BYRON'S POEMS ABOUT SCOTLAND

written and edited by Peter Cochran

The Scottish Byron has two perfectly-formed calves and feet.

Byron is thought of as an "English" poet, but "Anglo-Scots" is more accurate. Born in London, he was at the age of one removed from the capital by his mother, Catherine Gordon of Gight, who was descended from the fifteenth-century kings of Scotland. She took him back to Aberdeen, where he was educated at the grammar school. Mother and son stayed there for ten years. It was the headmaster of the school who had the pleasant job, late in May 1798, of announcing to young Byron that, his great-uncle having died, the boy was heir to the Rochdale baronetcy, and was now a Lord.

Moving south in August 1798, Byron never returned to Scotland, but the country influenced him in many ways – throughout his life people noted his faint Scots accent. It has been claimed that his aggressive satirical voice is from the Scots "flyting" tradition, and that some of his rhymes, especially in *Don Juan*, his masterpiece, can only work if pronounced *à la manière écossaise*.

He associated Scotland with things both disagreeable and agreeable, as his distance from it increased both in geography and time, and as his sense of it as a real location was replaced by a nostalgic myth of it as a place of rough simplicity and robust innocence. The myth is visible in two of his earliest published works. First the poem *Lachin Y Gair*, from *Hours of Idleness*:

LACHIN Y. GAIR.[1]

> LACHIN Y. GAIR, or, as it is pronounced in the Erse, LOCH NA GAER, towers proudly pre-eminent in the Northern Highlands, near Invercauld. One of our modern tourists mentions it as the highest mountain perhaps in GREAT BRITAIN; be this as it may, it is certainly one of the most sublime, and picturesque, amongst our "Caledonian Alps". Its appearance is of a dusky hue, but the summit is the seat of eternal snows. Near Lachin Y. Gair, I spent some of the early part of my life, the recollection of which, has given birth to the following stanzas.

AWAY, ye gay landscapes, ye gardens of roses!
In you let the minions of luxury rove;

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1: B. to Charles David Gordon, Aug 14 1805: *I suppose you will soon have a view of the eternal Snows that surround the top of Lachin Y. gair, which towers so majestically above the rest of our* Northern Alps (BLJ I 75).

Restore me the rocks where the snow-flake reposes,
Though still they are sacred to freedom and Love;
Yet, Caledonia! beloved are thy mountains,
Round their white summits though elements war;
Though cataracts foam, 'stead of smooth-flowing fountains,
I sigh for the valley of dark Loch na Garr.

Ah! there my young footsteps in infancy wandered;
My cap was the bonnet, my cloak was the plaid;[2]
On chieftains long perished my memory pondered,
As daily I strode through the pine-covered glade;
I sought not my home till the day's dying glory
Gave place to the rays of the bright polar star;
For fancy was cheered by traditional story,
Disclosed by the natives of dark Loch na Garr.

"Shades of the dead! have I not heard your voices
Rise on the night-rolling breath of the gale?"
Surely the soul of the hero rejoices,
And rides on the wind, o'er his own Highland vale:
Round Loch na Garr, while the stormy mist gathers,
Winter presides in his cold icy car;
Clouds there encircle the forms of my Fathers,
They dwell in the tempests of dark Loch na Garr.

"Ill-starred,[3] though brave, did no visions foreboding
Tell you that Fate had forsaken your cause?
Ah! were you destined to die at Culloden,[4]
Victory crowned not your fall with applause;
Still were you happy in Death's earthy slumber,
You rest with your clan in the caves of Braemar;[5]
The pibroch[6] resounds, to the piper's loud number,
Your deeds on the echoes of dark Loch na Garr."

Years have rolled on, Loch na Garr, since I left you,
Years must elapse ere I tread you again:
Nature of verdure and flowers has bereft you,
Yet still are you dearer than Albion's plain.
England! thy beauties are tame and domestic
To one who has roved o'er the mountains afar:
Oh for the crags that are wild and majestic,
The steep frowning glories of the dark Loch na Garr.

