

**United Islands? Multi-Lingual Radical Poetry and Folk Song
in Britain and Ireland, 1770–1820**

Oileáin Aontaithe? Filíocht Radacach Ilteangach agus Amhráin na nDaoine
in Éirinn agus sa Bhreatain 1770–1820

Eileanan Aonaichte? Bárdachd Radaigeach Ioma-chànanach
agus Mith-òrain ann am Breatainn agus Èirinn 1770–1820

Conjunct Islands? Mony-Leidit Raidical Makin an Fowk Sang
in Breetain an Ireland, 1770–1820

Organised by **John Kirk, Andrew Noble** and **Michael Brown**

for the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry

also

8th Language and Politics Symposium on the Gaeltacht and Scotstacht

organised by **John Kirk** and **Dónall Ó Baoill**

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Thomas Moore Festival 2008

United Islands?

Multi-Lingual Radical Poetry

and Folk Song in Britain and Ireland

1770–1820

A Multi-disciplinary Symposium

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

13–15 November 2008



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The purpose of the proposed network is to bring together a group of historical and literary/linguistic scholars augmented by folksong collectors/performers from England, Northern and Southern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, combined with a key group of North American experts. They will discuss the fate of non-canonical poetry/folksong in the period 1770–1820. The reformative, revolutionary and, indeed, reactionary political verse is to be best understood as an intra-national, Pan-British phenomenon. This underlying principle is expressed in Pocock's thesis, hitherto mainly applied to the seventeenth century, that British history should be practised as "an expanding zone of cultural conflict and creation". Manifest in the immediate enthusiastic response of not only literary but historical scholars we have invited to participate in this project is the remarkable growth in the last three decades of an intra-national, hence comparative, growing awareness of the fundamental implications for the writing of an innovative Pan-British history provided by the nationally, linguistically diverse creative writing of this period. Consequently, it is intended that this network should provide both locus and focus for the concentration and acceleration of trends already powerfully present.

The possibility and potential for such intra-national study is, however, of extremely recent origin. It is only in this century that AHRC-funded work in Wales on Morganwg, editorial and critical work on Burns in Scotland, and emerging Irish work on Moore, has provided a body of critical work of a quality which permits viable comparisons to be now made with English canonical poets such as Blake and Shelley. While the complex problems of the relation between canonical and non-canonical poetry will insistently recur in network discussion, the immediate practical problem is the sparse, erratic availability at present of what was a massive and linguistically diverse Pan-British corpus. In the 1790s, increasingly stringent government censorship drove poets and crucial publishers to silence, prison and exile. Indeed, the formal and linguistic strategies of dissident poetry are definable as subversions of state censorship. Increasingly radical poetry had to modify traditional modes derived from mainly Roman, Aesopian and post-Swiftian influences in order to avoid censorship. Formal awareness of how poetry reflects or, indeed, refracts historical reality will be a recurring problem in our discussions. Thus the subsidised pro-governmental poetry that sought to destroy it is both important in itself and as an often parodic negative image of radical verse. Subsequent Victorian editors, while assimilating loyalist verse into burgeoning imperialism, had absolutely no interest in assessing or retrieving its radical opponent so that much of it still lies fallow and geographically dispersed.

Consequently, the fundamental task of the network would be a review of published anti-establishment poetry combined with the status of ongoing work on archival retrieval. With regard to the first category, we are indebted to recent American scholarship for two significant anthologies of the non-canonical poetry of the period. The first (Scrivener) deals with reform poetry emanating from the intellectual, technological, entrepreneurial dynamism of England's mainly provincial urban centres. The second (Bennett) deals with intense ideological conflict produced by the Napoleonic Wars in which Scottish ultra-loyalism is a revealing as the absence of Irish poetry. Morley has supplied a seminal assessment of Jacobite inspired pro-American, hence anti-Hanoverian, Irish Gaelic poetry. Morley is currently extending this work into the impact of the French Revolution on this

formally and linguistically sophisticated verse. Similar work is underway on Scottish Gaelic poetry. Current work on Burns, Moore and Morganwg has had a knock on effect of uncovering tranches of poets politically sympathetic to these canonical representatives of their three national cultures. With regard to the extremely large canon of pan-British political folk music, an especially virile hybrid with its mixture of traditional music and contemporary vernacular lyrics, we are increasingly aware of its power. This is a vital oral popular form of political communication which is at least as important as the growth of literacy among the urban artisan class. This all has inherent within it the potential to recontextualise substantially the achievements of their English contemporaries.

Mediated through network lectures and discussions, this diverse body of poetry has the potential to create a narrative model of the dynamic fluctuations in the relations of the four nations over this period. These relations, especially those of England with the other three nations, can be defined as alternately centripetal and centrifugal. The initial drive is centripetal. The urban, pan-British reformist programme of the 1770s focused on the slave trade, civil rights for non-Anglicans, parliamentary reform, peace and, particularly for the Irish, the feral economic nature of British Imperialism.

While initially reformist elements in the three other nations adhered to, albeit varying-ly, English myth-history and its subsequent constitutional theorisation, all three began to seek their own bardically engendered ancestral roots. Thus the poet is a key figure in the genesis of late eighteenth-century nationalism. It was believed, especially in Wales, that, since late-Enlightenment universalism was the product of ancestral roots, all four nations could competitively but amiably follow complementary paths to the same goal. Even without the gravitational pull of America and France, this synthesis of late-Enlightenment universalism and national particularism was inherently transient and unstable. Thus the outbreak of war with France was both the British government's greatest external threat and greatest opportunity for internal repression. Thus, in the three Edinburgh Conventions, we see among the British delegates a losing struggle to hold together their vision of a patriotic, unitary reform movement. The fracture led to catastrophe in Ireland and the creation of a radical hyper-loyal Scotland, purged of radicals. Welsh rational dissent relinquished political ambition while English sympathisers split along class lines. The complex pan-British evolution of quite contrary elements, The Reform Bill and British Imperialism, ultimately obscured these fissures.

