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of Scotland and the Union in *Marriage*

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Untrammelled by Theory: Susan Ferrier's Polyphonic  
Vision of Scotland and the Union in *Marriage*

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**Abstract**

Writing at a time when the National Tale was both a flourishing genre and a label frequently used as subtitle, Susan Ferrier might seem to have chosen to focus her attention on domesticity rather than on national issues when she entitled her first work *Marriage. A Novel*. However, Ferrier does not content herself with analysing gender relationships, she also portrays Anglo-Scottish relationships, a century after the Act of Union. This paper aims to analyse the parallels she establishes between conjugal and political unions, as well as the extent to which her own gender may have affected her political views and her ways of expressing them.

Marriage was a common trope in both pro and anti-union tracts published before and in the aftermath of the Act of Union. However, Juliet Shields reminds us that Daniel Defoe – who had himself made use of this very trope in earlier texts – argued in *The Scots Union and Nation Vindicated* that it was a rather unhappy choice of metaphor for the Union since the political union between England and Scotland was based on an egalitarian partnership while ‘in a Marriage the Woman is a subject, an inferior; Promises Obedience, and is call’d by the Name of her husband’.<sup>1</sup> In spite of this warning against the potentially disastrous political impact of the conjugal metaphor, many authors continued to use it throughout the following century, both in political tracts and in fiction. Indeed marriage – or more precisely marriage between partners from different nations – is one of the key elements that define the national tale as a genre. Since most authors of national tales were women, their choosing to use this image meant more than simply relying on an easily identifiable tradition, it was also a means of suggesting – unlike Defoe – that both conjugal and political unions should

be partnerships in which neither the human nor the national bride – be it Ireland or Scotland – should be considered as mere subalterns.

In Susan Ferrier's first novel, marriage is not only a major element of the plot, as well as an important symbol, it is actually the main subject of the novel, as is revealed by the very title. All the references to the term union in this work refer strictly to conjugal ones. Yet, although categorising this novel as a national tale is not really a controversial issue,<sup>2</sup> I would like to begin by dwelling briefly on the reasons why a reading of this work not only as a domestic fiction but also as an implicit discussion of the political Union between Scotland and England is actually relevant. I will then proceed to analyse whether *Marriage* is to be read as a tale of union or disunion, whether it suggests that a 'marriage' between England and Scotland is something to be wished for or, on the contrary, whether it is doomed to end in a national divorce. As *Marriage* was published only four years after *Waverley* and as Scott's historical novel had at the time become the standard by which all portrayals of Scotland and of Anglo-Scottish relations were to be judged, I will draw a few parallels between these two works to see how the authors' genders affected their vision of the ideal Union between the two nations as well as their vision of the Highlands as a paradise lost or found. Finally I will focus on other intertextual references in *Marriage* to study the use Susan Ferrier makes of them in order to define her authorial position and authority.

At the time when Ferrier published her first novel, the National Tale was already clearly identified as a genre and the label was used as a subtitle by both Irish and Scottish authors.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Ferrier opted for the very neutral subtitle 'A Novel' and she seems to have chosen to associate her first work with the less narrowly defined genre of domestic fiction, as is suggested both by its title and also by the description she provides of her literary project in a letter to Charlotte Claverling:

I do not recollect ever to have seen the sudden transition of a highbred English beauty, who thinks she can sacrifice all for love, to an uncomfortable solitary Highland dwelling among tall red-haired sisters and grim-faced aunts. [. . .] the moral to be deduced from that is to warn all young ladies against runaway matches, and the character and fate of the two sisters would be unexceptionable. I expect it will be the first book every wise matron will put into the

hand of her daughter, and even the reviewers will relax of their severity in favour of the morality of this little work. Enchanting sight! already do I behold myself arrayed in an old mouldy covering, thumbed and creased, and filled with dog's-ears. I hear the enchanting sound of some sentimental miss, the shrill pipe of some antiquated spinster, or the hoarse grumbling of some incensed dowager as they severally inquire for me at the circulating library.<sup>4</sup>

Here, we can already sense that the geographical scope and diegetic importance of Scotland might be expanded beyond the mere Gretna Green of sentimental romances. However, it seems that we might be presented with a caricature of Scottish women, rather than a faithful portrait, and, furthermore, the emphasis seems to lay less on Scotland itself than on the didactic dimension of the work with regard to sentimental attachment and marriage.

