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**SCOTLAND AND THE MAKING OF BRITISH POETRY IN THE AGE OF
REVOLUTION**

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The present study examines a specific form of literary memorialization of Scottishness, stubborn and elusive as that term might be, under the concrete political, social, and economic conditions of the late eighteenth-century. It holds that literary history and criticism can make a significant contribution to understanding Scottish history, both in its own terms and in relation to British history writ large. It inserts into these histories a much wider range of late eighteenth-century Scottish poets than previous scholarship and deepens our understanding of the cultural and discursive manifestations of British state formation under the extreme stress of war and revolution. It also reveals the way the political crisis of the French Revolution converged with pre-existing concerns about the impact of union on the Scottish economy and society, as well as with

shared Anglo-Scottish critiques of state power that feature so prominently in the political history of this period. Many of the poets studied here have never figured significantly in political, cultural, or literary histories of the period and, with a few notable exceptions, no analysis of their poetry, whether in political or literary terms, has yet occurred. Consequently, this study brings both historical and literary analysis to bear on a large and diverse group of Scottish poets with a range of political and aesthetic perspectives that reflect not only on the question of Scottish, English, and British “identities,” but on the formation of British poetry more generally.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Alternative Scotlands	1
Stating the Argument: Did Scotland Ever Exist?	4
Scotland: World, Nation, Subjectivity.....	9
Defining Scotland.....	14
Scotland and the French Revolution.....	27
Literary History and the Remaking of Scotland’s Past.....	44
Chapter Summary.....	49
Chapter 1: The Other Ayrshire Poets: John Lapraik, David Sillar, and Isobel Pagan...	53
John Lapraik and Conservative Radicalism: Scotland as Satire.....	55
David Sillar and Bourgeois Nationalism: Scotland as Imagined Community....	77
Isobel Pagan and the Refusal of “National” Identity: Scotland as Moral Economy.....	97
Chapter 2: Radical Voices: James Maxwell, Janet Little, and the Politics of Pove.....	144
James Maxwell and the Polemics of Piety.....	145
Janet Little, Neither “Scotch” nor “Milkmaid”.....	163
Little v. Burns: A Woman’s a Woman for A’ That.....	165
De-Burnsing Scottish Poetry.....	180
Little and History: Scotland as Matriarchy.....	199
Chapter 3: Carolina Oliphant and the Abuses of History.....	211
Scottish Faces, British Masks.....	213

Madwoman in the Castle: Scotland as Gothic Nightmare.....	230
Jacobitism and the Aesthetic of National Trauma.....	248
The Empty Nation: Scotland and the Figure of Woman.....	295
Chapter 4: Alternative Radicalisms in the Poetry of Alexander Wilson, John Robertson, Alexander Tait, and Robert Tannahill.....	332
Alexander Wilson and the Aesthetics of Libel.....	335
Wilson, Robertson, Burns and the Critique of Capitalism.....	350
“Rab and Clootie”: Tait, Burns, and Scotland’s Deals with the Devil.....	365
Masters and Men: English Capital, Scottish Labor, and the Proletarian Nation.....	386
Robert Tannahill, North Briton: Bought and Sold for English Gold.....	406
Chapter 5: A Scottish Revolution in Verse.....	443
James Kennedy and the Poetics of Exile: Making Britain Scottish.....	444
Thomas Muir, Henry Dundas, and the Scottish Revolution(s).....	454
The Scottish Internationale.....	471
The Empire Writes Back: Radical Loyalisms in William Robb and Hamilton Paul.....	480
“Voices from the Dark”: Alexander Geddes, Scotland, and the Invention of British Poetry.....	497
Epilogue: Back to the Future.....	541
Bibliography.....	545

Introduction Alternative Scotlands

O Scotland! proud, long blessed above all others,
My sacred country, rich, broad-meadowed, strong,
Who could spell out your many grievances
And wounds, then find the words to match our own
Hurts *in extremis* under barbarous laws,
As now, sailing still further from the frontiers
Of our own land with all its lovely farms
I take up Horace—

Cras igens . . .
Tomorrow

We put out once again on the great deep.

---Thomas Muir de Hunters hill/“Gente Scotus, Anima Orbis terrarum Civis”
(1794)¹

KEEN blows the wind o'er Donnoch't head;
The sna' drives fnellyu thro' the dale;
The Gaverlunzie tirils my sneck,
And shiv'ring tells his waefu' tale.

“Cauld is the night, O let me in,
“And dinna let your minstral fa',
“And dinna let my winding sheet
“Be naething but a wreath of sna',

“Full ninety winters ha' I seen,
“And pip'd where Gor-Cocks whirring flew,

¹ Qtd. in Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books: A History of Scottish Literature* (Oxford, 2009), 368. Crawford translates the poem from the original:

O Scotia! O longum felix longumque superba
Ante alias patria, Heroum sanctissima tellus
Dives opum fecunda viris, latetissima campis
Uteribus!
Aerumnas memorare tuas summamque malorum
Quis queat, et dictis, nostros aequare Dolores
Et turpes ignominias et Barbara iussa?
Nos patriae fines et dulcia linquimus arva.
Cras ingens iterabimus aequor.

“And mony a day ye’ve danc’d I ween,
“To liltis which frae my drone I blew.”

My Elspa, wad’d and soon she cry’d,
“Get up geud man, and let him in,
For weel ye ken the winter night
Was short when he began his din.

My Eppie’s voice, oh, wou its sweet!
E’en tho’ the banks an’ scaulds awie;
But when its tun’d to sorrow’s tale,
Oh, haith its doubly sweet to me.

Come in, auld Carie! I’se stir my fire,
I’ll mak it bleeze a bonny flame,
Your blood is thin, ye’ve tint the gait,
Ye shou’d na stray *sae far frae hame*.

Nae hame have I, the Minstrel said,
Sad party strife o’erturned by ha’;
And, weeping at the eve of life,
I wander thro’ a wreath o’ sna’.
---from the *The Edinburgh Herald*, September 8, 1790

When envious JOHNSON tow’rd the Scotian round,
With narrow soul in frozen fetters bound,
Nor grave, nor tree, nor fertile flow’ry vale,
Could please his optics, or his mind regale.
A barren desart, which no verdure yields,
Unstocked pastures, and uncultur’d fields:
Bent to detract, maliciously describes
A barb’rous language, and ungenerous tribes;
A coward race, by nature’s law consign’d
To stand uncypher’d, and to science blind,
Shrunk from himself, he dropt his vir’lent quill,
And own’d thy merit—sore against his will.

---F—T, from *The Bee*, November 2, 1791

Scotland has always posed a problem for national histories of Britain. Until relatively recently, “British” history equated to English history and made little mention of

Scotland (or Wales), except perhaps as an eighteenth-century security concern for the Hanoverian regime (and a whipping boy for Scotophobes) or a nineteenth-century industrial workshop. With the advent of new approaches to British history disaggregating the composite state called “Great Britain” and considering its internal and imperial formation in broader historical terms, Scotland has played an increasingly important role in rewriting that history. In just the past quarter century or so, Scottish historians have produced an immense body of social, political, intellectual, and cultural history that has given the notion of a Scottish “nation” real and substantial content, even if there is no consensus on the precise nature of a nation that is not also a state. In this sense Scottish history has only recently come into its own as a disciplinary category that justifies dedicated institutional resources and the creation of a canon of seminal and influential texts. Academic careers can now be made in the subject of Scottish history, and there is no reason to think that this salutary development will change any time soon.

At the same time, however, the emergence of Scottish history as a discipline has precipitated a vigorous discussion of “Scotland” as a category of historical analysis. This discussion has scholarly, cultural and political dimensions and occurs in a variety of contexts, from academic conferences and publications to the floors of the British House of Commons and the devolved Scottish Parliament (not to mention the plethora of websites devoted to Scottish history, genealogy, culture, and tourism). Who is Scottish? Who is British? After four centuries of regal and three centuries of political unification, why—and for what purposes—do these questions still matter? To put the question another way, how does one conduct an analysis of Scottish history if the meanings of

“Scotland” and “Scottish” have yet to be settled in the same way, for example, that historians speak of “England” and “English”?

Stating the Argument: Did Scotland Ever Exist?

This study begins with Linda Colley’s thesis that, during the long eighteenth-century, Protestantism and the ongoing wars with France “forged” previously independent English and Scottish nationalities into a powerful sense of “Britishness.” This shared British identity, Colley indicates, helped to enable the British state to face down continental and imperial rivals and secure, at least for a large part of the nineteenth century, a nearly unassailable position as Europe’s naval and economic powerhouse.²

Colley’s thesis has been enormously productive in stimulating the development of a rich historiography of national identity formation in the British archipelago in the modern era. Scottish historians in particular have found much to expand upon and qualify in Colley’s argument and have generally accepted Colley’s formulation of the identity question as one of Scottish, and to some degree English, assimilation to “British” identity. While this body of historical analysis has produced a wide range of theoretical approaches to identity formation, it generally assumes that some form of “Scottishness” has always existed within or side-by-side with an overlaid “Britishness.”³

Moreover, most historians seem to agree that Scottish identity pre-existed British identity and thus became an essential element of Britishness, rather than a “lost” identity colonized and overwritten by a dominant, hegemonic power. In this context, eighteenth-century antiquarianism in Scotland can be viewed as part of a British project to assimilate

² Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, 2d ed. (New Haven, 2012).

³ “Scotland” or “Scottishness” here refers to an imaginary, not a geopolitical entity.

unique Scottish cultural, linguistic, and historical experiences into a composite state constituted by distinctive national histories. This perspective in turn presents the recovery of Scottish subnationalism, largely through the compilation and representation of folk and oral materials by (in many cases) the cultural elite, as part and parcel of the larger Whig interpretation of British history. For many eighteenth-century Scots engaged in such “nation-building,” representing Scotland as worthy of full partnership in the Union not only memorialized and preserved a narrative of Scottish indigeneity, but actively participated in the erection of, in Hegelian terms, a world historical entity, Britain, in which Scotland held pride of place. In this process, a historically impoverished and fragmented northwest European kingdom was transformed into an avatar of enlightened culture and world domination.

The assimilation thesis, however, assumes that there is something to assimilate. For the great Whig narrative to work, “Scotland” and “Scottishness” must be fixed and signified in a reasonably continuous historical and cultural context. For Colley and others, the long eighteenth century provides the crucible in which such concretization occurred. The Union precipitated, if not activated, a latent and pre-existent Scottishness (and well as an oppositional Englishness, especially during the era of Lord Bute and Wilkesite Scotophobia) that contributed its indigenous genius to the creation of Britain. The eighteenth-century experience of rebellion, destruction of feudal privilege, and intellectual and economic take-off provided the material for an epic narrative of Scottish exceptionalism that continues more or less unabated to the present. But can this assumption of “Scottishness” withstand close scrutiny in its eighteenth-century context?

I argue that it cannot withstand such scrutiny, at least not in the way that Scottishness has previously been constructed to undergird the ideological work of the imaginary of Britishness. A different analysis may be in order for Scots living abroad, whom Tom Devine and others have shown intensely identified with their Scottishness (perhaps in direct proportion to their distance from Scotland), but in this respect “Scottishness” pertains primarily to the construction of a British imperial identity, rather than a Scottish national variant within the British state. This study concentrates, however, on the internal dynamics of identity formation. In the later eighteenth-century context of increasingly volatile domestic political unrest and foreign wars, I argue, Scottishness did not assimilate into a synthetic British identity, but remained unstable, contested, and indeterminate. Consequently, to the extent that a British identity can be said to have formed during this period, it much more closely approximates “Englishness” than anything else. Scotland, in this sense, is neither “here” nor “there.”

To make this argument, I rely on literary materials, primarily lyric poetry, produced mainly in Lowland Scotland between approximately 1785 and 1805. I view these materials as a previously underexplored and crucial part of the historical record of the French revolutionary period. Not only are they an important medium for both political and social protest and loyalist expression, they are deeply embedded in local conditions, traditions, and histories in ways that escape more “objective” historical documents, such as court records, official correspondence, government reports, and statistical data.⁴ In

⁴ I would argue further that such “official” archives must be interrogated in terms of the exercise of power, sometimes unidirectionally, on behalf of the dominant institution that produces, directly or indirectly, the communication. From this perspective, lyric poetry

part, these materials may indicate particular *mentalités* at given times and places, but they also participated in a national contestation of the meaning of “Scottishness” and “Britishness” in the face of, depending on one’s perspective, of the threat or liberatory potential of the revolution in France. Much of this poetry appeared in periodical, newspaper, and pamphlet form, and was specifically intended to be publicly declaimed and discussed (not to mention denounced). It was also published alongside news from France, ministerial and parliamentary activity in London, editorials on all sides of the revolution question, and correspondence and reports from around Scotland of radical, loyalist, and reactionary responses to the extraordinary events of the day. Lyric poetry thus became one of the primary modes of expression of possible futures for “Scotland,” but at the same time questioned the existence and nature of the category of “Scotland” itself.

This study also does the honor of giving this body of literary production the critical treatment it has long deserved. My attention to form, language, and structure takes a literary critical approach to the material, but also emphasizes the historicity of the formal choices made by the Scottish poets who entered the fray. Poetry is a specialized discourse that demands to be read in particular and often coded ways. In this respect, I argue that poetry is no different from the standpoint of historical analysis than any other archival material, which likewise must be interpreted with attention to its form and purpose as a carrier of actionable information. At times in this study the formal analysis of a poem’s structural and linguistic aspects may seem outside of the realm of “history,”

might be seen as a more “authentic” expression of desire and, consequently, a historical source with both integrity and authority.

perhaps belonging rather to literary criticism or history instead. Assuming that such a distinction is legitimate, such analysis is nevertheless necessary to understand the political commitments that inhere in a particular poet's use of indigenous, continental, or "British" literary traditions. These poets of both genders, some plebeian or artisanal, some bourgeois, professional, or aristocratic knew what they were doing when they made such choices. This study seeks to make those decisions visible and restore their crucial part in identity formation during a period universally perceived to have been critical to state formation in the "isles."

I also argue here that Scottish poetry of this period is distinctive from its English counterparts in at least one fundamental respect: much of it was produced under extreme deprivation, poverty, and political disenfranchisement. During the 1790s Scotland suffered from periodic famine, which in many cases Scots believed to be caused by the agents of agrarian capitalism. The economic and social displacement attendant to the rationalization of Scottish agriculture throughout the eighteenth century left many Scots feeling disoriented and vulnerable, with tenuous livelihoods and little control over their local conditions. This sense of vulnerability has its parallel in England as well, but in Scotland the actual lived experience of physical and emotional hardship, in addition to the growing awareness during the 1790s that the revolution would not produce political, social, and economic improvement in Scotland after all, often left Scots desperate and angry. Much of the poetry we will examine registers this hopelessness and further undermines a pro-British narrative of identity formation during the period. At the same time, this distinctive Scottish poetry contributed far more to the making of British poetry,

especially Romantic poetry, than has previously been realized. Perhaps in this sense Scottish poets may indeed be more “British” than their English counterparts, but their constructions of “Britishness” frequently find that Scottishness, if it exists at all, has no place in a British world.

Scotland: World, Nation, Subjectivity

In her argument that eighteenth-century Anglo-Scots poets such as James Thomson deserve to be considered as much Scottish poets as English or British ones, Mary Jane Scott recognizes this very problem of categorization:

For Scottishness is a stubborn thing. It is not simply a matter of language or locale. It takes more than a Scottish birth-certificate, or a vocabulary sprinkled with Scotticisms, to make a Scottish poet. It is all those intangible influences—religious, historical, educational, aesthetic, geographical, linguistic, literary, and broadly cultural—which work together to determine national and individual character.⁵

For Scott, “Scottishness” evokes multiple bases of Scottish identity, speaking at once to the political and communal “nation” and to the ubiquitous Scottish presence in world culture. From this perspective, Scottishness constructs a kind of universal category available to anyone linked to Scotland by virtue of “broadly cultural” interpenetration. What makes Scottishness so “stubborn,” perhaps, is its refusal of signification within any standard geopolitical terminology. No one knows exactly what constitutes Scotland or Scottishness, certainly not in the way we think we understand the “constitution” of England or the United States. When the Scottish literary critic and historian Robert Crawford, for example, retails the story of Mario Vargas Llosa’s journey to Kirkcaldy

⁵ Mary Jane Scott, “James Thomson and the Anglo-Scots,” *The History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 2 1660-1800, ed. Andrew Hook (Aberdeen, 1978), 81.

and Abbotsford in search of Adam Smith and Walter Scott (citizens of the world if there ever were any), he does it to show the profound influence of Scottish literature on the wider world, as well as the immense culture industry that nineteenth-century Scotland has produced for world consumption.⁶ It seems that in addition to its other presences, both concrete and evanescent, Scotland might be said to exist as a kind of corporate entity engaged in global commerce, an entity that, lacking political sovereignty, has nevertheless established a “nation” sustained by an aggressively marketed national culture. I suspect that no one feels much of an emotional connection to the American nation when eating a Big Mac or listening to pop music, but something “Scottish” certainly happens when the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards strike up “Scotland the Brave.” Lord Dacre may have considered this type of nationhood—tartan, pipes, and Burns night haggis feasts—as “invented” out of a collective sense of historical inferiority and loss (if not outright hucksterism), but he underestimated the capacity of Scots to “invent” a nation that allows one to “be Scottish” because one “feels” real emotional attachment to, if not affection for, his or her Scottishness.⁷

Lord Dacre may put the question perjoratively, but this notion that the construction of Scottishness involves a process of imaginative and emotional self-projection, rather than establishing a stable identity, also draws on recent work of Carol McGuirk and others on Robert Burns. Pointing to the efforts by Andrew Noble, Patrick Scott Hogg, and Liam McIlvanney to situate Burns as a politically and intellectually sophisticated “radical,” McGuirk argues that Burns simply cannot be characterized in

⁶ Crawford, *Scotland's Books*, 3.

⁷ Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History* (New Haven, 2008).

specific categorical terms.⁸ Instead, in the context of the revolutionary period of the late 1780s and 1790s, Burns refashions a Scottish past fraught with historical crisis for the purpose of creating a “potentially utopian space that Burns defines as ‘Scotland’ . . . a place of free motion and strongly conveyed emotion. He critiques tyranny through a richly equivocal double vision of a glorious if embattled Scottish past and free-moving, free-speaking Scottish—and world—future.”⁹ One can easily discern a similar utopian aspiration, for example, in the Scottish National Party’s referendum manifesto, which calls upon Scots to remake Scotland as a dynamic and expansive “world,” rather than remaining a limited (and subordinate) political unit of an eighteenth-century nation-state.¹⁰

⁸ For purposes of this study, I adopt Liam McIlvanney’s definition of “radical” and “radicalism” as denoting “both the practical agitation for political reform that emerged in the wake of the American Revolution, and the intellectual resources of the reform movement—for instance, the contractarian and Real Whig ideas primarily associated with Dissenting and Presbyterian denominations.” Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton, 2000), 9. In McIlvanney’s usage, “radicalism” refers not to specific political affiliations but to a “general nonconformity and contentiousness, the comprehensive dissidence of a man [Burns] who could boast: ‘I set as little by kings, lords, clergy, critics, &c. as all these respectable Gentry do by my Bardship.’” *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹ McGuirk, “Writing Scotland: Robert Burns,” *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 2, ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh, 2007), 176.

¹⁰ The text may be found on the SNP’s website and reads as follows:

Independence is about making Scotland more successful. At its most basic, it is the ability to take our own decisions, in the same way as other countries do. Scotland is a society and a nation. No one cares more about Scotland’s success than the people who live here and that, ultimately, is why independence is the best choice for our future.

With independence we can work together to make Scotland a more ambitious and dynamic country. We can create an environment where our existing and new industries grow more strongly. We would have the economic levers to create new jobs and take full advantage of our second, green energy windfall. And instead of many young people having to leave Scotland to fulfill their ambitions, they would be

This dynamic impulse may explain the inconsistency and ambiguity of the SNP's terminology when referring to "Scotland," either as a present dependency within Britain or a future independent nation-state. Indeed, McGuirk's reading of Burns's Scotland as a place of "free motion and strongly conveyed emotion" comes much closer to articulating the concept of an essential Scottishness than does the SNP, while at the same time denying the possibility that Scotland can exist in anything other than a permanent state of incipience. It seems paradoxical to imagine an "essence" as always becoming and never fully present, but McGuirk seems to suggest a paradox nonetheless. To extend McGuirk's theorization a bit further, my approach to Scottishness borrows from the Bergsonian insight that feelings or emotions cannot be fully experienced or named until they have already passed into memory, meaning that "being" must necessarily describe the shadow

able to stay and take advantage of the increased opportunities here. We will have the powers to address the priorities of people in Scotland, from pensions to childcare. Scotland could do even more to lead the world in areas like renewable energy and tackling climate change, and play our part in creating a more peaceful and stable world. Independence will allow us to make Scotland a better place to live.

And independence will mean a strong, new relationship between Scotland and the rest of the UK. It will create a partnership of equals - a social union to replace the current political union. Independence means Scotland will always get the governments we elect, and the Queen will be our Head of State, the pound will be our currency and you will still be watching your favourite programmes on TV. As members of the EU there will be open borders, shared rights, free trade and extensive cooperation.

The big difference will be that Scotland's future will be in our own hands. Instead of only deciding some issues here in Scotland, independence will allow us to take decisions on all the major issues. That is the reality of independence in this interdependent world.

Scottish National Party, <http://www.snp.org/referendum/the-new-scotland> (accessed June 19, 2013).

or impression of a past identity as well as the flux and reflux of lived human experience.¹¹ In this sense, lived experience knows no present that it can think; the self can only hope to achieve consciousness of its own pastness as it recedes, gazing backward, into an indeterminate future that can only be imagined in an already archaized form. “Feeling” Scottish, then, connotes a lived experience that passes into consciousness through a complex process of memorializing Scotland.¹²

The present study examines a specific form of literary memorialization of Scottishness, stubborn and elusive as that term might be, under the concrete political, social, and economic conditions of the late eighteenth-century. It holds that literary history and criticism can make a significant contribution to understanding Scottish history, both in its own terms and in relation to British history writ large. It inserts into these histories a much wider range of late eighteenth-century Scottish poets than previous scholarship and deepens our understanding of the cultural and discursive manifestations

¹¹ Here I refer primarily to Bergson’s *Matter and Memory* (1896) and *Creative Evolution* (1907).

¹² Evan Gottlieb’s work on the Scottish Enlightenment doctrine of sympathy and its importance to developing conceptions of Britishness is of special interest here. See Gottlieb, *Feeling British: Sympathy and National Identity in Scottish and English Writing, 1707-1832* (Lewisburg, 2007). My use of the term “feeling Scottish” refers to self and collective identity formation through specific forms of “remembrance” available to poets and writers of all classes, educational backgrounds, and social and economic conditions. I am also cognizant of Neil Davidson’s carefully drawn distinction between “national consciousness” and “nationalism.” For Davidson, national consciousness precedes nationalism but does not necessitate it. National consciousness is “a more or less passive expression of collective identification among a social group,” whereas nationalism requires “a more or less active participation in the political mobilisation of a social group for the construction *or* defence of a state.” Neil Davidson, *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood* (London, 2000), 14-15. As we will see in its full amplitude, drawing lines of this sort when reading specific writers and poets in context is enormously difficult.

of British state formation under the extreme stress of war and revolution. It also reveals the way the political crisis of the French Revolution converged with pre-existing concerns about the impact of union on the Scottish economy and society, as well as with shared Anglo-Scottish critiques of state power that feature so prominently, for example, in the political history of this period. Many of the poets studied here have never figured significantly in political, cultural, or literary histories of the period and, with a few notable exceptions, no analysis of their poetry, whether in political or literary terms, has yet occurred. Consequently, this study brings both historical and literary analysis to bear on a large and diverse group of Scottish poets with a range of political and aesthetic perspectives that reflect not only on the question of Scottish, English, and British “identities,” but on the formation of British poetry more generally.

Defining Scotland

Historians have long struggled to determine Scotland’s position and influence in English, British, Atlantic, and world history, indicating that post-1707 Scotland escapes fixed definition. David McCrone, for example, has defined Scotland as a ‘stateless nation,’ a definition that seems only to emphasize the problem.¹³ Citing this definition, Leith Davis extends McCrone’s analysis, suggesting that “if Scotland is a ‘stateless nation,’ it is possible to think of the wider unit of Britain as a nationless state, as it has always been fraught with contradictions that refuse to settle into any coherent national identity.”¹⁴ Even the redoubtable Christopher Smout seems unsure of how to approach

¹³ McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: the sociology of a nation*, 2nd ed. (London, 2001), 2.

¹⁴ Davis, *Acts of Union*, 11.

terminology in his recent contribution to *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, referring to Scottishness and Britishness occupying the same cultural spaces in relative intensities.¹⁵ In a wonderful demonstration of the nexus between social and literary history, Smout argues that eighteenth-century “North Britain” refers to a geographic location and political affiliation assigned by an extremely narrow “enlightened” class with an enormous investment in that particular form of authority (which included the authority of English over vernacular languages). At the same time, he recognizes that people on the ground lived and worked through “a sense of Scottishness” that in part supplanted and negated such authority. Colin Kidd prefers to use the term “North Britishness” to describe a hybrid identity in which post-Union Scots essentially replaced allegiance to the ancient Scottish nation with a strong patriotic identification with “English institutions, liberties and economic developments.”¹⁶ Kidd emphasizes the anglicizing and assimilationist impulses of the eighteenth-century Scottish political and economic elites, though he recognizes that Scottish religious, linguistic, and cultural distinctiveness tended to thwart development of a “comprehensive vision of British

¹⁵ In contrasting the linguistic and literary practices of the elite *literati* in the university towns with both the Highland Gaels and Lowland Scots, Smout characterizes the eighteenth century as “the age of the ballad and the chapbook . . . The extraordinary success of the poems of Burns among working people of both sexes was one illustration of the consumption of vernacular literature, the repeated editions of the medieval epics of Wallace and Bruce another: all demonstrated how a sense of Scottishness was alive, and a sense of Britishness perhaps still muted.” Smout, “Scotland as North Britain: The Historical Background, 1707-1918,” *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 2, ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh, 2007), 6.

¹⁶ Kidd, “North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotisms,” *History Journal* 39 (1996), 363.

nationhood that drew on the history of both Scots and English.”¹⁷ And Tom Devine steers a middle course, noting that three centuries of union have fostered both national pride in a Scotland rich in its own distinctive history, culture, and tradition and a generally stable Scottish unionism.¹⁸

These examples do not begin to summarize adequately the vast scholarship on this subject, but they do confer some sense of the bewildering array of abstractions that necessarily inform an important and ongoing scholarly discourse. This study, which features a broad range of poetry produced by men and women, cultural elites, middling sorts, and “working people,” will demonstrate that late eighteenth-century lowland Scots, if they thought explicitly about Britishness at all, were far more preoccupied with naming their experiences of Scottishness using the historical, linguistic, and social memory with which they had to work. This is not to say that some British “feeling” did not make up an element of this memory, but that such feeling became inseparable from and assimilated to imagining the self as individually “Scottish” and as a member of a collective identity in which one might consider oneself a “Scot.”

While local identities wherever formed contribute to other forms of national (and perhaps transnational) self-identification in general, Scotland still seems to offer a special historical case, quite distinct from Ireland and Wales, England’s other incorporated

¹⁷ Kidd, “North Britishness,” 364.

¹⁸ This view is succinctly stated in Devine’s 2006 article in *Scottish Affairs* aptly entitled “In Bed with an Elephant: Almost Three Hundred Years of the Anglo-Scottish Union.” In this article Devine views the independence debate very much in pragmatic terms as a question of shifting economic and social interests that weigh more or less in favor of unionism under specific historical conditions. T. Devine, “In Bed with an Elephant: Almost Three Hundred Years of the Anglo-Scottish Union,” *Scottish Affairs* 57 (2006).

entities, or other nation-states that emerged from pre-existing imperial or colonial states.¹⁹ I argue that this distinction can be made on the basis of Scotland's unique conditions and the specific ways in which those conditions were converted to the historical, linguistic, and social memory available during the late eighteenth century. In this respect, my exploration is likewise informed by the work of Janet Sorenson, who has advocated a "transnational explanation of the multiple, layered senses of what it means to be English, Scottish, Celtic, and British," a process by which imperial Britain imposed Standard English on its geographic periphery as a common "dominant language" that constructed, differentiated, and hierarchized internal stratifications of class and gender.²⁰ She thus refigures Michael Hechter's provocative characterization of Scotland as an internal colony of England as a dialectical relation in which the English and Scottish Lowland cultural elites participated in the creation, epitomized in Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary*, of an "imperial grammar" or "national language" that no British subject actually spoke.²¹ This

¹⁹ This is certainly a debatable position. Citing the work of post-colonial theorists Benedict Anderson, Partha Chatterjee, and Homi Bhabha, for example, Davis argues that the creation of national identities is always contested and based on the assertion of difference rather than homogeneity. While Scotland does not present a unique case (although it is "more visible" by virtue of a separate Scots language), it does offer a particularly clear example of the kinds of contradictions intrinsic to nation-making that exist everywhere. Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation* (Stanford, 1998), 2-11. While I agree with Davis that the hybridization process may work similarly in all cases of national identity formation, substantial qualitative distinctions can be drawn in Scotland's case that, in my view, makes that case *sui generis*. This may be true elsewhere as well, but each case requires its own interrogation and response.

²⁰ Janet Sorenson, *The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge, 2000), 16-20.

²¹ As Sorenson puts it, "[T]he reader of his Dictionary recognizes his or her gendered, classed place in the nation at the very moment of recognizing the national language." *Grammar of Empire*, 21.

national language banishes pre-existing linguistic variations from the canon even as it revives some of those variations, such as Scots Gaelic, “for sale in the cultural marketplace.” Thus the “universalist” claims of Gaelic philologists and writers for the originary nature of the language, expressed, for example, in late eighteenth-century “Celtomania” in England and Scotland, failed to resuscitate Gaelic as a living language at the same time that Gaelic particularisms entered the cultural mainstream as relatively harmless “fictions.”²²

While in this interpretation Scots Gaelic withdraws beyond the margins of the political and commercial nation to take up a reified position in art, the Scots vernacular assimilates to imperial English in a much more ambiguous fashion. In their contribution to *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, for example, Charles Jones and Wilson McLeod generally concur with Sorenson regarding the colonizing effect of Standard English in late eighteenth-century Scotland.²³ At the same time, however, they point out that some writers and belletrists searched for a means of preserving a version of Scots vernacular for transactional and literary use, a kind of Scottish contribution to the emerging imperial “British” English similar to Sorenson’s imperial grammar. In this vein, Leith Davis cites James Beattie as exemplifying the ambivalence of this approach, in which the use of Scotticisms in written and spoken language at once embrace and alienate

²² Sorenson, *Grammar of Empire*, 23.

²³ Jones and McLeod argue that in this period “the view of the English spoken in Scotland is an intensely negative one: for Hugh Blair, in his immensely influential *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres* (1783), the mark of a good literary style was a function of the extent to which it avoided Scotticisms of all kinds, these being unashamedly conflated with general grammatical irregularity” Charles Jones and Wilson McLeod, “Standards and Differences: Languages in Scotland, 1707-1918,” *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 2, ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh, 2007), 27.

the concept of a distinct Scottish identity within Britain.²⁴ Moreover, like Davis, Jones and McLeod emphasize that in a late eighteenth-century context, ostensibly academic discussions of the extent to which a comfortable rapprochement between Scots vernacular and Standard English might be achieved could be seen as a proxy for political commitment.²⁵ David Daiches offers a blunt response to this question, arguing that antiquarianism became an acceptable form of nationalism while overt protests against the Union were politically ‘incorrect’ expressions of national sentiment.²⁶ As Daiches indicates, as long as “Scottish nationalism” had no reference to an entity that might be oppositionally (to England) identified as Scotland, one could enjoy his or her Scottish nationalism in relative peace and security. As we will see, this view may account for the political passivity of the *literati*, but it does not seem to apply to many of the plebeian poets we will read in the chapters to come.