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2 BYRON'S NOTE: This word is erroneously pronounced PLAD, the proper pronunciation (according to the Scotch) is shewn by the Orthography.

3 BYRON'S NOTE: I allude here to my maternal ancestors, the "GORDONS," many of whom fought for the unfortunate Prince Charles, better known by the name of the Pretender. This branch was nearly allied by blood, as well as attachment, to the STEWARTS. George, the 2d. Earl of Huntley, married the Princess Annabella Stewart, daughter of James the 1st of Scotland, by her he left four sons: the 3d, Sir William Gordon, I have the honour to claim as one of my progenitors.

4 BYRON'S NOTE: Whether any perished in the Battle of Culloden, I am not certain; but as many fell in the insurrection, I have used the name of the principal action, "pars pro toto".

5 BYRON'S NOTE: A Tract of the Highlands so called; there is also a Castle of Braemar.

6 BYRON'S NOTE: The Bagpipe. In fact, as Henry Brougham pointed out in his *Edinburgh* critique, B. confuses the instrument with the music.

Next the song *When I roved, a young Highlander*, from *Poems Original and Translated*, and addressed to Mary Duff:

Song

When I roved, a young Highlander, o'er the dark heath,
And climbed thy steep summit, oh Morven of snow![7]
To gaze on the torrent that thundered beneath,
Or the mist of the tempest that gathered below;[8]
Untutored by science, a stranger to fear,
And rude as the rocks, where my infancy grew,
No feeling, save one, to my bosom was dear;
Need I say, my sweet Mary, 'twas centred in you?

Yet it could not be Love, for I knew not the name –
What passion can dwell in the heart of a child?
But, still, I perceive an emotion the same
As I felt, when a boy, on the crag-covered wild:
One image, alone, on my bosom impressed,
I loved my bleak regions, nor panted for new;
And few were my wants, for my wishes were blest,
And pure were my thoughts, for my soul was with you.

I arose with the dawn, with my dog as my guide,
From mountain to mountain I bounded along;
I breasted[9] the billows of *Dee's*[10] rushing tide,
And heard, at a distance, the highlander's song,
At eve, on my heath-covered couch of repose.
No dreams, save of Mary, were spread to my view;
And warm to the skies my devotions arose,
For the first of my prayers was a blessing on you.

I left my bleak home, and my visions are gone;
The mountains are vanished, my youth is no more;
As the last of my race, I must wither alone,
And delight but in days I have witnessed before;
Ah! splendour has raised, but embittered my lot;
More dear were the scenes which my infancy knew;
Though my hopes may have failed, yet they are not forgot,
Though cold is my heart, still it lingers with you.

When I see some dark hill point its crest to the sky,
I think of the rocks that o'ershadow Colbleen;[11]
When I see the soft blue of a love-speaking eye,
I think of those eyes that endeared the rude scene;
When, haply, some light-waving locks I behold,

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7 BYRON'S NOTE: Morven, a lofty Mountain in Aberdeenshire: "Gormal of Snow," is an expression frequently to be found in Ossian.

8 BYRON'S NOTE: This will not appear extraordinary to those who have been accustomed to the Mountains. It is by no means uncommon on attaining the top of Ben e vis, Ben y bourd, &c. to perceive, between the Summit and the Valley, clouds pouring down rain, and, occasionally, accompanied by lightning, while the Spectator, literally, looks down upon the Storm, perfectly secure from its effects.

9 BYRON'S NOTE: "Breasting the lofty surge." SHAKESPEARE. *Henry V*, III (Chorus), 13.

10 BYRON'S NOTE: The Dee is a beautiful river, which rises near Mar Lodge, and falls into the sea, at New Aberdeen.

11 BYRON'S NOTE: Colbleen is a mountain near the verge of the Highlands, not far from the ruins of Dee Castle.

That faintly resemble my Mary's in hue,
I think on the long flowing ringlets of gold,
The locks that were sacred to beauty, and you.