Indeed this novel provides ample opportunity for analysing conjugal relationships since we are presented with numerous examples of them. While some of them are endogamous, we cannot but notice that the most important ones – that of the heroine's parents and her own – are Anglo-Scottish unions. Besides, both English and Scottish characters demonstrate an interesting blend of fascination and repulsion when discussing these exogamous unions and, even though they strongly advocate against miscegenation, matrimony is so obsessively associated with references to the other nation that we feel we are meant to read the political Union between the lines of the stories of individual unions.

Typically narrators of national tales will provide their readers with explanatory notes and comments of a cultural – sometimes almost ethnographic – nature to help them understand the exotic words or customs of the foreign nation depicted in the tale. Although *Marriage* contains very few notes, we find nods to this tradition in the shape of cultural comments made by the narrator or the characters. For instance, there is a debate on second-sight – a talent typically associated with Highlanders – then there are Major Douglas's comments on the evolution of female education in Scotland and its distinctive national features. At one point, we also find that the narrator uses the vernacular in a playful manner when choosing not to translate the word '*midden* – with the signification of which we would not, for the world, shock the more refined feelings of our southern readers' (*Marriage*, p. 29). Although this is the only explicit reference to an English

audience in the novel, it is clear that Ferrier had a British – rather than exclusively Scottish – readership in mind, not only because the narrative is mainly in standard English, but also because of certain details in the text, such as Major Douglas's calling two women that he and his niece meet in the Lowlands 'two specimens of Scotswomen', as though he and his niece were not themselves Scottish. Referring to these women as Lowlanders would have made more sense if this speech on the specificities of Scottish women had really been meant for his niece, so we can infer that these comments are in fact meant for the English readers.

From the earliest days, critical debates have tended to categorise national tales as either nationalist – ergo patriotic – novels or as unionist – ergo imperialist (sometimes even treacherous) – novels, although the line dividing these two categories may sometimes be extremely thin, as Lisa L. Moore underlines in her article which compares *The Wild Irish Girl* with *Castle Rackrent*.<sup>5</sup> The necessity to woo 'southern readers' so that they can be taught to appreciate the unusual charms of the 'exotic' nation usually results in a complex and rather ambiguous discourse<sup>6</sup> to make otherness acceptable without alienating the readers or negating differences between the national characters and customs. This complex narrative stance explains why categorising national tales as nationalist or unionist often proves difficult and sometimes has more to do with biographical knowledge about the author's opinions or with the reader's own bias than it has to do with a clearly identifiable and univocal narrative discourse. The task becomes even more complex when the author of the national tale is a woman. As Kathryn Kirkpatrick reminds us, Ferrier, like many authoresses, did not adhere to either Scottish or British nationalism, because whilst choosing sides might make sense for a man, it would not make sense for a woman, since all nations are patriarchal cultures and 'No nationalism in the world has ever granted women and men the same privileged access to the resources of the nation-state.'<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, Ferrier underlines the differences between English and Scottish cultures but refuses to define a national Scottish type. Rather she either shows the diversity of characters one may encounter in Scotland or she insists on the fact that some qualities (or more often than not some faults) witnessed in some of her Scottish characters are universal, in both cases preventing the reader from using her novel as a sourcebook to define an archetypal Scottish figure. As for her model hero and heroine, they can

less accurately be described as British than as Anglo-Scots, a hybrid rather than unifying identity, as Kathryn Kirkpatrick and Juliet Shield have underlined. Refusing to adhere to one form of nationalism or the other, however, does not imply that Ferrier is not expressing a view concerning the Union, and even though her Scottish characters are far from being exemplary, one cannot help but feel that she betrays a certain partiality towards her native land and countrymen.

First of all, it is important to note that *Marriage* does not exactly follow the traditional pattern of the national tale as established in the *Wild Irish Girl* and then adopted by Scott in *Waverley*, when he adapted some of the tropes of the national tale to create his historical novel. Instead of narrating the adventures of a young Englishman travelling to the Celtic periphery and marrying a native girl, Ferrier chooses to reverse this pattern by marrying a young English lady, Lady Juliana, and a Highlander. While most of the first volume of the novel is devoted to Juliana's discovery of Scotland, the second and third volumes reverse not only the gender pattern but even more importantly the centre-periphery – and therefore the norm vs. exoticism – pattern by having her Anglo-Scottish daughter Mary travel south to England.