When one ventures into the imperial domain, the meanings of Scottish, English, and British become even more mobile. With respect to post-Union Scots writing about the British Empire, Nigel Leask asks whether one can even identify a distinctly “*Scottish* literature of empire and emigration” (emphasis in original). Adopting John Barrell’s formulation of a Scottish literary consciousness of empire as the relationship between

²⁴ Davis, *Acts of Union*, 8-10.

²⁵ As they put it, “Scots seeking advancement in the British state had an enormous stake in determining which was the appropriate ‘standard’ of language at which they should aim: was it to be some purely English model (thus risking a charge of national treachery); a more indigenous, ‘polite’ Scottish version; or, more radically, should speakers simply refuse to abandon even ‘broad’ versions of their language?” Jones and McLeod, “Standards and Differences,” 28.

²⁶ David Daiches, *The Paradox of Scottish Culture: The Eighteenth-Century Experience* (Oxford, 1964), 28.

“this, that, and the other,” Leask argues that “what at first seems ‘other’ can be made over to the side of the self—to a subordinate position on that side—only so long as a new, and newly absolutely ‘other’ is constituted to fill the discursive space that has been thus evacuated . . . The fact that ‘Scotland’ might assume the role of ‘that’ in relation to an English ‘this’ (or vice versa) makes the barrier dividing it from the ‘other’ more permeable.” Leask adds that the term “Scotland” is itself an “imagined community” a palimpsest that “papers over numerous social and cultural subdivisions with their own internal dynamic.”²⁷ On the other hand, the recent addition of a Scotland volume to the *Oxford History of the British Empire* series indicates, as John MacKenzie, Tom Devine, and others have argued, that Scottish participation in imperial professions, business, migration, and settlement elicited a distinctive form of Scottish self-identification, just as Irish, Welsh, or even English imperial roles strengthened specific forms of national identity under the general rubric of Britishness.²⁸ This “Four Nations” approach to imperial history has certainly redounded to the benefit of Scottish (as well as Irish, Welsh, and English) imperial historians, who have undertaken the enormous task of

²⁷ Nigel Leask, “Scotland’s Literature of Empire and Emigration,” *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 2, ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh, 2007), 153-54. Leask adopts Benedict Anderson’s terminology.

²⁸ See especially T. Devine, *Scotland’s Empire and the Shaping of the Americas 1600-1815* (Washington, 2003) and John Mackenzie, “Essay and Reflection: On Scotland and the Empire,” *The International History Review* 15 (1993). Michael Fry generally agrees with these benefits of the Union, but also compares Scotland to other small European nations, such as Portugal, Holland, Sweden, and Denmark, that achieved substantial levels of economic and cultural development within the shadow of much larger dominant states. See Fry, “A Commercial Empire: Scotland and British Expansion in the Eighteenth Century,” *Eighteenth Century Scotland: New Perspectives*, ed. T. Devine and J. R. Young (East Lothian, 1999), 66-67.

tracing long-term Scottish formal and informal influences in colonial and post-colonial contexts.²⁹

I argue that such a formulation of cultural nationalism can mistake “Scottishness” for “Scottish nationalism.” The former might be described as a structure of thought, a complex of mental processes, that converts memory to feeling, whereas the latter entails a description of beliefs and practices indicating some degree of loyalty to an idea of the nation in an institutional sense. In this regard, Michael Fry usefully defines post-Union Scottish “nationalism” as a set of “modes of thought and action,” exemplified most notably in the operation of indigenous Scottish institutions such as the nobility, law, schools and universities, and the Kirk.³⁰ These institutions, Fry argues, continued to function relatively unimpeded by the Treaty of Union well into the nineteenth century, greatly diminishing the “need for Scots to adopt a defensive nationalism against loss of statehood.”³¹ Whether the longevity of Scotland’s feudal and juridical organization entitles what existed in Scotland prior to 1707 to designation as a “state,” especially in light of its vexed and often subservient relations with England, might be argued both ways, and even Fry sometimes slides between the terms “Scottishness” and “nationalism” in much the same way as other scholars do. But Fry’s gesture towards a form of Scottishness in some way dependent on institutions manned by cultured elites seems overly exclusive. Scottishness must be accessible both vertically and horizontally to

²⁹ See John Mackenzie, “Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English Worlds? A Four-Nation Approach to the History of the British Empire,” *History Compass* 6 (2008), especially 1245-50.

³⁰ Michael Fry, *The Dundas Despotism* (Edinburgh, 1992), 15.

³¹ Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, 15.

constitute a truly “national” consciousness. The poets and writers featured in this study exist within and in many cases respond to (and even resist) these institutional structures, but they also locate their Scottishness in uniquely personal, idiosyncratic, and affective “modes of thought and action.”

I argue further that whether and to what extent an indigenous Scottishness might meaningfully contribute to a form of cosmopolitan Britishness could shift radically in a short period of time, contingent on domestic and foreign news, the shifting political fortunes of specific figures, or the activities (or perceived activities) of people quite removed from the professional, university, and kirk environments in which the debate played out. For example, as the relatively positive response to the early stages of the French Revolution gave way to widespread paranoia associated with the terror in France and the sedition trials at home (only to be followed by general war weariness and dissatisfaction with the Younger Pitt’s regime), one might track destabilizing intensities that registered in the politer regions of literary canon-making. The controversy over Burns’s posthumous status as a vernacular, English, or British poet (which has never quite been settled) and the political values connected to the “appropriate” classification of Burns offers a case in point.³² What passed for a robust vernacular contribution to “British” poetry in the mid-1780s, when Burns reached the apogee of his cosmopolitan

³² Gerard Carruthers is particularly strong on this point, arguing that for the *literati* trying to make sense of Burns’s “genius,” figures such as Henry Mackenzie might position Burns as “the epitome of literary democracy and novelty,” but in doing so “the traces of the poet’s literary antecedents are kicked over.” Most of his poetry, Carruthers notes, reflects Burns’s schooling “in the modes of the eighteenth-century poetry revival (to say nothing of his very wide and catholic reading of all the mainstream poets of eighteenth-century Britain),” as well as his Scottish Enlightenment “mentality.” Gerard Carruthers, *Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh, 2009), 57.

fame, quickly became a dangerous and potentially subversive linguistic “otherness” during the radical phase of the revolution, with its concurrent social and political unrest in Scotland. Only when it appeared that the French menace had passed and the Pax Britannica had begun did the *literati* construct Burns’s rusticity as a form of Scottishness that could be safely interred in literary anthologies, collections of songs and ballads, and patronizing biographies.³³ Follow the politics and there the language will be—or is it the other way around?

Historians have frequently identified poets such as McPherson and Scott as primary agents for sanitizing Scottishness for English consumption in the second half of the eighteenth century, largely through the collection and reproduction of the traditional oral culture of both the Highlands and Lowlands.³⁴ It might be said that “Britishness” as a national or cultural identity amounts to little more than Scotland made digestible to the English, largely by the exertion of socially and politically aspirant Scots. Lord Dacre notoriously takes the most extreme view, as we have seen, but more mainstream discussions of the nature of “Britishness” continue to emphasize the asymmetrical

³³ On this subject the introduction to Crawford’s wonderful biography is particularly instructive. R. Crawford, *The Bard: Robert Burns, A Biography* (Princeton, 2009), 3-14. See also Richard Finlay, “The Burns Cult and Scottish Identity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *Love and Liberty: Robert Burns, A Bicentenary Celebration*, ed. Kenneth Simpson (East Linton, 1997), 69-78.

³⁴ As Leith Davis and Maureen McLane have observed, “For poets, antiquarians and collectors, the complex situation of orality turned out to be in some ways a boon, particularly in post-Culloden Scotland, when the volatility of political Jacobitism gave way to a milder cultural nationalism, an illustrious Scottish national past—an oral past—could be celebrated without necessarily challenging British hegemony.” Leith Davis and Maureen McLane, “Orality and Public Poetry,” *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Poetry*, vol. 2, ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh, 2007), 126. The authors align Ramsey, Burns, and Hogg, however, with the more radical and subversive possibilities of “representations of orality.”

involvement of Scots in imagining Britain.³⁵ In a finely nuanced discussion of Burns's and Scott's roles in antiquarian quests to recover a unique and usable Scottish linguistic and literary past, the late Susan Manning observes that, although antiquarianism was a European-wide phenomenon, in "Scotland's case . . . the passing of tradition and custom was typically described as a process initiated or accelerated by the Union. . . It is perhaps more productive to regard the condition of Britishness as offering Scottish writers a range of rhetorical resources with which to explore the implications of 'being modern' in the post-Union period."³⁶ Manning implies that "Britishness" is a discursive strategy for describing the necessarily fragmented and composite identities out of which the modern nation-state is constructed, as opposed to an individual or national identity in itself. This implication in turn suggests that Scotland's eighteenth-century experience of incorporation into an imperial England made it possible for poets such as Burns, steeped in neo-classical English literature, and Scott, with his enlightened professional education, to establish an entirely new "imperial grammar."³⁷

But the Burns case does not entirely dispose of the question. As we have seen, Sorenson's analysis emphasizes the hegemonic effects of Standard English on Scottish linguistic and cultural difference, but at the same time questions any response to such domination that relies on essentialist notions of cultural nationalism to construct an alternative grammar of resistance. Attempts to replace one privileged language system with another leave the structure in place and invite future usurpations. But, as Sorenson

³⁵ Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History*.

³⁶ Susan Manning, "Post-Union Scotland and the Scottish Idiom of Britishness," *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Poetry*, vol. 2, ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh, 2007), 48-9.

³⁷ Manning, "Post-Union Scotland," 49-50.

suggests, just as imperial grammars are constructed from disparate linguistic materials, they can be similarly refashioned to produce “progressive transnational links.”³⁸ I take her to mean that linguistic reformation can contribute to, in Virginia Woolf’s terms, “freedom from unreal loyalties.”³⁹ In the context of late eighteenth-century Scottish Lowland society, the question of real and unreal loyalties riveted the participants in that society with an intensity and urgency that have rarely recurred since (certainly not in today’s rather apathetic political environment). If some kind of potential for “progressive transnationalism” can be located in a specific historical context, the late eighteenth century may offer the best chance of finding it. To put it another way, “feeling Scottish” might bring us closer to understanding the differences that divide all of us and to liberating us from their coercive grasp.

Moreover, as Manning emphasizes, people perform their identities (whether national or otherwise), and these performances depend on the availability of broadly accessible, usable rhetorical and aesthetic resources. Eighteenth-century Scottish writers seem to have found very little in English history to assist them in fashioning a British identity. Standard Whig paeans to the glories of the English constitution or Tory patriotic hymns in praise of crown and church struck Scots like a hammer on the head. As John Pocock has observed, England’s interest in the 1707 Union emphasized Scotland’s incorporation and effective elimination as a free and unpredictable agent in European affairs. The English “acquired empire, in this case at least, not in the lapidary ‘fit of absence of mind’, but out of unwillingness to consider their relations with others in any

³⁸ Manning, “Post-Union Scotland,” 25-27.

³⁹ V. Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London, 1938).

conceptual form, with the result that these could take no other form than that of an extension of the system to which they were accustomed. They had reasons, however—it may be further said—for this extreme and now and then appalling self-centredness.”⁴⁰ Eighteenth-century Scots attempting to construct a meaningful form of British identity through which their felt Scottishness could be interpreted and situated could count on no reciprocity south of the Tweed, forcing them back almost entirely on their own historical and rhetorical resources. Indeed, Scottishness and Britishness make two sides of the same coin, and any conception of post-Union Scottishness cannot exist independently from a correlative and often hegemonic British identity. If Scotland is ever to be a nation-state in its own right, it may well find the challenge of providing a distinct national identity for its citizens much more difficult than people think. It seems obvious to point out that Scots can access much different historical and cultural memories than do the Irish or Americans, for example, who forged powerful and distinctive national identities from the experience of English colonization. Perhaps the closest analogues in the Scottish experience are the medieval Wars of Independence and the Jacobite movement, but (as we will see) these have already been so tightly woven into the complex rhetorical structure of post-Union Scottishness that it remains to be seen what they might contribute to a new state identity for Scots.

There are other possibilities and this study suggests some of them. The eighteenth-century Lowland poets featured here, who wrote from within a British imperial state under imminent threat of foreign invasion as well as domestic insurrection,

⁴⁰ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands: Essays in British History* (Cambridge, 2005), 145.

felt compelled to imagine and articulate potential new bases for usable local, national, and imperial identities.

Scots and the French Revolution

Like their English and Irish counterparts, Scots responded to the French Revolution in complex and ambiguous ways. Contemporary or near-contemporary observers, as well as later historians, drew different conclusions about the significance of events in France and their impact on Scotland and Britain. They also tended to interpret the revolution in terms of domestic controversies and concerns. Henry Cockburn's well-known observation that "literally everything was soaked in this one event" refers as much to the professional rivalry between Tories and Whigs in Edinburgh's insular legal community as to the revolution's influence on quotidian life in Scotland.⁴¹ Although the revolutionary period between 1789 and 1801 witnessed sporadic outbreaks of anti-government violence, notorious sedition trials, and rumors of broader insurrectionary intent among the "rabble," it does not appear to have produced sustained outdoor popular resistance to authority on a wide scale. Many prominent Scottish historians, including W. L. Mathieson, Christopher Smout, Tom Devine, and Bruce Lenman, have attributed this relative quiescence to factors such as improving material conditions and active state management of economic relations, aided by Scotland's pre-existing authoritarian feudal, political, and religious cultures and timely government repression.⁴² On the other hand,

⁴¹ Henry Cockburn, *Memorials of His Time*, ed. Karl F. C. Miller (Chicago, 1974), 80.

⁴² On Scottish inflammability, see W. L. Mathieson, *The Awakening of Scotland: A History from 1747 to 1797* (Glasgow, 1910), esp. Ch. 2; T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830* (New York, 1977), 412-16; T. Devine, "The failure of radical reform in Scotland in the late eighteenth-century: the social and economic context,"

Linda Colley and others have argued the broad thesis that both English and Scots Protestants enthusiastically made common cause against the French, cementing the Union solemnized in 1707 and realizing a unified “British” national identity.⁴³ In either case eighteenth-century Scots, it has been suggested, did not see themselves as “revolutionary.”

A substantial literature reassessing the orthodox view of Scottish inflammability has emerged in recent years, although the minority view might be traced back to Henry Meikle and Thomas Johnston.⁴⁴ Whatever position one takes, the scholarly debate

Conflict and Stability in Scottish Society 1700-1850, ed. T. Devine (Edinburgh, 1990) and *The Scottish Nation: A History, 1700-2000* (New York, 1999), 215-19; B. Lenman, *Enlightenment and Change: Scotland, 1746-1832*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 2009) and *An Economic History of Modern Scotland* (London, 1977), ch. 5.

⁴³ See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1832* (London, 1992); Colin Kidd emphasizes that culturally elite Scots likewise developed a patriotic attachment to English Constitutionalism as part of their “North British” identity. See Kidd, “North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotisms”, *History Journal* 39 (1996), 361-82.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of both orthodox views and new lines of inquiry, see Bob Harris, “Introduction: Scotland in the late 1790s,” *Scotland and the Age of the French Revolution*, ed. Bob Harris (Edinburgh, 2005), 1-22. Meikle emphasizes Thomas Paine’s influence on a general expansion of Scots’ political consciousness during the revolutionary period, while Johnston’s iconic Marxian analysis recounts the development of Scottish working class consciousness rooted in feudal authoritarianism and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century economic transformation. See especially Henry Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution* (Glasgow, 1912), 67-111, and Thomas Johnston, *A History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, 3rd ed. (Glasgow, 1929), chapters 6-11. Other notable contributions to this literature include: J. Brims, “From Reformers to ‘Jacobins’: The Scottish Association of the Friends of the People,” *Conflict and Stability in Scottish Society 1700-1850*, ed. T. Devine (Edinburgh, 1990), 31-50, and “The Scottish Jacobins, Scottish Nationalism and the British Union,” *Scotland and England 1286-1815*, ed. Roger Mason (Edinburgh, 1987), 247-65; D. J. Brown, “The government response to Scottish radicalism: 1792-1802,” *Scotland and the Age of the French Revolution*, ed. Bob Harris (Edinburgh, 2005), 99-124; T. Clarke and T. Dickson, “Class and class consciousness in early industrial capitalism: Paisley 1770-1850,” *Capital and Class in Scotland*, ed. T. Dickson (Edinburgh, 1982), 8-60, and “The making of a Class Society:

illustrates that the French Revolution undeniably altered—often dramatically—the way Scots of various social ranks perceived their national experience, both in relation to England and to the wider world. It contributed a vocabulary of ideas and terms that could be used to discuss social and political change in a distinctively new way, though a much older indigenous tradition of liberty continued to supply Scots with nationalist imagery and language as well. It provided a conception of civil rights and liberties that stretched traditional assumptions of political subjectivity in a highly structured society with powerful authoritarian institutions. It exemplified, at least for a brief historical moment, the possibility of radical and sudden change emanating from below. And not the least, it demonstrated the persistence, if not resurgence, of the *ancien régime*'s capacity for reaction and adaptation, particularly in the use of the repressive mechanisms available to an emerging modern, multi-ethnic state in the late eighteenth century. Indeed, late eighteenth-century Scotland may be seen as a proving ground for the techniques and technology of state creation under the pressure of immediate crisis, as well as the classic case for the development of a European subnationalism within a diverse, composite imperial entity. Whether Scotland, unlike Ireland, was ever in any danger of an organized

Commercialisation and Working Class Resistance, 1780-1830," *Capital and Class in Scotland*, ed. T. Dickson (Edinburgh, 1982), 137-80; W. H. Fraser, *Conflict and Class: Scottish Workers 1700-1838* (Edinburgh, 1988); Val Honeyman, "'A Very Dangerous Place'?: Radicalism in Perth in the 1790s," *The Scottish Historical Review* 87.2 (2008), 278-305; Kenneth Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland 1780-1815* (Edinburgh, 1979); Elaine McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution: Planting the Green Bough* (Edinburgh, 1994) and "Scottish Radicalism in the Later Eighteenth Century: 'The Social Thistle and Shamrock,'" *Eighteenth Century Scotland*, 275-97; and C. Whatley, "An Inflammable People?" *The Manufacture of Scottish History*, ed. I. Donnachie and C. Whatley (Edinburgh, 1992), 51-71, and "Roots of 1790s radicalism," *Scotland and the Age of the French Revolution*, ed. Bob Harris (Edinburgh, 2005), 23-48.

violent revolt requiring military intervention may certainly be doubted, but not all revolutions need be either organized or even particularly violent.

There are several problems intrinsic to an analysis of this sort. As we have seen, it is not easy to identify a single, coherent, and static “national consciousness” or “national identity” at any historical period in any single location. The term remains somewhat mystical and has taken on considerable theological and dogmatic weight, particularly in our own age of Hegelian nation-state worship. Breaking the term apart only increases the difficulties. But we have also seen that this wilderness is not uncharted territory in philosophical, historical, political, or sociological terms. Indeed, as Arthur Herman has polemically contended, the eighteenth-century Scottish intellectuals, who populated the great universities at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and St. Andrews, pioneered the modern study of national history, and “invented” some of the terms of analysis, might be said to have created the world their own image.⁴⁵ Their literary counterparts likewise fashioned the conventions of representation through which the modern state interpellates individuals so that they recognize themselves as “national” and “imperial,” not just as tribal, familial, or local actors.⁴⁶ Claims for Scottish exceptionalism have been in ready

⁴⁵ Arthur Herman, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World and Everything In It* (New York, 2001).

⁴⁶ For a magisterial account of how Scottish novelists such as Scott, Hogg, and Galt deployed Enlightenment ideas of social and psychological development to fashion a realist aesthetic for fiction that contrasted sharply with the Romantic aesthetic of the imagination, see Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton, 2008). For a compact and illuminating discussion of the contributions of the Scottish *literati* to eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, see Ian Ross, “Aesthetic Philosophy: Hutcheson and Hume to Alison,” *The History of Scottish Literature*. vol. 2 1660-1800, ed. Andrew Hook (Aberdeen, 1978).

supply ever since, and with very good reason.⁴⁷ At the same time, however, we should be wary of characterizing eighteenth-century Scots as politically and socially quiescent in a period of revolutionary upheaval and world war. Such a characterization risks substituting one exceptionalist narrative of Scottish history for another, but if the recent direction of the historiography (as evidenced in Harris's volume and elsewhere) is any indication, historians are finding that transnational affinities, relations, and contacts between Scots and others indicate participation in other forms and discourses of identity formation.⁴⁸

The Scottish experience of the French Revolution offers a productive approach to these questions of self and social identity. At least at its outset, the revolution held out the promise of a universal collective identity independent of local or national histories. What did the Scots, who had long been oriented toward the wider European (and later the colonial) world, think about that? Might not becoming "British" through the existential crisis of the revolution have alienated Scots from Britain rather than marrying them to it? Moreover, the recovery and reconstruction of Scotland's regal and independent past,

⁴⁷ Recent examples of the exceptionalism thesis (particularly in militaristic pursuits) include Magnus Magnusson, *Scotland: The Story of a Nation* (New York, 2003), and James Webb, *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America* (New York, 2004).

⁴⁸ As John Stevenson observes in his contribution to Harris's volume, Scotland "shared much in common with other parts of the British Isles, and with other parts of the Atlantic world. Indeed Scotland, like other parts of the British Isles, contained a multiplicity of responses to the French Revolution, not one, many of which remain to be fully explored." J. Stevenson, "Scotland and the French Revolution: An Overview," *Scotland and the Age of the French Revolution*, ed. Bob Harris (Edinburgh, 2005), 262-63. I might add only that eighteenth-century Scots also looked towards their historic associations with Europe as well. For the influence of Scots, Irish, and English "radicals" in post-revolutionary America, see Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic* (Lawrence, 1997).

particularly its tales of resistance to English hegemony, constituted a dubious basis either for carving out a relatively harmless place for Scottish national identity within the British state or providing a convincing narrative of Scottish equality in the imperial partnership. Alternatively (or perhaps additionally), I argue that the French Revolution contributed to the production of multiple variants of national self-identification among Scots that served to fragment rather than solidify emerging conceptions of “Scotland.”

Assuming warrant for this question, evaluating it requires a broad array of sources, much of which lies in ephemera from the period: newspaper reporting and editorializing; obscure literary productions circulated in the media; expressions of a nascent “public” opinion, particularly among the middling sorts and laboring poor. Some of this material has been digested in recent years and is readily available to historians, but much has lain silent and unaccounted for in the immense historical and literary scholarship on late eighteenth-century Scotland. This type of discursive evidence, however, must be solidly contextualized in terms of the wider economic and social conditions of the revolutionary decade. While there is general agreement that Scotland experienced a significant economic transformation in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth, somewhat less agreement exists on whether “improvement” benefited a substantial majority of the population.⁴⁹ As historians

⁴⁹ Devine calls Scotland’s transformation an “economic miracle” in which rapid agricultural improvement in the second half of the eighteenth-century fed an increasingly urbanizing and industrializing modern economy. T. Devine, “The Transformation of Agriculture: Cultivation and Clearance,” *The Transformation of Scotland: The Economy since 1700*, eds. T. Devine, C.H. Lee, and G.C. Peden (Edinburgh, 2005), 71-73, and *The Transformation of Rural Scotland: Social Change and the Agrarian Economy, 1660-1815* (Edinburgh, 1994), 35-41. Clive Lee concurs with Devine’s general thesis, though he

recognize, however, simply determining that some Scots enjoyed more or less improvement in the standard of living during the period (while others did not) does not take us very far in determining the precise nature of the relationship between their shared economic conditions and their political and ideological affinities. Indeed, if the views of historians who argue the case for working class distress during the revolutionary period have it right, the precarious situations of individual Scottish working people must have registered in the way ordinary Scots viewed the “national” question. Diminishing economic opportunities at home, perhaps coupled with the specter of emigration, might well make Scots indifferent to, if not contemptuous of, their own “exceptionality.” At the same time, they might also engender a more insular and defensive self-identification, creating more fertile ground for identity formation at a different level than either the Scottish nation or the British empire could contain. A BBC Radio Scotland series aired in May and June of 2003 puts the question this way:

Scotland does explode with the big idea in the eighteenth century. It altered the landscape and the social structure forever and did so with lightning speed. The foundations were undoubtedly laid for the delivery of a more productive country which would provide greater opportunities and sometimes even affluence. Yet did this immediately make people happy and more content? Did they look back to a Golden Age of affinity with the soil; or did they retain a

points out the uneven distribution of the benefits of eighteenth-century economic expansion and Scotland’s low wage levels vis-à-vis England and Wales. C. H. Lee, “Economic Progress, Wealth and Poverty,” *The Transformation of Scotland*, 141-42. Whatley argues that while real wages rose in the period from 1760 to 1790, the rate of change slowed substantially during the 1790s, though local wage levels and trade variations could make a significant difference in a worker’s material condition. Overall, he finds little evidence of a general improvement in the lot of the working classes in this period, and that at least three times in the 1790s (‘92-’93, 97’-’98, and ’98-’99) poor harvests and trade depressions pushed workers to acute levels of distress. C. Whatley, “Roots of 1790s Radicalism: Reviewing the Economic and Social Background,” *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution*, 23-30.

folk-memory of the times when death came at the age of thirty-five and starvation was a regular feature of an altogether miserable existence? If this new Scotland was so fantastic, then why were so many thousands pushed or pulled away to foreign lands?

The jury is out.⁵⁰

The wealth of social and economic history written about Scotland in the last forty years reveals that despite periodic episodes of famine and economic distress, Scotland was far more integrated into the early modern northern European economy than once thought.⁵¹ Nevertheless, even as the Scottish agrarian and commercial economy expanded in the run-up to and aftermath of the Union, a parallel narrative of marginal subsistence, lack of investment capital, and insufficient economic and social opportunity can leave a quite different impression.⁵² This increasing body of economic history can seem curiously detached from questions of Scottish national identity, as if the individual experiences of ordinary life had little directly to do with more abstract questions of national feeling.⁵³

⁵⁰ P. Atchison and A. Cassell, *The Lowland Clearances: Scotland's Silent Revolution, 1760-1830* (East Linton, 2003), 107.

⁵¹ Trevor-Roper, summing up the traditional historiography of pre-Union Scotland, argues that "at the end of the seventeenth century, Scotland was a by-word for irredeemable poverty, social backwardness [and] political faction." Qtd. in T. Devine, "The Modern Economy: Scotland and the Act of Union," *The Transformation of Scotland*, 13. Scottish historians such as Lenman, Devine, Whatley, Michael Lynch, and Louis Cullen have done much in the last 30 years to change this view.

⁵² For an excellent overview of living conditions in early modern Scotland, see E. Foyster and C. Whatley, "Introduction: Recovering the Everyday in Early Modern Scotland," *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland, 1600-1800*, ed. E. Foyster and C. Whatley (Edinburgh, 2010), 6-15. In the same volume, see also Stana Nenadic's contribution on diet and clothing. S. Nenadic, "Necessities: Food and Clothing," *History of Everyday Life*, 137-63.

⁵³ Tom Devine's recent study of Scottish emigration, *To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland's Global Diaspora, 1750-2010* (London, 2011), reverses this trend, arguing that the long history of Scottish mobility both within and outwith Scotland indicates a persistent cultural trait. Despite a significant amount of forced emigration associated with periods of social and economic change, such as the Highland Clearances, Devine attributes rising

One might reasonably ask to what extent the Malthusian struggle for survival faced by a substantial number of Scots in the late eighteenth century diminished “national” self-identification, leaving the field to a small minority with sufficient leisure and affluence to ruminate on such an elevated plane, or at least cloaked specifically economic and social grievances in nationalistic expression. To put it another way, how much of the dissent we find in Scottish society in the late eighteenth century really has anything to do with nationalism of any kind? What criteria might we use to evaluate this question and what kinds of evidence should we seek?

The pro-British side of the argument relies on a substantial body of evidence of loyal reaction to the excesses of the French Revolution and the supposed subversive activities of Scottish “Jacobins.” Loyal addresses from the burghs, sermons from the pulpits, and opinions from much of the periodical press support the view that a fairly broad cross-section of Scottish society, at least after 1793 or so, supported the government’s international and domestic policies.⁵⁴ Yet at the same time, the war with France became increasingly unpopular in Scotland (as it did in England) as the decade wore on, and patience with Pitt’s regime frayed significantly even among those who had no truck with the more politically radical elements.⁵⁵ This recalcitrance might indicate the predominance of a Scottish rather than British identity, but it might also intimate a lack of

levels of Scottish emigration throughout the nineteenth and first third of the twentieth century (despite the strength of the Scottish economy) primarily to the relatively common desire of Scots for a better life.

⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion of the government side of the “Scottish print wars of the 1790s,” see Harris, “Print and Politics,” *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution*, 164-95.

⁵⁵ On this subject, see A. Wold, “Scottish Attitudes to Military Mobilisation and War in the 1790s,” *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution*, 141-63.

interest in being shot at in any damn fool war, whoever might be fighting it. As Glaswegian barber Ritchie Falconer, reacting to the 1797 Militia Act, put it:

I hope the folk will tak tent; and if decent lads leave their wives and bairns, against their will, in defence o' their kintra, let the kintra pay them better, and look kindlier after their sma' families. Had the folks hereabouts mair to say in the makin' o' their laws than they hae, I jalouse they would na get sic scrimp justice.⁵⁶

As is the case with the meal mobs and King's Birthday riots earlier in the decade, it is exceedingly difficult to fix the individual and collective motivation of any large group of angry and belligerent people, but sometimes the answer might be as simple as Ritchie Falconer's. Moreover, as historians begin to address whether and in what ways gender inflected the response to a revolutionary decade, the everyday struggles of ordinary women to feed and clothe their families has become an increasingly prominent factor in gauging the depth of social dissent.⁵⁷ Hunger, poverty, frustration, illness, discomfort, and fear are powerful forces that may or may not express themselves in "nationalism," but they can certainly express themselves in voting with one's feet. As recent research has indicated, eighteenth-century Scottish emigration was a "dripping tap" that became a flood in the nineteenth century. Most emigrants hailed not from denuded Highland

⁵⁶ Qtd. in D. Horsebroch, "Scottish Military Identity from the Covenant to Victoria 1637-1837," *Fighting for Identity: Scottish Military Experience c. 1550-1900*, ed. S. Murdock and A. Mackillop (Leiden, 2002), 118-19.

⁵⁷ Sue Innes and Jane Rendall note the involvement of poor women in the King's Birthday Riots, "demonstrating especially outside the house of Lady Arniston, Henry Dundas's mother, with an effigy of her son." They also point out that women "were at the forefront of opposition to the Militia Act." Nevertheless, "no historian has yet found women participating in the radical societies of male artisans founded in Scotland from 1792 onwards." S. Innes and J. Rendall, "Women, Gender, and Politics," *Gender in Scottish History since 1700*, ed. L. Abrams, E. Gordon, D. Siminton, and E. Yeo (Edinburgh, 2006), 52.

estates, but from Lowland tenant farms and towns.⁵⁸ Capitalist economic development certainly made Scotland more “productive,” but that kind of improvement seems to have offered little consolation to the many Scots who pulled up stakes and moved on.

Some economic and social historians of Scotland view the Scottish experience of the 1790s in terms of a “more rapid penetration of capitalist relations into the economy” and the Thompsonian development of class awareness.⁵⁹ Though full-scale industrialization would not be realized until after 1830 (the “second” industrial revolution in Scotland) the necessary foundations—increasing agricultural productivity, capital accumulation through trade and finance, and the creation of an industrial labor force—have been identified as far back as the seventeenth century.⁶⁰ Economic transition did not come easily, cheaply, or quickly to Scotland, any more than it did to England, Ireland, and Wales, but in eighteenth-century Scotland it has been closely associated with the effects of the Union, Scottish access to imperial trade, the reconstruction of Gaelic society, comparatively low wages, and the Enlightenment impulse toward rationalization

⁵⁸ As many as 80% of the 75,000 people who emigrated from Scotland between 1700 and 1780 were Lowlanders, an experience largely repeated in later nineteenth- and twentieth-century migrations. In an interview for the BBC Radio Scotland production mentioned previously, Dr. Marjory Harper of Aberdeen University compared the “Lowland Clearances” to a “dripping tap of depopulation that was going on right throughout the nineteenth century, and before that century and throughout that century beyond.” Atchison and Cassell, *The Lowland Clearances*, 113-14. Professor Devine likewise emphasizes the heavy predominance of Lowland Scots in *Scotland's Global Diaspora*.