Yet the day may arrive, when the mountains once more
Shall rise to my sight in their mantles of snow;
But while these soar above me, unchanged as before,
Will Mary be there to receive me? Ah, no!
Adieu, then, ye hills, where my childhood was bred!
Thou sweet flowing Dee, to thy waters adieu!
No home in the forest shall shelter my head,
Ah! Mary, what home could be mine, but with you?

Byron associated Scotland not just with innocence, but with predestination, sex, and hypocrisy. Writing to William Gifford, he claimed of Aberdeen Grammar that he was "early disgusted with a Calvinistic Scotch school where I was cudgelled to Church for the first ten years of my life".[12] In fact, as Christine Kenyon Jones has shown,[13] Calvinism was only one variety of Christianity available to a schoolboy in Aberdeen. However, when he was nine, his Scots nurse May Gray, from whose lips he was used during the daytime to hear the Bible read, would, as was later reported, "come to bed to him & play tricks with his person".[14] The sexual experience made him precociously aware of women, and made him both susceptible to, and suspicious of, the concept of predestined guilt, a theme which often surfaces in his poetry – in *The Giaour*, for instance.

He next associated the country with harsh criticism of his literary work. In January 1808 his first book, *Hours of Idleness*, was reviewed in the influential Whig journal *The Edinburgh Review*. The reviewer, quoting Horace's *Ars Poetica*, wrote "The poesy of this young lord belongs to the class which neither gods nor men are said to permit".[15] For much of the rest of his life Byron bore a grudge against this writer, whom he presumed, inaccurately, to be the *Review*'s famous editor, the Edinburgh advocate Francis Jeffrey; and the satire he published just before he left on his first journey to Greece, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, was a result. In it Jeffrey is mocked for his part in a duel which he failed to fight with the Irish poet Thomas Moore – later a friend of Byron. In the following lines, "Caledonia's Goddess" speaks to her darling, Jeffrey, whose life she has saved by removing the bullets from both his pistol, and that of his Irish enemy:

"My son," she cried, "ne'er thirst for gore again,
Resign thy pistol, and resume the pen;
O'er politics and poesy preside,
Boast of thy country, and Britannia's guide!
For long as Albion's heedless sons submit,
Or Scottish taste decides on English wit,
So long shall last thine unmolested reign,
Nor any dare to take thy name in vain.
Behold a chosen band shall aid thy plan,
And own thee chieftain of the critic clan."

The idea of Scots taste governing English reading is one Byron finds monstrous – especially if it involves a devaluation of his own poems.

12: BLJ III 64.
13: See Christine Kenyon Jones, 'I was Bred a Moderate Presbyterian': Byron, Thomas Chalmers and the Scottish Religious Heritage, in Stabler and Hopps (eds.) *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens* (2006).
14: Marchand 57.
15: *Edinburgh Review*, January 1808, p.285.

In Greece in 1810 and 1811 Byron encountered more evidence of Scots villainy, when he saw the damage which the Scots peer Lord Elgin had done to the Parthenon, in removing the friezes. Byron wrote *The Curse of Minerva* in response, penning some of the most vitriolic anti-Scots lines ever. (Minerva has accused an Englishman of ruining the Parthenon):

She ceased awhile, and thus I dared to reply,
To soothe the vengeance kindling in her eye:
"Daughter of Jove! in Britain's injured name,
A true-born Briton may the deed disclaim.
Frown not on England; England owns him not:
Athena, no! thy plunderer was a Scot.
Ask'st thou the difference? From fair Phyle's towers[16]
Survey Bœotia; – Caledonia's ours.[17]
And well I know within that bastard land*
Hath Wisdom's goddess never held command;
A barren soil, where Nature's germs, confined
To stern sterility, can stint the mind;
Whose thistle well betrays the niggard earth,
Emblem of all to whom the Land gives birth;
Each genial influence nurtured to resist;
A land of meanness, sophistry, and mist.
Each breeze from foggy mount and marshy plain
Dilutes with drivel every drizzly brain,
Till, burst at length, each wat'ry head o'erflows.
Foul as their soil, and frigid as their snows.
Then thousands schemes of petulance and pride
Despatch her scheming children far and wide:
Some East, some West, some – everywhere but North!
In quest of lawless gain they issue forth.
And thus – accursed be the day and year!
She sent a Pict[18] to play the felon here.
Yet Caledonia claims some native worth,
As dull Bœotia gave a Pindar birth;[19]
So may her few, the lettered and the brave,
Bound to no clime, and victors of the grave,
Shake off the sordid dust of such a land,
And shine like children of a happier strand;
As once, of yore, in some obnoxious place,
Ten names (if found) had saved a wretched race."

