

Daniel Kaminski

Prof. Small

Section R

December 10th, 2021

The 400 Year War

It is often said that if we do not learn history, we are doomed to repeat it. Off of this idea stems the question: is the repetition of history inevitable? For hundreds of years the people of Scotland have been trying to become independent of Great Britain and have yet to succeed. The satirical piece, "Scots Vote to Stay In UK; 'Yes' Voters to Be Hanged as Rebels" posted on *Satire Wire* focuses on satirizing this issue. The author of the piece satirizes the Scottish struggle of independence by writing about an alternative reality, in which the voters who voted for separation from Great Britain will be punished in various ways, in the hope that readers will pay attention to the treatment of those that are for separation. The satirical piece "Scots Vote" conveys Britain's consistently negative attitude towards Scottish independence through past-present historical comparisons in attitude; however, the author ultimately overuses sharp wording and misplaces caricature of political leaders, which blurs the focus and elicits a sense of personal attack rather than criticism, making the reader less likely to consider the author's point.

In this satirical piece, historical references are effectively used by the author to show that Great Britain's treatment of Scotland in the modern age is similar to in the past, and that Britain itself has changed little. By showing the temporal continuity of British resistance to independence movements, the author solidifies the idea that Britain has consistently treated

Scottish independence movements harshly. In the satire then prime minister of the U.K., David Cameron, says, “As we have throughout history – from Falkirk to William Wallace to the failed Jacobite Risings – Great Britain will always deal harshly with those who would seek to threaten the unity of our realm” (Admin). Through the contextualization of the independence movement as something ongoing, the author can lend legitimacy to the idea of the movement. In the article, P.M. Cameron also says that, “The ‘Yes’ votes were a decision Scots would, ‘once again, regret’” (Admin). This only strengthens the context of the movement being something that has been put down for hundreds of years, while also evoking sympathy. It is also written that in this parallel universe, “Queen Elizabeth II today revealed Thursday’s vote on Scottish independence was an elaborate ruse meant to root out Scottish radicals” (Admin). When the Queen is put into such a position of power, it harkens back to the past where British monarchy had more power over the country. This is useful to the author because this parallel universe Britain seem the same as Britain from hundreds of years ago, and the logical next step is for the reader to observe that the attitude towards independence has also not changed. Secondly, this is also perhaps a reflection on the large amount of attention is given to the Queen that may be considered unwarranted given the British monarchy’s current lack of political power. Overall, while historical references are used effectively, other devices, such as sharp language, were implemented less effectively.

Even when considering the use of historical context, the ability of the satire to convey the author’s point is negated through ineffective use of other devices, partly due to misplaced caricature of political figures, and focus on irrelevant social issues, which blurs the purpose of the satire and results in something closer to a personal attack than genuine critique. As a result

of this sentiment created by the caricature, the reader may be less willing to listen to what the author has to say, as opposed to if the author used caricature to expose flaws. The Queen specifically is very strongly caricatured as brutal in this piece, as in this reality she heads the program to punish the 'yes voters. For example, when the plan succeeded, she said, "'Our enemy is defeated. Britain is victorious. God save Me,'" with the phrase, "God save me," being a parody of, "God save the Queen" (Admin). The author is trying to draw attention to the over-importance that is placed on the Queen by caricaturing her as self-absorbed, but this does not further the purpose of the satire. She also says, "'We shall do all we can to continue to earn their loyalty,' said the Queen. 'As for the rest, kill them. Kill them all,'" with this particular phrase being so far removed from the actual diction of the Queen that it does not achieve its purpose (Admin). The purpose of the Queen saying that was to connect the parallel universes' Queens brutality to the brutality in real world Britain, but the focus is instead placed on the unrealistic portrayal of the Queen. Lastly, much of the satire focuses on making the Queen seem self-absorbed and cruel, while in reality she has little to no influence on real life events, thus resulting in the caricature being misplaced. This is exactly what occurs when the author writes that, "The Queen, tired of the 'bleating Scots,' devised a scheme to end secessionist talk once and for all" (Admin). As the Queen did not have much to do with the decision making of the issue, the caricature would be more effective if it focused on someone else, such as the former Prime Minister David Cameron, who had a larger say on the subject. If the satire was more evenly blended across officials or focused more on those that had an influence, it would support the satire rather than hindering it. However, something that can support caricature itself is the wording used, which is often abrasive and sharp.

The author of "Scots Vote to Stay In UK; "Yes" Voters to Be Hanged as Rebels" overuses strong language to the point that the essay feels almost comically overdone, and the absurd and possibly offensive connotations make it difficult to take the author seriously. Part of what makes the use of sharp wording ineffective is its overuse. For example, when the author writes that the Prime Minister of Scotland will be, "Hanged by the neck, cut down while still alive, disemboweled, have his entrails burned before his eyes, and then beheaded and quartered," the treatment of 'yes' voters is not the first thing that comes to mind (Admin). Rather the first thing that the reader notices is that the sharp description of the punishments and does not think about why the 'yes voters' are being punished in the first place. If the amount of sharp wording in this sentence would be reduced, then perhaps the idea would be clearer to the reader. This also occurs when the author writes, "British troops will round up the 1.6 million Scots who voted 'Yes, most of whom will be put on trial for sedition and hanged," as the words such as "sedition", "round up", and "hanged" are unnecessary, making the idea feel almost comical and disconnected from the real issue (Admin). The author focuses a large amount on the punishments, harkening back to the history of British punishments. However, doing so blurs the purpose of the phrases, placing more focus on the punishments themselves than on the fact that there are repercussions for wanting independence. The author may also alienate parts of the audience, such as the Scottish, when he writes that, "'One would think these traitors would learn, but the Scots are a stubborn lot, little more than animals, if truth be told, and now they will pay for their impudence'" (Admin). While phrases such as, "one would think these traitors would learn" and "little more than animals" may serve to convey the harsh treatment of the Scottish and the British anti-Scottish sentiment, they may also serve to offend those

whom the piece is supporting. Thus, in some cases the sharp wording can be offensive in a way that reduces the effectiveness of the wording in conveying the author's message. Taken all together the authors misuse of sharp wording only hinders the piece's ability to effectively satirize the issue of resistance to Scottish independence.

Despite the satire's efficient and realistic approach to comparing past and present British-Scottish relations, "Scots Vote" is unable to effectively satirize the issue of Scottish independence due to the use of caricature and sharp wording in a way that can be considered overdone, and too similar to an attack. However, even if a satire is ineffective, the point it brings up may still be valid, and perhaps even vital. "Scots Vote" is a perfect example of such a satire. While the message is not conveyed as effectively as possible, it is true that historically Scotland has wanted to leave and has been denied this opportunity by Great Britain, even when other properties have been granted this. While the referendum of 2014 had a 'yes' vote of only 45%, the reason for these results may go beyond opinions of people. It is possible that since treatment of those who wish to separate has historically been poor, people voted in a way that did not necessarily reflect their opinions to avoid the repercussions of voting 'problematically'. This is something that must be prevented for a democratic process to proceed correctly. Can the results of a vote even be trusted when voting one way or another can have serious repercussions for the voters?

Works Cited

Admin. "Scots Vote to Stay in UK; 'Yes' Voters to Be Hanged as Rebels." *Satirewire.com*, 19 Sept. 2014, <https://satirewire.com/scots-vote-to-stay-in-uk-yes-voters-to-be-hanged-as-rebels/>.