

***Voglie divise*: William Drummond of Hawthornden and Petrarchan national sentiment in the wake of the Union of the Crowns**

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This paper brings together two recent developments in early modern literary history: a renewed focus on Petrarchism's role in the cultivation of national sentiment across Europe (exemplified by William Kennedy's *The Site of Petrarchism* (2003)); and the geopolitical turn towards 'the British problem' - that is, toward questions of national and regional identity in the North-West Atlantic archipelago around the time of the Union of the Crowns in 1603. In *Archipelagic English* (2008), a study exemplary of this latter movement, John Kerrigan offers an intimidatingly sophisticated reading of how William Drummond's work was conditioned by the relative isolation of Scotland within a culturally conflicted regal union. However, he makes barely any mention of the Petrarchan poetry upon which Drummond's literary reputation rests, beyond noting that it has been 'misconstrued as a hangover from Elizabethan Petrarchism'. This is surprising. As Kennedy observes, the premise that the Petrarchan sonnet provides a site for the expression and exploration of early modern national sentiment is 'not controversial', and, given Scotland's ambivalent status post-Union we might

expect the sonneteering of the ‘Petrarch of the North’ to be the site of particularly intriguing such explorations. But Kennedy, too, in his own study, while mentioning Petrarchism’s role in the shaping of national sentiment in Italy, France, Spain, England, Germany, Eastern Europe and the New World, never touches on the growing fascination of Scottish poets for the Petrarchan sonnet sequence in the wake of the union of the Crowns.

The hypothesis I want to offer for discussion is that after 1603 Scottish poets — and especially, and distinctively, William Drummond — found in the Petrarchan mode an extraordinarily subtle means of consciously and unconsciously negotiating the tensions between their often peculiarly conflicted local, regional and national loyalties. There is not the space here to offer the close readings necessary to really tease out the complexities of Drummond’s Petrarchism, or fully explore the role of the dynamic of the public and the private in these negotiations (as promised in my abstract – apologies!). Instead, I shall focus on establishing some key contexts for such readings, in order to suggest that Drummond, at least, might have adopted the Petrarchan mode to further a specifically ‘British’ project.

One possible reason for Kennedy’s and Kerrigan’s neglect of Drummond’s Petrarchan ventures in contexts where they would seem relevant might be an established narrative regarding Scottish poetry post-Union. From early in Elizabeth’s reign, writers in England used the Petrarchan mode to nurture and legitimize an emerging national character, and the English craze of the 1590s for Petrarchan sonnet sequences had already waned by the time James VI of Scotland became James I of England. While William Fowler, Alexander Montgomerie and even Mary Queen of Scots had written in the Petrarchan mode before the Union, extended amorous Petrarchan sequences by Scottish poets only really began to appear after 1603. They were penned largely in English, not Scots, by men who for the most part followed James south to London, such as William Alexander, David Murray and Alexander

Craig. These ‘Scoto-British’ writers have often been seen as betraying their Scottish roots by abandoning the language and traditions of their Scots predecessors in favour of a wholesale—even craven—embrace of the courtly English Petrarchism of the south. According to this account, the writing of a Petrarchan sonnet sequence by a Scottish poet post-Union indicates nothing more than ‘cultural cringe’, a desire to ingratiate oneself by ‘Englishing’ one’s output. Unlike his fellows, Drummond remained in Scotland, in a Caledonian version of Petrarch’s retreat outside Avignon. Hawthornden became his Vaucluse and the river Esk his Sorgue, its cliffs and caves mirroring those that recur so frequently in Petrarch’s verse. From there, he produced Petrarchan verse — most notably *Poems* (1616) — that looks to lay the foundations for a coherent, synthetic, imperial British poetry that might win recognition in continental Europe, while simultaneously serving as a potential alternative to (London-centric) courtly discourse.

The essentialism and separatism characteristic of modern nationalism were largely absent in early modern Scotland (cf. Goodare 2004: 65), and Scottish patriotism and the Union of the Crowns were seen as compatible by men of widely differing political and religious persuasions. For many, Scottish patriotism generated British consciousness. Andrew Melville, Calvinist principal of St. Mary’s College at St. Andrews, looked forward with enthusiasm to the prospect of a Britain united under a Stewart monarch leading a protestant crusade against the papal Antichrist. Melville’s crusading Calvinism is a long way from Drummond’s conservative Episcopalianism, but a bridge between the two can be found in the figure of David Hume of Godscroft. Hume fused Melville’s Calvinist opposition to episcopacy with a neo-Stoic Renaissance civic humanism close to Drummond’s. In his *De unione insulae Britannicae* (1605), Hume envisaged Britannia as a pseudo-republican, aristocratic Calvinist oligarchy, which would become ‘the most glorious kingdom in the

world' (Hume 2002: 163). Poetry plays a central role in Hume's conception of the Union, which he anticipated would lead to a great cultural flowering, particularly in the field of literary endeavour. No longer engaged in bitter internecine strife, Britons would go 'over to the delightful camps of the Muses'. This in turn would answer to a specifically Scottish national concern, showing that in former times Scots had been warriors rather than 'men of letters' out of necessity: 'we want to refute that old charge of ignorance and to show that it was never a failing of the Scottish people, but rather of the times—and henceforth not to yield to anyone a superior rank in the civilized virtues than they did in former times with respect to their bravery' (2002: 89-91).