⁵⁹ T. Dickson et al., *Scottish Capitalism*, 137.

⁶⁰ See T. Devine, “Industrialisation,” *The Transformation of Scotland*, 34-35. For a discussion of the Scottish economy at the time of the Union that refutes the orthodox view of Scotland’s pre-eighteenth-century economic backwardness, see T. Devine, “The Modern Economy: Scotland and the Union,” *The Transformation of Scotland*, 13-33.

and commercialization.⁶¹ Still, for most of the eighteenth century Scotland remained a primarily rural society with most of the land concentrated in a very few hands.⁶² In this regard, Marxian perspectives on Scottish economic development have worked hand-in-hand with feminist analysis to critique the particularly theocratic form of patriarchy in eighteenth-century Scottish society. In this interpretation, the Kirk, regardless of its moderate or evangelical cast, encouraged women to accept domestic and reproductive slavery to establish an expanding supply of cheap labor for an increasingly anglicized and industrial economic engine.⁶³ More recent accounts, however, have read the Kirk's relations to women in a more sympathetic mode, arguing that kirk leaders protected women and children from the worst abuses of their husbands and the economic system as a whole.⁶⁴ In any case, the underlying thesis of these critiques lead to the same place: the assimilation of a small and basically self-sufficient (although at periodically low levels of subsistence) pre-Union economy into a much more powerful and dynamic one, where the chief virtue of the former is the ready availability of cheap labor and cannon fodder, and the primary need of the latter is plenty of both. Indeed, if so many Scots had not already been inured to periodic decline into poverty and violence, one wonders how the English would have made do in the almost continuous state of European and colonial warfare stretching from 1640 to 1815, much less have built either the first or second empires. At

⁶¹ See, for example, C. Whatley, *Scottish Society 1707-1830*, 99-116; see also Lenman, *An Economic History of Modern Scotland*, ch. 4.

⁶² According to Whatley, Scotland probably had 'the most concentrated pattern ownership in Europe, with the position of the landed classes being consolidated at the expense of smaller lairds throughout the eighteenth century.' *Scottish Society 1707-1830*, 145.

⁶³ See Callum Brown, "Religion," *Gender in Scottish History*, 91-92.

⁶⁴ See R. Mitchison and L. Leneman, *Girls in Trouble: Sexuality and Social Control in Rural Scotland, 1660-1780* (Edinburgh, 1998), 119-124.

least in this sense, it might well be said that eighteenth-century Scots gained an empire but lost a nation.⁶⁵

While most historians have rejected deterministic Marxian versions of national development, in Scotland's case Marxian analysis can still offer a helpful hermeneutic for the late eighteenth century, particularly in its emphasis on the close relationship between economics and ideology.⁶⁶ From his late eighteenth-century perspective, David Hume famously marveled that Scotland, in a mere half century, had been transformed from a backward and ignorant nation to the European fountainhead of philosophy and science.⁶⁷ A sense of this wonderment persists today, although this view has become much more complex and ambivalent. Much effort has been made to trace the origins of the Scottish Enlightenment, and possible explanations range from the virtues of the Scottish education system, to the egalitarian aspirations of Scotland's national religion, to the historic European orientation of Scottish elites.⁶⁸ Marxian analysis, however, locates the

⁶⁵ As Davidson puts it, "On the threshold of the nineteenth century, the Scottish bourgeoisie could legitimately have cried: yesterday, America; today, India; tomorrow, the world." *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood*, 111. From the opposite end of the spectrum, Fry argues that the Scots not only "preserve much of what had been their own before 1707 and develop it afterwards. When they did, it let them meet and trade with distant peoples on equal terms, and prompted them to the study of alien cultures to do so the better. There they found their conception of a commercial Empire both practically and morally vindicated." "A Commercial Empire," 67.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Davidson, *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood*.

⁶⁷ For the classic statement of this view, see Mathieson, *The Awakening of Scotland*, 203-4.

⁶⁸ There is a vast scholarship on the Scottish Enlightenment, its sources, and its influences. See, for example, D. Allan, *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century: Union and Enlightenment* (Harlow, 2002) and *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1993); D. Daiches, P. Jones, and J. Jones, eds., *The Scottish Enlightenment, 1730-1790: a hotbed of genius* (Edinburgh, 1996); N. Phillipson and R. Mitchison, eds., *Scotland in the Age of Improvement: Essays in Scottish History in the Eighteenth Century*

intellectual achievements of eighteenth-century Scots in the economic changes wrought by agrarian landlords allied with the lawyers and churchmen in whose hands political power was concentrated after the Union of 1707.⁶⁹ In many cases these were the same people, but they all subscribed to the philosophy of “improvement” and rational “common sense” that justified restructuring the moral economy. This restructuring did not just happen in Scotland, to be sure, but in Scotland it certainly appeared that the new philosophy and the new economy marched more or less in lock step. At the same time, landowner control of Scottish society came under fire from merchants and manufacturers in the rapidly growing burghs in the form of political, religious, and education reform movements that burgeoned in the 1780s, as Marxian analysis would predict.⁷⁰ What Marxian analysis could not predict, however, was how effectively the Scottish landowning elite adapted to the changing economic situation and co-opted the “liberal” bourgeoisie. Scotland, like the rest of Great Britain, had its gentlemanly capitalists, too, and in many cases the old regime and the new one looked remarkably similar.⁷¹

(Edinburgh, 1970); R. Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (London, 2000); and J. Rendall, *The Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment* (London, 1978). If the publication of recent popular histories of the Scottish Enlightenment by A. Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 2007), J. Buchan, *Crowded with Genius: The Scottish Enlightenment: Edinburgh's Moment of the Mind* (New York 2003), and A. Herman, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* is any indication, Hume's sense of wonderment is still going strong.

⁶⁹ See T. Dickson, *Scottish Capitalism*, 125-28.

⁷⁰ On the dynamics of burgh reform, see W. Mathieson, *The Awakening of Scotland*, 244-45.

⁷¹ For a discussion of the applicability of the Cain and Hopkins gentlemanly capitalism thesis, see A. Mackillop, “Locality, Nation, and Empire: Scots and the Empire in Asia, c. 1695-1813,” *Scotland and the British Empire*, ed. J. Mackenzie and T. Devine (Oxford, 2011), 54-83.

It was a scion of this old regime, Sir Walter Scott, who perhaps more than any Scot of the French Revolution era embodied this process of assimilation—not so much into an Anglo-Scottish identity but into a cosmopolitan, bourgeois, and capitalist one. In this sense the “Scottishness” Scott suggests is largely based on the moral economy of feudal loyalties, political clientage, public charity, and religious zeal of various stripes. “Britishness”—which in important respects describes the transition to agrarian and industrial capitalism—involves the reconstruction of the old society in terms of “free” labor, abstract political ideals (the British “constitution” and rights and liberties of freeborn British subjects), a Protestant work ethic, and private religion.⁷² This may just be another way of characterizing the pervasive anglocentricity of Enlightenment ideas of an ordered society, which Scott internalized and reproduced as universally modern rather than specifically British. Familiar Enlightenment uniformitarian assumptions about the stadial development of civilizations not only slotted perfectly into Scott’s perception of historical change in Scotland, but they also came to delineate the Marxian stages of history and, as George Lukács and others have pointed out, rendered Scott the Marxian novelist *par excellence*.⁷³ From this perspective Scott’s specific historicity, particularly in the *Waverley* novels, as well as his insistence on locating character within a matrix of

⁷² For a superb analysis of Scott’s pivotal role in translating and transmitting Scottish Enlightenment social theory in the British idiom of modernity, see R. Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 2000), ch. 3. See also C. Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past: Scottish whig historians and the creation of an Anglo-British identity, 1689c.-1830* (Cambridge, 1993), for an illuminating discuss of the eighteenth-century development of a Scottish variant of Whig history. Kidd concludes that the Scottish Enlightenment *literati* successfully constructed an “Anglo-British” interpretation of Scottish history, whereby English progressive, liberal, and constitutional political and social development supplanted Scotland’s violent feudal past.

⁷³ See G. Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (London, 1962), 30-63.

interlocking local, regional, national, and cosmopolitan identifications, mark the absence of any specific historicity at all. Scott's (and others') "invention" of Scottish history—and the Scottish nationalism that has long been associated with it—in some ways constitutes an abolition of Scottish history and nationalism at the very moment in time when nationalism was itself "invented."⁷⁴ Just as the French revolutionaries hoped to abolish the *ancien régime* and usher in the universal republic, those classes of Scottish (and more largely British) society that stood to lose the most from real republicanism discovered that "modern" national identity, complete with atavistic but harmless modes of dress, diet, armament, and literature, could effectively validate and sustain "the more rapid penetration of capitalist relations into the economy."⁷⁵

This disciplinary process required a revolution in the organization of social relations, a revolution that, whenever it might be said to have commenced, reached a crisis in the 1790s. The crisis was not the French Revolution itself and the potential spread of Jacobinism among the "lower" sorts of Scottish society, as many elites believed, but whether the vast majority of Scots would submit quietly to the demands of the new economic order. The Reverend George Hill (1750-1819), in a sermon delivered

⁷⁴Nairn's Marxist reading of Scottish history posits a post-Union "stable split" between Scottish civic institutions (church, law, and universities) and the British state. When Romanticism and European nationalist movements threatened to destabilize Anglo-Scottish political hegemony, conservative figures such as Scott constructed a literary "sub-nationalism" that enshrined Scottish cultural nationalism but shied away from political agitation. See T. Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*.

⁷⁵In some ways echoing Nairn, Devine argues that Scottish participation in the British Empire had economic roots and was ultimately sustained by economic motives and benefits. The ideology, especially the romantic Highland identity invented in the first three decades of the nineteenth century by Sir Walter Scott and others, came later and served to cement further Scottish economic ties to the empire. See especially T. Devine, *Scotland's Empire*, 354-56.

to his home parish at St. Andrew's and again at Edinburgh in the fall of 1792, said it best when he admonished his congregation to heed Solomon's counsel: "My son, fear thou the Lord, and the king, and meddle not with them that are given to change."⁷⁶ Hill not only pronounced Burkean anathema upon constitutional reform, but cautioned reformers against questioning the prerogatives of capital vis-à-vis labor.⁷⁷ Hill's viewpoint might be taken for that of the vast majority of authoritarian figures in late eighteenth-century Scottish society. While many Scots took his counsel to heart, many others begged to differ.

It is difficult to isolate precise causes and effects in the historical process. Ascribing some kind of primary causation of Scotland's eighteenth-century transformation to economic factors seems to be in the ascendant today, even in our post-Marxian age. As we have seen, identifying the precise manner in which economic factors influence societal and cultural change, however, remains elusive, forcing historians to fall back to a general thesis of causation based on individual desires for economic security and a better life. I am not sure we can do any "better" than that, but I am also persuaded

⁷⁶ G. Hill, *The present happiness of Great Britain*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1792), 23.

⁷⁷ On the reaction of the Church of Scotland clergy to the revolution, see E. Vincent, "The Responses of Scottish Churchmen to the French Revolution," *The Scottish Historical Review* 73.2 (1994), 191-215. She argues that while most Church of Scotland ministers did not react negatively to the revolution's early stages, they soon feared the growing radicalism of plebeian responses. "This heightened the insecurity of the Moderate party of churchmen about their dominant position within the Church of Scotland (which was increasingly challenged by the Evangelical or 'Popular' party), and about the position of the Church of Scotland within national life and in relation to the government. It determined that the primary concern of the Kirk's ministers would be with the practical effects of the Revolution—its encouragement of domestic radicalism—rather than with an academic interest in its philosophies and progress. Moderate churchmen portrayed the British radical leadership as a set of unscrupulous men who encouraged discontent and incited anarchy as a means of gaining wealth and status for themselves." 193.

that we can do nothing better than to study what people said and wrote about what they thought was happening to them. This study reveals a remarkable lack of consensus and considerable skepticism about the truth value of elite claims regarding the nature and composition of the nation and the direction of history. As fractious as Scottish society (assuming that the historical or political entity we call “Scotland” actually existed in the minds of people we think of as “Scottish”) had been in prior centuries under conditions of frequent dearth, military occupation, and political instability, the Scotland of the 1790s might not appear particularly exceptional, given the precarious state of the economy, periodic popular disturbances, and the increasing repression of even moderate reformist politics (not to mention the more radical elements, such as they were). In this context, making Britons out of people who only remotely identified with the British composite state—and maybe only marginally with “Scotland” in any concrete sense—may have been a response to the existential threat that British elites perceived in the form of French republicanism and, later, Napoleonic despotism, but it was also aimed squarely at disciplining people to serve as wage laborers in an urban industrial economy. As we shall see, the poets and writers who lived through the experience suffered few illusions about the true nature of this “historical process,” demonstrating that the political and cultural elites of our own day should beware of assuming they know what the people over whom they rule really think.

Literary History and the Re-Making of Scotland’s Past

On another plane, this study responds to Robert Crawford’s invitation to “heighten awareness of the current position of Scottish Literature which remains too

often either ignored or lumped in with ‘English’, its cultural inflections and position airbrushed away in syllabuses across five continents.”⁷⁸ Since Crawford wrote those words, numerous scholars, predominantly from within the Scottish Academy, have done substantial work in building Scottish literary history and criticism from the ground up. I take advantage of and to contribute to this ongoing project by examining a body of poetry in English, Scots, and Anglo-Scots (alas, I cannot read Gaelic) composed primarily in and around the French Revolution, a period of intense and sometimes violent contestation of the meaning of “Scotland” and “Britain.” A great wealth of historiography has grown up around this question since the publication of Linda Colley’s *Britons* and the development of Atlantic studies as a full-fledged discipline, to which this study contributes as well.

The revolutionary period in Scotland coincides with the life and poetry of Robert Burns. Burns deservedly holds a central position in Scottish literary studies of this or any period. His poetry continues to inform and, in some ways, to determine the contours of analysis and criticism of the poetry of his contemporaries, to the extent that such poetry has come under scholarly scrutiny. Indeed, in his recent magisterial general history of Scottish literature, *Scotland’s Books*, Crawford names this period “The Age of Burns,” indicating a now well-established eighteenth-century Scottish poetic canon composed of the vernacular voices of Ramsay, Fergusson, and Burns⁷⁹ (themselves connected to a

⁷⁸ R. Crawford, “Scottish Literature and English Studies,” *The Scottish Invention of British Literature*, ed. R. Crawford (Cambridge, 1998), 240.

⁷⁹ David Daiches adds William Hamilton of Gilbertfield to this list. D. Daiches, “Eighteenth-Century Vernacular Poetry,” *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 154. Maurice Lindsay discusses a somewhat more eclectic selection of poets in his chapter on the eighteenth century, including Alexander Pennecuik, Hamilton, Alexander Ross, David

venerable early modern tradition of Scottish bards and makars), together with the Anglo-Scot poet James Thomson, primitivists James MacPherson and James Beattie, and the romanticist Scott.⁸⁰

The present work brings to historical and critical light Scottish Lowland poetry composed during the “Age of Burns.” Burns’s monumental presence has resulted, it might be argued, in the promulgation of an aesthetic standard that has precluded the kind of intensive critical analysis long performed with respect to, for example, so-called “minor” English poets (a cadre formerly thought to include Ramsay and Burns!⁸¹). As Robert Dewar has written, those “who ventured into Burns’s field were either minor poets at best, or show discolouring alien influences that remind one of their divided loyalties and make them appear—save in some honest vamps of genuine old Scottish pieces, ranking at least with Burns’s slighter achievements for Johnson—as writers taking a holiday from their own proper field of work.”⁸² Dewar cites a few examples of near contemporaries of Burns who wrote poems in “Burns’s manner,” including John Ewen, James Tytler, Elizabeth Hamilton, Anne Barnard, and Joanna Baillie, though he does not provide any analysis of their poetry. He also briefly acknowledges Carolina Oliphant and Robert Tannahill, whose works are central to this study, as “considerable” poets in their

Malloch, Tannahill, Elizabeth Hamilton, Baillie, and Oliphant. See M. Lindsay, *History of Scottish Literature* (London, 1977), ch. 4.

⁸⁰ R. Crawford, *Scotland’s Books*, 329-383. Crawford’s Burns, however, must share the spotlight with Boswell. *Ibid.*, 383.

⁸¹ See, for example, M. Jarrell and W. Meredith in *Eighteenth-Century English Minor Poets* (New York, 1968). The editors consider Ramsay and Burns as a company with Prior, Shenstone, Gay, Swift, Congreve, Gray, and others.

⁸² R. Dewar, “Burns and the Burns Tradition,” *Scottish Poetry: A Critical Survey*, ed. J. Kinsley (Norwood, Pennsylvania, 1976), 208.

way (whatever “way” that might be).⁸³ With respect to Oliphant, Dewar names a few Jacobite lyrics as worthy of remembrance, though it “is not her fault that elsewhere she is a sort of feminine Burns at best—especially when one remembers D. G. Rossetti’s pronouncement that ‘Burns of all poets is the most a Man’.”⁸⁴ Tannahill, on the other hand, writes respectable nature poetry, but “when a poet makes a habit of losing the lady of his song in description of the scenes devised for meeting her (however attractive his songs may still be in their own fashion), we can be sure he is no Burns.”⁸⁵ While much more substantive work has been done since Dewar’s essay, particularly with respect to poetry by Scottish women, the notion of an inimitable Burns towering over lesser poets persists in the scholarship of late eighteenth-century Scottish poetry.

It is not my intention here to argue that Scottish poets such as Oliphant and Tannahill approach Burns’s “greatness” or deserve any particular position in a Burns-centric canon of Scottish literature. I will show that Scottish Lowland poets writing in the same period as Burns made their own uses of available historical, linguistic, and cultural forms and material to address local, national, and imperial concerns. As conceptions of late eighteenth-century “Scottishness” and “Britishness” continue to evolve in academic discussion and debate, the time is ripe for a sustained analysis of the work of Burns’s contemporaries in both historical and literary terms. Perhaps much of the poetry examined here does not hold up to the kind of rigorous aesthetic and linguistic scrutiny that Burns invites and informs. But that does not make such poetry less interesting or

⁸³ I have chosen to refer throughout this study to Carolina Oliphant rather than to Carolina Nairne, Lady Nairne, or Carolina, Baroness Nairne.

⁸⁴ R. Dewar, “Burns and the Burns Tradition,” 208-9.

⁸⁵ R. Dewar, “Burns and the Burns Tradition,” 208-9.

valuable as a means of better understanding the ways in which Scottish poets represented individuals, families, communities, and nations in crisis.

What emerges from this study is a fuller appreciation of late eighteenth-century Scottish literary achievement in its own right, as well as of Scottish poetry's centrality to a larger British, and indeed Anglophone, poetic tradition. In his wonderful recent survey, Gerard Carruthers emphasizes the importance of using the same diverse modes of critical discourse to read Scottish literature as have commonly been employed to interpret other "national" literatures. "The future health of Scottish literary studies demands this," Carruthers argues, "if it is to be in line with other areas of literary study and so as to be prevented from becoming merely a minor adjunct to the discipline of history."⁸⁶ Moreover, in an afterword to the second edition of his seminal work *Devolving English Literature* (published in the immediate aftermath of the opening of the revived Scottish Parliament) Robert Crawford challenges Scotland to "engage in debate with the rest of the world, reasserting not only its own awareness of itself as a nation, but also its sense of being part of an international community. Poets, novelists, and critics can all play their part in this, and it seems best, . . . to suggest ways in which Scottish literature both projects and can be seen from international perspectives."⁸⁷ This critical study aims to participate in this debate, if only to demonstrate that late eighteenth-century Scots writing a wide and inclusive variety of poetry evinced an acute awareness of the national and international context of their work, regardless of their local social and economic conditions. Indeed, Crawford's call for Scotland to reassert "its own awareness of itself

⁸⁶ G. Carruthers, *Scottish Literature*, 198.

⁸⁷ R. Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 313-14.

as a nation” might fruitfully expand to include interrogations from outside Scotland of the nature of that awareness, which the poets featured here themselves asserted at the threshold of modernity. As Crawford argues elsewhere, Scottish literature belongs to the world, and in this sense all readers of Scottish literature contribute to the composite Scottish identity in very personal ways through the experience of reading.⁸⁸

Scotland thus exists as a diverse reading community—a critical consciousness—far beyond its juridical borders or the limits of political sovereignty, however those limits may expand or contract. As eighteenth-century Scots looked for ways to reconceptualize the nation as part and parcel of a global empire, twenty-first-century Scotland may well imagine itself (for the first time) as an independent modern nation-state. Undoubtedly, as they have before in other periods of national crisis, Scots will turn to the past for guidance and inspiration for this collective undertaking. In ways that will become clearer in this study, the poets of the later eighteenth century create a “grammar” for this project, a complex of historical, cultural, and linguistic associations, ideas, imaginative self-projections, discursive modes, and material practices that may instruct future narratives of a young, new Scotland.⁸⁹ Nation-states may be constituted in a day, but the narratives that make them a real and tangible presence in the lives of their citizens may take decades or even centuries to come into focus—and even then, they remain elusive, ambiguous, and provisional.

Chapter Summary

⁸⁸ R. Crawford, *Scotland's Books*, 1.

⁸⁹ I am borrowing this term from Janet Sorenson's brilliant study, *The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing*. I discuss Sorenson at length earlier in this introduction.

We encounter the first group of such narratives in Chapter 1, which closely examines the work of Ayrshire poets whom Burns knew (or, in Isobel Pagan's case, knew of) and with two of whom he exchanged poetic epistles. John Lapraik and David Sillar, who shared Burns's educational background, published volumes of poetry inspired by Burns's Kilmarnock edition and engaged many of the same subjects and genres as the heaven-taught ploughman (to little public notice and *de minimis* financial effect). Though Isobel Pagan did not have either the educational or (relative) economic advantages of her male counterparts, her songs and lyrical poems share a close formal affinity with their work. Pagan's poetry, however, which she composed under the most extreme conditions of mendicancy and social exclusion, registers more explicit concerns about the working poor, especially women, and their vulnerability in a strongly authoritarian and masculine society. As a comparative analysis of the varieties of form, meter, and language present in the work of these poets reveals, each of them imagined "Scotland" in ways that depart significantly from the Burns model and evince an acute awareness of the social effects of Scotland's subordinate economic and political position in the Union.

In Chapter Two we turn to the forgotten work of the pietistic James Maxwell, the "weaver" poet of Paisley, as well as that of the better-known "Scotch Milkmaid," Janet Little. While this pairing may appear arbitrary, both poets had strong, negative responses to the Burns cult and used poetry as an explicitly political medium to propagate religious and social views from below. Whereas Maxwell deployed the allegorical tradition to interpret the crisis of the French Revolution and subsequent repressive domestic reaction, however, Little adapted Latinate classical modes—lyric, panegyric, elegiac, and

pastoral—to explore the decline of the feudal order and its implications particularly for the “peasantry” and women. Moreover, neither poet relies on the iconography of Scottish patriotism common to political poetry of the period (such as Burns’s), opting instead for a different construction of Scottish identity based primarily on what we might think of as “conservative” values of faith and work.

Chapter 3 argues that some of the most popular Jacobite songs in the Scottish tradition—those of Carolina Oliphant, Lady Nairne—have often been mischaracterized as apolitical, sentimental, and elegiac laments for the lost cause. Read with attention to its full range and variety, Oliphant’s poetry reveals a much more complex and ambivalent view of Scottish history and the purpose of “national” poetry and intervenes in the Enlightenment narrative of the progressive transformation of Scottish society from the feudal past to a “modern” civil society. Indeed, Oliphant rivals Burns both as a poet *and* a poet of politics, aspects of her *oeuvre* that have not yet been thoroughly explored.

Chapter Four, which examines the lives and work of Alexander Wilson, John Robertson, Alexander Tait, and Robert Tannahill, features a range of Lowland poetic responses to the economic, social, and political crises of the revolutionary period. Though these poets can be intensely local in their concerns, their poetry voices a powerful sense of national crisis and its implications for domestic and personal well being. Indeed, under the pressure of their frustration and disillusionment with conditions in Scotland, Wilson chose emigration to America and both Robertson and Tannahill took their own lives. Taken as a group, these poets articulate, often in deeply moving tragic or bitterly satirical strains, the stresses of a society under siege by external forces of change and dissolution.

The final chapter takes up explicitly polemical poetry from both radical and conservative perspectives. Specifically, I examine the relationship between the poets' linguistic choices and their political commitments. For the radical weaver James Kennedy, his decision to compose largely in English enables him to mimic loyalist discourse while subverting its appeal to British patriotism. At the same time, however, Kennedy deconstructs "Scotland" as an alternative site of national identity, holding it responsible for complicity with the repressive British state, and finds potential social cohesion in class identification. The loyalist William Robb, an Episcopal clergyman, defends the notion of "British liberty" from attack by radicals such as Kennedy, but, similar to Kennedy, sees no future for a British identity with a distinctive Scottish national variant. A third Scot composing in English, Presbyterian clergyman Hamilton Paul, finds no historical purchase for either a Scottish or British "nation" to begin with, falling back simply on opposition to Gallic aggression as a basis for national coherence. Finally, Latin poets Alexander Geddes and Thomas Muir locate "Scotland" not in opposition to England or Britain, but in its Roman and European intellectual traditions.

Chapter 1

The Other Ayrshire Poets: John Lapraik, David Sillar, and Isobel Pagan

Andrew Noble's introduction to his and Patrick Scott Hogg's controversial Canongate edition of Burns's poetry seeks to disinter the "real" Burns from a tomb safeguarded by the cultural and political conservatives who prevailed in the political struggles of the late eighteenth century. "Consequent on such a new explication of Burns's political values and poetry, will be an exploration into the calculated and deeply successful manner in which, from the moment of his death, his achievement as a radically dissenting democratic poet was denied and suppressed," Noble asserts. "Indeed, what is revealed is the degree to which a whole segment of late-enlightenment liberal, Scottish culture of which Burns was an integral part was, as far as possible, obliterated from the national memory by reactionary forces which were quick to build on their total victory in the 1790s."⁹⁰ Subsequent work on Burns by Robert Crawford, Carol McGuirk, Liam McIlvanney, and others has further established Burns's eighteenth-century context, particularly in terms of religious, intellectual, and political thought.⁹¹ Indeed, putting

⁹⁰ A. Noble and S. Hogg, *The Canongate Burns: The Complete Poems and Songs of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, 2003), x.

⁹¹ See R. Crawford, *The Bard*; C. McGuirk, "Scottish Hero, Scottish Victim: Myths of Robert Burns," *History of Scottish Literature*, 219-38; L. McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton, 2010). McGuirk's succinct discussion of the Burns myth postulates a "two-sided" critical perspective of the poet: Burns the "working-class hero and also a national hero—a super-Scot"; and "Burns as a victim" who died a broken man without "the recognition and support that he deserved." "Scottish Hero, Scottish Victim," 219. McGuirk argues that Burns fits neither description and that both devalue the real Burns poet, who "disintegrates" English into the Scots vernacular "in an effort to evoke the 'Scottish' subject matter as truly universal,

Burns back into his actual socio-economic environment—or as Noble puts it, “the domestic squalor and poverty in which he mainly lived”—in some respects renders his poetry even more miraculous and transcendent than even Henry Mackenzie and his fellow Edinburgh *literati* represented at the time.⁹² Though perhaps not “Heaven-taught,” Burns continues to emerge from much modern critical and biographical treatment as *sui generis*, a “native” genius very much in the eighteenth-century meaning of the term.⁹³

Burns, however, shared this environment with a number of other poets, who, like the gifted ploughman, experienced the vertiginous economic and social conditions of late eighteenth-century Scotland, as well as the rich intellectual environment of the Scottish Enlightenment. Three of these poets, John Lapraik, David Sillar, and Isobel Pagan, have received little significant critical attention in his or her own right (with the exception of a pair of Pagan’s poems in Catherine Kerrigan’s wonderful anthology) and have yet to appear in anthologies of eighteenth-century Scottish poetry.⁹⁴ Each has been treated as a producer of inferior poetry or doggerel verse, and Lapraik and Sillar have further suffered

not local. Burns’ transformative use of English is itself a form of Scottish rebellion against assimilative culture and a marker of “Scotland’s continuing cultural difference.” “Scottish Hero, Scottish Victim,” 234.

⁹² For an excellent overview of first wave Burns criticism, see C. Andrews, “The Genius of Scotland: Robert Burns and His Critics,” *International Journal of Scottish Literature* 6 (2010), 1-16.

⁹³ For a discussion of how both the right and left appropriate the Burns myth for their own ideological uses, see R. Finlay, “The Burns Cult and Scottish Identity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *Love and Liberty: Robert Burns, A Bicentenary Celebration*, ed. K. Simpson (East Linton, 1997), 69-78.

⁹⁴ In her *Anthology of Scottish Women Poets*, Catherine Kerrigan groups Pagan with contemporary Scots and Anglo-Scots poets such as Jean Elliott, Anne Hunter, Lady Anne Lindsay, Anne Grant, Jean Glover, and Elizabeth Hamilton. The two poems are “Ca’ the Yowes to the Knowes” and “The Crook and the Plaid,” C. Kerrigan, *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets* (Edinburgh, 1991), 164-65.

from inapt comparisons to Burns (until fairly recently, Pagan had been largely forgotten).⁹⁵ Even Burns's friendship for Lapraik and Sillar, evidenced, for example, in the poetic epistles addressed to them, may be construed as patronizing, and Pagan's most widely known poem is thought by some to have been significantly improved by Burns. Indeed, Burns unwittingly helped to enshrine the inferiority of Lapraik and Sillar as poets, whereas Pagan's poverty and social marginality placed her so far outside of the critical mainstream that she has only recently begun to figure in studies of eighteenth-century women peasant poets. The other Ayrshire poets have always been considered as Burns's "others:" lesser poets, lesser intellectuals, lesser radicals, and lesser Scots. In this chapter I will initiate a reassessment of the work of Lapraik, Sillar, and Pagan, to enhance our appreciation not only of Burns's world and the broader context of British poetry in a period marked by intense political, economic, social, and—some would say—revolutionary dynamism, but also of the variety and richness of Scottish poetry itself.

John Lapraik and Conservative Radicalism: Scotland as Satire

Son of a relatively affluent Ayrshire landowner, John Lapraik was born in 1727 near Muirkirk at Laigh Dalquhram. He attended parochial school, where he received at least the rudiments of a literary education, and, if his experience was anything like that of Burns (albeit Burns's schooling occurred some three decades later), somewhat better than that. His father left him the family estate, which Lapraik augmented by leasing the lands and mills of Muirsmill. In 1754 Lapraik married Margaret Rankine, whose brother John,

⁹⁵ As Robert Crawford puts it, "It is a predictable but unfortunate aspect of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Scottish minor poetry that a lot of it is unexcitingly sub-Burnsian." R. Crawford, *Scotland's Books*, 361.

a tenant farmer in Adamhill, Tarbolton, belonged to the same Ayrshire circle as Lapraik.⁹⁶ When Margaret died following the birth of their fifth child, Lapraik married again in 1766 to Janet Anderson, the daughter of a local farmer, with whom he had nine children. Lapraik lost the family lands in the aftermath of the spectacular financial collapse of the Ayr Bank in August, 1773, a fate he shared with many farmers who took advantage of the Bank's liberal lending practices.⁹⁷ His slow decline into bankruptcy played out over more than a decade, culminating in his commitment for a short time to an Ayr debtor's prison in 1785. Lapraik subsequently accepted a position as postmaster at Muirkirk and later opened a public house adjacent to the post office. He died on May 7, 1807.⁹⁸

In the same year as his imprisonment for debt, Lapraik made Burns's acquaintance. In his "Epistle to J. Lapraik: An Old Scotch Bard, April 1, 1785," first printed in the Kilmarnock edition (1786), Burns recounts hearing a song attributed to Lapraik⁹⁹:

On Fasteneen we had a rockin,
To ca' the crack and weave our stockin;

⁹⁶ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 151.