In the eighth chapter of *Waverley*, we find the first descriptions of Scottish landscapes and inhabitants. After a mock-epic description of old women protecting children from a horse's hooves and disparaging comments about the physical appearance of an old man, the narrator – who clearly, albeit implicitly, reflects Waverley's vision – is struck by the rustic charm of young Scottish peasant girls:

Three or four village girls [. . .] formed more pleasing objects, and, with their thin short-gowns and single petticoats, bare arms, legs, and feet, uncovered heads and braided hair, somewhat resembled Italian forms of landscape. Nor could a lover of the picturesque have challenged either the elegance of their costume or the symmetry of their shape; although, to say the truth, a mere Englishman in search of the comfortable, a word peculiar to his native tongue, might have wished the clothes less scanty, the feet and legs somewhat protected from the weather, the head and complexion shrouded from the sun, or perhaps might even have thought the whole person and dress considerably improved by a plentiful application of spring water, with a *quantum sufficit* of soap. (*Waverley*, Edinburgh University Press, p. 35)

This scene is echoed in *Marriage* when Mary encounters English rustics on her way to church. Yet, while she is similarly aware of the comparative poverty of Scottish peasants, her aesthetic vision is clearly that of ‘a lover of the picturesque’ rather than of ‘a mere Englishman in search of the comfortable’:

But to Mary’s eyes the well-dressed English rustic, trudging along the smooth path, was a far less picturesque object than the bare-footed Highland girl, bounding over trackless heath-covered hills; and the well-preserved glossy blue coat seemed a poor substitute for the varied drapery of the graceful plaid. So much do early associations tincture all our future ideas. (*Marriage*, p. 254)

Waverley’s and Mary’s points of view are both prejudiced and examples of what could be described as unconscious nationalism. Although one could not argue that one vision is more valid *per se* than the other, each will definitely produce a different effect on the ‘southern reader’. In the first case, English readers may be sensitive to a gentle irony in the reference to the ‘mere Englishman’ but they are likely to share in Waverley’s sense of exoticism. In the second excerpt on the contrary, they may find it unsettling to find their own norm described as less likeable because it is less familiar. Of course the narrator makes efforts to pacify the readers who might be offended when reading these lines by using positive adjectives to describe the English costume too, although ‘well-preserved’ and ‘glossy’ are not quite as flattering as ‘graceful’, and the description of the English rustic’s gait is certainly not positive. Even more importantly, while the ‘poor substitute for the varied drapery of the graceful plaid’ suggests free indirect speech, the narrator takes control of the narrative again in the last sentence, and the suggestion that Mary’s point of view is biased is likely to make the glorification of the Highland costume more acceptable. Nevertheless, the notion that childhood memories affect our judgements cuts both ways, and English readers should draw the conclusion that their preference for their own national costume – or indeed any other national specificity – is similarly biased. Furthermore, the fact that we should have a Highland girl’s point of view rather than that of a young Englishman suddenly places the English reader in a peripheral position: that of the Other, being assessed with a set of standards that he/she does not meet.

It is not Ferrier's aim, however, to replace one prejudiced vision with another. Instead, Mary must, and will, learn that acceptance of other cultures and a capacity to adopt a critical stance towards the familiar experience and culture of one's childhood are important in order to make choices based on reason as well as sentimental attachment (in spite of the importance of sentimental roots). Indeed, the experience of alienation is a very important step in Mary's *Bildungsroman* and in the reader's education, as Juliet Shields underlines:

Ferrier envisions a hybrid Anglo-Celtic Britishness formed not through a facile synthesis of Highland and metropolitan values and manners but through an open-minded and tolerant observation of cultural differences. [. . .] Britishness is not created by the simple commingling of English and Scottish cultures or Anglo-Saxon and Celtic races. Instead hybridization entails a process of cultural alienation or defamiliarization that allows for the emergence of neither/nor or interstitial identities. (*Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish identity* 1745–1820, p. 129)