Drummond certainly knew Hume, and possessed his *De Unione* (MacDonald 1971): Hume's daughter was to translate Petrarch's *Trionfi*, and Drummond complimented her upon her delicate verses. Drummond would have been receptive to Hume's vision of a Scottish poetic blossoming under the guise of a British literature set forth in the first part of the *De Unione*. Furthermore, it lays out the grounds for Union in terms that might have appealed to the Petrarch of the North. The one bond, the one principle, 'the touchstone of union', Hume declares, is love (2002: 143). The very name of the beloved of Drummond's *Poems*, 'Auristella', establishes his sequence as a programmatic fusion of the best of English and Scottish practice within the European Petrarchan tradition. In his commonplace book, Drummond notes that 'the Italiens vpon the names of ther mistrisses hath a sorte of diuision particulare in my iugement to them selues as may be seene in the 5 sonnet of Petrarche' (NLS MS 2060: 241<sup>r</sup>). The sonnet in question is that in which Petrarch plays on the capitalized syllables of Laura, or LAU-RE-TA. Drummond was thus clearly alert to the possibilities of Petrarchan syllabic play upon the beloved's name. In christening the beloved of the *Poems* 'Auristella', Drummond points to his fusing of the matter of his preferred English poet,

Sidney, with the manner of his Scoto-British sonneteering friend, William Alexander, in order to create a new, distinctly British strain of Petrarchism. The eponymous beloved of William Alexander's sequence is Aurora, while Sidney's Astrophel is of course enamoured of Stella.

However, unlike most of the other Scoto-British Petrarchan sequences, Drummond's *Poems* appeared in print once the first flush of enthusiasm for Union had begun to wane. James had not made his promised returns to Scotland and was pushing through unpopular religious policies, and a gap had started to open up between the essentially British, imperial sense of national identity of those Scottish courtiers who had moved south, and that of the 'provincial' Scottish nobility, which was untouched by the court and harked back to a concept of Scotland which predated the regal union. As Keith Brown has argued, this growing chasm was ultimately to contribute to the aristocratically-led national revolt that brought down the imperial British monarchy a few decades later (Brown 1993: 576). Inklings of this split were only just beginning to appear when Drummond was writing most of the sonnets in *Poems*, but Drummond, having remained in Scotland but with many friends among the Scoto-British nobility south of the border, found himself with increasingly divided loyalties.

Against the insistence that we 'read Drummond as he wished to be read, as an English poet' (MacDonald 1971: 22), John Corbett has argued that Drummond's English idiom is coloured with Scottish vocabulary and rhythms. For Corbett, its fashioning into an intertextual, multicultural collage can be seen as Drummond's attempt to distil the vernacular European tradition and position himself as one of the first generation of *British* writers (1999: 84). Corbett never explicitly evokes the Petrarchan mode's deployment as a linguistic model for the creation and exploration of national sentiment. Yet the text largely responsible for

popularising Petrarchan sonneteering in the Renaissance, Pietro Bembo's *Le Prose della volgar lingua* (1525), made Petrarch's *Canzoniere* a model for the development of national literatures not only on stylistic grounds but also, as its title suggests, for specifically linguistic reasons. Drummond owned and read Bembo's *Prose*, and the language of *Poems* can be read as an attempt to appropriate the legitimizing power of the European Petrarchan tradition to bring into being a synthetic 'British' poetic vocabulary, that in its prevailing English idiom reflects the political realities of the new imperial state while yet deliberately retaining elements of Scots.

Bembo's *Prose*, however, might have interested Drummond for another reason, too. Bembo proposed the language of Petrarch specifically as an alternative to the adoption of the language of the court as a national tongue. We can imagine that, as a member of the Scottish provincial nobility and a critical Royalist with a neo-Stoic distaste for the corruptions of the court, Drummond would have found Bembo's presentation of the Petrarchan mode as an alternative, potentially oppositional language extremely attractive. It seems feasible that Drummond might have conceived the 'British' project embedded in the linguistic texture of his text as part of the establishment of an alternative (but not disconnected) site for cultural formation from that of the English court, especially in the light of how Scoto-British Petrarchan literary networks seem to have operated to form some kind of pseudo-public neo-Stoic sphere critical of the London court.

One has to turn to a close examination of individual sonnets to get a full sense of how Drummond's Petrarchism enables him to navigate the streams and tides of local, Scottish and British sentiments. The contexts established here, however, should suggest that such examinations might prove fruitful, and alert us to the conflicting drag and pull of loyalties that Drummond's engagement with the Petrarchan tradition both brought to the fore and

helped him to negotiate. At the very least, they remind us that from the very beginnings of the British Empire Scottish writers sought to play an active role in the construction of a distinctively British culture, while looking to continental models to legitimize this culture.

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*I would be happy to provide a select bibliography or further material on the matters discussed here, including close critical readings of individual poems, to anyone who might be interested. Please feel free to contact me by email at [scassacocchi@gmail.com](mailto:scassacocchi@gmail.com)*