From 1707, Scotland was in political union with England, both countries ruled by a parliament at Westminster and with a Hanoverian monarch on the throne. This was the broad constitutional context within which, from about the 1720s, Scotland began to live through an Age of Enlightenment, when its high culture was the equal of anything to be found elsewhere in Europe. Its thinkers, the 'literati' (the 'well-educated ones'), made immense contributions to science, moral and social thought, historical analysis, and so on, and its literature, in prose and poetry, had an impact far beyond these shores.

I shall note some of the elements of Enlightenment Scotland, beginning with the 'Statistical Account of Scotland' edited by one of the great figures of the Enlightenment, Sir John Sinclair. His 'Statistical Account' is an endlessly rich mine of information about this country at the end of the 18th century, giving us insights into Scotland's human, economic, cultural and other resources, including information about improvements in farming methods. Many of the improvements were instituted by landowners who experimented with kinds of crop rotation, with the use of lime and marl on the soil, and so on, and who worked successfully to clear vast swathes of land of bog and mosses, and so made the land economically more productive. These scientifically-minded improvers were part of the Enlightenment, and their successes are duly recorded by Sir John Sinclair.

Another area of improvement was in the hands of architects and town planners, their most spectacular success being Edinburgh New Town, built on a grid plan, and with wide, airy streets and splendid domestic architecture, a beautiful new district in which the comfortable middle classes, the lawyers, merchants and professors, could feel at home. Although the plan to build the New Town in the form of the Union Jack

was not accepted, the names of the streets tell a Unionist story – Hanover Street, George Street, Queen Street, Princes Street, Charlotte Square, Frederick Street – the rhetoric on behalf of the Union, a political union under a Hanoverian monarch, could not be clearer. Sir John Sinclair learned some lessons from Edinburgh New Town; he himself constructed a new town, also on a grid plan, immediately south-west of Thurso.

The literati were a very sociable and convivial group, meeting in the scores if not hundreds of clubs and societies in the university cities and elsewhere. They discussed a wide range of topics theoretical and practical. One, which held the attention of many in Scotland, concerned the Gaelic bard Ossian son of Fingal, whose two works 'Fingal' and 'Temora' were 'discovered' and 'translated' by James Macpherson. A dispute arose almost at once as to the authenticity of these works. Some thought Macpherson a cheat who had translated nothing but had simply written the English works that he aimed to pass off as translations from the Gaelic. Yet the poems took Europe by storm. Their success, measured in terms of impact on authors, composers and artists, dwarfed the dispute about authenticity and rendered the dispute an almost irrelevant sideshow.

The Ossian epics no doubt gripped the imagination of many Scots looking for something indigenously Scottish to be proud of, at a moment when Scotland seemed in danger of cultural absorption into England. Yet at the same time we see a phenomenon with an opposite tendency, a determination by some Scots to write in an English style that does not reveal the Scottish origins of its author. David Hume produced a list of 'Scotticisms' and warned several literati that works they were planning to publish contained examples of these stylistic errors. Again there is reason to think that the idea of the Union casts a

shadow across this issue, for worries about Scotticisms imply a natural superiority of the English spoken by people from England over the English spoken by Scots. Robert Burns rose above this contested area and was welcomed and celebrated by the literati, but the debate about Scotticisms was centred on prose writing, not on poetry written in Scots.

There can be no doubt that the Union of Scotland and England was one of the major contexts for the Scottish Enlightenment. To what extent Scotland's awesome cultural achievements in the 18th century benefited in some way from the Union, and to what extent they would have occurred even had there been no Union – this is a contested matter and the resolution is not in sight.

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