Although neither the pure-bred English characters nor the pure-bred Scottish ones can be model characters because of the paramount importance of the alienation process in their moral development, the foibles of the Scottish characters are usually much less detestable than those of the English characters. Major Douglas's comment about the two Lowland ladies is in fact a case in point. While he suggests that the worse faults of Mrs Gaffaw – who is utterly unlikable – are universal, he explains that the irritating but amusing eccentricities of Mrs Macshake have something to do with national character (*Marriage*, p. 221). This is presented to us as one character's point of view and not as the reliable analysis of an omniscient narrator, but it actually illustrates a recurring impression that one has when reading *Marriage*: all human beings are very imperfect and often unlikable, but the Scots are perhaps a little less so than others. Another element that is likely to make the reader side with the Scots is the fact that while Scottish characters are sometimes victimised by English ones, the reverse is not true – indeed Lady Juliana may be miserable in Glenfern but her hell is self-inflicted.<sup>8</sup>

However, the most obvious sign of Ferrier's prejudice in favour of



Scotland is the fact that her model hero and heroine, who own estates in both England and Scotland, choose to settle in the Highlands. Indeed the trope of Highland Arcadia is to be found in both *Waverley* and *Marriage* but in a very different manner. With Scotland playing the part of the bride in the conjugal metaphors about the Union, and with the Highlands working as a synecdoche for Scotland, we are not really surprised to find that in both novels the Highlands are the realm of the feminine, that of Flora on the one hand and that of Alicia Douglas and then Mary on the other. However, if we compare the description of Flora's and Alicia's domains, they convey two very different pictures. In Scott's novel we find all the usual ingredients of a sublime landscape, the beauty of which is 'of a stern and commanding cast', with a 'pass of peril' (*Waverley*, p. 113) creating a sense of dizziness in the hero. In Ferrier's novel, on the other hand, we find the kind of domesticated sublimity that Anne Mellor identifies as characteristic of romantic female literature.<sup>9</sup> The 'Eden' (p. 114) described in *Waverley* is an aesthetic artefact not only because it is presented through the distorted vision of the eponymous hero but also because we have a sense that the whole magic of the scene has been staged. There is a 'sylvan amphitheatre' and the trees have been planted 'under the direction' (p. 113) of Flora who appears as a skilful decorator and stage director who knows how to make efficient use of the landscape to influence her audience. This impression that the Highlands are aestheticised is reinforced at the end of the novel when they disappear from centre stage and are only preserved as a painting, sketched in Edinburgh then painted in a London studio and therefore twice removed from the actual scenery that inspired it.

The Eden created by Flora is characterised by its seclusion and she warns Waverley that 'He who woos the Celtic Muse must love the barren rock more than the fertile valley and the solitude of the desert' (p. 114). On the contrary, when we are first introduced to Lochmarlie in *Marriage*, part of its charm resides in the presence of fishermen singing ditties in Gaelic – thus suggesting the presence of a happy community. Furthermore, the metaphors used to describe the landscape are very different from the ones we find in *Waverley*; instead of the lexical field of the theatre, we find that of needlework with the large masses of rock 'festooned with ivy and embroidered by mosses of a thousand hues' (*Marriage*, p. 95),<sup>10</sup> which highlights the domestication of this landscape. This earthly paradise which the heroine loses for a while when she is exiled in England is rediscovered at the end of the novel,

when she and her husband find ‘as much happiness as earth’s pilgrims ever possess’ (p. 468). Thus, in *Marriage*, the Highlands are not somewhere to be remembered with nostalgia, they are a place one can actually inhabit, the place chosen by the Anglo-Scottish hero (raised in England) and the Anglo-Scottish heroine (raised in the Highlands) who both embody the best qualities of these two nations.