However, when he returned to England, his wrath cooled, and when, with the publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, he became the second most famous man in Europe, he was anxious to put all his anger, both anti-English and anti-Scots, behind him. He only published *The Curse of Minerva* privately and anonymously, and expressed regret at *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.*

He then wrote nothing about Scotland for some time. This was partly because of the hugely successful sequence of Scots novels which, from 1814 onwards, flowed from the pen, at first anonymous, of Sir Walter Scott. Starting with *Waverley*, a novel set at the time of the 1745 Jacobite insurrection, the books gave Scotland a new profile for the international

16: Phyle's towers were a fortress on the north coast of the Gulf of Corinth.
17: Bœotia is the barbarous world north of Greece – what, Byron asserts, Scotland ("Caledonia") is to England.
18: Picts were the savage inhabitants of Scotland in Roman times.
19: Pindar, the Greek lyric poet, was born in Bœotia.

reading public. Byron adored the Waverley novels, read them all as they came out, and studded his letters with quotations from them. “I never move without them”, he wrote.[20]

In 1814 Moore reports him as preparing a poem for a fund-raising for the Royal Caledonian Asylum, an institution in Islington founded by Act of Parliament the following year, to care for the many homeless and orphaned Scottish children roaming the streets of London. Moore writes:

> The following poem, written about this time, and, apparently, for the purpose of being recited at the Caledonian Meeting, I insert principally on account of the warm feeling which it breathes towards Scotland and her sons:
>
> Address intended to be recited at the Caledonian Meeting
>
> Who hath not glowed above the page where Fame
> Hath fixed high Caledon’s unconquered name;
> The mountain-land which spurned the Roman chain,
> And baffled back the fiery-crested Dane,
> Whose bright claymore and hardihood of hand
> No foe could tame – no tyrant could command?
> That race is gone – but still their children breathe,
> And Glory crowns them with redoubled wreath:
> O’er Gael and Saxon mingling banners shine,
> And, England! add their stubborn strength to thine.
> The blood which flowed with Wallace flows as free,
> But now ’tis only shed for Fame and thee!
> Oh! pass not by the northern veteran’s claim,
> But give support – the world hath given him fame!
>
> The humbler ranks, the lowly brave, who bled
> While cheerly following where the Mighty led –
> Who sleep beneath the undistinguished sod
> Where happier comrades in their triumph trod,
> To us bequeath – ’tis all their fate allows –
> The sireless offspring and the lonely spouse:
> She on high Albyn’s dusky hills may raise
> The tearful eye in melancholy gaze,
> Or view, while shadowy auguries disclose
> The Highland Seer’s anticipated woes,[21]
> The bleeding phantom of each martial form
> Dim in the cloud, or darkling in the storm;
> While sad, she chaunts the solitary song,
> The soft lament for him who tarries long –
> For him, whose distant relics vainly crave
> The Coronach’s wild requiem to the brave![22]
>
> ’Tis Heaven – not man – must charm away the woe,
> Which bursts when Nature’s feelings newly flow;
> Yet Tenderness and Time may rob the tear
> Of half its bitterness for one so dear;
> A Nation’s gratitude perchance may spread
> A thornless pillow for the widowed head;

20: BLJ IX 87.
21: The *Highland Seer* is Ossian.
22: A coronach is a dirge.

May lighten well her heart's maternal care,
And wean from Penury the soldier's heir;
Or deem to living war-worn Valour just
Each wounded remnant – Albion's cherished trust –
Warm his decline with tose endearing rays,
Whose bounteous sunshine yet may gild his days –
So shall that Country – while he sinks to rest –
His hand hath fought for – by his heart be blest! – May 1814.