⁹⁷ On the bank's establishment and failure, see Lenman, *An Economic History of Modern Scotland*, 93. See also J. Paterson, *The Contemporaries of Burns and the More Recent Poets of Ayrshire; With Selections From Their Writings* (Edinburgh, 1840), 21-23.

⁹⁸ Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 17-34; see also T. W. Bayne, "Lapraik, John (1727-1807)," rev. G. Carruthers, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

⁹⁹ The song, "When I Upon Thy Bosom Lean," is the subject of some controversy. According to J. L. Hempstead, it may have been plagiarized from an earlier version of the song, published in the *Weekly Magazine* on October 14, 1773. See J. L. Hempstead, *Burns Chronicle* (Feb. 1994), 94-101; Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 137. In any event, Burns revised the song for James Johnson's *The Scots Musical Museum* (Edinburgh, 1787-1803).

And there was muckle fun and jokin,
Ye need na doubt;
At length we had a hearty yoking,
At *sang about*.

There was *ae sang*, amang the rest,
Abbon them a' it pleas'd me best,
That some kind husband had address
To some sweet wife:
It thirl'd the heart-strings thro' the breast,
A' to the life.

I've scarce heard ough describ'd sae weel,
What gen'rous, manly bosoms feel;
Thought I, 'Can this be *Pope* or *Steele*,
Or *Beattie's* wark?'
They tald me 'twas an odd kind chiel
About *Muirkirk*.¹⁰⁰

As Noble and Hogg observe, Burns's comparison of Lapraik to Pope, Steele, and Beattie (not to mention later in the poem to Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson) is "hyperbolic in the extreme."¹⁰¹ Another contemporary of Lapraik, James Maxwell, assessed Lapraik's talent as a poet as follows:

A—SH—E is sure become a fruitful field,
It doth such store of noble Poets yield.
Lo, here's another started up of late,
That on Parnassus sure hath had his feat;
He seems with Poetry so deeply fraught,
He sure hath been by great Apollo taught.
If of Castalia's Well large draughts he's ta'en,
He sure hath lost it ere he came again.
His budget sure from off his back hath gone,
For grammar, rhyme, or reason he hath none.
His brother B--- does him by far excel,

¹⁰⁰ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 133.

¹⁰¹ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 137.

And is a bolder advocate for hell.¹⁰²

Robert Crawford, the only modern critic I have been able to locate who refers to Lapraik's poetry, is more forgiving of Lapraik's skills, though for Crawford both Lapraik and Sillar remain "lesser poets." In his recent biography of Burns, Crawford credits Lapraik with helping Burns establish a local idiom in which his democratic politics could be "couched in warm, unthreatening language. . . . Companionable tone, rather than revolutionary politics, achieves a result whose implications, recognized alike by the young William Wordsworth and subsequent generations, are powerfully revolutionary."¹⁰³ I believe that Lapraik's "local idiom" may be more complex, allusive, and polyvocal than this, but concur with Crawford that Lapraik can and should be read as "revolutionary."

John Lapraik's *Poems, on Several Occasions* was published in Kilmarnock in 1788. The volume contains more than forty poems and songs on various subjects and in various verse forms. Some of the poems feature the Scots vernacular, such as his "Epistle to R****T B****S" and the Burnsian dialogues "The Herd and Dog" and "The Devil's Answer to the Poet's Address," but most speak primarily in an Anglicized poetic voice. Lapraik's *oeuvre* likewise imitates favorite Augustan genres: pastoral (for example, the volume begins with a seasons cycle, "Spring," "Summer," "Harvest," "Winter"); didactic ("In Praise of Charity," "A Query After Happiness," "Time, How Thoughtlessly We Let it Pass," "The well-meaning Jobber's Lamentation"); speculative

¹⁰² James Maxwell, "On L-----'s Poems. Another A----sh----e Bard," *Animadversions on Some Poets and Poetasters of the Present Age, Especially R----t B----s, and J----n L-----k* (Paisley, 1788).

¹⁰³ R. Crawford, *The Bard*, 188-89.

("Man's Creation and Fall"); ode ("On Melancholy," "On Solitude," "On Ridicule"); and elegy ("Elegy on G**** B****"). There are a few of the ubiquitous epistolary poems, but they are not as numerous as in Burns's or Sillar's Kilmarnock volumes. The following selections, however, focus on Lapraik's political, social, and economic themes. They reveal a powerful strain of Tory or conservative radicalism, classing Lapraik with English poets preoccupied with the loss of English rural values and the moral barrenness of "modern" commercial society.

Much of Lapraik's *oeuvre* comments on contemporary economic and social conditions in Ayrshire. These poems concern themselves with the history of the moment, the struggles of farmers and rural folk in the grip of larger economic forces over which they have no control. Generally speaking, the poems seem to lack the elegiac tone associated with the rural poetry of English poets such as Cowper and Crabbe. There is little sense in the poems of a golden age of rural life, now lost in the mania for agricultural improvement and commercial exploitation, although the plague of wealth-seeking inflicts Scotland just as pervasively as it does England. Scottish farming had always been a harsh and uncertain living at best, but in Lapraik's world of financial collapse and bankruptcy, it appeared unsustainable for the traditional small farmer. While historians tell us that the late eighteenth century witnessed a large scale economic "take-off" in Scotland, partially based on more rational and productive agricultural practices, Lapraik's poetry narrates the cost of improvement in terms of the destruction,

not of a rural idyll, but of the ordered universe itself.¹⁰⁴ For example, in “On the Distressed Condition of Honest Farmers” the poet begins:

If man’s possesst of *common sense*,
He may well see, at the first glance,
Mankind a *common system* is,
 And should support
Each other, in their stations here,
 And them comfort.

The Governor of all the earth
Has made each being that draws breath,
And ev’ry priv’lege that man hath
 ‘S receiv’d from GOD;
Then why should stupid mortals boast
 In this abode?¹⁰⁵

Whereas Burns, for example, often uses Standard Habbie measure for satirical purposes, Lapraik employs it here in a heavily moralistic strain particularly reminiscent of Passus V of Langland’s *The Vision of Piers Plowman*.¹⁰⁶ More specifically to the Scottish tradition, the poem’s subject matter recalls Sir David Lindsay’s *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estatis* (1552), an estates satire in the tradition of Chaucer, Gower, and other medieval British poets. The poem emphasizes how human corruption undermines the “common system” God created. Lapraik’s use of the term “common sense” may or may not allude to the Scottish school of philosophy of that name, but Lapraik’s equation of “common sense” with “common system” reconceptualizes an empirically-based approach to ethics as a more ancient, morally grounded one, i.e. Christian ethics. Lapraik’s moral

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, T. Devine, “The Transformation of Agriculture.” Lapraik probably would have agreed more enthusiastically with Dickson’s analysis of the costs of “client capitalism” and agricultural improvement. T. Dickson, *Scottish Capitalism*, 128-30.

¹⁰⁵ John Lapraik, *Poems, on Several Occasions* (Kilmarnock, 1788), 118.

¹⁰⁶ See R. Crawford, “Robert Fergusson’s Robert Burns,” *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, ed. R. Crawford (Edinburgh, 1997), 3.

economy, in which lairds, farmers, and laborers share a cooperative, paternalistic ethos founded in the land, hardly constitutes an idealized or allegorized state, however. Following three stanzas of exhortation to the rich to care for the poor, the poem continues:

If men of wealth were ne'er so keen,
They're but a *wheel* in the *machine*:
Inferiors may as well be seen,
 And as much valu'd;
If they do act their functions well,
 No more's required.

And if man would impartial be,
He may see't well, with half an eye,
The man who is of *high degree*
 Is much ador'd;
Yet still the *pleb'an* is of use
 Him to uphold.

By working, drudging, and what not,
Although his *wage* be but a *groat*,
And though he can't live like a *sot*,
 As some men do,
His daily bread's all his concern,
 And plenty too.¹⁰⁷

Lapraik does not shy from representing the actual condition of the laboring poor. There is no noble peasantry here, no Piers plowing his half-acre. Men work, drudge, and “what not” for meager wages and bare subsistence. A man of high degree depends on the “pleb’an” for his daily bread, but he also shares the common man’s fate to a greater or lesser degree. Scotland is not England, at least not the England of much eighteenth-century rural poetry. While vast inequities exist between rich and poor, as they do in England, the symbiosis between them produces a different effect than reflections on a

¹⁰⁷ Lapraik, *Poems*, 120-21.

ruined landscape and regrets for England's imagined pastoral past. Instead, the poet strikes a defiant pose:

Give up to *Landlords* all their land,
Matters would soon be at a stand;
For work they could not with their hand,
 I am no fraiser
Their natures, sure, need to be chang'd
 Like Nebu'dnezzar.

And were their *natures* all so chang'd,
They must, like sport dogs, all be mang'd,
When from their former soil estrang'd,
 That was sweet pasture,
And now turn'd out to *heath'ry moors*,
 With great disaster.

For he who hath the wildest land,
When he gets his rent in his hand,
Can up with his companions stand,
 And drink and toast,
And *Fate* or *Fortune* still defy,
 That rule the roast.

But would the *Lairds* submissive be,
And *Landlords* of whate'er degree,
And think one moment, then they'll see
 I'm not mistaken,
'Tis *Lands o'er dear* and *Factors keen*
 Make such a *breaking*.¹⁰⁸

The threat of plebeian revolt is in the air. Oppressed by high rents and rapacious agents, those who work the land may one day turn out, leaving the increasingly absentee lairds cash-starved and capital-poor. In some ways, Lapraik's critique parallels Maria Edgeworth's contemporary diagnosis of Anglo-Irish society, although she shies away from the revolutionary implications of failed landlordism that Lapraik explicitly

¹⁰⁸ Lapraik, *Poems*, 121-22.

acknowledges.¹⁰⁹ The repetition of terms and images connoting cataclysm further emphasizes the poem's political cast: the "breaking" point cannot be far away, and when it occurs, the hubristic lairds, defiant of fate and fortune, will fall. Moreover, unlike its medieval predecessors, there is no appeal to the monarch to exercise his prerogative to relieve the people. Instead, we are left with a stark confrontation between the plebes and the lairds, without an apparent mediator. Thus what begins as a standard morality play about the deleterious effects of avarice and pride on the social body ends as a cautionary tale of political and social upheaval. In this instance Lapraik's radical critique, however, suggests a conservative remedy for social change. As in Edgeworth's fiction, the cure is not the redistribution of the land to the peasantry, but reasonable rents and resident landlords who, at least in an imagined ideal feudal past, give long leases and reinvest in their estates.

Lapraik's broadside against the landlord class continues in "Honest John's Opinion of Patronage." This poem takes the form of a dialogue between friends, composed (with the exception of the first stanza, which ends in a triad) in octosyllabic rhymed couplets. Unlike the direct speech in the "Honest Farmer," the dialogic method distances the poet from the speaker in the poem. Here "Honest John," who may be an alter ego of the poet himself, accuses the lairds of corrupting the Kirk by forcing the congregations to accept their sons and protégés, thus prostituting the church to the temporal power of the ruling elites.

Good morrow neighbour; what's your news?
Tell what you ken, pray, don't refuse.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, M. Edgeworth, *The Absentee* (1812).

Says he, The folk's all in a rage,
 And blame the Church for *Patronage*.
 Sir, my opinion is the same
 With those men who the Church do blame;
Curst Patronage usurps a pow'r,
 And makes our Church a *common who—e*.
 The most of Christians own 'tis bad,
 And if rid of it would be glad,
 Except such men who have a *Son*,
 Who's forc'd in by *tuck of Drum*.
 While conscience nought against him says;
 His *worldly wealth* he may increase,
 By forcing into Church—an *Ass*.¹¹⁰

Once again the poem recalls the anti-clericalism of estates satire, in which the lairds (or often the bishops in the older Catholic format of anti-clerical criticism) exploit the church for personal profit and fill its pulpits with their impoverished and doltish second sons. Lapraik's critique extends to the Moderates who controlled Kirk government for most of the second half of the eighteenth century and constituted the Edinburgh *literati* that toasted and patronized Robert Burns.¹¹¹

The poem continues:

Such impositions must offend
 Those who're relig'ously inclin'd:
 It makes *dissensions* throughout the land,
 And puts the weak mind to a stand.
 The bond of all Society,
 By *Patronage* is forc'd to fly;
 If men, true friendship cannot stay,
 Where men are void of charity.
 The wisest Patron can't find proof
 In all the *Scriptures*, which are *truth*;
 Nor do we find, in ancient days,

¹¹⁰ Lapraik, *Songs*, 101-2.

¹¹¹ On the rise of New Light moderatism in the mid-eighteenth century and its influence, see McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical*, 127-35.

That e'er the Church was treat those ways.¹¹²

Indeed, rather than promoting social harmony, those who acquiesce in the practice of patronage undermine it, making “dissensions” and promoting schism. Here the “breaking” warned against in the “Honest Farmer” is refigured as a breakdown of the “Society” of believers. Honest John voices sound Calvinist doctrine here, rejecting any Biblical authority for lay patronage or church government. At the same time, no matter how well-intentioned or “wise” the patron may be, the very act of usurpation implied in the presentation of a clergyman violates the social bond between the lords and the commons. The paternalism intrinsic to the estate critique found in the “Honest Farmer” does not extend to the essentially democratic and egalitarian sphere of Presbyterian faith. The lairds penetrate that sphere not only at their own risk, but at the risk of profound social disorder, a potent threat given Scotland’s recent history of seventeenth-century religious conflict. The poem continues with something of a history lesson tracing the purity of the early church, the Constantinian imposition of prelacy, and the subordination of the church to the secular, political ends of the state. The poem concludes:

Now by this time the *Pope of Rome*,
Who’s by the Romans call’d, *Supreme*,
None could dispute his right, as such,
To fill up ev’ry vacant Church:
But why should we so much complain,
Of *Antichrist* and *Pope of Rome*,
Since arbitrary pow’r is us’d,
In settling Priests, though still refus’d?
To *Presbyt’ry* we need not claim;
To us ‘tis but a borrow’d name:
No court is held to crave a *Vote*,

¹¹² Lapraik, *Songs*, 102.

If you'll have such a Priest or not.
The *Patron*, who has got a friend,
Who serv'd him for some noble end,
His Son repays with *Kirk* and *Glebe*,
Ev'n though he's one of *Haman's* tribe.
Such *grace* and *goodness* ne'er can dwell,
Where *uproars* and *convulsions* swell;
Nor can they find a joy that's sweet,
Where *truth* and *friendship* do not meet.¹¹³

Honest John questions whether the Reformation achieved anything other than the substitution of one ruling elite (the lairds) for another (the Pope).¹¹⁴ The “arbitrary pow'r” long associated with Popery is simply in different hands; Britain’s claim to Protestant liberty, embodied in the territorial constitution and the free institutions of Parliament and Church is a cruel sham, not worthy of the blood of martyrs. Moreover, Honest John’s complaint implies no Jacobite nostalgia for lost Scottish independence or the courtly society of a ruling monarch in Holyrood, but the purified “Presbyt’ry” Knox’s reformed church promised, the Solemn League and Covenant affirmed, and the 1707 Treaty of Union preserved. Indeed, the poem may be read *even* more subversively as suggesting the breakdown of the Union itself, as Scottish lairds assimilate to pernicious English practices, betraying their historic and traditional responsibilities to the people and nullifying the social contract upon which the British state is founded. The reference to Haman, who, according to the Book of Esther, with his wife Zeresh plotted the massacre of the Jews in ancient Persia, deepens the sense of political treachery and betrayal in the

¹¹³ Lapraik, *Songs*, 105-6.

¹¹⁴ Lapraik’s anti-Catholicism was widely shared by Scots, regardless of their particular stamp of Protestantism. Indeed, serious anti-Catholic riots broke out in Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1779 when Henry Dundas proposed easing the penal laws. See R. Finlay, “Keeping the Covenant: Scottish National Identity,” *Eighteenth Century Scotland: New Perspectives*, 128. See also C. Whatley, *Scottish Society, 1707-1830*, 164-70.

poem. Moreover, figuring “relig’ously inclin’d” Scots Presbyterians as a persecuted “Chosen People” belies the whole project of assimilating Scotland into the British imperial domain. Here assimilation is quite literally equated with extinction.

Paralleling the economic and social conservatism of the “The Honest Farmer,” the speaker in “Honest John” is religiously conservative, yet radical in the threat that religious conservatism poses to “British” Scotland. In this complaint poem the conservative-radical Lapraik takes aim at finance capitalism. As we have seen, the failure of the Ayr bank (also called Douglas, Heron & Company after two of its original shareholders, Patrick Heron of Heron and Sir Archibald Douglas) in 1773 ruined Lapraik and hundreds of others, including the 225 partners who lost more than £660,000.¹¹⁵ According to one historian, the causes of Douglas and Heron’s dissolution included “trading beyond their means; divided control by permitting branches to act independently; forcing the circulation of their notes; giving credit too easily; ignorance of the principles of business; and carelessness or iniquity of officers.”¹¹⁶ In *Observations on the D----S AND H---N B--K*, the poet returns to Standard Habbie, but this time in a more detached satirical mode than in the bitter, almost personal complaint of “The Honest Farmer”:

In the year Sixty-nine and Sev’nty,
The *Notes* amongst men were too plenty:
They took their glass and were right canty;
 They little thought,
That *plenty*, when ‘tis misimproven,
 Brings men to *nought*.

¹¹⁵ See Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 21-23.

¹¹⁶ See A. Kerr, *The History of Banking in Scotland* (London, 1926), ch. 9.

The cry went through from *pole to pole*,
There's *credit* here for ev'ry soul;
If he's well back'd, without control,
 He shall have *Money*:
'Tis bitter sauce to each one now,
 That then was honey.

This *credit* went o'er all the Country;
It was as ready as *King's Bounty*:
But now there is not one of twenty
 That can get rest;
Hornings are going every day,
 They're so opprest.

If I might pick some men by name,
Wha did lay out a decent *scheme*:
They're foolish folk wha those men blame;
 For their intention
Was to make ev'ry *crown a pound*
 By this invention.¹¹⁷

The first four stanzas of the poem perfectly describe a credit bubble, a periodic occurrence in eighteenth-century Britain where financial regulation was virtually non-existent (it would appear that little has changed in the twenty-first century). The poem's language emphasizes the slipperiness of signifiers of financial instruments: credit, money, notes. Each term seems interchangeable, seemingly solid and tangible but in reality without "backing" or "control." Moreover, in the first stanza the poet plays on the word "plenty," first using it to indicate the deceptive perception of wealth conferred by the free availability of credit, and then ironically revealing the deception by deploying the word in its traditional sense of real, tangible plenitude, sown and reaped by the sweat of one's brow. In the third stanza, the hollow signifier of wealth becomes the "King's Bounty" (perhaps an allusion to the popular faith in the "King's Cure"), a marker of English

¹¹⁷ Lapraik, *Poems*, 47-48.

financial and political corruption inflicted on Scotland in the wake of the Union. This fraudulent English finance oppresses the hapless Scots, who suffer every day from “Hornings”—a Scottish legal term connoting a “process of execution issued under the signet directing a messenger to charge a debtor to pay or perform in terms of the letters, under pain of being ‘put to the horn’, i.e. declared rebel.”¹¹⁸ In this process the king’s messenger actually blew three blasts on a horn, proclaiming the debtor an outlaw and “air landis and gudis eschete.”¹¹⁹

Thus in a striking and ironic reversal of the unionist dogma of Anglo-Scottish equal partnership, an aggressive, capitalistic English state exploits Scots law (theoretically preserved under the Treaty of Union) to assimilate the Scottish rural economy to serve its own economic interests. Moreover, it accomplishes this hostile takeover by virtue of the kind of “Dutch finance” (to use Disraeli’s phrase) most abhorred by the country party itself. As the particularly galled poet points out, the Scots have only themselves to blame for falling for the whole scam: those members of the 1707 Scottish Parliament who sold their country to the English for a few shekels of gold, as well as those lured by the prospect of making “ev’ry crown a pound” by dint of unsound English financial legerdemain. After bemoaning the failure of the scheme and the descent of the creditors, the poet concludes:

Those consequences are so bad,
That many wish they ne’er had had
Such *credit*; for they’re us’d, by G-d!
Not like to men;

¹¹⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed. (1989).

¹¹⁹ Sc. Acts Rob. III (1844) I 574/I; *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d. ed. (1989).

Yet seldom own that they themselves
Were much to blame.

Man, *Agar's wish*, should not exceed,
To pray for what's his daily bread:
Industr'ous he should be indeed
To gain the same;
But if his bread should scanty be
He none should blame.

Should one, who for some Cent'ries past,
Has been a *Laird* baith East and West,
Make such a volley and a blast,
And say, he'll not
Yield up the cause, though he should die
Upon the spot?

Or why should men ev'n think it strange,
Though PROVIDENCE should make a change?
It can't be said it is revenge,
Though he make Laird,
Ev'n that man whom we despise
And disregard.¹²⁰

Lapraik again interweaves biblical and political allusions, at once evincing the world-weariness associated with the people's eternal Job-like suffering, produced partly by their own vanity and pride, and the bitterness of historical subjection to a ruling class, suggesting the possibility of plebeian revolt. At first the seemingly resigned poet cites "Agar's wish," which is found in Proverbs XXX, verse 8: give me not wealth or poverty. But in its fuller Scriptural context this moral commonplace becomes more menacingly revolutionary:

1. Two things I ask of thee; take not favour from me before I die.
2. Remove far from me vanity and falsehood: and give me not wealth *or* poverty; but appoint me what is needful and sufficient:

¹²⁰ Lapraik, *Songs*, 49-50.

3. lest I be filled and become false, and say, Who see me? or be poor and steal, and swear *vainly* by the name of God.
4. Deliver not a servant into the hands of his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be utterly destroyed.
5. A wicked generation curse their father, and do not bless their mother.
6. A wicked generation judge themselves to be just, but do not cleanse their way.
7. A wicked generation have lofty eyes, and exalt themselves with their eyelids.
8. A wicked generation have swords *for* teeth and jaw-teeth *as* knives, so as to destroy and devour the lowly from the earth, and the poor of them from among men.¹²¹

As in “Honest John,” the poet employs biblical language (perhaps suggesting the Covenanting tradition) to draw down a scourge on the lairds for their wickedness. Indeed, English finance and the illusion of “credit” appear in the wake of the Union to “destroy and devour the lowly” Scots and must be rejected by the “industr’ous,” who work the land to yield its true wealth. Moreover, the poem warns the parasitical capitalists that the right of self-determination, once enjoyed by the “*Laird* baith East and West” and asserted in the Declaration of Arbroath (1320), might once again emerge as a cause worth dying for. We might also read this line as alluding to the ancient defenders of Scottish independence, Bruce and Wallace, and to God’s chosen people—the very Scots now suffering persecution both in religion (“Honest John) and political economy (“The Honest Farmer” and here). The devouring, monstrous English state, assisted by its collaborators in Scotland, may well live to see the tables turned, as “Providence” can as easily unmake a laird as make one. And the instrument at hand—the “we” of the poem’s final phrase who “despise and disregard” the fraudulent laird—are the people, the “us’d ... not like to men.”

¹²¹ From Sir Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, *English Translation of the Septuagint* (London, 1851).

Lapraik's selective use of biblical and Scots history to construct a kind of conservative radicalism built on the old moral economy and coupled with egalitarian Presbyterianism appears more programmatic and "popular" than, for example, Burns's appeals to Scotland's heroic past, republicanism, or moderate New Light Presbyterianism. Curiously, however, tucked between his attacks on English finance and church patronage, Lapraik inserts two panegyrics to noblemen. The first, "The Right Honorable The Earl of Dundonald's Welcome to Ayr-Shire, July, 1787," celebrates Archibald Cochrane, 9th Earl of Dundonald, a pioneer of the process of extracting tar from coal and founder of the British Tar Company (1780).¹²² Written in neoclassical rhymed couplets cleansed of Scotticisms, it begins in a predictably standard fashion:

Inspire my Muse, ye *tuneful Nine*
 With strains immortal and divine;
 And teach a humble Bard to sing,
 Till rocks and hills with echoes ring;
 And publish wide, to ev'ry clime,
 DUNDONALD'S far resounded fame!

Hail! great DUNDONALD! *wise and sage!*
 Bright *Ornament* of ev'ry age!
 Thy *virtues* great and godlike *skill*,
 With grateful joy each heart do fill!
 Thy *Fame* resounds from pole to pole,
 And fills with wonder ev'ry soul!
 Each proud Philosopher doth see,
 And owns himself excell'd by thee:
 They waste their time in dry disputes
 Whilst thou by practice show'st it's fruits.¹²³

¹²² For a brief history of this ill-starred investment, see J. Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 31-2.

¹²³ Lapraik, *Poems*, 95-96.

To this point, the poem reads just like the interminable “Odes for the King’s Birthday” penned dutifully by poet laureates such as Thomas Warton and Henry James Pye and published annually in periodicals and newspapers across Britain.¹²⁴ These poems acquired additional political significance during the wars with France and varied little from year to year, asserting the steadfast love and devotion of the king’s subjects and their patriotic unity in the face of French military aggression and Jacobin republican principles. Similarly, the invocation of this poem is entirely formal; the poet apes the hyperbolic style and diction of the genre with mechanical exactitude. The poet continues:

Mankind, astonish’d, now behold
Nature’s *deep secrets* all unfold.
What had for many cent’ries been
A secret hid from mortal men,
With *Art Divine* thou hast found out,
And unto full perfection brought.
From *Coal*, which men thought only good
To keep them warm and dress their food,
Thou dost extract so many kinds
Of things that do surprise our minds.
Men now no more need fetch from far,
That useful article of *Tar*.
Great Britain’s Thunder now may roar,
In dreadful claps, from shore to shore!
With joy we see her *Men of War*
Secured by thy matchless *Tar*,
That worms in vain their force employ,
Their warlike bottoms to destroy.
With it bedaub’d, they longer last
Than they were sheath’d with *metal cast*.
The fur’ous waves may dash in vain;
Their well pitch’d sides do firm remain;
Corroding Time’s destructive force,
In ages scarce can make them worse.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ The classic book on poets laureate and their ode-making is William Forbes Gray, *The Poets Laureate of England: Their History and Their Odes* (New York, 1915).

¹²⁵ Lapraik, *Poems*, 96-97.

Here the duly acknowledged Lord Dundonald is all but forgotten as the panegyric turns to the peculiar attributes of British coal. Not merely fuel for heating and cooking, coal yields the ultimate weapon in Britain's maritime world wars for imperial supremacy. Britain's natural resources, some of which might be mined in Ayrshire no less, leverage British global hegemony by rendering the Royal Navy invincible. Without them the roar of "Great Britain's Thunder" would sound like a pathetic yip, its "warlike bottoms," rotten and worm-eaten, sink to the bottom. The poem invokes the Anglo-Scottish patriotism of Thomson's "Rule Britannia," yet with a difference. Note the end rhymes in the second part of the stanza: "War" and "Tar," "employ" and "destroy," "last" and "cast," "vain" and "remain," "force" and "worse." This emphasis on terms linking martial ambition and destruction indicates that the potential exploitation of Scottish resources (including Scotland's young men, often in the vanguard of Britain's military campaigns on the continent and in the empire) supports an ongoing imperialist war that enriches the English elites and their Scots collaborators. Lapraik's panegyric thus turns in on itself, warning of the very evil the poem purports to laud.

The poet then turns to the economic and social impact of the possibility of increased coal mining on an impoverished Ayrshire. Following a long lament on the extended series of financial disasters that have struck this part of Scotland, culminating in the Ayr bank failure, the poem returns to Dundonald's praise:

As *Phoebus*, with his glorious light,
Dispels the gloomy shades of night,
The world that late in darkness lay,
Transported, hails the cheerful day;

So AYR-SHIRE lifts her drooping head,
Erewhile in gloomy darkness laid,
And casting round her wond'ring eyes,
Beholds DUNDONALD great arise;
And stretching forth his gen'rous hand,
To save from death a ruin'd land!

But chief MUIRKIRK, a poor, starv'd place,
With *hunger* painted in it's face,
With joy may bless the happy day,
That e'er your LORDSHIP came this way.
Her sons, before that you came here,
Could scarce afford to drink small beer,
And oft were fain to hold with water,
Make now the *mutchkin stoup* to clatter:
They all before had scarce two groats,
When now their pocket's lin'd with *notes*.¹²⁶

By the 1780s Muirkirk was the center of a growing Ayrshire mining and iron industry. Dundonald and the British Tar Company had located an extensive tar works there in 1785, and the Muirkirk Ironworks was founded in 1786. In the event, the prosperity promised in the poem collapsed abruptly when in 1793 the Royal Navy decided to sheath its vessels in copper rather than pitch.¹²⁷ Muirkirk remained a relatively “poor, starv'd place./With hunger painted in it's face” into the nineteenth century, when the railroad boom after 1835 gave a fillip to iron-ore smelting and to Muirkirk's fortunes.¹²⁸ Lapraik's panegyric looks forward hopefully to an era of sustained plenty for the laboring poor, freed from the oppressive landlords of “The Honest Farmer.”

¹²⁶ Lapraik, *Poems*, 97-98.

¹²⁷ See J. Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, pp. 31-2. In fact, Dundonald, who never made a dime from his patent on the coal-tar process, went bankrupt and died penniless in Paris in 1831.

¹²⁸ The founding of the Muirkirk Iron Works in 1787, though according to Bruce Lenman, the industry suffered from “intermittent development and stagnation” until after 1835, when technological and transportation improvements opened larger markets for Scottish iron. B. Lenman, *An Economic History of Scotland*, 129-32.

We may also read this poem in terms of Popean mock-epic. Consider the next poem in the volume, entitled “Lines Put upon a Poet leading to the Tar-Work at Muirkirk, 1786”:

HALT, Passengers, come here and see
What *Fortune* has bestow’d on me.
A *Field* run o’er with *moss* and *glaur*,
Yet in it’s bow’ls is *Coal-Pit Tar*;
Not only *Tar*, but *Paint* and *Oil*,
And *Salts* to make one spout a mile;
Magnesia, and G-d knows what,
Are all extract from my *Coal-Pit*.

A *Noble Lord*, of Ayr-shire blood,
Owns all my *minerals* are good;
Both *Coal* and *Lime*, and *Ir’n* and *Clay*,
More rich than on the banks of *Spey*.
May that great *Lord* for ever shine,
First *Chymist* of the Scottish line!

Sure Nature nothing made in vain,
Though man must toil with *grief* and *pain*,
That worthy *Lord*, with *Art Divine*,
Doth honour to all Ayr-shire men;
Which shows that Nature still intends,
Ev’n though ‘tis late, to make amends;
And cause MUIRKIRK surmount the globe,
Before that she give her last throb!¹²⁹

This poem represents Lord Dundonald’s achievement from a different and perhaps darker perspective. Here the speaker appears anxious to publicize the turn of fortune’s wheel that has converted a worthless field of “moss and glaur” to a profitable mine, stopping passengers in mid-career to “come here and see.” He initially affects knowledge of minerals, but soon betrays complete ignorance (“G-d knows what”). A “Noble Lord, of Ayrshire blood,/Owns all my *minerals* are good”; the dual meaning of the word “owns”

¹²⁹ Lapraik, *Poems*, 99-100.

doubles the speaker's claim of ownership and his faith in his lordship's authority as the "First *Chymist* of the Scottish line," alluding to Joseph Black and the industrial chemists that revolutionized the Scottish iron industry and made Scotland the workshop of empire in the nineteenth century.¹³⁰

The poet's seeming optimism gives way to a note of anxiety, if not desperation, in the third stanza. Muirkirk, as in the previous poem, is close to "her last throb." The speaker's appeal to Nature's redemptive "intention" veils his uneasiness that coal-tar may be another fool's gold or worse. Nature's belatedness seems almost arbitrary and cruel. After all, the natural order gives the rich the means to get richer at the expense of the poor. The working man "must toil in grief and pain," while the "worthy Lord" with his "Art Divine" brings fame and fortune to the same old propertied elite. Though set to profit from Muirkirk's rise to global economic prominence in the new British imperial order, the speaker in the poem cannot fully disassociate from the traditional moral economy and its paternalistic ethos. Lapraik's conservative radicalism burns through even the most formal of poetic disguises—the panegyric—revealing a deep-seated skepticism of the values of an acquisitive capitalist class. Fortune gifts the individual in the poem, not the social body. Virtue continues to be located in the plebeian caste.