In Scott’s novel, the Highlands are doomed because history must run its course and because the time has come for them to follow the stadial development described by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Indeed there are clues in *Waverley* suggesting that the Jacobite rebellion was ill-fated from the start because the Highlands had already begun to adopt the commercial values of Hanoverian society, an evolution hinted at through Fergus MacIvor’s occasionally mercenary attitude and confirmed in the ‘postscript that should have been a preface’ when the narrator regrets that the development of commercialism should have contributed to the disappearance of the disinterested loyalty that used to characterise the Highlanders. In *Marriage* too we have a suggestion that times are changing and that Highlanders must evolve. However, these changes do not entail the loss of positive values, quite the contrary. When Lady MacLaughlan comments on the feud between the Lennoxes and the MacLaughlans, she insists that there is no room left for such behaviour and absurd situations in the early nineteenth century. While male friends of the two families had tried, in vain, to reconcile Sir Sampson and Charles Lennox’s father by placing them in the same regiment, Lady MacLaughlan succeeds in preserving Charles Lennox’s inheritance – as well as bestowing the domain upon Mary through her matchmaking scheme – thus proving the superior efficiency of feminine methods. Reconciliation and progress are not to be achieved thanks to the army but thanks to a feminine domestic ethos. *Marriage* thus does acknowledge the necessity of ‘civilising’ the Highlands, however this is not achieved as a result of imperialist methods such as military defeat or the influence of commercialism, but rather as the result of a domestication of the landscape and of its inhabitants by the Anglo-Scot Alicia Douglas:

‘This must be a very expensive place of yours, though . . . there is so much garden and shrubbery, and such a number of rustic bridges, bowers, and so forth: it must require half a dozen men to keep it in any order.’

‘. . . had our embellishments been productive of much expense, or tending solely to my gratification, I should never have suggested them. When we first took possession of this spot it was a perfect wilderness, with a dirty farm-house on it; nothing but mud about the doors; nothing but wood and briers and brambles beyond it; and the village presented a still more melancholy scene of rank luxuriance, in its swarms of dirty idle girls and mischievous boys. I have generally found that wherever an evil exists the remedy is not far off; and in this case it was strikingly obvious. It was only engaging these ill-directed children by trifling rewards to apply their lively energies in improving instead of destroying the works of nature, as had formerly been their zealous practice. In a short time the change on the moral as well as the vegetable part of creation became very perceptible: the children grew industrious and peaceable’. (*Marriage*, p. 97)

Alicia Douglas’s insistence on the fact that the beauty of the place is a reflection of the moral improvement of the local population and not something that could be purchased with money suggests that it is actually possible to escape the taint of commercialism. This programme of moral improvement will be pursued by Charles Lennox and Mary and thus, the Highlands – once domesticated by the refined Anglo-Scots – become the ideal society that the rest of Great Britain should try to emulate. This ideal vision of the Highlands – although it will be contradicted by Ferrier’s more pessimistic later novels – is a perfect illustration of Anne Mellor’s analysis in *Romanticism and Gender*:

Many women writers of the Romantic era [. . .] explicitly or implicitly advocated ‘family politics’ as a political program that would radically transform the public sphere. They proclaimed the value of rational love, an ethic of care, and gender equality as a challenge both to a domestic ideology that would confine women within the home and to a capitalist laissez-faire system. (p. 84)

In *Waverley*, the eponymous hero’s confrontation with landscapes is a means of measuring the effect that his romantic illusions have on his perception of the world. The Highlands have a similar function at the beginning of *Marriage* when Lady Juliana discovers them for the first time and her dis-

torted vision turns them into the archetypal scenery of a Gothic novel. In the following chapters however, the Highlands are imbued with a more significant meaning when they become a moral touchstone for the characters.

Beautiful objects are always in danger of triggering rapaciousness, and both Scott and Ferrier denounce the predatory attitude of English people towards Scotland. In *Waverley*, this is alluded to when Colonel Talbot explains how the cup of Saint Duthac was found ‘in the possession of a certain Mrs. Nosebag, who, having been originally the helpmate of a pawnbroker, had found opportunity during the late unpleasant scenes in Scotland to trade a little in her old line, and so became the depositary of the more valuable part of the spoil of half the army’ (p. 362). In *Marriage*, this is illustrated partly through Lady Juliana’s attitude but even more strikingly through the scene in which the aptly named Mrs Fox dispossesses Aunt Grizzy of a family heirloom:

‘Here,’ said Mrs. Fox to her victim, as she unlocked a superb cabinet, ‘is what I value more than my whole collection put together. It is my specimens of Scotch pebbles; and I owe them solely to the generosity and good-will of my Scotch friends. I assure you that is a proud reflection to me. I am a perfect enthusiast in Scotch pebbles, and, I may say, in Scotch people. In fact, I am an enthusiast in whatever I am interested in; and at present, I must own, my heart is set upon making a complete collection of Scotch pebbles.’ (p. 378)