A year after *Waverley* appeared, Byron wrote a short poem celebrating the death of a Scots hero at Culloden, the 1746 battle in which George "Stinking Billy" the Duke of Cumberland defeated Bonny Prince Charlie: battle with which *Waverley* climaxes. The poem – which Byron did not publish – is named after its hero, "Golice Macbane" (in fact, and with greater credibility, Gillies MacBean, or MacBain). Its hero was a 6ft 7ins captain in the Mackintosh regiment who killed fourteen Hanoverians at Culloden before being killed himself:

Gillies MacBean

The clouds may pour down on Culloden's red plain,
But the waters shall flow o'er its crimson in vain;
For their drops shall seem few to the tears for the slain,
But mine are for thee, my brave GILLIES MACBANE!

Though thy cause was the cause of the injured and brave;
Though thy death was the hero's, and glorious thy grave;
With thy dead foes around thee, piled high on the plain,
My sad heart bleeds o'er thee, my GILLIES MACBANE!

How the horse and the horseman thy single hand slew!
But what could the mightiest single arm do?
A hundred like thee might the battle regain,

But cold are thy hand and heart, GILLIES MACBANE!

With thy back to the wall, and thy breast to the targe,
Full flashed thy claymore in the face of thy charge;
The blood of their boldest that barren turf stain,
But alas! thine is reddest there, GILLIES MACBANE!

Hewn down, but still battling, thou sunk'st on the ground,
Thy plaid was one gore, and thy breast was one wound;
Thirteen of thy foes by thy right hand lay slain;
Oh! Would they were thousands for GILLIES MACBANE!

Oh! loud, and long heard, shall thy coronach be;
And high o'er the heather thy cairn we shall see;
And deep in all bosoms thy name shall remain,
But deepest in mine, dearest GILLIES MACBANE!

And daily the eyes of thy brave boy before
Shall thy plaid be unfolded; unsheathed thy claymore,
And the white rose shall bloom on his bonnet again,
Should he prove the true son of my GILLIES MACBANE!

Byron was now, after all his early anti-Scots animus, writing as a Scots patriot, for whom the English were the oppressors, and as an European liberal, lamenting the death of so many French patriots at the still more momentous battle which had just been fought – for we are, for "Culloden", to read "Waterloo", in the immediate aftermath of which (August 1815), the poem was written, and the outcome of which Byron, like many of his Whig friends, regretted. Waterloo gave victory to the hated Tories, the bloated Prince Regent, the unpopular Foreign Secretary Castlereagh, to the tyrannous King of Prussia, and to the Emperors of Austria and Russia.

In his stanzas on the eve of Waterloo in *Childe Harold* III, it is the gallantry and ferocity of the Scots, not the English, soldiers that Byron celebrates – the thrilling noise of their bagpipes, not the squalling of the English fifes:

And wild and high the "Cameron's gathering" rose!
The war-note of Lochiel, which Albyn's hills
Have heard, and heard, too, have her Saxon foes: –
How in the noon of night that pibroch thrills,
Savage and shrill! But with the breath which fills
Their mountain-pipe, so fill the mountaineers
With the fierce native daring which instils
The stirring memory of a thousand years,
And Evan's, Donald's fame rings in each clansman's ears!

"Her Saxon foes" are the English. Time is now lending enchantment to Byron's view of Scotland. As his primary homeland, England, declines in his estimation – the year after *Golice Macbane* was written, he left the hated country, never to return – so his secondary homeland, Scotland, is forgiven her former sins, and readmitted into his favour. In 1821 he even considered buying back some of his mother's land, writing "I have always preferred my mother's family – for it's royalty".[23]

His famous Venetian lyric, *So we'll go no more a-roving*, is in fact a translation of a song attributed to King James V of Scotland.

23: BLJ VIII 73.

