name?

Sir J.: Oh Brawley! it makes a body think something o' himsel'; and I am verra thankfu' to ye for it.

Vic.: Thanks is but poor payment; but I suspect you will give us a more substantial proof of your gratitude.

Sir J.: Weel, mem, I hae but little siller, and . . .

Vic.: Don't mention money, for poor old Peabody's will keep the wolf from the door for a time; but I'll tell you what—my garden is overcrowded with labourers, and I fear they will be eating each other some of these days, so I intend to draft off a lot for exportation. How many shall I send you?

Sir J.: Oh, I'll tak a wheen o' them, and gar the bodies out here true that they are a' needed.

Vic.: Exactly so; but I pray proceed very cautiously, for I see you have some eye-openers among the canaille in your quarter.

Sir J.: True, mem, true; and fu' weel ken I that some o' our newspaper cattle would be the better o' haein their tongues clippit.

THE 'ELDER VOICE'

Unlike the other areas considered, the area of church life became a focus for serious tension and discord between the several linguistic voices of the Scots. We know from the Scots version of the Psalms mentioned above that some devotional material in this tongue was in circulation in the district. Although Gaelic worship was widely conducted there is no tangible evidence of systematic public worship having been conducted in Lowland Scots. Conflict, when it came, was between Gaelic and English and such disagreement as reached the newspaper concerning the two, was conducted in English.

Presbyterianism, the dominant religious denomination of the Scots, was carried by them to each of the regions in which they settled. Initially, much of the worship conducted was that performed within the home, with the head of the house conducting prayers and Bible readings and leading Psalm singing. The arrival of an itinerant minister marked a special occasion when many people from the visited district would gather for a formal service and, if the need was there, to have children baptised and marriages performed. As communities grew and numbers became sufficient to call a full-time minister, churches were established and a

routine of formal sabbath worship instituted. The Hamilton district was no exception to this pattern. First the nucleus of a congregation was established, then, some years later, in 1856, a building was erected to serve as a Gaelic church. The Rev. Angus Macdonald ministered ably to the Highland population in Gaelic until his accidental death in 1868.⁹

The deep attachment of Gaels to the forms and language of the worship of their homeland saw the subsequent erection of a number of other Gaelic-speaking churches in the neighbourhood of Hamilton. However, this same attachment was to bring about a certain amount of tension within Presbyterian congregations. The introduction of a musical instrument into worship services, for example, saw a rift open up within various congregations. A correspondent writing of the Hamilton congregation (18 Dec. 1863, 4), and the response of the Highland section of that church to the offer of a musical instrument, amusingly but without much understanding of the Highland religious temperament, recorded the horror provoked by such a suggestion:

'I believe that the "Sassenach" portion of the congregation did not as a body object, but your pure Celt would have "none of it", and I was told as a fact that, during the period when the Episcopal body had use of the Scotch Church and had their instrument there, such was the deep and ineradicable horror entertained by some of the Celtic ancients for that harmless-looking instrument, that numbers abstained from paying their devotions hebdomadally, as was their wont, asseverating, with a fervency of spirit that did more credit to their warmth of feeling than their taste, that they would rather see "the Duffil in the kirk than yon masheen".'

The letter continued in this vein, ridiculing the part played by the Gaels in seeking to maintain their traditions, especially as they related to their form of worship.

'Our Celtic countrymen are very impressionable and especially open to the "convictions" of music. Why they should prefer the nasal harmony that forms the running accomplishment of "prayers and praise" in a great number of our churches where Gaelic is preached, can only be accounted for on the supposition that they recognise the resemblance it bears to their national pipe, and believe in nothing without a "sough", whether it be the "birr" of the drone, or the more dissonant but characteristic falsetto that governs the higher notes of the "chaunter".'

Thus did 'Civis Romanus' caricature and criticise the Gaelic portion of the congregation for their attitude towards musical instruments in church. In a follow-up letter (25 Dec. 1863, 3), he lauded the innovation introduced by one Presbyterian church in Hamilton whereby the minister had the congregation stand during the singing of the concluding Psalm 'instead of their usual lazy and apathetic

mode of sitting or lolling on their seats’.

Tension between the different sections of the congregation was exacerbated when the issue of the availability of Gaelic leadership for worship raised its head. The death of Rev. Angus Macdonald led to a vacant pulpit which, following normal Presbyterian practice, was to be filled by the congregation ‘calling’ another minister to it. In a letter signed ‘Gael’ (3 Oct. 1868, 3), following a successful call to a non-Gaelic-speaking minister, the divisions engendered by the Gaelic language issue made themselves public. Writing in standard English, the author challenged the assumption that the settlement of the new minister, Rev. Mr McMillan, rested on the unanimous vote of members:

‘Permit me to state, as one who was present, that the “unanimity” was all on one side; and that the feeling displayed by a considerable number of the English-speaking portion of the congregation does not reflect much credit on them as professing Christians. It is also stated that Mr McMillan is “to a certain extent, familiar with the Gaelic language”. If so it must be to a very limited extent indeed; for during his stay in Hamilton, neither did he on any occasion, in public or private, conduct any religious service in that language—on the contrary he has repeatedly expressed his inability to do so. By this I do not mean to cast any reflection on Mr McMillan, but simply to guard my fellow countrymen from being misled. I feel confident that Mr McMillan is cognizant of the gross injustice that will be inflicted upon the Highlanders if any Minister be elected who cannot preach in their native tongue, he will at once decline to accept the call. The Highlanders very justly contend for their rights, and will not rest satisfied with, nor acquiesce in, the election of any pastor who cannot minister to their wants in Gaelic.’