The English woman is indeed as cunning as her name suggests and the use of repetitions in her speech is striking: there is something almost mesmerising about it and one might virtually envision her circling closer and closer until she metaphorically goes for the throat – where Aunt Grizzy wears the brooch. Because the adjective ‘Scotch’ is repeated over and over again and because Mrs Fox associates her enthusiasm for the stone with her enthusiasm for the people, it is tempting to read this victimisation of the naive Scottish woman by the Machiavellian Englishwoman as a metonymy for English tourists’ attitudes at a time when Scotland had become a fashionable destination. If the Anglo-Scottish heroines, Alicia and Mary Douglas, are more refined than Scottish women – which enables them to domesticate the Highlands – they are also less naive, which, in turn, enables them to

protect the havens that they create. Mary may not be able to prevent her aunt from giving her brooch away but she does see through Mrs Fox's schemes and Alicia protects her flowers from Lady Juliana's greed. There is a clear contrast between the attitude of Alicia, who respects the natural world, and Lady Juliana, who considers flowers as things to be grown in hothouses for her personal enjoyment, preferably in large quantities. In the same way as Ferrier underlines the necessity for women to be more than just pretty things to be sold on the marriage market, she suggests that the true beauty of the Highlands lies in something deeper than the mere gratification of the senses and that they must, and can, be protected from patriarchal capitalistic logic: the economic market, as well as what Bourdieu describes as the market of symbolic goods through which men aim at increasing their power.

Like all authors of national tales, Susan Ferrier aims at dispelling English prejudices against her native land and its people, and at providing them with a truer picture. There are two forms of prejudice concerning Scotland that are presented as particularly damaging: excessive idealisation linked with romantic literature, and patronising colonialist visions in the vein of arguments like that of Samuel Johnson. The attitude of her English characters shows that although they might seem to be opposite kinds of prejudices they often coexist in the mind of the same character. In fact this is less paradoxical than it might seem, since Scottish people are then perceived as either good savages or barbarians, two visions equally condescending. Literature was the appropriate weapon to fight against these prejudices, since it had in fact contributed to creating them. These stereotypes are mainly (though not exclusively) voiced by Lady Juliana and by the literary circle of Mrs Bluemits. The chapter dedicated to Mrs Bluemits and her bluestocking friends plays no part in furthering the plot but it enables Ferrier to show how English readers of Scott or Byron have come to view Scotland as 'the land of poetry and romance' (p. 414). It is no coincidence that at some point in their conversation these women should mention Dr Johnson and associate him with a patriotic comment: 'for the sake of my country, I would wish that every word we utter might be compelled to shew its passport, attested by our great lawgiver, Dr Samuel Johnson' (p. 421). Although in this reference to Johnson they do not mention his *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, the comment echoes that of Lady Juliana regarding the coarseness of the Scottish language: 'Then, to hear the Scotch

brogue – oh, heavens! I should expire every time she opened her mouth!’ (p. 189). Besides, the figure of Samuel Johnson had already been conjured up earlier in the novel, albeit implicitly, when Juliana’s English maid servant, discovering the Highlands, exclaimed: ‘A pretty way of travelling, to be sure, it will be . . . to go bumping behind a dirty chaise-driver; but better to be shook to a jelly altogether, than stay amongst such a set of *Oaten-toads*’ (p. 14). Her malapropism is quite interesting. First of all, it combines two derogatory comments by Johnson on the Scots: his comparison of the Scots with various ‘savage tribes’ in *A journey to the Western Isles* and his definition of oats in the dictionary: ‘a grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people’. The animalisation of the Scots is clearly further reinforced by the introduction of the word ‘toad.’ However, at the same time, there is a certain irony in the fact that when this English character expresses her racist contempt towards the Scots she should be twisting Johnson’s words (and more importantly the English language) thus committing the worst possible crime against ‘the great lawgiver’, and proving that English people’s linguistic skills are not necessarily superior to that of the Scots, as they generally tended to assume.