He became nostalgic for his days at Aberdeen Grammar School. In January 1822 he wrote to Scott, to whom he had dedicated *Cain*, "my 'heart warms to the Tartan' or to any thing of Scotland which reminds me of Aberdeen and other parts not so far from the Highlands as that town – (about Invercauld & Braemar where I was sent to drink Goat's *Fey* in 1795-6 [following a] threatened decline after the scarlet fever)".[24] The "goat's whey" reference is from Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian*: Byron is now viewing the Scottish Highlands through the idealising lens created by Scott's novels, which reaffirm the image he created for the country in his early verses.

In October 1822 he wrote the tenth canto of *Don Juan*, which contains, in one of its early digressions (stanzas 16-19) an address to Francis Jeffrey, whom he still imagined to have reviewed his first book, but who had subsequently become one of the critics whom he trusted most. Byron's tone when writing about Scotland is now quite altered:

> And all our little feuds, least all *mine*,
> Dear Jeffrey, once my most redoubted foe,[25]
> (As far as rhyme and Criticism combine
> To make such puppets of us things below)
> Are over; here's a health to "Auld Lang Syne!"[26]
> I do not know you – and may never know
> Your face[27] – but you have acted on the whole *
> Most nobly, and I own it from my Soul. –
>
> And when I use the phrase of "Auld Lang Syne!"
> 'Tis not addressed to you – the more's the pity
> For me – for I would rather take my wine
> With you, than aught (save Scott) in your proud City;[28]
> But Somehow – it may seem a Schoolboy's whine,
> And yet I seek not to be grand, nor witty –
> But I am half a Scot, by birth – and bred
> A whole one,[29] and my heart flies to my head,
>
> As "Auld Lang Syne" brings Scotland, one and all –
> Scotch plaids, Scotch Snoods, the Blue hills, and Clear Streams,[30]
> The Dee, the Don, Balgounie's brig's *black wall*,[31]
> All my boy feelings – all my gentler dreams
> Of what I *then dreamt*, cloathed in their own pall;
> Like Banquo's Offspring[32] floating past me seems

24: BLJ IX 87.

25: *Dear Jeffrey, once my most redoubted foe:* B. never learned who really had harshly reviewed his early volume *Hours of Idleness* in the *Edinburgh Review* for January 1808, and always assumed that it had been Jeffrey. Ironically in the present context, it had in fact been Brougham.

26: *"Auld Lang Syne!":* Scots song (the phrase means literally "Old Long Since") attributed inaccurately to Burns.

27: *I do not know you – and may never know / Your face*: B. and Jeffrey never met.

28: *... for I would rather take my wine / With you, than aught (save Scott) in your proud City:* "Read ... "Tales of my Landlord", – grand work – Scotch Fielding, as well as great English poet – wonderful man! I long to get drunk with him" *(Ravenna Journal*, January 5 1821: BLJ VIII 13).

29: *But I am half a Scot, by birth – and bred / A whole one:* B. had written to Scott on January 12 1822: **"To me those novels have so much of 'Auld lang syne' (I was bred a canny Scot till ten years old) that I never move without them ..."** (BLJ IX 86-7).

30: *Scotch plaids, Scotch Snoods*: the plaid is the outer article of the Highland costume; a snood is a distinctive hair-band worn by young unmarried women (both OED).

31: *The Dee, the Don, Balgounie's brig's* black wall: the Dee and the Don are the two rivers which flow into the sea to the south and north, respectively, of Aberdeen, where B. lived from the ages of three to ten. The tall, single-arched Bridge of Balgounie, built by Robert the Bruce in 1320, commands a view of the Don estuary. It has never fallen down, even under a load interdicted by curse.

My Childhood in this Childishness of mine –
I care not; 'tis a Glimpse of "Auld lang Syne." –

* The brig of Don near the "auld toun" of Aberdeen, with its one Arch, and its black deep Salmon Stream below, is in my memory as yesterday. I still remember, though perhaps I may misquote, the awful proverb which made me pause to cross it, and yet lean over it with a childish delight, as being an only Son, at least by the mother's side. The Saying as recollected by me was this, but I have never heard or seen it since I was nine years of age:

"Brig of Balgounie – *black's* your *Wa',*
"Wi'a wife's *ae Son,* and a Mear's *ae foal,*
"Doun ye shall fa'!"