David Sillar and Scottish Bourgeois Nationalism

David Sillar was born in 1760 at Spittalside, near Tarbolton. Sillar left his father's tenant farm as a young man to open a school at Commonsie. Finding little financial success in teaching, Sillar moved to Irvine and opened a grocery business. The

¹³⁰ See T. Devine, "Industrialisation," 60.

first we hear of Sillar's association with Burns is during the Lochlea period of Burns's residence near Tarbolton.¹³¹ The younger poet joined Burns's social circle and became a prominent member of Burns's Bachelor's Club, formed in 1781 in Tarbolton.¹³²

According to Sillar, a close friendship grew up between the two men:

Mr. Robert Burns was some time in the parish of Tarbolton prior to my acquaintance with him. . . . Whether my acquaintance with Gilbert [Burns] was casual or premeditated, I am not now certain. By him I was introduced not only to his brother, but to the whole of that family, where in a short time I became a frequent, and I believe, not an unwelcome visitant. After the commencement of my acquaintance with the Bard, we frequently met upon Sundays at church, when, between sermons, instead of going with our friends or lasses to the inn, we often took a walk in the fields. . . .¹³³

Sillar's apparently small means during the hungry 1780s induced Burns to write in his

"Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet":

It's hardly in a body's pow'r,
To keep, at times, frae being sour,
 To see how things are shar'd;
How *best o' chiels* are whyles in want,
While *Coofs* on countless thousands rant,
 And ken na how to ware't;
But DAVIE, lad, ne'er fash your head,
 Tho' we hae little gear;
We're fit to win our daily bread,
 As lang's we're hale and fier:
 'Mair spier na, nor fear na,'
 Auld age ne'er mind a fet;
The last o't, the warst o't,
 Is only but to beg.¹³⁴

¹³¹ R. Crawford, *The Bard*, p. 85. See also *The Life and Works of Robert Burns*, Robert Chambers, ed. Rev. William Wallace, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1896).

¹³² C. Rogers and J. C. Craig, *The Book of Robert Burns: genealogical and historical memoirs of the poet, his associates and those celebrated in his writings*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh, 1889-91), 28.

¹³³ Rogers and Craig, *The Book of Robert Burns*, 28.

¹³⁴ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 97.

Indeed, the cost of producing his own volume of poetry helped drive Sillar and his grocery shop into bankruptcy. Like Lapraik, Sillar was committed to a debtor's prison, where he presumably begged the five pounds he needed to pay his debt, apparently not from the "friends" who so signally failed to patronize his poetry. Sillar returned to teaching, this time opening a school for the instruction of sailors in navigation. This venture proved more financially rewarding, eventually yielding Sillar an annual income of a hundred pounds and enabling him to marry (twice) and raise children. Unlike Lapraik, who never escaped poverty, Sillar prospered, ultimately inheriting the farm at Spittalside from a younger brother and a healthy sum of money from two elder brothers who traded in Africa. Sillar now had sufficient independent wealth to give up the navigation school. He retired to Irvine, where he became a magistrate and died peacefully in 1830.¹³⁵

David Sillar faces Lapraik across a generational divide. While his poems exhibit some of the same anxieties and insecurities of caste as those of the older poet, they do not hearken back to estates satire or socio-religious allegory. Instead, Sillar treats contemporary Scottish economic and social conditions as a function of the alienation of Scots from their "true" national identity. At the same time, his affinity and shared poverty with Burns do not produce a similar political reaction; we see very little of Burns's republicanism or overt reference to Scotland's heroic age of independence. Instead, Sillar appears more or less content to remain within the ambit of "common sense" virtue, much as Lapraik does. But Sillar's poems are more heavily inflected by

¹³⁵ R. H. Stoddard, *Under the Evening Lamp*, vol. 1 (New York, 1892), 8-12.

Scots vernacular than Lapraik's, marking him as more of a "national" poet in this respect. Whereas Lapraik often uses Scots to emphasize caste distinction and his own plebeian identity, Sillar seems more conscious of the language's demarcation of cultural boundaries between Scotland and England. In this context I would argue that Lapraik is the more versatile poet in terms of genre (though Sillar certainly demonstrates familiarity with genre), while Sillar explores more deeply the use of Scots as poetic language. The conservative radical Lapraik thus emerges, in this respect, as more "British" than his nationalistic bourgeois compatriot.

Sillar's *Poems*, published in Kilmarnock in 1789, contains more than 50 poems and songs. This selection will examine Sillar's handling of political, social, and economic subjects, as well as his "national" characteristics. One of the early poems in the volume, "To the Critics, An Epistle," claims for the poet a similar "lad o' pairts" status as that attributed to Burns. Invoking Allan Ramsay ("Few praises to our songs are due;/But pray, Sir, let's hae ane frae you"), the poet pleads for critics to take into account his humble, plebeian origins:

Then know, when I these pieces made,
Was toiling for my daily bread:
A scanty learning I enjoy'd;
Sae judge how I hae it employ'd.
I ne'er depended for my knowledge,
On School, Academy, nor College.
I gat my learnin's at the flail,
An' some I catch'd at the plough tail.
Amang the brutes I own I'm bred,
Since herding was my native trade.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ David Sillar, *Poems* (Kilmarnock, 1789), 14.

Though James Paterson takes Sillar at his word, one suspects that the poet's "scanty learning" is not far inferior to that of Burns, though his primary occupation as a youth was likewise "catching at the plough tail" on his father's farm.¹³⁷ Indeed, the poems reflect not only an intimate knowledge of the Bible as we might expect, but also demonstrate familiarity with classical genres and contain allusions to Greek and Roman mythology and poetry, church and national history, and contemporary doctrinal controversies. Burns's meteoric ascent to cultural prominence in Edinburgh by assuming the modest role of an untutored genius is no doubt on Sillar's mind, but it is equally important to the poet to establish his poetic identity as an imitator of Ramsay, Fergusson, and Burns.¹³⁸ This self-identification is reiterated in Sillar's "Epistle to R. Burns":

WHILE Reekie's Bards your Muse
 Commen',
 An' praise the numbers o' your pen,
 Accept this kin'ly frae a frien',
 Your Dainty Davie,
 Wha ace o' hearts does still remain,
 Ye may believe me.

I ne'er was muckle gi'en to praisin',
 Or else ye might be sure o' fraisin':
 For trowth I think, in solid reason,
 Your kintra reed
 Plays sweet as ROBIN FERGUSSON',
 Or his on Tweed.¹³⁹

Your *Luath*, *Coefar* bites right fair;

¹³⁷ "Here the author admits his ignorance of classical learning, and is apparently quite unambitious of the honours of scholarship." Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 39.

¹³⁸ Robert Crawford likewise notes Sillar's occasional jealousy of Burns's success, but emphasizes the poets' close friendship and Burns's debt to Sillar's musicality. Sillar, too, composed songs and inspired Burns to take up the fiddle (unsuccessfully, as things turned out). R. Crawford, *The Bard*, 85-90.

¹³⁹ That is, Ramsay's.

(Which to my cost I feel)
In sechtin sair wi' *luckless brutes*,
Till they kick'd up my heel.

Now fare-ye-weel, my guid frien' RAB,
May *luck* and *health* attend ye;
If I do weel, I'll bless the day
That e'er I came to ken ye:

But on the tither han', should folk
Me for my nonsense blason,
Nae doubt I'll curse th'unlucky day,
I listen'd to your fraisin.

May that great *Name* that ye hae got
Untainted aye remain!
And may the *Laurels* on your head
Ay flourish fresh and green!

The LORD maintain your honour aye,
And then ye needna fear,
While I can write, or speak, or think,
I am your frien' sincere.¹⁴¹

Here we see the trope of modesty once again, but despite the poem's intensive use of Scots, the poet gives no explicit praise for Burns's revival of an authentic Scottish poesy. Indeed, the acknowledgement of Burns's fame appears as an afterthought (the poet's reflections on his life struggles and creative exhaustion dominate the poem) and remains limited to hoping for the preservation the younger man's "Name" and "honour," hardly Scottish national attributes. Even the form of the poem—four-line stanzas with octosyllabic couplets rhymed abcb—resists the "national" Standard Habbie revived by Fergusson and others.

¹⁴¹ Lapraik, *Poems*, 39-41.

Sillar's overt Scottish nationalism might well appear to mark the generational gap yawning between the older and younger Ayrshire poets and stake out different ideological ground. Lapraik's critique of the "old" and "new" Scotland makes no gesture toward an idealized Scottish past of political and cultural independence, but recognizes the reality of power by Scottish lairds regardless of British overlordship. Sillar, on the other hand, recasts the question of power as a national one; the only compensation for the loss of the Scottish state is the refounding of the Scottish nation on "indigenous" cultural aesthetic principles.

This aesthetic nationalism is again made explicit in "Epistle to the Author, By J. H*****N." The poem, likewise composed in Standard Habbie, presents itself as a letter to Sillar from a poet recently arrived in Irvine, where he finds "Sic plenty o' *Ramsaic* men" as to render Ayrshire a second "Parnassus":

Let you an' I, wi' ilka chiel,
 Whene'er we wad Parnassus spiel,
 Sing woods an' trees, or ony fiel',
 Or ought that's bonny;
 An' no ay trample wi' our quill
 Upo' Mess Johny.

Horace an' *Virgil* baith did sing
 O' woods, rivers, an' ev'ry spring,
 O' mountains an' each harmless thing;
 An' mayna we
 Mak woods an' hills aroun' us ring
 In poetry?

They sang Tiber, that flow'd thro' Rome,
 Meander, an' swift Hermodoon;
 An' mayna we in Irvine Town,
 Wi' equal flame,
 Sing Irvine, Ayr, Garnock, an' Doon,
 As weel as them?

But I maun now lay by my quill;
I hope ye winn tak it ill,
That I hae sent these lines you till;
 Or will't be harm,
Some night wi' you take drink a gill,
 Our nebs tae warm?

Sae I'll nae langer, at this time,
Fash you tae read sic ill spun rhyme:
Be pleas'd, Sir, tae accept this line
 Frae Jock or John,
A real frien', without design,
 Yours, H*****n.¹⁴²

Here the local muse combines a judicious imitation of classical models with Scottish sociability. If Edinburgh resembles the “Athens of the North” in which every educated man is a philosopher, Ayrshire mirrors the Attic countryside in which every farmer spouts poetry. At the same time, the displaced narrative of the poem (the newcomer appears carried away in a gush of emotion) may be read to ironize the writer’s characterization of Ayrshire’s aesthetic landscape. His rhyme is “ill spun,” and the comparison of Irvine, Ayr, Garnock, and Doon to Greece and Rome is hyperbolic at best. Yet the poet’s sincerity and desire for friendship “without design” distinguish him from mere fame-seeking poetasters. He identifies with the communal values intrinsic to “real” Scots poetry, the poetry of the hearth and the fields, of work and play. In late eighteenth-century Scottish poetry, the rural landscape is still peopled and generative, as Thomas Crawford has put it, of an active aesthetic of “love, labour, and liberty.”

¹⁴² Sillar, *Poems*, 89-90.

A third example from Sillar's volume makes a powerful claim for Scots as the language of "indigenous" British poetry. Introducing an extended didactic poem called "The Duel," the poet announces:

Give ear a' people, while that I rehearse
Britannia's follies in her native verse:
Nor think our foibles, tho's they're clad in
 satin,
Deserve their painting frae the Greek or Latin.
A Scotchman's ears shou'd never tak offence,
Because his failings are na wrote in French.
A country's dialect still will do maist good,
Within the bounds where 'tis best understood.
If wrote unknown, 'twill raise our mirth or
 spleen
As much when heard o', as when it is seen;
So I a Scotchman send a Scot amang you:
Gif do him justice, f—h he'll never wrang
 You;
But if ye fight, he'll cut you to the bone.
The foll'wing dress wha fits may pit it on.¹⁴³

Here the poet, a self-identified "Scotchman," proclaims an intention to "rehearse/
Britannia's follies in her native verse" (rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter) and sends
"a Scot amang you" for that purpose. This Scot, moreover, if resisted will "cut you to the
bone." Who is this Scottish emissary with violent propensities? Whose resistance will
provoke him? What anxiety is contained or elicited in an otherwise unremarkable
denunciation of the vice of dueling that might draw such a response and cause the poet to
issue this warning?

The poet commences in a defensive posture. He claims that his Scots "dialect"
best suits a description of "Britannia's follies," suggesting the moral corruption of the

¹⁴³ Sillar, *Poems*, 18.

British state and its potential for purification by authentic “national” discourse. Indeed, Greek, Latin, and French are the artificial languages of the classically trained British elites. The use of language separates true Scots from those to whom Scots is “unknown”; the poet trains his sights on the arrogant elites who purge Scotticisms from their dialects, cozen their English overlords in the name of the Union, and treat native speakers as objects of Johnsonian ridicule or scorn. In other words, Scottish identity is determined linguistically: we know the presence of a Scot “[A]s much when heard o’, as when . . . seen.” Situating the Scottish nation within language allows Sillar to reach across caste boundaries in a way Lapraik, for example, does not attempt. Whereas Lapraik bases his critique of Scottish society on traditional socio-economic grievances, Sillar suggests the reconciliation of historically-determined caste tension through the creation of a linguistically-determined, unified Scottish nation.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, this type of nationalism can be highly aggressive when activated by resistance, particularly by resistance from within the nation itself. One cannot help but read this poem as a rebuke to the Edinburgh literati and their attempts simultaneously to claim and deracinate Burns. It also explodes the concept of the “Caledonian antisyzygy” by insisting on a unified Scottish identity that strips away the supposed contradictions of Scotland’s history of political conflict and religious disputation.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ In another context, Ian Duncan has suggested that this aesthetic or cultural nationalism is a product of both Edgeworth’s and Scott’s invention of the “Scottish” novel and the periodical wars between the Whig-controlled *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood’s Magazine’s* “Tory Romanticism.” See Ian Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow: the novel in Romantic Edinburgh*.

¹⁴⁵ This term refers to the proposition, advanced in 1919 by G. Gregory Smith, Professor of English at Queen’s College, Belfast, that Scottish literature evinces a fundamental

The poem's morally empowered "Scotchman" proceeds to tell a cautionary tale of the dangers of drinking, disputation, and dueling. He locates these peculiar vices not in the laboring classes, who work hard by day and dally innocently by night, but among the rich:

Hail! morning, hail! light now begins
to peep,
An' lads an' lasses rising frae their sleep:
The country peasant threshing in his barn,
While his kin' spouse sits thrifty at her yarn.
The fire kindl'd, an' the morning past,
She calls him in, kin'mate, to break his fast.
When that is o'er, he goes again to wark,
An' toils wi' pleasure till the day grows dark;
When ilka beast demands his watchfu' care,
Thro' the lang nights, when fiels are bleak
an' bare.
Then 'side the ingle, ilka lad an' lass,
Wi' merry tale, the winter ev'ning pass.
At hame, when tir'd, the lads gae wi' their rock,
An' wi' some neebor reft an' pass their joke;
An' when the night 'bout hafflins gins to pass,
Ilk lad gaes out, an' wi' him taks his lass,
Where they may kiss, an' love, an' free frae
harm,
Nae laird mair happy, nae lady mair warm.
An' when the time is come for them to shed,
They kiss an' part, an' gang home to bed.

Not so the man, wha needs na work or toil,
Whase fortune's plac'd him on a richer soil;
A soil weel fitted for the best o' seeds,
Or if neglected, for the warst o' weeds.
The first, by care, like the green laurel shoots;
The last, by vice, is sunk beneath the brutes.
Be this your care, to hae a perfect crop;

bipolarity of realism and fantasy. Smith identifies this tradition as medieval and based on a unique instability of Scottish culture. The concept continues to influence Scottish literary criticism and inform notions of Scottish exceptionalism. See G. Carruthers, *Scottish Literature*, 11-14.

Pull up what's noxious, an' luxuriance lope.
The tender plant, let nae unworthy sprout
Infect it's blossom, or disturb it's root;
Then in the harvest, out o' due regard,
Content, wealth, honour, a' will you reward.
But if neglect the laurels an' the bays,
An' frae wild nature think to merit praise;
Or think nae person ever could you match,
Whase goodness kept them frae the dire de-
bauch.

Thus sober people are made laughing stocks,
To those whase brag's how aft they've had
the pox.

Nor are the gentry, whole they have na trode,
The road to vice, an' ev'ry visious rode.
Such things as these, if they did never ken,
They cou'd na be right modern gentlemen.¹⁴⁶

The Hogarthian rake, a *locus classicus* of eighteenth-century “Englishness,” is here contained within a Scottish critique of “modern gentlemen.” While the poet conventionally chastises the idle, propertied classes for a variety of sins, he nevertheless marks these sins as characteristically and specifically English. Later in the poem, when describing the “gentlemen” antagonists’ drunken argument over a woman, the poet switches into an allegorical mode, attributing their lust to “little *Cupid's fire*” and comparing the mounting anger of the erstwhile duelists to “*Pluto's or Mogul's . . . furious rage.*” As we have seen in the poem’s introduction, classical languages belong to the cultural elites bent on eliminating Scottish national distinctiveness through unionist assimilation. English gentlemen speak in foreign tongues, and their emulation of foreign manners and vices contaminates the purity of indigenous Scottish love and courtship.

¹⁴⁶ Sillar, *Poems*, 21-23.

The elite advocates for the Union cannot have it both ways; Scottish and English national cultures can hardly co-exist, much less integrate.

At the climax of the poem, the poet steps between the combatants:

O Happy for you, that aid was sae near,
Which sav'd your life! an' wha, withouten
fear,
His ain did venture, while he stood between
Your horrid arms, which look'd saw stern an'
keen.
This ventrous hero merits your regard,
An' tender friendship, as his just reward;
For doing what he nobly dar'd to do,
An' offer'd life a sacrifice for you.¹⁴⁷

The Scotchman's "heroic" intervention not only avoids bloodshed, it reverses the current of linguistic practice and its correlative moral influence. The "tender friendship" of the plebeian, plain-speaking Scot trumps the supposed chivalric values of the English gentleman, claiming for Britannia a revised polarity based, at least initially, on national difference rather than assimilation. But can a Scotchman and an Englishman share the common ground of friendship in the face of such difference? The poet is not so sure, and the English may be irredeemably incorrigible. As the poet laments in the final couplet, "[B]ut turpid actions never can affront/The man wha's led by Satan, pride, or -----." We are left to imagine the final rhyme with "affront," but there is little suggestion of any real or lasting reformation in English attitudes or Anglo-Scottish relations. The duel thus becomes a figure for national rivalry, but not simply an Anglo-Scottish rivalry; the poem also targets assimilationists who repudiate Scottish linguistic and cultural identity in hopes of currying favor with an alien invader. Scots, the poet tells us, would rather

¹⁴⁷ Sillar, *Poems*, 27.

extend the hand of friendship than start a fight, but they are not afraid of a fight if one is foisted upon them. The poem raises the possibility of revolt from below in defense of communal Scottish values rooted in the rhythms and customs of rural life, a possibility Henry Dundas and his minions came to heed in the 1790s.¹⁴⁸

Even so, Sillar has no clearly articulated political program, whether Jacobite, Jacobin, or constitutionalist Whig. In his “Epistle to J. W****N, Student of Divinity, Edinburgh,” his relative indifference to doctrinal differences seems evident as well:

My patience, lad, is clean worn out,
An’ silence I maun break, nae doubt;
But kensna how ye’ll like this route
 My muse has tane;
Yet I’m resolv’d to hae a bout
 Wi’ you again.

I’m thinkin’ ye hae me forgot,
Sin’ twa last letters that I wrote,
Nae answer to them e’er I got;
 Which looks sae odd,
I fear they’ve tane the back-door trott,
 An’ miss’d the road.

But sin’ they’re gane, it maksna whether:
I’m now set down to write anither;
An’ should they chance to meet thegither,
 At your levee,
Ye’ll get twa droll anes then, my brither,
 An’ maybe three.

Thro’ mony a Bishop, Dean, an’ Doctor,
I’ll warran lair, poor thing, ye’ve fought her;
An’ whyles, nae doubt, ye’ll think ye’ve caught her,
 Till out she slip
Frae ‘tween your han’s, while ilka mocker
 Cries, Haud the grip.

¹⁴⁸ As discussed in the Introduction, most historians agree that Dundas took the threat of plebeian revolt very seriously.

But dinna think that I'm in jeerin';
For ignorance maun ay be speerin';
'Mang a' the book which ye've been wearin',
 Could ye no sen'
A real gude, or unco queer ane,
 To you auld frien'?

When ye come back frae out your teachin',
To try the trade which we ca' preachin',
Will ye be flytin' or be fleechin'
 Wi' silly fock;
Or will ye free them frae, or keep them,
 'Neath yon auld yoke?

Will ye appear i' the *New Light*,
Which pits sae mony in a fright;
Or come an' *Orthodoxian Wight*,
 Inspir'd an' proud,
An roarin' H-ll wi' a your might
 Tae please the crowd?

Whate'er ye are, be sure an' fix't;
Opinions ne'er haltin' atwixt;
Whilk hath right mony fair perplext,
 An' wi' ilk doubt,
An' win' o' doctrine, hafflins mixt,
 An' drove about.

There's fock about this place sae fell,
That ilk ane that's no like themsell,
They reprobate, an' sen' to H-ll
 To warm their skin;
Whare get they sic a pow'r, O tell,
 Gif ye do ken?

Auld feckless fock, trowth wyles they fear,
Wi' torments dreadfu' an' severe;
Ithers unmov'd can stan' an' hear
 Them deal d-mn-tion
Amang the wicket, far an' near
 Aroun' the nation.

Wha is't, think ye, dis them inspire

Wi' sic an awfu' kin' o' fire?
Whilk frae the lower or the higher
 Abode dis't come?
For me, I likena to come nigher
 For fear o' yon.

I think my pen I now will quat;
I hope nae harm frae what is wrote;
An' till your answer I hae got,
 I will remain,
Yours, David Sillar, an' why not,
 Humble servain?¹⁴⁹

As Liam McIlvanney has persuasively argued, Burns draws on his Scottish Presbyterian inheritance in two distinct ways: “the New Light, with its subjection of all forms of authority to the tribunal of individual reason,” and “the traditional contractarian political theory long associated with Presbyterianism.”¹⁵⁰ Can a similar claim be made for Sillar? The poet demands that the young student declare his partisanship in the disputes currently (and seemingly endlessly) riving the Scottish Kirk. He asks whether the young divine will preach Old or New Light doctrine: “will ye be flytin’ or be fleechin’/Wi’ silly fock;/ Or will ye free them frae, or keep them, /’Neath yon auld yoke?” This verse is particularly emphatic, given its alliterative effect and use of the archaisms “flytin’” and “fleechin’.” “Flyting,” a noun connoting the practice of trading abusive invectives with a poetic rival, is associated with sixteenth-century Scottish poets such as William Dunbar (“The flyting of D. and Kennedie,” 1508) and Alexander Montgomerie (“The flyting betwixt M. and Polwart,” 1585). In this sense of the term, the poem may be read as a flyting—or at least as an invitation to a flyting—directed at the young scholar who

¹⁴⁹ Sillar, *Poems*, 57-60.

¹⁵⁰ L. McIlvanney, “Presbyterian Radicalism and the Politics of Robert Burns,” *Love and Liberty*, 179.

refused to acknowledge Sillar's missives. It can also mean reproaching or rebuking, which here characterizes Old Light preaching.¹⁵¹ "Fleeching" denotes coaxing or wheedling, presumably typical, in the poet's view, of moderate, "enlightened" Presbyterianism.

The poet advises the student to pick a side and "fix't"; "haffling," or shilly-shallying, it seems, is even worse than acting the "Orthodoxian wight," "roarin' H-ll wi' a' your might." At the same time, however, he asks what inspires the Old Light ranters who "deal d-mn-tion": "Wha is't, think ye, dis them inspire/Wi' sic awfu' kin' o' fire?" As for the poet, he doesn't want to get close enough to find out, "[F]or fear o' yon." While not explicitly counseling the student to avoid the radical Calvinist "yoke," Sillar nevertheless distances himself (and by implication, all reasonable people) from those "fock . . . sae fell" who demonize others based on religious difference. Indeed, "flytin'" over religious doctrine threatens the "nation" itself, undermining Scotland's imagined national unity and enabling its absorption into the British state. Internal bickering over obscure theological niceties thus serves British interests; the political resistance to Hanoverian rule once and for all crushed in the aftermath of the '45 has turned inward, dividing the Scottish nation along sectarian lines. In the end, it doesn't matter which side the student chooses. Either way "the trade which we ca' preachin'" no longer carries the banner of Scottish identity, which even the martyrs of the Covenanting tradition did, in spite of their excesses. For the poet, religion should be considered as both a national characteristic and a matter of private conscience. It should not establish a standard of

¹⁵¹ *OED*, 2d. edition (Oxford, 1989).

public morals or conduct nor determine an individual's membership in a social body. If in "The Duel" Sillar throws down a linguistic gauntlet for the national community, this poem maps the nation's value system as broadly Presbyterian, communal, and egalitarian. Sillar thus negotiates the Old Light/New Light controversy not by taking sides, as Burns does, but by advocating the redirection of internal energy away from divisive doctrinal controversies to a broader justification of Scotland's claims to nationhood.

Sillar closes his Poems with four songs, the last of which was written for the King's Birthday (June 4, 1787). But instead of the traditional celebration of the Hanoverian monarchy and the public and private virtues of its current representative, the verses call for an end to imperial wars abroad and political faction at home:

Tune, The Lilies of France

I.

Let Britons rejoice in the prospect of peace,
When freedom shall reign, and oppression shall cease;
When tyrants their pow'r shall be forc'd to lay down,
And liberty smile from the cot to the crown.

CHORUS

Drink success to freedom,
Till tyranny's brought down;
And liberty smile
From the cot to the crown.

II.

A nation in bondage can never be brave;
Then Britons detest the mean name of a slave;
And rouse like old heros, till liberty smile
Alike thro' all parts of the great British isle.

III.

A health to the King, may he long rule the state,
Assisted by men who are good as they're great;
Till freedom and friendship their int'rests entwine,
And faction and party are forc'd to resign.¹⁵²

The song appears Thomsonian in its Augustan rhetoric and familiar patriotic appeal to British liberty as a bulwark against continental tyranny. Yet on this occasion the oppressed “slaves” are British, and the tyrant is the British “state” itself, embodied by the King, his ministers, and the political factions that monopolize power “thro’ all parts of the great British isle.” In calling for the arousal of the “old heros,” the poet gestures toward Scotland’s rich history of resistance to English tyranny: the Jacobite rebels of 1715 and 1745, Viscount Dundee and his pyrrhic victory at Killiecrankie (1689), George Buchanan’s famous defense of popular sovereignty in *De Jure Regni apud Scotos* (1579), the Declaration of Arbroath (1320), Wallace and Bruce. Rather than suggesting that Scotland would be better off out of the Union, however, the poet appeals to “freedom and friendship” as the appropriate relationship between the nations that compose “Britain.” Instead, the so-called “Dundas despotism” has divided Scottish society between a co-opted, anglicized elite that monopolizes political power through domination of the legal and clerical professions and the disenfranchised people that clings to what is left of its culture, language, and history. Sillar’s brand of nationalism continually resists the temptation to nostalgia and sentiment often found in poetic laments about Scotland’s lost past. For him Britain is an accomplished political and historical fact, but that fact need not overwrite the continuing narrative of Scottish nationhood. Indeed, Scotland’s past is

¹⁵² Sillar, *Poems*, 219-20.

prologue; new heroes will arise to redress the imbalance of power in the state and restore liberty to freeborn Britons. Scotland's claims to nationhood will redeem those of the other "British" nations as well. In that sense, Wallace, Bruce, and their progeny properly belong to Britain; the history of Scotland is British history.

Isobel Pagan and the Refusal of "National" Identity

James Paterson relates the following anecdote about Isobel "Tibbie" Pagan:

An old clergyman of our acquaintance states that he once visited Tibbie in company with a young lady. "We found her," adds the writer, "in her den, the most realization of a witch or hag that I ever saw. She had her Bible at her elbow. She told us of a satire that had been written on her, which stated that she was a strumpet when only twelve years of age, and that she would go to hell. 'Oh!' quo Tibbie, 'was not that great nonsense?' She sang a song to us, which she had composed by way of retaliation. The young lady's father and another gentleman came in search of her and me, and were greatly diverted when they found us in Tibbie's abode, listening to her 'screeching out poetic verse.' We gave her a half-a-crown each; and she said she was 'aye happy when decent folk ca'd on her!'"¹⁵³

A witch, a hag, a strumpet, a beggar, a woman, a poet. One wonders how women could ever have written at all, and indeed Paterson has to convince himself that such a figure could produce a lyrical poem as good as "Ca' the Yowes to the Knowes":

Ca' the yowes to the knowes,
Ca' them where the heather grows,
Ca' them where the burnie rows,
 My bonnie dearie.

As I gae'd down the water side
There I met my shepherd lad;
He row'd me sweetly in his plaid
 An' he ca'd me his dearie.

Will ye gang down the water side
And see the waves sae sweetly glide,
Beneath the hazels spreading wide?

¹⁵³ Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 117.

The moon it shines fu' clearly?

Ye shall get gowns and ribbons meet,
Caul-leather shoon to thy white feet;
And in my arms yese lie and sleep,
An' ye shall be my dearie.

If ye'll but stand to what ye've said,
Ise gang wi' you my shepherd lad,
And ye may row me in your plaid,
An' I shall be your dearie.

While water wimples to the sea,
While day blinks in the lift sae hie,
Till clay-cauld death shall blin' my e'e,
Ye shall be my dearie.¹⁵⁴

Burns composed two versions of the lyric, but according to Pagan's biographer "did not acknowledge Pagan as the original source."¹⁵⁵ Paterson credits Burns with "pruning" Pagan's original, which was edited by its publisher, Allan Cunningham, to excise "one verse, in which the heroine is made to express her apprehensions of a moonlight walk by the river side, though she had been before on the banks of the same stream, and 'row'd sweetly' in her shepherd's plaid."¹⁵⁶ Paterson adds that the "verse omitted for its indelicacy, is still farther characteristic of the Poetess of Muirkirk; and the assertion of Burns, who wrote in 1797, that the air or words were never before in print, to some

¹⁵⁴ Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 113. He appends the following comment: "This is a sweet little lyric; and its great superiority to the other known effusions of Isobel, is well calculated to raise a doubt whether it be really hers or not." Paterson concludes that the song is Pagan's.

¹⁵⁵ See T. W. Bayne and J. Potter, "Pagan, Isobel," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004-11). Burns's versions can be found in Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, at 338 and 823-24.

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 114. See also A. Cunningham, *The Songs of Scotland, ancient and modern; with an introduction and notes, historical and critical* (London, 1825), 276.

degree corroborates Pagan's claim to the authorship."¹⁵⁷ Margery Palmer McCulloch, on the other hand, argues that Pagan transmitted the song rather than composed it, "for this courtship folksong is much more sophisticated in idea and expression than any of the verses printed under Pagan's own name. To say this is not to denigrate Pagan or her contribution to the eighteenth-century song tradition. She is representative of good local folk poets and singers who worked in the tradition of transmitting and adapting existing songs and airs for their own local purposes."¹⁵⁸ Taking a middle course, Kirsteen McCue argues that the poem "exemplifies two important aspects of songs of the period. Firstly, they commonly hailed from an oral tradition and consequently appeared in numerous different versions. Secondly, there was often difficulty in distinguishing lyrics written by men and women."¹⁵⁹

In any event, Isobel Pagan thus comes before us as a surprising anomaly, an old witch who could, on occasion, write "sweetly" but whose low origins and scandalous way of life compel paternalistic critics to clean her up for presentation to respectable people (strikingly parallel to Burns's nineteenth-century cleansing). Even her DNB biographer concedes, "Pagan reputedly had a beautiful singing voice, but she was habitually drunk and unashamedly sexually promiscuous."¹⁶⁰ Paterson believes that people in the neighborhood of Muirkirk feared her tongue and temper: "However much

¹⁵⁷ Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 114. I do not know why Paterson dates Burns's comment to 1797, the year following the poet's death.