The organisers further propose that this picture of a failed revolutionary impulse undermines apparently secure presumptions within the academic literature concerning the Enlightenment, Romanticism and radical culture itself. It opens the first term up to complex political appropriations, suggesting that the Enlightenment did not necessarily imply a variant of Anglo-unionist loyalism. Equally, it re-problematizes the relationship to Bardic nostalgia considered inherent in the Romantic movement, rethinking the mode as less backward looking and more subversive. So too it reinvigorates the notion of radicalism itself by highlighting the creative productivity of the movement and the subtle gradations that existed in the political spectrum signified, from cautious Whig sympathisers to determined Jacobins.

Registered Participants

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Mary-Ann Constantine (*in absentia; to be read by Jon Mee*)
'Bards of Liberty': Iolo Morganwg, Wales and Radical Song

Thursday 13 November 2008: The Great Hall

11.00–11.30	REFRESHMENTS	10.00–10.45	Registration and REFRESHMENTS
11.30–1.00	Radical Contexts Chair: Tom Bartlett Kevin Whelan <i>The Green Atlantic</i> Catriona Kennedy <i>A 'pleasure culture of war'? Britain and Ireland 1793–1815</i>	11.00–11.30	Welcome and Introduction John Kirk Cairns Craig
1.00–2.00	LUNCH	11.30–1.00	United Islands? Chair: John Kirk Michael Brown <i>Enlightenment and Revolution: A British Problematic</i> Andrew Noble <i>Universalist Aspirations: Nationalist Particularities</i>
2.00–3.30	Radical Historiography Chair: Michael Brown Tom Bartlett Terry Brotherstone Bob Harris Alex Murdoch	1.00–2.00	LUNCH
3.30–4.00	REFRESHMENTS	2.00–4.00	Irish Ireland and Gaelic Scotland Chair: William Gillies Vincent Morley <i>Of birds and bats: homology and analogy in the 1790s</i> Brendan Mac Suibhne <i>'And Lord and Duke Await the Peasant's Call': Public Prints and the Public House, 1772–1835</i> Peter Mackay <i>Lost manuscripts and reactionary rustling: is there a radical Scottish Gaelic Poetry 1770–1820?</i>
4.00–5.30	United Islands? Chair: John Kirk Rapporteurs: John Barrell Claire Connolly Jon Mee Katie Trumpener	4.00–4.30	REFRESHMENTS
5.30–6.00	Business Meeting: United Islands? The Way Forward Chair: John Kirk	4.30–6.00	Loyalist Poetry Chair: Andrew Noble Leith Davis <i>The Politics of Irish Song in Charlotte Brooke's Reliques of Irish Poetry</i> Frank Ferguson <i>Harping on the Union: Conservative Poetics and the Percy Circle in North-East Ulster 1795–1811</i>
6.30 onwards	INFORMAL HOT EVENING BUFFET		

The Linen Hall Library, 17 Donegall Square North, Belfast, BT1
5GB (entrance is round the corner in Fountain Street)

6.30 Reception and EVENING BUFFET

7.30 **Special Session**

Simon Davies *Queen's University Centre for Eighteenth-Century Studies*

John Gray *The Linen Hall Library*

Siobhan Fitzpatrick *The Thomas Moore 2008 Festival Travelling Exhibition 'My Gentle Harp: Thomas Moore's Irish Melodies, 1808–2008' followed by exhibition tour*

2.00–3.30

Moore: A Pan-British Canonical Poet?

Chair: **Terence Brown**

Ed Larrissy *Thomas Moore and the Idea of Nation*

Brian Caraher *Bermudans, Canadians, Catholics, Shiites: Multi-Cultural Politics of Moore's Melodies and Epistolary Verse*

3.30–4.00

REFRESHMENTS

4.00–6.00

Radical Song

Chair: **John Kirk**

Andrew Carpenter *Virile vernaculars: radical sexuality as social subversion in Irish chapbook verse 1780–1820*

John Moulden *The printed popular song in Ulster between 1770 and 1820: radical or politically indifferent?*

Terry Moylan *Language registers in radical song*

Friday 14 November 2008: The Great Hall

9.30–10.00 REFRESHMENTS

10.00–10.45 **British Radicalism**

Chair: **Alex Murdoch**

Bob Harris *British Radicalism in the 1790s: A Scottish Perspective*

7.00

HOT EVENING BUFFET

Speaker: **John Thompson**

10.45–11.30 **Burns: A Pan-British Canonical Poet?**

Chair: **Andrew Noble**

Nigel Leask *Sung Versions of the Pastoral: Burns and the Pastoral*

8.30

Concert of Radical Song

Ciaran Carson

Maggie MacInnes

Brian MacAlpine

Dafydd Idris Edwards

Terry Moylan

11.30–12.00 REFRESHMENTS

12.00–1.00 **Moore: A Pan-British Canonical Poet?**

Chair: **Terence Brown**

Luke Gibbons *History in the Optative Mood: Moore and Radical Nostalgia*

The Harty Room, School of Music

Saturday 15th November 2008: The Great Hall

1.00–2.00 LUNCH

9.30–11.00

Poetry and History

Chair: **Edna Longley**

Julia Wright *'Thy Branching Words': Radical History and Education in William Drennan's Verse*