Support from another Gael, Lachlan Morrison, was soon forthcoming (21 Oct. 1868, 3). He wrote to the newspaper to point out that a statement of 30 March 1857, setting up the church, had declared: ‘That as a very large proportion, if not the majority, of the Presbyterians in and around the township of Hamilton are Gaelic-speaking, and prefer to have the ordinances administered to them in their native tongue, it is resolved that no minister be requested to settle in Hamilton but one who can minister to the people both in Gaelic and in the English language’. Morrison went on to announce that in support of the continuance of this original aim, a petition had already been signed by ‘about one hundred Gaelic-speaking Highlanders of Hamilton and neighbourhood’ and presented to the court of the church. This petition, Morrison wrote, had been ignored. Would the English-speaking portion of the congregation, he asked, like to be told that a minister was to be appointed who was only ‘to a certain extent’ familiar with that language? The argument, he reasoned, should be seen as ‘reciprocally applicable. Only last month the average attendance on [*sic*] the Gaelic service for four consecutive Sabbaths was over one hundred and fifty, showing that nothing has occurred for the last eleven years to justify its discontinuance.’ Morrison pointed to the possibility of schism in

the church if the situation continued the way it was going and noted, no doubt having in mind the issue of musical instruments in church worship as well as the language issue, that the local Presbyterian church was 'a structure which has of late exhibited unmistakeable symptoms of degeneration and decay'.

An attempt to inject a measure of reasonableness into this argument was made by Rev. James Henderson (4 Nov. 1868, 3). He agreed with Morrison that the 'religious rights' of the Highlanders should be defended. He pointed out, however, that one of the great stumbling blocks to the continuation of Gaelic worship in the district was the difficulty of 'securing a suitably equipped pastor' who would be able to minister in both languages. More significantly, he added that, as the English-speakers now outnumbered the Gaelic residents of the district, it would not be possible to honour the original pledge relating to the appointment of a minister able to discharge his duties both in Gaelic and English. The matter continued to simmer for some time and, eventually, after refusing to join with the Union churches, the Gaelic portion of the congregation established itself as a separate Highland church, just as the congregation of 1856-57 had done.¹⁰

There is little doubt that the presence of Scotland's three tongues, Gaelic, Lowland Scots and English, has broadened the range of creative expression open to individual Scots, and enriched Scottish literary output over many years. Certainly, all three Scottish tongues were present from the earliest days of the provincial newspaper in the small colonial town of Hamilton, at the other end of the world from Scotland; a strong indication that the linguistic plurality enjoyed by Scots did not cease to operate outwith Scotland. The willingness to publish material from other sources in Scots, and to give space to the foregoing sample of letters and literary endeavours in English, Gaelic and Lowland Scots, bespeaks a measure of editorial liberality on the part of the *Hamilton Spectator*, perhaps even an enlightened notion that publication of such material in the public press could help to foster the development of an integrated community spirit. Consideration of the body of material from Scots published in that journal indicates that Gaelic and Lowland Scots did continue to be everyday voices among the emigrants, as evidenced by their use in print to instruct, amuse, and address the issues of current concern. The pages of the *Hamilton Spectator* go some way, too, to dispelling any surviving residue of that old stereotype—the tongue-tied inarticulate Scot!

NOTES

- 1 Unless otherwise specified, all subsequent references are to this paper.
- 2 *HS*, 8 October 1864, 4. More recent historical research has revised this figure down but still estimates that Scots formed something around two-thirds of the settlers. See, for example, Kiddle 1980, 14.

- 3 For instances of German and Lancastrian pieces see *HS*, 28 Jan. 1865, 4 and 4 Feb. 1865, 4.
- 4 Warrnambool is a coastal town in the Western District of Victoria, some 80 km from Hamilton. It boasted a large Highland population.
- 5 This appeared in *CA*, 21 March 1868, 3. Coleraine was a town situated about 32 km west of Hamilton.
- 6 *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* was mostly in Gaelic but, while it printed the verse of celebrated Highland poets in Gaelic, it had given the poets' biographies in English.
- 7 *CA*, 19 March 1869, 4.
- 8 Lands successfully selected under the Act of 1865 were deemed to be only leased because failure to pay the instalments, or to make the requisite improvements, could lead to a termination of tenure.
- 9 Local poet, Macpherson, contributed a 'Monody on the Death of Rev. A. Macdonald' to the *Hamilton Spectator* on the death of the minister, 4 April 1868, 4.
- 10 See, for example, *HS*, 7 August 1863, 2; 2 Sept. 1869, 3; 8 Jan. 1870, 2. See also *BC*, 1979, 5-7.

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