¹⁵⁸ M. McCulloch, *Women, Poetry and Song in Eighteenth-Century Lowland Scotland*, <http://www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk> (accessed August 22, 2013).

¹⁵⁹ K. McCue, "Women and Song 1750-1850," *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. D. Gifford and D. McMillan (Edinburgh, 1997), 60.

¹⁶⁰ Bayne and Potter, "Pagan, Isobel."

her character and mode of life might be reprobated, few were willing to offend her by expostulations or remarks; and she attained a sort of ascendancy, which the fear of her sarcasm and her crutch alike combined in enabling her to maintain.”¹⁶¹ Indeed, her penchant for vicious satire and violent temper earned her the nickname “Wicked Tibbie.” We are therefore constrained to read Pagan’s poetry through the triple veil of her gender, her poverty, and her unconventional moral conduct. Even if she had enjoyed the opportunity to produce poetry in the amount and quality of Burns’s, who can doubt that the bourgeois literati who honored the plowman while pardoning his peccadilloes would have consigned Pagan and her “screeching” to literary oblivion.

The conditions under which Pagan composed her verses were hardly propitious for “great” poetry, much less so than even those of Lapraik and Sillar, who by virtue of their gender enjoyed infinitely greater advantages of education and economic means (though these could be slight for them as well). Pagan was born in New Cumnock, Ayrshire, in 1741 or 1742 and lived for the remainder of her life in the Muirkirk area. Her autobiographical poem, “Account of the Author’s Lifetime,” describes her early life:

I was born near four miles from Nith-head,
Where fourteen years I got my bread;
My learning it can soon be told,
Ten weeks when I was seven years old.
With a good old religious wife,
Who liv’d a quiet and sober life;
Indeed she took of me more pains
Than some does now of forty bairns.
With my attention, and her skill,
I read the Bible no that ill;
And when I grew a wee thought mair,

¹⁶¹ J. Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 117.

I read when I had time to spare.¹⁶²

Abandoned by her parents, allegedly because of a birth defect that lamed her for life, Pagan was thrown upon the world with no resources except a considerable supply of wits. The care lavished on her education amounted to a few weeks of reading instruction in the Bible by a charitable woman, who in seeking to help Pagan save her soul tutored a poet. A local landowner, Admiral Keith Stewart, gave her an abandoned brick-house, once part of Lord Dundonald's tar works (the same lauded by Lapraik), which she inhabited for thirty years, operating an unlicensed spirit house and entertaining her patrons with "her dramatic monologues and bawdy songs."¹⁶³ It appears that Pagan's haunt was popular with both the local peasantry and gentry, particularly in August, when grouse hunting (a frequent subject of her poetry) attracted sportsmen from the surrounding counties.¹⁶⁴ Though Pagan could read, she could not write, and her friend William Gemmell, a Muirkirk tailor, transcribed the poems that were eventually published in 1803. Pagan died in 1821, and, accompanied to her grave by a large crowd, is buried in the Muirkirk churchyard.¹⁶⁵

Pagan's lyric ability (and reputed licentiousness) in the unpublished "Ca' the Yowes" to the Knowes finds its match in "The Crook and the Plaid":

¹⁶² Isobel Pagan, *A Collection of Songs and Poems on Several Occasions* (Glasgow, 1803), 4. All poems, except for "Ca' the Yowes to the Knowes" and "The Crook and the Plaid" are quoted from Pagan's 1803 volume. The other two can also be found in Kerrigan, *Anthology of Scottish Women Poets*.

¹⁶³ Bayne and Potter, "Pagan, Isobel."

¹⁶⁴ J. Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 116.

¹⁶⁵ J. Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 122. For an additional short biography of Pagan, see Suzanne Kord, *Women Peasant Poets in Eighteenth-Century England, Scotland, and Germany: Milkmaids on Parnassus* (Rochester, 2003), 268-69.

Ilk lassie has a laddie she lo'es aboon the rest,
Ilk lassie has a laddie, if she like to confess't,
That is dear unto her bosom whatever be his trade;
But my lover's aye the laddie that wears the crook and plaid.

Ilk morn he climbs the mountains, his fleecy flocks to view,
And hears the lav'rocks chanting, new sprun frae 'mang the dew;
His bonnie wee bit doggie, sae frolicsome and glad,
Rins aye before the laddie that wears the crook and plaid.

And when that he is wearied, and lies upon the grass,
What if that in his plaidie he hide a bonnie lass?—a
Nae doubt there's a preference due to every trade,
But commen' me to the laddie that wears the crook and plaid.

And in summer weather he is upon the hill,
He reads in books of history that learns him meikle skill;
There's nae sic joyous leisure to be had at ony trade,
Save that the laddie follows that wears the crook and plaid.

What though in storms o' winter part o' his flock should die,
My laddie is aye cheerie, and why should not I?
The prospect o' the summer can well mak' us glad;
Contented is the laddie that wears the crook and plaid.

King David was a shepherd while in the prime o' youth,
And following the flocks he ponder'd upon truth;
And when he came to be a king, and left his former trade,
'Twas an honour to the laddie that wears the crook and plaid.¹⁶⁶

Paterson thinks this poem “perhaps only wants the magic touch of a Burns to render it equal” to its counterpart (which was touched up by Burns), demonstrating once more that Burns's plaidie makes it very hard to see the other Ayrshire poets hidden beneath it.¹⁶⁷

Pagan's relationship with Burns proved equally ambivalent as those of Lapraik and Sillar, who likewise sought a share of Burns's poetic laurels only to be disappointed by rejection

¹⁶⁶ William Stanley Braithwaite, ed., *The Book of Georgian Verse* (New York, 1909); Bartleby.com., 2013. www.bartleby.com/333/165.html [accessed March 25, 2013].

¹⁶⁷ J. Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 120.

and obscurity (except in the epistolary poems Burns addressed to them). Upon Burns's death, Pagan penned this apologia, "On Burns and Ramsay":

Now Burns and Ramsay both are dead,
Although I cannot them succeed;
Yet here I'll try my natural skill,
And hope you will not take it ill.

You know their learning was not sma'
And mine is next to nane at a';
Theirs must be brighter far than mine,
Because I'm much on the decline.

I hope the public will excuse
What I have done here by the Muse;
As diff'rent men are of diff'rent minds,
My metre is of diff'rent kinds.¹⁶⁸

Whereas Lapraik and Sillar likewise deploy the trope of modesty to address their critical readers, Pagan, rather than positioning her poetry as competitive with that of Burns as her male counterparts do, seems more interested in moving beyond the Scottish vernacular and Standard Habbie of the dead poets. In the first stanza Pagan, having pronounced their demise, refuses succession, announcing that her "natural skill," rather than imitation of learned models, will inform her art. She thus claims authority not in the classical mode of Lapraik and Sillar, with their invocations of the Muses of poetry, but in the only way a woman peasant poet possibly can: she calls upon her own "Muse," who inspires her to compose "metre . . . of diff'rent kinds," distinct from the kind written by men. The cryptic allusion to her "decline" in the fourth verse of the second quatrain seems to refer to a dulling of the "brighter" learning of Ramsay and Burns, but having stated previously that she had "next to nane" it appears that the poet speaks of something else. I argue that

¹⁶⁸ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 6.

the poem adumbrates a poetics of “decline” in the obsolescent sense of the word, a wholly experiential idiom that falls away or turns aside from the dominant Scottish vernacular poetry championed by the dead poets (though her physical decline at the age of 60 is implied as well).

Viewed from this perspective, the two pastoral poems with which we commenced this discussion may be read as revising traditional genre poetry. Pagan does not deploy pastoral as a classical genre that celebrates the virtues of rural life and love, as we often see in Burns, Lapraik, Sillar, and others, but as a medium for bringing the experience of sexual pleasure out into the open as a form of poetic expression. In both “Ca’ the Yowes to the Knowes” and “The Crook and Plaid,” the shepherd’s implements are explicitly sexualized, mirroring the shepherd lad’s obvious intentions. In the former poem, the shepherd’s sweetheart takes some wooing before allowing the lad to “row me in his plaid,” while in the latter she conceals herself under it. But in both poems there seems to be little doubt that the love relationship will not long survive the inevitable cooling of sexual desire. The lad’s promise that “While water wimples to the sea,/While day blinks in the lift sae hie./Till clay-cauld death shall blin’ my e’e./Ye shall be my dearie” seems predictably callow, given that the maid has already fallen to his blandishments, just as “The prospect o’ the summer can weel mak’ us glad” indicates the fleetingness of passion before the chill of the “storms o’ winter.” Moreover, the seemingly odd reference to King David in the final stanza of “The Crook and Plaid” is comprehensible not only in terms of the shepherd king’s humble occupational origins, but, given the overt eroticism of the poem, in terms of his spectacular polygamy as well. We may also detect the patriot king

imagery of Jacobite poetry, both in the erotic appeal of the “Highland laddie” trope and the Davidic associations of the youthful Stuart prince, imbued with the purity of rural life, renewing the corrupt and urbanized kingship of the usurping Hanoverians.¹⁶⁹

Jacobite themes, however, do not constitute a primary staple of Pagan’s poetry in general, though parody and satire do. For example, Pagan’s ability to adapt conventional verse forms to her own “Muse” manifests in a wonderful mock-epic poem, simply titled “A New Song”:

There came a bold hero of late from the west,
Unto the moorlands where he thought the pouts* best; *partridges
And as on the road he did chance for to see
A pout and pursued it to the Lumagee.

When at Bellapath he had a fine chance,
Being of stout heart, he did boldly advance,
His powder was quick, and the shot he let flee,
Tho’ he could kill nothing at the Lumagee.

But discretion oblig’d him her meal pock to bear,
Expecting new favour, put him in good cheer;
He could not enjoy that which made him turn back,
To hunt thro’ the planting at night in the dark.

He is a brave shooter wherever he goes,
He loses much powder, tho’ not with his foes;
If he wants ammunition, if a pout he does see,
He will surely remember the old Lumagee.

These lines I will conclude, and lay down my pen,
Lest these simple verses should any offend;
The clash of the country tells many a lie,
But M—y was surely at the Lumagee.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ On the Jacobite song’s erotic fascination with the “laddie wi’ the tartan plaidie,” see W. Donaldson, *The Jacobite Song: political myyth and national identity* (Aberdeen, 1988), 54-58.

¹⁷⁰ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 20-21.

Paterson may have this poem in mind when he speaks of Pagan's volume as "doggerel," but one can hardly argue that this burlesque misses its satiric target.¹⁷¹ As she does with the shepherd lad in the lyrical poems, Pagan figures the "hero from the west" as primarily interested in sewing his oats rather than devastating the local fauna. More specifically, she equates hunting and love-making; masculine desire manifests itself in multiple acts of violence. A "pout" may signify either a partridge or a maid, but to the desiring machine they amount to the same thing.

The poem further alludes to the hunter's class superiority, his condescension "her meal pock to bear" as titillating chivalrous foreplay. The hunter's objective, a dead bird or a deflowered maid, seems equally desirable; the hunt is the thing, and the male aggressor is fully justified by rank and tradition to bag his prey. The final stanza identifying the hunter, however, gives us a taste of Pagan's legendary bite, as she turns the only weapon available to a defenseless maid against him. But the problem for women who are hunted, as the poem's narrator implies, is that the "brave shooter's" supremacy is not only physically but culturally assured before he ever loads his gun. The maid who refuses him at the Lumagee, who "made him turn back," may have evaded "the shot he let flee," but such an escape only provokes the hunter to renew the hunt with greater vigor. Still, Pagan's willingness to call out the hunter by name reveals something "diff'rent" about her Muse. While perfectly capable of imitating the forms of poetry used by learned men, a moment comes when she reveals (quite literally as we see here) the man behind the curtain—or under the plaidie.

¹⁷¹ J. Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 115.

Pagan's social satire unerringly lampoons the pretensions of the rural gentry. A brilliant example of this satiric mode can be found in "The Laird of Glenlee":

My name is J---k M---r, I care not who knows it,
For I am the laird of the lands of Glenlee,
And I am the man that can parritch and brose* it, *oatmeal or oat cake over which
And drink strong liquors, if you'll keep me free. boiled water of milk has been poured
I J---y M---r, was there e'er such another,
I'm laird of Glenlee, Lord Justice Clerk's brother,
And twenty fat wethers*, like rabbits I'll smother, *male sheep; castrated ram
And eat them myself at the mill of Glenlee.

Religion's a whim, I know nothing about it,
Its principles never were studied by me.
My belly is an idol, and if you dispute it,
Its altar is in state, at the mill of Glenlee,
Where thousands of victims I do yearly offer,
To know if there is any devotion a proffer,
That twice in the year, to the gold of my coffer,
When I lift the rents at the mill of Glenlee.

It is a long time since my kyte was disform'd,
And handsomeness it is a stranger to me;
My head's like a bull's, if it were as well horn'd,
It would fright all the cows on the mill of Glenlee.
My belly's so big, with the weight of my paunches,
The grease of my sides hangs over my haunches.
I'm render'd unable to kiss the fair wenches,
Which makes me lament at the mill of Glenlee.

I'm render'd unable for the pleasures of Venus,
And nothing like that is a pleasure to me,
With eating and drinking I nourish my genius,
I feed like a swine at the mill of Glenlee.
Behold, when I'm dead, they'll say there lies a fat one,
Another cries out, and drunkard and glutton;
Let them say what they will, I'll devour my lov'd mutton
With greed, while I live at the mill of Glenlee.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Pagan, *Poems and Songs*, 25-27.

Pagan's disgust at the exploitation and excess of the gentry equals that of Lapraik and is similarly framed in terms of estates satire. The laird both personifies gluttony (and perhaps lechery as well), as one would find in medieval allegory, and identifies a specific local figure, who no doubt recognizes himself as the target of the broadside. She does not even grant the buffoonish laird the humanizing style and wit of a Falstaff, instead convicting him by his own confession of the grossest incontinence. The laird's monologue, which commences in boastful and defensive self-assertion, unwinds itself, ending in shameless and almost masochistic self-loathing, particularly in the laird's description of his immense obesity in the third octave and his impotency in the fourth. To add insult to injury, the laird's sexual incapacity links to his cuckolding in his self-comparison to a "well horn'd" bull, and the images of castration multiply in the figure of the "wethers" slaughtered for the laird's table. By the end of the poem the laird compares himself to the "swine at the mill of Glenlee," parroting and parodying the Burkean slander of the seditious rabble, as well as emphasizing the lack of deference paid to the laird's local hereditary rank and status.

While "The Laird of Glenlee" is perhaps a more scurrilous *ad hominem* assault than Burns, Lapraik, or Sillar might have produced, it is no less serious-minded than the critiques of her male counterparts. Indeed, Pagan's social satire demonstrates a range of poetic forms and voices. Consider, for example, the epistolary poem, "A Letter to a Gentleman on the Death of his Pointer":

Sir, be pleas'd thir lines to read,
I fear they make you sad,
Your pretty little pointer's dead,
For he the sniffers* had.

*snuffles

As soon's we knew he was ta'en bad,
We quick the doctor brought,
He gave him physic of the best,
I'm sure he wanted nought.

We did all that we could for him,
In every respect:
And to prevent his trouble first,
We bled him in the neck.

When I heard that he was ta'en bad,
O, but I was wae,
For when he was from old Gabbens spain'd*, *weaned
He in my bosom lay.

He was a chearfu' bonny beast
As ever I did see,
He never did his nurse forget,
But still was kind to me.

When I remember at the door,
How he did loup and play,
A week his trouble was right fore,
Died on Sabbath-day.¹⁷³

This simple common meter features both rhymed verses of iambic tetrameter (first, third) and iambic trimeter (second, fourth), yet takes as its subject not the hymn of praise usually associated with this form but lightly ironic social comedy or mock elegy. In informing her master of the death of one of his hunting dogs, the servant uses a formal diction suitable to the dignity of the occasion, though she occasionally backslides into the vernacular (snifters, spain'd). Whether the master actually knows the pointer remains in doubt, for the servant has apparently “nursed” the dog herself since his weaning from “old Gabbens.” Here the poem suggests the genteel practice of putting out children for

¹⁷³ Pagan, *Poems and Songs*, 27-28.

wetnursing, creating strong affective bonds between the children of gentlemen and their working class “mothers,” while rendering filial relations cold and distant. Moreover, the nursemaid’s description of the dog’s illness as the “snifters” and its unnecessary and probably deleterious medical treatment heightens the comic effect but clouds the reader’s perception of her good faith. When the servant speaks of her affections for the pointer, she identifies herself in the first person singular, but when alluding to the dog’s treatment she shifts to the first person plural, thereby diffusing any personal responsibility for his death. This sliding between individual and collective voice seems discomfiting; the sum of the parts—the nurse’s love, the trivial illness, the dubious medical practice, and the dead dog—do not appear to add up to the whole of the story. A hint of the menace from below seeps out between the grammatical cracks and slippery self-representations the servant’s letter offers. Something is not right on the estate.

This disturbance takes explicit political form in “A New Song on the Times.” Echoing similar social and economic concerns voiced by Lapraik and Sillar from a decade earlier, in this poem Pagan initially postures her critique as a hymn of thanksgiving:

Let Britain’s subjects now rejoice,
Since peace and plenty’s come,
It is not drink nor music’s noise,
Nor beating of a drum.

But thankfulness it is requir’d,
With humble heart sincere,
Since Providence has been so kind,
As take pity on the poor.

Ye know its two long years and more,
The poor’s been sore oppress’d,

And dealers who had ought to sell,
They try'd who could get most.

Rejoice the markets has come down,
Half price they will not get,
Extortioners may join and mourn,
None of them I'll except.¹⁷⁴

The immediate historical context of the poem is the Treaty of Amiens (1801), which temporarily froze hostilities between France and the five powers, Britain, Spain, Prussia, Austria, and Russia. Famine had struck Scotland (and parts of England as well) in the mid- to late 1790s, triggering meal riots and reactionary suppression of “seditionists” and radical malcontents. Vagrancy and homelessness heightened upper class fears of social dissolution and overwhelmed parishes responsible for outdoor relief. Much of the popular anger, as the poem indicates, was directed at grain dealers, jobbers, and engrossers, but food scarcity and high prices could also be blamed on the rapacious landlord class and their lackeys in the British government.¹⁷⁵ Pagan’s ballad, however, avoids the kind pietistic vitriol we will observe in James Maxwell, for example, adopting an almost gentle, admonishing voice. Britain’s ills stem from the sin of pride—military and commercial hubris—rather than from the noxious effects of party factions, Dundas depotisms, or Pittite repressions, which would undoubtedly continue unabated had “Providence” not “been so kind./As take pity on the poor.” The poem continues in this vein, urging the privileged to recognize their moral duties:

Ye justices and gentlemen,
Ye sure have a great charge,
In time of need unto the poor,

¹⁷⁴ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 50-51.

¹⁷⁵ See C. Whatley, *Scottish Society, 1707-1830*, 170-74.

Your charity enlarge.

If widow, or the fatherless,
Goes hungry from your door,
You scarce a blessing can expect,
If you neglect the poor.

And what you give, take my advice,
Give cheerfully away,
You'll get it sevenfold restor'd,
I hope, some other day.

When world's trash is of no use,
Will stand you in no stead,
Nor knife and fork at beef or pork,
At any table head.¹⁷⁶

One can hear the echo of Blake's "Holy Thursday" in *The Songs of Innocence* (1789):

Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door

Pagan's ironic tone (as does Blake's), however, betrays the sharp edges of her address to "Ye justices and gentlemen," who, she plainly implies, are more like the Laird of Glenlee than "the aged men wise guardians of the poor." Gluttons and hoarders at home, they take a high-minded Burkean view of the established social order as dictated by the same "Providence" the speaker invokes. The poor will always be with us; the poor are morally prone to laziness and drunkenness; the poor are a dangerous threat to property. Indeed, after reminding the privileged of the parable of the camel and the eye of the needle, Pagan's speaker acknowledges their cant, anticipating the objections they will make to enlarging their charity:

For my part I am hearty still,
And ne'er sought charity;

¹⁷⁶ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 51.

But I'll regard them while I live,
That has been kind to me.

I cheerfully enjoy myself,
Never frets for world's wealth,
Contentment still shall be a feast,
While I enjoy my health.¹⁷⁷

This is a curious and certainly un-Blakean appendage. As a class representative of the poor, the speaker of the first eight quatrains may be perceived as a kind of collective social conscience, rehearsing formulaic moralisms and Christian compassion for widows and orphans, and gently chastising the rich for their parsimony. But in the final pair of quatrains the speaker enters the poem as Isobel Pagan, who threatens those who have not “been kind to me” with the weapon of poetry. Uninterested in “charity,” which she sees as a threat to her independence, Pagan becomes an avenging angel or, perhaps more accurately, a Dionysian force that will “cheerfully” wreak havoc on the Burkean social order. The repetition of the term “enjoy” in the last quatrain, the paradisaical ideal of the “feast of contentment,” and the emphasis on “health” over “wealth” all suggest the return of the Golden Age, but a return enforced by the menacing “regard” of the androgynous Dionysus, who comes to redress the imbalance of the world in the guise of a woman peasant poet. Only a poet in Pagan’s specific subject position, in fact, possesses the necessary moral authority to appropriate the law of the Gospels to the moral reformation of an iniquitous society. No Blakean bard after all, the poet erupts as a natural force from below that, through her independent, Dionysian self-hood, can, at least imaginatively, remake the patriarchy in her own image.

¹⁷⁷ Pagan, *Poems and Songs*, 51-52.

The last poem in Pagan's volume, simply titled "A New Song," narrates the bottom side of the hoped-for "peace" promised by "A New Song on the Times." Here Pagan deploys a nearly regular iambic trimeter (also often used by Blake), rendering a powerfully direct address to the same powers who in the previous song deliver the dubious peace in the previous song:

The French is in force now,
Our country to invade,
And to conquer Britain,
Great attempts have made,
But I hope our noble heroes,
Will pull the usurpers down,
Success to King George,
Long may he wear the crown.

There is word at present
That Buonaparte is fled,
And one general Moreau,
He doth him succeed.
Although he is a Scotsman,
He joins the French crew,
I leave you to judge
If his heart has been true.¹⁷⁸

The first octave mimics the loyalist appeal for all Britons to unite in opposition to the invader. But here the appeal sounds perfunctory, a kind of political catechism that must needs be honored only in the breach. In the second octave, the speaker retails a rumor that Napoleon has been defeated (probably in Egypt), and that "one general Moreau" has succeeded him. Indeed, Jean Victor Marie Moreau (1763-1813), a republican military hero for his victories over the Austrians, became disenchanted with Napoleon's imperial pretensions. His flirtation with royalists seeking to restore the Bourbons resulted in his

¹⁷⁸ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 76.

exile to the United States.¹⁷⁹ But he was no Scot, and it is conceivable that Pagan confuses Moreau with Étienne-Jacques-Joseph-Alexandre MacDonald (1765-1840), another French revolutionary war hero whose Jacobite father, Neil MacDonald, hailed from South Uist and took up exile in France following the 1745 uprising. MacDonald became one of Napoleon's most successful generals but fell under suspicion for supporting Moreau's alleged royalist plot in 1805. He subsequently rejoined Napoleon, serving in Spain and Russia, but following the emperor's abdication, threw his support to the Bourbons.¹⁸⁰ Be that as it may, we may still wonder why the speaker makes a special point of this supposed Scottish turncoat. Perhaps it accentuates the contrast between the "noble heroes" and "usurpers" mentioned in the first octave, but it might also draw attention to "King George," coded as the Hanoverian usurper in Jacobite poetry, and the possible restoration of the true Scottish monarchy with the help of French arms.¹⁸¹ Moreover, rather than denouncing the traitor, the speaker abstains from judgment, leaving the issue of whether "his heart has been true" to the reader. This would seem to allow space in the poem for both Jacobite and loyalist resonances, clouding the issue of what it means to be "loyal."

In this ambiguous posture the poem turns to the kind of Britain the wars with France has created:

¹⁷⁹ See Victor Moreau, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/392063/Victor-Moreau>, accessed August 22, 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Etienne-Jacques-Joseph-Alexandre MacDonald, Duc de Tarente, Marshal, http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/marshals/c_macdonald.html, accessed August 22, 2013.

¹⁸¹ On Scottish Jacobitism generally, see M. Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 1994), especially 50-58.

There's disputes at parliament,
And bribery at home,
Such conduct as this
Makes the war still go on.
But if truth would bear the sway,
And make deceit to cease,
It still might be hoped
There soon might be peace.

There is such taxations
We can scarcely bear,
Which makes the whole country
To be in a steer.
For men to be made soldiers,
The trade is broken down,
And leaves families mourning
In many a town.

But let every individual
Lay it to heart,
Be just in their station,
And act an honest part.
Be just in their dealing,
Act no over-rise,
It is my real opinion
There soon would be peace.¹⁸²

These are familiar complaints about government corruption and fractious political infighting. Nevertheless, approximately one in four Scottish men between the ages of 18 and 45 served in the British armed forces during the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods, with higher concentrations from many parts of the country, particularly the Highlands and northeast counties.¹⁸³ The commonplace observation that “For men to be made soldiers/The trade is broken down,/And leaves families mourning/In many a town”

¹⁸² Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 76-77.

¹⁸³ C. Whatley, *Scottish Society, 1707-1830*, 251. On the Highlanders' mixed motives for enlisting in the British military during this period, see A. Mackillop, “For King, Country and Regiment?” Motive & Identity Within Highland Soldiering, 1746-1815,” *Fighting for Identity*, 185-211.

speaks literally to the catastrophic economic and social effects of so many absent men (a phenomenon that also plagued Ireland and numerous rural English counties as well). When the speaker pleads with “every individual” to act justly and honestly, she does not urge dutiful acceptance of a Burkean status quo, but, as in the previous poem, a moral revolution that will “make deceit to cease.” War is a condition created and perpetuated, the speaker asserts, by those who profit most from it: financiers, landowners, grain dealers, and politicians who control lucrative military contracts. Though she admonishes them to be “just in their dealing,/Act no over-rise,” this expression of utopian desire for a morally just nation can never be fully realized. The speaker’s “real opinion/There soon would be peace” remains proleptic, for the interests of the British imperial state will always oppose it. In this sense, the poem arguably directs its readers to the idea of a revolutionary “Scotsman” at the head of a French army, a Wallace, a Bruce, or even a Stuart. Perhaps the “Auld Alliance” has another life to live, and the real enemy lives next door, rather than across the Channel.

This anticipatory revolutionism finds more direct expression in a weaver poem, “The Spinning Wheel”:

When I sit at my spinning wheel,
And think on every station,
I think I’m happiest mysel,
At my small occupation.
No court, nor freet, nor dark debate,
Can e’er attend my dwelling.
While I make cloth of diff’rent sorts,
Which is an honest calling.

Indeed ye know the nights are lang,
And sometimes I do weary,
But, as they’ll shortly turn again,

I hope I'll grow more cheary.
I'll sing a song with noble glee,
And tune that I think canty,
But I sing best, it is no jest,
When the tobacco's plenty.¹⁸⁴

Once again the court appears as the enemy of the people, contrasting with the artisanal virtue conventional to weaver poetry. But the weaver registers the depression in trade and its corresponding psychological condition; the corruption of the court causes both economic and emotional depression, depriving the poor of even the meager enjoyment of conviviality.

I live content, I pay no rent,
In my quiet habitation,
For B—e he did order it,
Which shews his great discretion.
To favour one so low as me,
While I was no relation;
But now he's dead, and in the clay,
I hope he's won the blessing.

M'A---m brave, agrees to this
Kind, honest disposition,
He's charitable, just and true,
Not like most men of fashion.
I have no reason here to fret,
That I was never married,
Since I a free possession get,
Of freedom I'm not wearied.¹⁸⁵

Perhaps Pagan uses the weaver to refer to the very real blessing of her own rent-free dwelling, but the weaver seems anxious to pay poetic homage to the charity of the “men of fashion” who have “favoured” her. Her allusion to her unmarried state, which to her constitutes a fair exchange for “free possession,” suggests, however, that the weaver's

¹⁸⁴ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 13-14.

¹⁸⁵ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 14.

economic condition precludes her from marrying, and that the landlord's charity will be withdrawn if she does. The "freedom" that does not weary her is thus enforced by a threat of loss if the weaver should attempt to enjoy the pleasures and benefits of marriage. Whereas government corruption determines her low economic and psychic condition, the tenuous beneficence of her landlord further limits social outlets for pursuing "happiness."

The final straw, as it is in the previous ballads, is the cash-nexus of an amoral economic system:

For when around me I do look,
And see the merchants dealing,
For they do triple profit take
For every thing they're selling;
For honesty is grown so weak,
It is so old a fashion,
'Tis not regarded in our day,
'Tis scarce throughout the nation.

Kind providence sent a good crop
For to support our nation,
But Satan's crew sent it abroad,
Which is a sad vexation,
That e'er such blackguard vagabonds
Should have a habitation
Below our British government,
That takes this occupation.¹⁸⁶

"Satan's crew," the grain engrossers and dealers, have once again cheated the people and sold the crop to foreigners, a common (if not always justified) complaint in populist political discourse. The weaver's xenophobia associates merchant gold with war profiteering, feeding back into "our British government" in the form of bribes and speculation. This circuit likewise connects to the popular anti-Union slogan "bought and

¹⁸⁶ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 14-15.

sold for English gold” and to the usurpation of William of Orange and the Hanoverians. Even more fundamentally, Pagan, like Lapraik, adeptly uses these tags to fashion a poetic that revives the moral tradition of medieval estates satire, combining the virtuous poverty of the dreamer/poet with popular indignation at the abuses of the nobility, clergy, and commons. This reading renders a conception of the Scottish “nation” as non-hierarchical, with mutually interdependent estates bound together in a commonwealth underwritten by a Christian moral code of faith, hope, and charity. Hence the absence of the strident vernacular appeals to the iconography of Scottish epic heroism or the explicit invocation of Jacobite typology, though the more general association of monarchical illegitimacy and social and economic decline runs very strongly through these poems.

Pagan’s talent for updating the old argument for the moral economy in terms of contemporary events presents itself again in a mock panegyric to a Highland regiment that was quartered in the Muirkirk area to suppress radical dissent during the height of the Pittite repression:

The Duke of Gordon’s fencibles,
They’re handsome here in Cumnock town;
And at Muirkirk a party lies,
For to haud the reformers down.

They’re decent, I can say no less,
For any thing that I do see;
And well they set the Highland dress,
Although they’re bare aboon the knee.¹⁸⁷

During the revolutionary wars of the 1790s, Scottish fencible regiments served primarily, as the British military historian J. W. Fortescue has noted, “for the purposes of domestic

¹⁸⁷ Pagan, *Poems and Songs*, 17.

police.”¹⁸⁸ The Duke of Gordon’s fencibles, commanded by the 4th Duke Colonel Alexander Gordon, kept an eye on disaffected colliers in the neighborhood of Cumnock, a market and mining town (and later the home of the Labour Party founder, James Keir Hardie).¹⁸⁹ But the speaker does not appear as interested in political unrest as she is in the nudity to which the Highland dress calls attention. The speaker’s fixation on the sexual occupation of Cumnock and its environs constructs the Highlanders in xenophobic terms not normally associated with them; their assimilation into the service of the British state betrays their historic attachment to Scottish independence and converts their chivalric restraint into overt sexual aggression. The speaker then proceeds, with mock naïveté, to identify individual members of the troop by name, protesting their decency but accentuating their predatory motives, particularly the regiment’s piper:

And their musicianer, T---m S---w,
I think he’s decent, blithe and young;
I vow he plays his trou---
Although he has the Highland tongue.¹⁹⁰

While the speaker adopts a “boys will be boys” approach to the Highlanders’ philandering, the poem’s real bawdiness erupts when it comes to the local “maids”:

The maids in town and country round,
Gallants with them with right good will;
They love to dance the soldier’s jig,
And swear they love their soldier still.