Dr Johnson is not the only writer with whom Ferrier implicitly or explicitly engages in her novel. Other references to various English, Scottish and Irish writers are made through some of the narrator’s comments, through Lady MacLaughlan’s allusion to the works of Joanna Baillie, Lord Byron and Charles Maturin and through Emily’s bantering suggestion that she wishes her sentimental life were as complicated as that of the heroine of a Gothic novel: ‘Alas! I live in degenerate days. Oh that I had been born the persecuted daughter of some ancient baron bold instead of the spoiled child of a good-natured modern earl! Heavens! To think that I must tamely, abjectly submit to be married in the presence of all my family, even in the very parish church! Oh, what detractions from the brilliancy of my star!’ (*Marriage*, p. 250) After all, she does bear the same first name as the heroine of the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, although these two characters have little else in common. By commenting on other literary genres, Ferrier implicitly asserts the validity of her own choices. Just as Lady MacLaughlan decides to prevent the Lennox-MacLaughlan feud from turning into a tragedy and rewrites it as a domestic romance leading to the marriage of Charles Lennox and Mary Douglas, Ferrier uses domestic fiction to rewrite the story of

Scotland outside of the colonial discourse of Samuel Johnson and the romantic discourse of male Scottish writers.

Through the domestication of the Highlands combined with a condemnation of the mercantile values of England, Ferrier manages to convey a message which is, at one and the same time, both pro-Union and pro-Scotland, which can be a little confusing for the reader. Whether they are interested in Ferrier's depiction of the condition of women or in her depiction of Scotland, critics have often suggested that while the official message of the novel is one of reconciliation, Ferrier unconsciously rebelled against her own didacticism and involuntarily betrayed her misgivings.<sup>11</sup> It is, however, difficult to believe that the ambiguity inherent in Ferrier's novel is not intended. The irony with which she alludes to the morality of her book in her letter to Charlotte Clavering and the humour with which she describes herself as a synecdoche for her book show that her intentions should not be reduced to the deliverance of a straightforward moralistic message. In his *Memoirs and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier*, J. A. Doyle underlines the fact that Susan Ferrier was 'untrammelled by theory' and indeed both Emily and Mary explicitly refuse on several occasions to sum up their opinions as mere formulas. Yet the absence of a clearly defined explicit discourse in *Marriage* is not to be interpreted as an absence of vision, as we are meant to realise when we read the ironic comment on Mary's great-aunts' incapacity to understand Alicia Douglas's method of education: 'They did nothing themselves without a bustle, and to do a thing quietly was to them the same as not doing it at all' (p. 161). Like Alicia Douglas, Susan Ferrier avoids long explicit exposés of her educational agenda concerning the role of women and of Scottish people in early nineteenth-century British society but her dealing with such issues implicitly and through the use of competing discourses in the novel should not necessarily be interpreted as a sign that her rebellion was unconscious, repressed or self-censored. Rather, I would suggest that the trope of hybridity – and the heterogeneity and complexity that it entails – is not only useful for understanding the issue of nationality but is a key to approaching other aspects of her novel. Thus, the concluding lines of the novel suggest a conflation of the public and domestic spheres and Charles Lennox and Mary preside over the community as a couple rather than as gendered individuals. Besides their marriage was made possible through the agency of Lady MacLaughlan, the fairy godmother-*cum-deus-ex-machina*, whose attitude and clothing are quite

ambiguous gender-wise. And if one accepts the notions of an interstitial nationality and interstitial gender, why not accept as well the notion of an interstitial style that intentionally juxtaposes morality and humour? The similarities between Emily's voice and that of Ferrier in her correspondence have been noted by critics and although seeing Emily as Ferrier's mouth-piece would be an over-simplification, it is tempting to say that, like Emily, the novelist probably 'tires of people who have only two or three notes in their character' (p. 269). The so-called inconsistencies in the tone of the novel therefore rather appear to me as an intentional attempt to provide the reader with a polyphonic and polythematic partition in which the themes of gender and nationality subtly intertwine.

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## Notes

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- 1 Daniel Defoe, *The Scots Union and Nation Vindicated from the Reflections cast on them in an Infamous Libel, EntitPd The Publick Spirit of the Whigs*, (London: A. Bell, 1714), p. 3, quoted in Juliet Shields, *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish identity, 1745-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 17.
- 2 It figures, for instance, among the novels Juliet Shields analyses in her chapter dedicated to 'National Tales and the Domestication of the Highlands'. Besides, as early as 1819, in the epilogue of the third series of *Tales of my Landlord*, Walter Scott had identified in *Marriage* a cultural and national project similar to the one he was pursuing in his historical novels:

I have the vanity to suppose, that the popularity of these Novels has shown my countrymen, and their peculiarities, in lights which were new to the Southern reader; and that many, hitherto indifferent upon the subject, have been induced to read Scottish history, from the allusions to it in these works of fiction. . . . More than one writer has of late displayed talents of this description; and if the present author, himself a phantom, may be permitted to distinguish a brother, or perhaps a sister shadow, he would mention, in particular, the author of the very lively work entitled *Marriage*. (*A Legend of the Wars of Montrose*, Edinburgh University Press, p. 183).