Balgounie's Brig, Aberdeen

And though, as you remember, in a fit
  Of wrath and rhyme, when Juvenile and Curly,[33]
I railed at Scots to show my rage and wit –
  Which, must be owned, was sensitive and surly,
Yet 'tis in vain such sallies to permit –
  They cannot quench young feelings fresh and early;
I "*scotched,* not killed" the Scotchman in my blood,[34]
And love the land of "Mountain and of Flood".[35]

32: *Banquo's Offspring floating past me:* in this punctuation, the line compares his childhood with the triumphant apparition of Scots kings (descendants of the murdered Banquo) at *Macbeth* IV i 112-24. The comparison would make his maturity a period of guilty and sterile despair.

33: *... in a fit / Of wrath and rhyme, when Juvenile and Curly*: a double reference, to *English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) and *The Curse of Minerva* (1811).

34: *I* "scotched, *not killed" the Scotchman in my blood:* another *Macbeth* quotation (III ii 13-15) with a twisted ring: *the Scotchman* would, if placed accurately in context, be a thing he still wished to exterminate.

35: *... the land of "Mountain and of Flood":* B. quotes from a patriotic section of Scott's poem *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805: VI ii 1-4):

O Caledonia! stern and wild,

"Balgounie's Brig" is the tall, single-arched Bridge of Balgounie, built by Robert the Bruce in 1320, which commands a magnificent view of the estuary of the river Don. It is still to be seen [*see illustration*], unchanged since Byron's day, in a suburb of Aberdeen, in a sequestered residential area. Leaning over it and looking into the depths of the stream below – sharing both Byron's boyhood dreams, and his adult dreams of them – one may imagine him doing the same, and understand why, despite its alleged Calvinistic cant, its literary butchery, and its monumental depredations, he still loved Scotland – even though now only in retrospect.

"He loved the mountains of Greece," write Teresa Guiccioli, "because they recalled those of Scotland";[36] and nostalgia may have been a factor in calling him to Greece in the last months of his life. Guiccioli quotes *The Island*:

> The infant rapture still survived the boy,
> And Loch-na-Gar with Ida look'd o'er Troy,
> Mix'd Celtic memories with the Phrygian mount,
> And Highland linns with Castalie's clear fount.[37]

In the ranks of the British Philhellenes who risked, and often lost their lives, in the cause of Greek freedom, a disproportionate number were Irish and Scots. They seem to have viewed Greece as a displaced version of their own homelands – humiliated, and made a mockery to the world by centuries of bondage to gross and hypocritical imperialist neighbours and masters, as all three countries had been. Byron was not the least of these heroes. In Greece he attempted to set himself up as a Highland chieftain, trying to lord it over his men in feudal style. From Cephalonia he wrote, quoting Macduff's description of his family, describing the Greeks as "… widows – orphans – refugees – and rascals of all descriptions of mine at one 'swoop;"; [38] later, quoting *Waverley* again, "I think that they [the Greeks] will win. – At any rate I shall 'cast in my lot with the puir Hill Folk'".[39] Pietro Gamba reports him as saying, "Our wild troops here, which remind me of what our highlanders must have been, are more in my way, at least as a poet".[40] From Missolonghi he wrote, "… as I pay a considerable portion of the Clans – I may as well see what they are likely to do for their money".[41] But his Suliote "Clan" proved refractory, arrogant, greedy, and ungrateful – everything the Highlanders at Culloden were not; and he gave up on them.[42]

Byron tried to create his ideal Scotland in Greece: the attempt killed him.

Meet nurse for a poetic child
Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood ...

36: Teresa Guiccioli, *My Recollections of Lord Byron, and those of Eye-Witnesses of his Life*, tr Jerningham (New York 1869), p.359.
37: *The Island*, II 291-3.
38: BLJ XI 77.
39: BLJ XI 82.
40: Guiccioli, op.cit., 121-2.
41: BLJ XI 102.
42: BLJ XI 111-112.