There’s one call’d F---r I have seen,
A verse from me he may expect,
One night at Cumnock fell late,

¹⁸⁸ J. W. Fortescue, *The British Army 1783-1802* (London, 1905), 20.

¹⁸⁹ On the history of the Duke of Gordon’s fencibles, see C. G. Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: the history of the Gordon Highlanders* (Edinburgh, 1901).

¹⁹⁰ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 18.

A lass convoy'd me near Affleck.

And F---r she did take with her,
To crack to her as she gaed hame,
And as his kilt was short before,
Think ye he wad na---her wame.¹⁹¹

It is this kind of verse that Paterson presumably has in mind when he writes:

Poor Isobel, with all her follies, had, we doubt not, her own redeeming qualities; and it is possible to conceive, even in her very recklessness and contempt of the formalities of life, the workings of a mind naturally strong, and of feelings perverted but not destroyed. . . . Driven upon the sea of life without a helm—deprived by nature even of those personal accomplishments which are the birthright of her sex—and deceived as she appears to have early been by the promises of one who had probably no intention of ever fulfilling them, there is after all no great wonder that she became the sardonic worshipper of Bacchus represented. Solitude is in general the nurse of “meek-eyed Contemplation”; but with her it appears to have been the food of the Furies.¹⁹²

Setting aside Paterson's spectacular condescension and sexism in this passage, I concur that the “Dionysian” aspect of Pagan's verse often predominates. Pagan does appear as a “Bacchanalian” force, as we have seen, but she does so out of a strong self-identification with the miserable condition of the laboring classes and an acute sense of the hypocrisy and self-aggrandizement of the privileged classes and the institutional structures (army, church, business, state) through which they oppress the poor. Indeed, the explicit language of sexual exchange in these “bawdy” verses suggests that the “maids in town and country round” use the only power available to them to turn the tables on the oppressors: their ability to “dance the soldier's jig,/And swear they love their soldier still.” Two can play this game, it seems; the predators have become the prey.

¹⁹¹ Pagan, *Poems and Songs*, 18.

¹⁹² J. Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 122.

But the game is serious, and the speaker observes that resistance to the occupiers takes multiple forms:

The soldiers they like Cumnock best.
Their sweethearts there they're swear to want;
And at Muirkirk they are more shy
Because the colliers are not scant.

Now them that lodg'd at Avandale inn,
They do not like their lodging well,
For they pay boarding very dear,
They feed them with the beggar's meal.¹⁹³

The images here become more ominous. Initially portrayed as the besiegers, the Highlanders find themselves besieged, holed up in Cumnock for fear of the same Muirkirk miners they came to “haud down” and at the mercy of the local innkeeper and merchants they are assigned to protect. The poem puts paid to the idea of a mystically unified “Scottish” nation, whether independent, Jacobite, constitutionalist, imperial, or otherwise. Instead, the poem asserts both a defiant localism and anti-imperial animus, belying the breezy irony of the concluding quatrain:

Now these lines I will conclude,
My song made out I will go hame;
The road's not far, the night is good,
This I will sing, and gang my lane.

But Providence the wars would cease,
That chearful hearts would dance and sing,
And every lad enjoy his lass,
And love his country and his king.

The speaker returns to Blakean ironic mode, fiddling the tune of British state patriotism while East Ayrshire burns. With even greater intensity than Lapraik, Pagan conducts a

¹⁹³ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 18-19.

revolutionary energy in these poems that balances on the insurrectionary edge. But much like Lapraik's rehearsal of plebeian demands, Pagan directs the anger from below toward a utopic, if not millenarian, vision of the hypothetical social harmony of a feudal past (or of a deferred future), in which the three estates enforced each against the other a moral economy based on Christian communitarianism. At the same time, Pagan's poetic subjects have little illusion that things will actually turn out that way: "But Providence the wars would cease,/That chearful hearts would dance and sing." The subjunctive mood places such a Golden Age beyond the real possibilities of politics and power. Recuperation, rather, inheres in the possibilities of poetry alone: "The road's not far, the night is good,/This I will sing, and gang my lane."

Pagan records the confrontation between property and liberty as pervasive in her social milieu. No relationship remains unaffected by the political and economic conditions of the day, except perhaps the poet's "independence" from the false consciousness created by contracts of adhesion, which for Pagan (as for Virginia Woolf more than a century later) can only be evaded by gifts of charity that are given freely and unconditionally. Moreover, Pagan's communitarian ethos implies that intersubjective relationships, whether domestic, economic, political, or social, do not exist in separate spheres but are fundamentally public in nature. This is clearly seen in the philandering of the Highlanders, whose occupation of Cumnock tears the pre-existing social web and weaves a new one in its stead.

Though Pagan calls on a deep tradition of estates satire to articulate contemporary social and economic tensions, she also demonstrates an acute awareness of the "modern"

class antagonism that characterizes industrial capitalism. For example, another poem also entitled "A New Song," celebrates the colliers' victory over management in a showdown over wages:

Although I have no company,
Yet cheerfully I'll sing,
I hope M'---m will won the plea,
Good news to us to bring.
The work it has been dull this while,
But now its got a turn,
Well may he prosper in his way,
Long may his [lacuna] kills burn.

Rejoice ye colliers, all rejoice,
Cheer up your hearts and sing,
The fine appearance of the coal,
To us great honour bring.

Altho' the colliers they rejoice,
The merchants they may mourn,
They'll get their cash at twa weeks' end,
Which is a clever turn.
For money is better than company's lines,
By which men are oppress'd,
If you get your money in your hand,
You'll war't as you think best.
Rejoice, &c.

See how he treats his men this day,
Which shows a lib'ral part,
I wish them well where'er they go,
That has a gen'rous heart.
Rejoice ye colliers all with me,
Cheer up your hearts and sing,
You'll get your cash at two weeks' end,
Will praise and profit bring.
Rejoice, &c.

A dinner for the children he
Provided cheerfully,
And serv'd the table to the same,
The like I ne'er did see.

You need not think where such a crowd,
They all well pleas'd would be,
But the grateful part they did confess,
It was humility.
Rejoice, &c.

A pity that this gentleman,
Should come so far from hame,
And leave his Lady and family,
And not the plea have won.
But Providence hath favour'd him,
As you may plainly see,
There such appearance of the call,
I hope he'll won the plea.
Rejoice, &c.

Now there is an agreement made,
But how I cannot tell,
The company is made to yield,
And sore against their will.
Rejoice ye kiln-men with me,
Cheer up your hearts and sing,
Make wives and children join the glee,
And gare carantable ring.
Rejoice, &c.¹⁹⁴

In his memorable chronicle, *The History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, Thomas Johnston details the long struggle of colliers for emancipation from the legal serfdom, first imposed by Act of the Scottish Parliament in 1606, that bound them (and their children if the parents accepted earnest money for the bond) to the mines for life:

The poor unfortunates condemned to this servitude in the mines and salt works became as a race apart; they were buried in unconsecrated ground; some of them wore metal collars round their necks; they were bought and sold and gifted like cattle; unless in certain extraordinary instances, like the lead miners at the Leadhills in Lanarkshire, they were wholly unlettered; they developed a jargon of their own, and were regarded with superstitious fear and terror by the majority of their fellow-countrymen; they lived in colonies; and in every old mining district in Scotland local tradition still tells of how the "brown yins" or the "black folk"

¹⁹⁴ Pagan, *Poems and Songs*, 48-50.

allowed no stranger near their habitations. Their alleged “privileges” consisted in exemption from taxation and from military service and in the legal obligation which rested with the owner to provide for them in sickness and in old age, and to supply a coffin for their burial. Lord Cockburn, the Whig jurist, who wrote shortly after the serfs were freed, declared that while the collier and salter slaves could not legally be “killed or directly tortured by their masters,” in every other respect they were held to be “cattle,” possessing no human rights.¹⁹⁵

The economic historian Bruce Lenman describes the late eighteenth-century mining industry in these terms:

The Scottish coal industry had a rather curious history in the decades after 1780. Coal prices rose steeply, to the extreme distress of consumers who sought about for culprits to blame for the problem. . . . On the other hand, wages in mines did undoubtedly rise sharply until about 1810. Between 1715 and 1785 rates of pay for hewers roughly doubled and then between 1785 and 1808 they more than doubled again. Much of this increase was due to shortage of labour in a very labour-intensive industry. The servile status of colliers undoubtedly made it difficult to increase the labour supply, thus placing the very unservile serfs in Scottish coalmines in a very strong bargaining position. Emancipation was embarked upon late and falteringly. By 1800 effective legislation to this end was a fact but it had comparatively little impact on wages for a couple of decades, when a flow of cheap Highland and above all Irish labour helped to solve the recruitment crisis and simultaneously strengthen the hand of the employer in wage negotiation. However, it would be wrong to blame all the increase in coal prices between 1780 and 1810 on labour costs. All prices rose within the British economy in the period 1792-1813. One price index shows an increase of over 100 percent in domestic prices between 1792 and 1812-13.¹⁹⁶

As both the Labour MP (and Secretary of State for Scotland in Winston Churchill’s wartime cabinet) Johnston and the professional historian Lenman acknowledge, the impetus for the elimination of serfdom in the mining industry had nothing to do with humanitarian concern and everything to do with a cheaper labor supply.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, Johnston’s argument that Parliament abolished tied labor in Scottish mines only after it

¹⁹⁵ T. Johnston, *History of the Working Classes*, 79-80.

¹⁹⁶ B. Lenman, *An Economic History of Scotland, 1660-1976*, 132.

¹⁹⁷ T. Johnston, *History of the Working Classes*, 82.

became unprofitable for the coalmasters anticipates by two decades Eric Williams' brilliant and unorthodox thesis regarding slavery and the slave trade.¹⁹⁸ Pagan the poet, who, like Johnston, takes the colliers' point of view, puts the issue in more direct, communitarian terms. Here we find many of the same grievances that nineteenth-century trade unionists, radical reformers, Chartists, and other labor interests would have to fight out all over industrialized Britain: the right to regular cash wage payments, freedom from the truck system, and a living wage. It is notable, however, that even the initial emancipation act, enacted in 1775, only phased out serfdom over time, and "any collier participating in an 'unlawful combination' for the raising of wages, before the day of his emancipation arrived," had two years added to his servitude (this included any efforts to establish or join a trade union).¹⁹⁹ When full emancipation finally came in 1799, Parliament assigned the task of fixing wages for colliers to local justices of the peace (hence the "plea" in the poem) and expressly extended prior acts of the Scottish Parliament against unlawful combinations to colliers. This does not mean, as Chris Whatley has pointed out, that colliers were at the complete mercy of the masters. Noting the long history of colliers' strikes in Scotland since the seventeenth century, Whatley argues that "Scottish collier serfs . . . could and did withdraw their labour. . . . while it would be mistaken to claim that there existed in the Scottish mining districts 'formal continuous associations' of the 1800s, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that . . . within the Scottish collier communities there were deeply embedded traditions of

¹⁹⁸ E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1944).

¹⁹⁹ t. Johnston, *History of the Working Classes*, 83.

collective activity, which surfaced whenever opportunities for material advances were perceived, or when the need for mutual defence arose.”²⁰⁰

Pagan’s song registers this tenuous balance between the “collective activity” of East Ayrshire colliers and the mine owners, whose agent “Should come so far from hame./And leave his Lady and family./And not the plea have won.” Indeed, the bemused speaker observes the agent’s attempts to propitiate the miners by treating the men with “a lib’ral part” and serving “A dinner for the children.” While the miners “gratefully” accept the proffered largesse, they apparently decline to modify their bargaining position. The speaker sheds crocodile tears when, despite the fact that “Providence hath favour’d him, the plea is resolved in favor of the colliers: “The company is made to yield./And sore against their will.” Pagan’s poem sheds light on Whatley’s conclusion that “liberation was sought, not for the colliers, but for their masters”:

It was they who were to be freed, first, from a mass of estate custom and legal decisions which made labour recruitment difficult and its retention insecure, and second from the restraining force of organized labour. For the colliers it was hoped by their masters that emancipation would lead to lower wages and a loosening of their employees’ grip over the pace and organization of underground operations. The colliers’ legal servitude was to be replaced by the far more effective subjugation of a combination-free labour market.²⁰¹

Pagan’s celebratory song, then, serves rather as an incipient requiem for the rights of labor, which under the guise of “emancipation” have been shackled more than ever before. Although tied to the mines they worked, colliers exercised greater control over their labor, wages, and competition than they did under anti-combination acts such as the

²⁰⁰ C. Whatley, ““The Fettering Bonds of Brotherhood’: Combination and Labour Relations in the Scottish Coal-Mining Industry c. 1690-1775,” *Social History* 12.2 (1987), 142-43.

²⁰¹ T. Johnston, *History of the Working Classes*, 154.

one enacted at the masters' behest in 1799. But beyond the historical moment the poem captures—the last stand of labor before the full onslaught of capitalist *laissez faire* economics—Pagan once again reveals the communitarian ethos that undergirds all of her “social” poetry. She also speaks for the “kiln-men” and their families, who often worked (and died) side by side for long hours under conditions of extreme hazard and discomfort. For them, real independence lies far more in getting “their cash at twa weeks’ end” than it does in Smithean political economy. Though she pokes fun at the masters and their machinations, however, the speaker makes no objection to a paternalistic economy that exchanges service for reasonable financial security. Indeed, only in such an economy can the entire community “profit.” For this reason the speaker wishes the masters well, for only in their prosperity can the community thrive. Moreover, there is “great honour” in the “fine appearance of the coal,” a pride of place that does not attach to capitalistic enterprise.

But even in poems without the explicit revolutionary pulses or suggestion of class warfare we see above, the same sense of incipient violence remains equally palpable. “Remarks on Evil Speakers,” who would not live at Peace disturbingly locates this violence in an intimate domestic setting:

Head ye ever tell of girning gude,
And venom Jean his wife;
'Tis well known in the neighbourhood
They're daily rising strife.

Their cursing, swearing and deceit,
'Tis more than tongue can tell;
If they do not repentance get,
This is the way to hell.

And brimstone Mary in the tool*, *querelous
Her tongue gives never o'er;
If she were horn'd like bull or stot,
She would us a' devour.

Now, gude forgive me for this crack*, *gossip
If I thought it were wrang,
For that on such I'll turn my back,
And sing a merry song.²⁰²

This shrewish wife, “venom Jean,” is folkloric but the “girning gude” complicates the speaker’s characterization of the song as mere “crack.” As we have seen, Pagan’s satiric moralism not only holds up the affectations of rank and authority to ridicule, but aims at specific individuals. In this case, the wife is named but the husband’s identity, well known to the speaker’s auditors, is not specified for readers. This ambiguity suggests that whereas individual wives may act the part of the termagant, both the individual husband and the universal “guidman” in fact wear the horns “like bull or stot” and “us a’ devour.” Pagan masculinizes the iconic shrew, relocating the source of domestic violence in the peevish and tyrannical master of the house. The figure of “brimstone Mary,” likewise a stock shrewish character, might be taken for Isobel Pagan, the poet whose “tongue gives never o’er” but whose gender precludes her from being taken too seriously. This doubling appears strategic, enabling her simultaneously to strike an evangelical pose (“If they do not repentance get./This is the way to hell”) and to disavow it (“For that on such I’ll turn my back./And sing a merry song”). Unlike, for example, her contemporary Hannah More, whose concern for the laboring poor manifested in an evangelical poetics from a bourgeois economic perspective, Pagan’s lack of standing liberates her to assume

²⁰² Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 19-20.

contradictory self-representations, one as a purveyor of malicious (or at least salacious) gossip and the other as a regulator of communal moral conduct.²⁰³ That same social marginality yields both invulnerability and inerrancy to her verse; one may take it or leave it, but one cannot ignore it.

This dualist quality also animates one of Pagan's most accusatory poems, marvelously titled "Muirkirk Light Weights." The poem begins with a particularly juicy bit of gossip:

In Muirkirk there lives a taylor,
He scrimpit weight for greed of siller;
He scrimpit weight, he counts not fair,
Till he's made three hundred pounds and mair.

The year the sugar has come down,
Three pounds give less nor half-a-crown,
And a' the dealers round about,
Came to the taylor in great doubt,
Whether to hang themselves or no.
Some said they would, and some said no;
Some said, I think we will set a day,
We'll fast and sigh, and read and pray,
Perhaps the gods will please that well,
If we turn to them frae the de'il.²⁰⁴

The speaker paints with a broad brush: all merchants cheat their customers, and the "cult of commerce" masks the devil's religion. Moreover, the merchant class not only exploits the poor while admonishing them for their lack of piety, but views such exploitation as merely part of doing "business." Only when the question comes to "Whether to hang themselves or no" do they feel any "doubt" of the propriety of their conduct. Once again

²⁰³ For a discussion of bourgeois patronage of women peasant poets, specifically the relationship between the Ann Yearsley, the "poetical milkwoman of Bristol," and her patron Hannah More, see Kord, *Women Peasant Poets*, 39-47.

²⁰⁴ Pagan, *Poems and Songs*, 21.

we see the inflammability of local conditions, the insurrectionary potential of a community oppressed by a state and church that crush the poor under military conscription and occupation, high food prices and dishonest business practices, and a prescriptive moral code that rewards hypocrisy and criminalizes pleasure. The poem continues in this vein:

The taylor said, with heart right fair,
I fear for me God will not care,
For I within my coat do wear
Ten thousand curses every year.
There's something I'll confess and tell,
Beside me I do keep a mell,
And now and then my weights do hit,
And whiles break aff a gay wee bit.²⁰⁵

Here Pagan calls on a standard trope from the long tradition of English provincial religious poetry. The taylor's recognition, "For I within my coat do wear/Ten thousand curses every year," sounds a distant echo of Haukyn's coat, Langland's vivid figure of the Active Life in Passus 13 of *Piers Plowman*:

Thanne Pacience parceyved, of pointes his cote
Was colomy thorough coveitise and unkynde desiryng.
Moore to good than to God the gome his love caste,
And ymagynede how he it myghte have
With false mesures and met, and [mid] fals witnessse
Lened for love of the wed and looth to do truthe,
And awaited thorough w[itte]s wyes to bigile,
And menged his marchaundise and made a good moustre:

* * *

'In haly daies at holy chirche, whan ich herde masse
Hadde I nevere wille, woot God, witterly to biseche
Mercy for my mysdedes, that I ne moorned moore
For losse of good, leve me, than for likames giltes;
As, if I hadde dedly synne doon, I dredde noight that so soore

²⁰⁵ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 22.

As whan I lened and leved it ost or longe er it was paied.
So if I kidde any kyndenesse myn even cristen to helpe,
Upon a cruwel coveitise my conscience gan hange.²⁰⁶

In Langland's allegory Patience and Charity must instruct Haukyn in the virtuous activity of a Christian life, "making judgments of good and evil, and bearing patient poverty in charity."²⁰⁷ In Pagan's retelling the taylor rejects the possibility of redemption, fearing "for me God will not care," paralleling Haukyn's inability to seek God's mercy in prayer because of his obsessive avarice. Instead, the taylor advises his brethren to make hay while the sun shines:

The oldest dealer he did say,
What will be said at the last day?

The taylor said, ne'er mind the last,
If we can but make money fast;
There will be large allowance gaun
For every dealer in the land.²⁰⁸

Justification by faith, it seems, has indeed supplanted the doctrine of good works, and the taylor reveals himself as a good nominalist: his assurance that "There will be a large allowance gaun/For every dealer in the land" reflects the moral salve that this form of Calvinism could provide to the troubled soul of Via Activa. The merchants do not take much convincing:

Then every one thought to themself
'Tis good for us to keep a mell,
So they struck a' their weights right fair,
Some broke off less, and some broke mair.

²⁰⁶ William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman, A Complete Edition of the B-Text*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London, 1978), 13, ll. 354-361; 383-390, pp. 158-59.

²⁰⁷ E. Kaulbach, *Imaginative Prophecy in the b Text of Piers Plowman* (Cambridge, 1993), 129.

²⁰⁸ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 22.

This practice did so long prevail,
Till poor workmen were like to fail.²⁰⁹

Again we see the poetic voice lamenting the failure of the communitarian ethic that could soften the sharper edges of the old moral economy. Her alignment with the regulatory comprehensiveness of this economy questions both the Enlightenment emphasis on individual self-interest as the basis of moral action and social theories linking “improvement” with progress, civility, and peace. To put it another way, the speaker struggles with reconciling a particular form of “pro-business Protestantism” with its clearly deleterious effects on the well being of the community. By pointing to the condition of the exploited “poor workmen” as the true measure of social progress, the speaker presents a Janus-faced perspective on the present. She deploys the communitarian ethos of the past to emphasize that a Protestant variant that sanctions and encourages acquisition perverts true religion, while gesturing towards a future in which the bitter antagonism between capital and labor will determine social relations.

It appears that the vestiges of the moral economy still exist in East Ayrshire in the late eighteenth century, a last stand for the community enforcement of fraudulent business practices:

Some told the Dean of Guild of Ayr
That Muirkirk weights they were not fair;
To try the same was his intent,
The standard to Muirkirk he sent.
The day was short, the road was wet,
For depute, he employ'd C---t,
Who thought it was his only chance
To seize the merchants all at once,
And bring them all unto one place,

²⁰⁹ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 22.

And do them justice to their face.

O man, it was a pleasant sight,
The works of darkness brought to light.
How bravely I their names could tell,
Who had been busy with the mell;
But at this present, I will spare,
And hope they will do so nae mair.

Thanks to the gentlemen and judges that were there,
I'm sure they acted honourably, no person they did spare;
Long may they live, and happy be, and aye to good inclin'd,
And aye when 'tis convenient, their standard they should mind.²¹⁰

The speaker's ambiguous panegyric, however, can be read either to laud the "gentlemen and judges" for meting out the proper punishment or to chastise them for inflicting a mere slap on the wrist. Moreover, the speaker ironically alludes to the fact that the merchants, caught in flagrante delicto, are judged not by the "poor workmen" they fleece but by their own class, who might be expected to engage in some of the same unethical practices as the accused. While *estates satire* frequently comments on corruption in the administration of justice, as may be hinted here, it also provides a cathartic judgment (usually by the monarch to whom the case is tried) that redresses the transgressions of one estate on the other and restores social harmony. In "Muirkirk Light Weights," that judgment goes lacking, and there is little sense of such a vindication or restoration. Though the speaker tells us that "it was a pleasant sight,/The works of darkness brought to light," the lame "hope" that the merchants will be "aye to good inclin'd" and not simply revert to their cheating ways does not replenish the community. All that is gained is a momentary deterrent, with no expectation of transformative moral improvement.

²¹⁰ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 22-23.

Pagan's world is no allegorical field of folk searching for salvation through a virtuous life that reconciles the active and contemplative. Instead, the fear of getting caught appears to be the only "standard they should mind."

In a companion poem to "Muirkirk Light Weights," "An Observe on Extortioner's Wives," Pagan again uses allegorical personification to critique the common business practice of adulteration. The poem figures this particular vice as feminine:

It happen'd one night, late at een,
That two or three wives they did convene,
And their design it was, I har,
For to raise a' provisions dear.

Lady extortion she was there,
And she sat as preses on the chair,
And to her friend she did apply,
To raise the milk and butter high.

They say she sells her milk o'er dear,
And mixes aye with fountain clear,
Regards not what men say till her,
If she can get the poor folk's siller.

Some greedy wives that liv'd near by,
That had wee farms, and keepet kye,
Unto her measures did comply,
To raise the milk and butter high.²¹¹

In the first quatrain the speaker evokes images of a witches' coven to project the sinister plans of the wives. "Lady extortion," both an allegorical figure and the malicious crone of folklore, presides over the cabal. Read together with "Muirkirk Light Weights," the poem registers the division of labor in a traditional provincial town, the exclusive male preserve of crafts and trade and domestic "women's work" of the dairy and household. Pagan sees

²¹¹ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 23-24.

no real distinction in the types of work that men and women perform, only that the sin of avarice infects both settings to the detriment of the whole. But whereas in the previous poem the guild merchants' incipient feelings of guilt are mediated through religious observance (prayer and fasting), here Lady extortion "Regards not what men say till her/If she can get the poor folk's siller." It appears that the gender distinction inheres not in the nature of the work (both men and women are fully capable of cheating the poor), but in the exclusively male institutions—the guild, kirk, and law—that regulate labor. The incestuous relationship between the regulator and the regulated in "Muirkirk Light Weights" demonstrates that even the old moral economy must in fact be "moral" in order to protect the community's interest.

Moreover, the poem implies that male institutions entirely exclude women's occupations from their domain, leaving the "poor folk" especially vulnerable to the effects of greed in the domestic sphere. At the same time, this masculine monopoly on official avarice refuses appeals based on moral concerns. It appears, however, that in a feminized space, with its close identification of virtue and domesticity, some recuperation becomes possible:

A mistress, with a feeling heart,
She spake, and took the poor folk's part,
Said she, provisions are so dear,
I will not raise my milk this year.

A mistress old, whose head was gray,
To those extortioners did say,
Before I have the poor folks curse,
I'll rather wear a lighter purse.

For fourpence is a desp'rate catter
To take for milk mix'd up with water;

I'll rather give six pints for a goat,
Than get a fail in Satan's boat.²¹²

It only takes one honest broker to break up an extortion ring, and in contrast to the weak and ineffectual institutional regulatory mechanisms we see in the masculine world of trade, women deploy a much more persuasive and effective direct moral influence to cleanse the domestic sphere of vice. The venerable “mistress old, whose head was gray,” alter ego to Lady extortion in the first half of the poem, refuses to “have the poor folks curse,” in stark contrast to the Haukyn figure that wears ten thousand curses in his coat in “Muirkirk Light Weights.” Moreover, the seemingly necessary antagonism between “business” and moral conduct does not translate to the domestic domain, where the moral economy still determines proper business practices. By contrasting the ethical bases of masculine and feminine zones of work, Pagan indicates that community regeneration remains possible, but only in response to the moral suasion exercised by women with “feeling hearts.” She thus makes a powerful appeal on behalf of an idealized matriarchal ethos that flatly contradicts that of a society moving swiftly to rationalize economic relations under the laws of the market.

This agonistic dialectic of masculine and feminine moral and occupational spheres and the necessity of communitarian justice mediated by women are on display in “Lament for the Herring”:

Woes me for the herring that stand in the barrel,
They're short in the fish, and they cannot well fell,
The people that see them, they make it a quarrel,
Indeed they're o'er many to keep to my sell.
If the merchant had known that he is a cruel villain,

²¹² Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 24.

And after this, from me he'll ne'er get a shilling,
If they do not sell, I'll send them back till him,
And punish him for that, if in Glasgow he dwell.

I will not blame J---h, for he is my well-wisher,
He'll do me no more harm, than he'll do himsel;
But, O, 'tis a pity, he look'd not the herring,
I'm sure he'll be troubled when he hears tell.
My friends in Muirkirk, they're a' very sorry,
All but taylor S---l, as 'tis that scolin's glory;
The loss will be mine, to conclude the story,
And black is my heart, if the herring don't sell.²¹³

While Pagan does not show quite the range of verse form and poetic diction that characterize Lapraik's and Sillar's poetry, this poem indicates that she nevertheless has access to a variety of models, both classical and traditional. Like "The Laird of Glenlee," "Lament for the Herring" is composed to a large extent in iambic hexameter (or alexandrine), imitating the usage of sixteenth and seventeenth-century English poets such as Edmund Spenser, Michael Drayton, and John Dryden (who often composed an alexandrine to vary the regular pattern of iambic pentameter in his mock-heroic satires and elsewhere). The structure and rhyme scheme of the poem likewise indicate Pagan's ability to manipulate poetic elements to achieve a specific effect. The first octave features a quartet rhymed *aaaa*, followed by a second rhymed *bbba*. She varies the second octave, beginning *cada* and ending *eeea*. The speaker's complaint thus builds on the a rhyme, which appears twice in the word "sell." This enables the speaker to link the transactional term with words denoting animosity: "fell," "quarrel," and "tell" (slander). For the poem's speaker, "selling" the herring—or more accurately not selling them—is a part of a larger complex of social transactions that sustain the life of the community and

²¹³ Pagan, *Songs and Poems*, 25.

its members. The merchant's dishonesty breaches the social compact and threatens both the speaker's physical well being (she cannot earn anything selling rotten fish) and her moral reputation (the people who "make it a quarrel" believe she is passing bad goods; even her "well-wisher" turns up his nose at her merchandise). The speaker's slanderous attacks on the fishmonger who oversold the tainted herring and the "scolin" taylor (perhaps the same figure portrayed in "Muirkirk Light Weights") signify a community standard that, if violated, justifies the retaliatory response the speaker enacts in the poem: economic boycott ("from me he'll ne'er get a shilling") and adverse publicity ("I'm sure he'll be troubled when he hears tell"). These punitive measures may not remediate the speaker's harm in the instant case—the politically disenfranchised woman fish-monger has no right to sue the merchant, for example—but they do aim to compensate for the social harm that evil business practices perpetrate. Moreover, the type of collective punishment the speaker envisions in the destruction of the merchant's business itself has revolutionary potential, particularly in a commercial society that measures "progress" by growth in trade and affluence, as eighteenth-century Britain certainly did. The best means of resistance in such a society is to refuse self-identification as a "consumer" who is at the mercy of the capitalist market, just as it is for the colliers to refuse the individuation involved in "free labor." The speaker recognizes that the concept of "liberty" means very little when, as Carlyle put it, it becomes the liberty to die by starvation.²¹⁴

Pagan proves herself as adept as Lapraik and Sillar in the adaptation of common poetic traditions to the social and economic crisis in late eighteenth-century Scotland.

²¹⁴ T. Carlyle, *Past and Present*, Bk. 3, ch. 13 (1843).

Though she confronted barriers that effectively silenced most women (Janet Little, as we shall see, at least had a patron who took interest in her writing), they could not prevent her from using her very marginality to speak on behalf of the poor and exploited in her own immediate world. Moreover, her political aesthetic, though not explicitly drawing on conventional eighteenth-century figures of Scottish resistance and independence, invests the most intimate and pervasive of intersubjective relations—not only those between lovers and spouses, but those involving everyday economic transactions without which lovers and spouses could not subsist—with decisive historical importance. Pagan, much like Lapraik, does not allow a “national” discourse, with its rhetoric of “freedom,” to suppress the quotidian interpersonal negotiation that determines small-scale social and community relationships. Acutely aware of the traumatic disruptions in such relationships attendant to massive shifts in the ethical basis of master-servant and seller-buyer relations, Pagan constructs in her poetry a consistent communal voice that privileges the virtue of horizontally organized reciprocity within a vertically stratified power structure; she does not seek to topple the power of the landowners, merchants, and money-men, but simply to subject their practices to the moral regulation of the people. Hers is a conservative voice in this respect, but one that challenges the dominant theory of agricultural “improvement” and commercial capitalism. At the same time, Pagan declines to recognize national or imperial claims or loyalties as paramount; her allegory is thus not political, but typological and, ultimately, eschatological.

Lapraik, Sillar, and Pagan shared a common acquaintance with poverty and economic uncertainty. None spent their lives primarily as a farm or other manual laborer

(though Lapraik and Sillar had worked on their family farms, and Pagan engaged in selling goods on the street), but filled various occupations in the “middling sort” (a category that accommodates substantial disparities in income). While Sillar was the most financially successful and independent, each found some measure of material comfort in later life. Lapraik and Pagan wrote poetry in old age; Sillar abandoned the pen as a young man. By the same token, Sillar experienced the revolutionary period prior to middle age, whereas Lapraik and Pagan were already advanced in years when the French Revolution and subsequent European war broke out. Like Burns, each poet was exposed to Scottish Enlightenment philosophy and the doctrinal disputes within the Scottish Kirk, as well as to the history of Scottish independence, the Union of 1707, and Jacobitism (though Pagan, who could not write, had no formal education whatsoever). Their Scotland was predominantly rural and deferential to authority, but undergoing intensive change. East Ayrshire, particularly Pagan’s Muirkirk, was increasingly industrial in the late eighteenth century, and a plebeian radicalism existed among the artisans, colliers, and laboring poor. Most significantly, in my view, each poet directly experienced the economic and social instability of Scottish society in the late eighteenth century: its dramatic swings of personal fortune, its climate of “improvement” and rapid economic change, its political struggles between the forces of reform and reaction, and its search for a distinct “national” identity within the British state and empire.