- 3 Ferrier began writing *Marriage* in 1810 – four years after the publication of Sydney Owenston's *The Wild Irish Girl* – and published it in 1818 – three years after Christian Isobel Johnstone's *Clan-Albin*.
- 4 J. A. Doyle ed., *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier, 1782-1854* (London: John Murray, 1898), p. 76.
- 5 'Acts of Union: Sexuality and Nationalism, Romance and Realism in the Irish National Tale' in *Cultural Critique* 44 (Winter 2000).
- 6 See Ainsley MacIntosh's analysis of the 'competition of cultural discourses' ('Domestic Fiction' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish women's Writing*, p. 59) in Ferrier's novels



- and Ian Duncan's conclusion that '*Marriage* saves room for those unimproved national characters whose quirks and crochets give the fiction its spice' and who 'embody a resistance (however local and limited) to the ascendant regime of taste' (*Scott's shadow: the Novel in Romantic Edinburgh*, Princeton University Press, 2010 p. 87).
- 7 Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Summer, and Patricia Yaeger (eds.), *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 6.
  - 8 It is however significant that while encounters between English and Scottish characters may be conflictual and while some English characters victimise the Scots, Ferrier is careful to avoid depicting conflicts on a national scale. For instance, in *Waverley*, the Highland soldiers are Jacobite rebels but in *Marriage*, which takes place several decades later, Mary's father is stationed in London and later serves the British Empire in 'a distant station in India'; moreover, the last two volumes of Ferrier's novel focus on the couple of years before the battle of Waterloo, when the regiments of Highlanders – and the heroine's husband – distinguished themselves in their defence of Great-Britain. Keeping conflicts at the individual levels rather than dealing with issues of potential national dissension enables Ferrier to criticise some aspects of English society without criticising England as a nation.
  - 9 Anne Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 103.
  - 10 Although it is in all likelihood unintentional, there is a delightful irony in the use of this image for a reader who is aware of M. G. Lewis's notorious misogynist comment about women writers: 'I heard it rumoured that Miss F.L. doth write novels or is about writing one. I wish she would let such idle nonsense alone . . . as a rule I have an aversion, a pity, and contempt for all female scribblers. The needle, not the pen, is the instrument they should handle, and the only one they ever use dexterously'. (*Diary, illustrative of the Times of George IV*, quoted in *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier*, op. cit., p. 126).
  - 11 Mary Cullinan, for instance, who considers that the proto-feminist elements in the novel are never conscious, underlines the morbid circumstances surrounding the heroine's marriage, both on the day when she was engaged and on her wedding day. If we choose to consider that these macabre elements betray the author's unconscious reluctance against this marriage, it is tempting to read it from a nationalist as well as a feminist point of view and to remember that on the day when the Act of Union was signed the bells of St Giles's cathedral played the Scottish tune 'Why should I be so sad on my wedding day.' In this case, we should read those deaths as an unwitting condemnation of the Union as well as a subconscious rejection of the moralising happy ending. However, I do not find such interpretation wholly satisfying. First of all because it is a little difficult to be truly affected by the tragicomic allusions to the death of Sir Sampson MacLaughlan and secondly because it seems to me that Ferrier's tendency to associate tragic and happy events has less to do with her subconscious betraying itself against her better judgement than it has to do with her religious beliefs; after all, the christening of Alicia Douglas's little boy is also tainted by death. Although this may baffle a contemporary reader, Ferrier's contemporaries would have been familiar with this kind of rhetoric, as we can see for instance in Charles Maturin's sermon on the occasion of the death of Princess Charlotte: 'Life is full of death; the steps of the living cannot press the earth without disturbing the ashes of the dead – we walk upon our ancestors – the globe itself is one vast churchyard' (*Sermons*, Constable, 1819, p. 10).