Chapter 2

Radical Voices: James Maxwell, Janet Little, and the Politics of Poverty

The Edinburgh literati's appropriation of Burns's poetry to demonstrate Scotland's cultural value to the British state, as we have already seen, cast a long shadow over Burns's contemporaries. This chapter examines the work of two such poets, James Maxwell and Janet Little, who not only reject the Burns cult and its aesthetic valuation, but also the alternative rhetoric of British loyalism and Scottish patriotism so common to the political poetry of the revolutionary period. For Maxwell, as for Lapraik and Pagan, poetry must recover its moral basis in traditional, medieval, and broader European genres of religious allegory and estates satire. His strikingly millenarian pose identifies the poet with the impoverished lower orders against the whole structure of the British state, which he depicts as a corrupt and rotten Castle of Pride. Janet Little, on the other hand, begins from a social and economic position even more obscure than Maxwell's. Despite the double bind of poverty and gender, however, Little imitates an impressive variety of poetic forms and language for the purpose of critiquing both Augustan and Scottish aesthetic standards and strips off the cloak of invisibility that Burns casts over his fellow plebeian poets. Whereas Maxwell deploys the older poetic traditions to access a rhetoric of political and social critique of the British state, Little concentrates on the possibilities of poetic discourse beyond the traditionally gendered and exclusive models that buttress the hierarchies oppressing the poor, particularly poor women, regardless of questions of national self-identification.

James Maxwell and the Polemics of Piety

James Maxwell, the self-styled “Poet in Paisley” and “student of divine poetry,” was born in Auchenback, parish of Mearns, Renfrewshire, in 1720. At the age of 20, he migrated to England in search of work and found it as a packman, weaver, clerk, usher, schoolmaster, and stonebreaker, as detailed in his long autobiographical poem, “A Brief Narrative, or, Some Remarks on the Life of James Maxwell” (1795). According to the poem, Maxwell at one time married and had a son, though no trace of either spouse or sprig remains. The town council of Paisley awarded Maxwell a small pension in 1787, upon which he lived until his death in 1800. Maxwell produced a large body of verse, including significant works of religious poetry, *Divine Miscellanies* (1756), *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1759), and *A New Version of the Whole Book of Psalms in Metre* (1773). As his DNB biographer put it, Maxwell “represents the terminus of the virile strain of poetry of Calvinist pietism in eighteenth-century Scotland. His work, however, rarely rises above doggerel.”²¹⁵

Maxwell eschews both the Scots vernacular and any suggestion of Scottish historical, linguistic, or cultural exceptionalism. Indeed, his *oeuvre* famously includes diatribes against the “radical” Burns and, less famously, Lapraik (whose volume of poetry he refers to as “Bumfodder”²¹⁶). While these effusions have been perhaps rightly ignored by generations of critics, Maxwell’s response to the French Revolution and its

²¹⁵ J. C. Hadden, “Maxwell, James (1720-1800),” rev. G. Carruthers, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

²¹⁶ J. Maxwell, *Animadversions on Some Poets and Poetasters of the Present Age, Especially Robert Burns, and John Lapraik. With a Contrast of Some of the Former Age* (Paisley, 1788). The Paisley printer John Nielsen printed all of Maxwell’s poems on the poet’s behalf.

political claims, particularly as articulated in the works of Thomas Paine, merit much closer examination than they have historically received. Beginning with the poem, “On the French Revolution. A moral essay on the rights of man,” Maxwell invokes Richard Price’s famous *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1789), which famously warns European monarchies:

Tremble all ye oppressors of the world! Take warning all ye supporters of slavish governments and slavish hierarchies! Call no more (absurdly and wickedly) reformation, innovation. You cannot now hold the world in darkness. Struggle no longer against increasing light and liberality. Restore to mankind their rights and consent to the correction of abuses, before they and you are destroyed together.

Maxwell’s version of Price’s sermon adopts the same millenarian strain and argues that the Revolution enacts God’s judgment on the pride of overreaching rulers:

Tremble, ye Potentates throughout the globe,
While mankind of their nat’ral rights ye rob;
Here learn a lesson from this great event,
And of your folly now in time repent.

* * * *

“Yea, more recent proofs did GOD advance,
In that GREAT REVOLUTION made in FRANCE!
Who could have thought that such a potent Prince
Would such a wondrous change at once evince?
When he a Despot was, of high renown,
And all his people trembled at his frown,
His will alone the source of ev’ry law,
To keep his subjects all in rev’rent awe;
Two strong supporters he could also shew,
The Aristocracy and Priesthood too,
Heritable his Kingdom long had been
For ages past: no danger could be seen.
His two supporters shar’d to fleece the flock,
Such threefold cord could not be easy broke,
To all appearance, it appear’d so strong,
Moreover, it had thus continued long,
And scarce a subject durst even think it wrong;
Much less to speak his mind, he thought it so,

Or he to the Bastille was sure to go.²¹⁷

The poem continues in this vein, heaping more opprobrium on aristocratic and church abuses and cruelty, the alliance of the French noblesse with the Pope, and the use of the Bastille to wall up offenders under false accusation and arbitrary justice. God calls down the Revolution—His power breaks Louis’s pride and forces him to call the Three Estates, from which the National Assembly emerges. The poem recounts the attack upon and fall of the Bastille, the symbol of French tyranny, and lauds the abolition of feudal privilege and the declaration of the rights of man (complete with a recitation of all 17 articles of the declaration in rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter, no less). Finally, the poem calls upon God to protect the French republicans from the threat of counter-revolution by European tyrants (including George III) and predicts a glorious republican victory.

Like Price and William Blake, Maxwell assumes a prophetic or bardic persona that is quite distinct from anything offered by his Scottish contemporaries. He is an interpreter of God’s will and intervention in human history, not only on behalf of the oppressed French peasantry, but also of the universal proletariat. Though the rhyme and meter are somewhat irregular, Maxwell frequently writes in the Old English line, identifying his verse with the tradition of Chaucer, Gower, and Langland rather than a particularly Scottish one. Indeed, as we shall see, Maxwell rejects imitation of his Scottish predecessors, eschewing both the verse forms of the Makars and the more recent

²¹⁷ James Maxwell, “*On the French Revolution. A moral essay on the rights of man*” (Paisley, 1792), 2-3.

recovery of a Scottish vernacular tradition in the verses of Ramsay, Fergusson, and Burns (to whom Maxwell exhibited an extreme aversion²¹⁸).

In addition to his identification with the formal elements of English medieval allegory, Maxwell reaches back to the pre-Reformation period in European history to find a political vernacular for his growing dissatisfaction with the British state in the revolutionary present. We see this older tradition in a long dramatic dialogue, “A Touch on the Times; or, Observations on Mr. Paine’s letter to Mr Secretary Dundas, Set Forth in the Following Dialogue” (Paisley, 1793?), composed in the style of fifteenth and sixteenth-century Scottish courtly literature (as well as European late medieval literature of this type) and following a pattern of complaint and exhortation to moral reform. In this respect Maxwell echoes in both form and content (though not in language) Lindsay’s pre-Reformation drama, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* (1542).²¹⁹ Maxwell’s “modern” dramatic complaint diagnoses Scotland’s ills as moral in nature, and that the path to true “reform” lies through a second reformation of the Scottish kirk and a renewal of Scotland’s commitment to a purified faith.

The poem begins with Henry Dundas and Thomas Paine engaged in dialogue. Dundas challenges Paine and demands suppression of his *Rights of Man* (stanzas 1-3). Paine responds:

- (6) There’s not an Author yet extant
 That wrote on civil government,
 More innocent than I:
 Therefore, tho’ all your clam’rous gang,

²¹⁸ Crawford notes Maxwell’s extreme hatred of Burns. R. Crawford, *The Bard*, 324.

²¹⁹ As we saw in the previous chapter, Lapraik and Pagan invoke Lindsay as well, but do not go as far as to imitate the formal verse of estates satire.

- Have rais'd against me such harangue,
Their malice I defy.
- (7) Your Mandate points at none but those,
Who truth and honesty oppose,
Seditious and profane:
But no such thing is found in mine,
Truth thro' the whole transparent shine,
All falsehood I disdain.
- (8) Examine all my Rights of Man,
And then disprove them if you can,
Or point out ought that's vicious:
Your Place men all I can defy,
And Pensioners whene'er they try,
To point out what's seditious.²²⁰

Dundas and the British government had indeed indicted Paine for seditious libel in the spring of 1792, following the publication of the second part of *Rights of Man* in February of that year. He defended his text with words similar to those used by the poet: "If, to expose the fraud and imposition of monarchy . . . to promote universal peace, civilization, and commerce, and to break the chains of political superstition, and raise degraded man to his proper rank; if these things be libellous . . . let the name of libeller be engraved on my tomb."²²¹ According to the poet, Paine's libelers include the court sycophants and their apologist Edmund Burke, who, in stanzas 10-12, accuse Paine of undermining the foundation of hereditary reign and inciting the swinish multitude to rebellion. Paine's denial in stanzas 13-23 reveals the constitutional basis for his call for political

²²⁰ James Maxwell, "A touch on the times [electronic resource]; or, observations on Mr. Paine's letter to Mr. Secretary Dundas; set forth in the following dialogue. ... To which is added, ... a paraphrase on the sixth chapter of Daniel; with practical observations, remarks, &c" (Paisley, 1793?), 4.

²²¹ T. Paine, "Letter Addressed To The Addressers On The Late Proclamation," 374.

reformation, appealing to both the king as the “father of the people” and to parliamentary sovereignty as established by the Glorious Revolution:

(14) If Governments were truly wise,
To see where their true interest lies,
They never would oppress:
Nor umbrage to their subjects give,
When they had much ado to live;
And were in sore distress.²²²

(23) And this is the law, I will maintain,
That whatsoever King shall reign,
He’s subject to the laws;
Ev’n to the laws that then were made,
When first they chose him for their head,
This is a righteous cause.²²³

Consistent with estates satire, the “Community” then responds in stanzas 24-58 with an extended list of grievances pertaining to taxes, war, debt, the abuses of aristocratic privilege, and the profiteering of the monied classes. Once again, the Commons invokes the traditional appeal of medieval complaint to the paternalistic affection of the monarch for the people, whose obedience is conditioned on the monarch’s subordination to law and parliament. Popular suspicion of “counselors” who seek a return to Stuart absolutism in order to sanction their avarice, the people warn, has brought the country to the verge of civil war.

(24) We most sincerely love our King,
And would obey in every thing
That’s equitably just:
But when his counselors persuade
Him on our nat’ral rights t’invade,
Then refuse we must.²²⁴

²²² Maxwell, “A touch on the times,” 5.

²²³ Maxwell, “A touch on the times,” 7.

²²⁴ Maxwell, “A touch on the times,” 7.

(29) We can't forget America,
Which did so many millions draw
To keep a needless war up:
Devoid of justice as of sense.
To sink us in such vast expence,
Above the breeches far up.

(30) And what got we to quit the cost?
Above half the empire lost,
With thousands of our lives:
Fathers and sons to so many slain,
But few returned home again,
To cheer their mourning wives.²²⁵

(46) The Slave-trade too that is prolong'd,
The kingdom thinks itself much wrong'd,
By this inhuman deed:
It raises also jealousy,
That most of us soon slaves must be,
It seems almost decreed.

(47) But most of us resolve to die,
Rather than live in slavery,
This is our fixt intent.
If this the Court their course hold on,
They'll soon have subjects few or none,
Whate'er may be th' event.²²⁶

While the American War has brought the country to financial ruin and caused widespread social disruption, the slave trade taints Britain's moral virtue and threatens the liberty of the subject itself. The Commons reflects the growing populist sentiment against the slave trade as an infringement on free labor, as well as an "inhuman deed" inconsistent with Christian doctrine. In this respect, it is far from clear that the Commons adopts Paine's "rights of man" universalism and its implications for political equality. Indeed, the

²²⁵ Maxwell, "A touch on the times," 8-9.

²²⁶ Maxwell, "A touch on the times," 12.

“people” seem quite content with their existing privileges under the law. Their primary concern appears to be the restoration and maintenance of the constitutional order and ejection of the overweening Court.

The Court responds by chastising the people for their ignorance and allowing contumacious hotheads such as Paine to goad them into insurrection. The people repeat their allegations against the courtiers, accusing them of destroying the monarchy and constitutional government. The poem ends with a peroration on the blessings of British liberty in terms James Thomson would approve:

(66) Let peace and liberty still reign
In Britain, and just laws maintain,
And then let none offend;
But let all ranks united stand,
To guard the bulwarks of the land,
For ever without end.²²⁷

This poem is followed by a long allegory laboriously entitled, “Daniel in the Lion’s Den; Or, A Paraphrase on the VIth Chapter of Daniel; Wherein is set forth, the danger of Kings hearkening to Parasitical Court-Dressers, and false-hearted flattering Counsellors with Practical Remarks and Observations on the foregoing Historical Chapter.” The title leaves little doubt who is in for a pasting here, but the poem is hardly a simple repetition of the people’s case against Dundas and the Court in “Mr Paine’s letter.” Maxwell compares Darius’s counselors, who persuaded him to condemn the innocent Daniel, with the present British government. Instead of the dialogic format of the estates satire, the poet reverts for the most part to iambic pentameter:

Our present British King, ‘tis true we find

²²⁷ Maxwell, “A touch on the times,” 16.

Hath always shown an honest upright mind;
Yet he is so by flatt'ring men deceiv'd,
His subjects are most grievously enslav'd.²²⁸

So these likewise, without the least occasion,
Have caus'd our King to sign a Proclamation,
Which they had form'd with bold ambitious views,
That so they might the innocent accuse.
But all their fabrication was in vain,
Till they gave it another foolish strain,
And made it speak what it doth not contain.
It only speaks of libelers seditious,
And such as publish pamphlets false and vicious;
But they have given it another strain,
To make it speak against the WORKS OF PAINE.
And such is their false overstraining plan,
To make it speak against the RIGHTS OF MAN.
If this had been within their Proclamation,
'Twould have been to mankind abomination,
But this they durst not do, nor go so far,
For it would then have been declaring war
Against mankind, all that of Adam came,
Of ev'ry nation, and of ev'ry name.
This would have been a task for them to do,
For they must mean all mankind to subdue—
Suppress their rights, and make them all submit
To whatever bondage they thought fit.²²⁹

Yet is our Court still deaf to all our cries,
And all our sore complaints they still despise.
This shews that we are Christians but by name
And nothing else to prove our sacred claim.²³⁰

The general appeal is by now familiar, but here the Court stands accused of its imperial design to subjugate all the sons of man. In place of the British constitutional exceptionalism evident in “Mr Paine’s letter,” the poet warns “ev’ry nation” of the Court’s intention to replicate the Roman persecution of Jews and Gentiles alike. Darius

²²⁸ Maxwell, “A touch on the times,” 26.

²²⁹ Maxwell, “A touch on the times,” 27-28.

²³⁰ Maxwell, “A touch on the times,” 30.

represents every voluptuous “Oriental” tyrant present in the British imagination, but the poem nevertheless produces a striking deployment of orientalist displacement to describe political oppression in the heart of the empire itself. While fears of the domestic effects of “Asian despotism” were rife in the wake of the Hastings Trial and revelations of corruption in the East India Company (in which Dundas was implicated), the poet seems to make common cause between the dispossessed classes of Britain and those of Britain’s Asian domains.²³¹ If Britons are “Christians but by name,” who is to say that the Hindus or Muslims of Britain’s vast Indian empire might yet make their own claims to the privileges to which Britons—and Christians—are entitled? Though the poem’s natural rights appeal is undoubtedly Anglocentric, it is nonetheless powerful for its assumption that, just as in the revolution all people become French, in liberty all people may become British.

The poem closes with the Court accused of seeking offensive war, “To rob, to murder, plunder, and destroy.” The poet predicts the demise of British liberty unless Providence intervenes to save it: “If gracious Heav’n do not his grace dispense,/And cause a reformation here commence.” Once again, the poem is significant for its reversal of Protestant, “British” triumphalism, a theme to which Maxwell returns three years later in another long-winded political poem entitled “War Against Heaven Openly Declared By Multitudes in This Degenerate Age; Who Say to the Almighty, Depart From Us; For We Desire Not the Knowledge of Thy Ways. A seasonable and serious Exhortation for all Sorts to consider of their Ways, before it is too late.” This time, however, the poet

²³¹ On the general subject of the domestic implications of corruption in the EIC, see N. Dirks, *Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, 2009).

turns *against* the radical political doctrine of Paine, the atheistic philosophy of Hume, and the moral libertinism of Burns, viewing them as symptomatic of the rot at the core of the

British state:

Alas! alas, what wretched age is this!
Hark, how th' old serpent now begins to hiss!
Yea, boldly men their Blasphemies impart,
And to the Almighty say, "From us depart:
We neither know, nor do we want to know,
The knowledge of Thy ways on earth below.
In vain thou send'st thy priests and prophets here,
For none of such will we attend to hear;
And what they call thy pure and holy Word,
Is totally by men of sense abhorr'd:
For all they say, and all they can devise,
We know is only base fallacious lies."

Thus hath the arch-deceiver led them on
To think a heav'n or hell, or future state is none.
This they believe a while, and when they die
They think they shall for ever thoughtless lie
Among their fellow brutes, and never rise
To hear the trumpet that shall rend the skies;
Therefore they heed not what they do or say
Because they think there is no judgment day.
These are the notions they have learnt ('tis plain)
From their great fav'rite leader, Thomas Paine;
And many more, who now are gone before,
Whose works and memories they much adore.
Emissaries from hell, they labour'd hard,
But now they're gone to get their full reward.
Such as a Hume and Burns, who now are gone
Into a state, to them before unknown.
But were they suffered hither to return,
How would they for their former madness mourn!
Like him who would have had a Laz'rus sent
To warn his brethren that they might repent;
Before they to that place of torment came,
Where he was scorch'd with everlasting flame.
But, ah, too late! his cries were all in vain;

For none can there that liberty obtain.²³²

The subject of the poet's wrath has shifted from the repressive political machinations of the Court to the religious, philosophical, and scientific materialism identified with radical dissenters such as Richard Price and Joseph Priestley, as well as notorious Scottish radicals such as Alexander Leslie, an Edinburgh bookseller, deist, and member of the *United Scotsman*.²³³ But this is no Burkean paean to conservatism, deference, and aristocratic virtue. Maxwell's pietism aims rather at the failure of the political idealism unleashed by the French Revolution to sustain the moral and spiritual renovation of the British state. The Court is just as corrupt as ever, the Monarch just as ill-served by his courtiers and placemen, and the Church just as impotent and worldly. Paine's *Rights of Man* still stands, as long as "Man" is conceived as subject to eternal judgment. The utilitarian principles that Paine, Priestley, and their ilk imply will never produce the kind of Christian republic the poet desires, but only a godless deism in which the state itself becomes the object of religious adoration. In Burkean fashion (ironic, given the poet's disdain for the statesman), the poet refrains from condemning the Enlightenment and its aspirations for the perfection of human knowledge, but specifically denounces a specific strand of materialistic thinking within the Enlightenment project. The Miltonic strain of the poem, the poet's invocation of the "old serpent" and the darkness visible, reveals (as in Milton) the poet's bitter disappointment with the failure of republican ideals and godly

²³² James Maxwell, "War Against Heaven Openly Declared By Multitudes in This Degenerate Age; Who Say to the Almighty, Depart From Us; For We Desire Not the Knowledge of Thy Ways. A seasonable and serious Exhortation for all Sorts to consider of their Ways, before it is too late" (Paisley, 1796), 2-3.

²³³ See Harris, "Print and Politics," *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution*, 176-77.

living to usher in the New Jerusalem. In this sense, Paine's crime is not that he is too republican, but that he is not a good Puritan:

But none of all his black infernal train,
So barefac'd or invet'rate were as Paine;
Against the Word of God hath he so spurn'd,
That some ('tis said) have now their Bibles burn'd.
If this be true or false, affirm not I,
But better proof we shall have by and by.
But this is certain, that if they've receiv'd
His horrid blasphemies, and them believ'd,
No wonder that they have their Bibles burn'd,
And at reveal'd religion, wholly spurn'd.²³⁴

Here the poem reveals a greater uneasiness with the basis of British "science"—the empirical method itself. It is not enough for Christianity to be "reasonable" and defensible based on rational principles alone. "Reveal'd religion" can never be compatible with an empirical approach to human understanding, despite the efforts of Lockean ethicists to make it so. Indeed, the poet actually commends the Bible-burners for their intellectual honesty. If they believe the empiricists and the materialists, they *must* put their Scriptures to the torch. Moral bankruptcy lies with those, like Burke, who desperately assert the authority of religious tradition without the categorical imperative of revelation. Far better to be a skeptic such as Hume or Burns, who discovered the error of their ways and now take their eternal medicine like honest men, than a hypocritical court sycophant or bloodthirsty Jacobin:

Yea, this I'm certain of, that some despise
That precious Book, and call it lies;
I have heard some call it but a legend vain,
And this they own'd they've learnt from Thomas Paine.
Yea, it is said they have appointed clubs,

²³⁴ Maxwell, "War Against Heaven," 4.

And duly meet to give the Bible rubs.
Yea, there they meet, and all confer together,
To harden and confirm each one another.
Nay, it is said that ev'n in Paisley Town,
Four of these cursed clubs are there well known.
If this be true that Magistrates connive,
No wonder then that deism here thrive.²³⁵

Despite Pittite repression and sedition trials, radical secret societies, the poet tells us, still exist in Paisley and, indeed, across Scotland. “Radical Renfrew” did not earn its reputation for nothing. In 1794 Paisley appears to have hosted a “more fiery, turbulent sub-stratum of radicalism within the Scottish labouring population,”²³⁶ featuring frequent arrests of weavers and artisans for a variety of political crimes such as drinking seditious toasts, planning jail breaks, attempting to persuade His Majesty’s soldiers to desert the colors, and circulating subversive writings such as *Rights of Man*. The poet further suggests that the “Magistrates connive” with the “deists,” allowing these groups free rein to spread their false doctrines. But for Maxwell the “sedition” identified with political radicalism, such as the declaration of one Paisley weaver, John Finlayson, that “he would for a penny cut off His Majesty’s Head” (thereby imagining the king’s death and committing high treason²³⁷) pales before blasphemy.²³⁸ But while the blasphemers come in for their share of opprobrium in the poem, they are at best gullible and at worst misguided. The poet’s real venom is reserved for the engrossers, who have used their

²³⁵ Maxwell, “War Against Heaven,” 4.

²³⁶ B. Harris, “Scotland in the 1790s,” *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution*, 7.

²³⁷ On the efforts of the British government to extend treason prosecutions to those who did not directly threaten the king, but only “imagined” his death, see J. Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford, 2000).

²³⁸ Qtd. in B. Harris, “Scotland in the 1790s,” *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution*, 7.

monopoly on food production to create 'fictitious scarcity' and increase the suffering of the poor:

One mighty phalanx I shall here describe,
Who are deriv'd from Mammon's num'rous tribe,
Who fell with Satan, when from heav'n he fell
And got a place appointed him in hell.
As num'rous these as are the grains of sand
That deck the margin of the ebbing strand,
And are as eager riches to obtain,
As if they were just starving for a grain;
These now are risen mightily of late,
And for earth's riches they make great debate;
Yea, lo, they strive to compass sea and land,
And strive to wrest them from Jehovah's hand.
Their god, ev'n Mammom, highly they adore,
And all they covet is for earthly store.
Of late have they got out their cruel horns,
Strong as the heads and necks of unicorns.
With these they push, and cruelly devour
All that they can get once within their pow'r.
For instance, God had sent of grain such store
As seldom had on earth been seen before;
Yet did they raise a clam'rous false report,
That grain was grown so scarce of ev'ry sort;
And that there was not now enough to serve
Till harvest came, but half the land must starve.
And this alarm soon reach'd our British court,
(That corn of ev'ry kind was grown so short:
This mov'd the Court these tidings to believe,
Tho' all their craft was only to deceive.)
The court at once the false report believ'd,
And never thought that they were thus deceiv'd.
All means was then attempted to sustain
The nation, since we were so short of grain.
Distilling was forbid, lest there should be
A famine soon unto the last degree!
The King's own table with brown bread was serv'd,
Because 'twas thought we soon should all be starv'd.
Starch-making and hair-powder were suppress'd,
And ev'ry frugal method was thought best.
A bounty was allow'd to bring in grain
From foreign parts, the nation to maintain.

These put it in the pow'r of Mammon's tribe
To raise all articles we can describe
For mankind's use, and to distress the poor
Beyond the pow'r of nature to endure.
This is ingratitude beyond degree,
Against the King of kings; this all may see.²³⁹

Here the poet refers to the skyrocketing cost of meal and the attendant controversy over grain exports from Scotland to England in the 1790s. According to Kenneth Logue, grain prices increased to historically high levels in 1795 and 1796 and then again in 1799 and 1800, triggering food riots across Scotland and England.²⁴⁰ Resonating once again with rhetoric common to medieval estates satire, the poem criticizes profiteering on the sale of grain as increasingly capitalistic Scottish “improvers” bypass relatively unprofitable local or regional markets for hugely lucrative bulk grain sales to the English national market. “The effective operation of the markets in these staple commodities was crucial for the survival of the lower orders,” Christopher Whatley notes. “If the market system was judged by the urban working classes to be failing, that is not delivering grain and meal in sufficient quantities at reasonable prices, there was a risk of terrifying threats (in the form of anonymous letters and circulars), rioting, and physical assaults on the persons and property of those deemed guilty of disregarding customary expectations that local needs should be satisfied first.”²⁴¹ Indeed, meal riots were a recurring feature of Scottish society in the late eighteenth century, despite lingering paternalistic efforts to force farmers to sell their products locally (and, as the poet notes, to curtail brewing) and

²³⁹ Maxwell, “War Against Heaven,” 5-6.

²⁴⁰ K. Logue, *Popular Disturbances*, 23-31.

²⁴¹ C. Whatley, “Roots of 1790s Radicalism: Reviewing the Economic and Social Background,” 35.

parliamentary acts allowing bounties on imported oats.²⁴² The moral economy, the poet reminds us, is God's economy, not Adam Smith's. The "ingratitude beyond degree" of the landowners, with their enclosures and sheep walks, their cash rents and agricultural "improvement," threaten the nation with starvation and their own eternal souls with perdition. Even the King and his court fall victim to the agricultural entrepreneurs and opportunists; the poem suggests that they, too, have been duped by the "false report" of scarcity in the midst of God's plenty.

O cruel avarice, what hast thou done?
By thee have thousands here been forc'd to groan:
While thou and Mammon rear'd rebellious arms
Against the God of heaven with loud alarms.
Such are the bold emissaries of hell,
With many more who with their leader' fell:
But time would fail me here to mention all
The rebel tribes that sprang up since the fall.
I therefore shall but mention one tribe more,
Who take delight in shedding human gore;
Namely the cruel seed of cursed Cain,
By whom Abel, his dear brother slain.
And such are those who raise offensive war,
Against their neighbors, whether near or far.
These have appear'd of late exceeding fast,
But now we hope the storm is almost past:
For they have got their bellyfuls of late,
We hope they will not soon their game repeat.
AMEN. SO BE IT.²⁴³

The poem that begins by denouncing Thomas Paine and his atheistic (or at least deistic) disciples closes with a diatribe against warmongering, linking the greed of the grain engrossers to the bloodlust of the hawks in the Pittite and French governments. As the

²⁴² Logue counts 42 food riots in Scotland between 1780 and 1815. K. Logue, *Popular Disturbances*, 23.

²⁴³ Maxwell, "War Against Heaven," 8.

seemingly endless war with France dragged on year after year, even vigilant loyalism had difficulty stifling the voices of dissent, and the poem demonstrates that it was quite possible to reject Paine's radicalism and republicanism without at the same time embracing King and country. Despite government efforts to suppress popular expressions of war weariness and mount a counter-offensive shoring up public support for the government's war policy, opposition might still make itself heard, not only in plebeian poetry, but also in unsubsidized media such as *The Scots Chronicle*, which opined at the dawn of the new year, 1797:

After four years of bloodshed, hostility and devastation, unparalleled in the annals of the crimes, the follies, and the sufferings of mankind; we have lately seen the Belligerent Powers making a feeble attempt to reconcile their enmities, and suspend the calamities, which they have so long, and so eagerly been heaping upon each other. Every step towards this desirable object, from the commencement to the conclusion, marked their mutual jealousy, and we fear has only tended to confirm their hatred. The attempt has, therefore, proved abortive; and by this failure we are again doomed to experience all the miseries and misfortunes of a war, which has almost exhausted the strength, and drained the veins of the most powerful and flourishing nations under the sun. Like lightning in a hurricane at midnight, this pale flash of hope just alarmed us with a momentary view of the horrors that surround us, then, vanishing into darkness, has left us to despair.²⁴⁴

For every agonized editorial or protest petition against the war, dozens can be adduced in its favor, a testament to the ability of a paranoid government to manufacture "popular" expressions of loyalty to the King and his ministers and to denounce any dissent as inspired by Jacobinism. James Maxwell imagined a third way, a second reformation, a millenarian release from the "mind-forg'd manacles" of war profiteering and corrupt government.

²⁴⁴ *The Scots Chronicle*, January 10, 1797.

Janet Little: Neither “Scotch” nor “Milkmaid”

As Valentina Bold has pointed out, Janet Little’s poetry, long seen as imitative of that of Burns, has received only a smattering of critical attention in the context of Scottish identity formation during the revolutionary period.²⁴⁵ Little was born in 1759 at Nether Bogside, Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire. According to James Paterson, her “parents were not in circumstances to afford her more than a common education; but she was early distinguished for her superior capacity and love of reading.”²⁴⁶ She served in the family of a clergyman in Glasgow, worked for Burns’s patron Mrs. Dunlop, and rose to head dairymaid of the Ayrshire estate, then under lease to Mrs. Dunlop’s sister. She married another servant of the estate, John Richmond, and raised his five children by a previous marriage. She also joined a Dissenting congregation at Galston.²⁴⁷

Little produced a single volume of poetry, published in 1792 by the Ayr printers John and Peter Wilson and dedicated to her patron Flora, Countess of Loudoun.²⁴⁸ Like her fellow Ayrshire poets Lapraik and Sillar, Little composed a broad variety of verse in formal Augustan and, in a few cases, vernacular modes, featuring significant generic, rhythmic, and metrical variety. The 54 selections in the volume include odes, a large number of pastoral love poems, elegies, satires, epistolary poems, and didactic verse. Paterson’s judgment that Little’s poems are “not destitute of merit, while all are unexceptionable in point of morality, and bear evidence of a cultivated, well-regulated

²⁴⁵ In V. Bold, “Janet Little ‘The Scotch Milkmaid’ and ‘Peasant Poetry,’” *Scottish Literary Journal* 20.2 (1993), 21-30.

²⁴⁶ J. Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 79.

²⁴⁷ See Paterson’s biography, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 78-91.

²⁴⁸ All poems are quoted from J. Little, *The Poetical Works of Janet Little, The Scotch Milkmaid* (Ayr, 1792).

mind,” is remarkably complimentary (if patronizing), given that he attributed to Sillar an utter “lack of genius” and to Lapraik “little of the genius of poetry” (though Paterson credits him with “good sense”).²⁴⁹ Additionally, Little was more than willing to cloak herself in Burns’s mantle and market to potential patrons as an untutored poetaster, the “Scotch Milkmaid.”²⁵⁰ For these reasons, and perhaps because Little does not engage in *direct* political or social commentary in the poems, her critique of Anglo-Scottish culture and the dominant Augustan poetic conventions that she perceives as discriminating against women and the laboring poor has received relatively little attention.²⁵¹ Yet Little’s identity as a woman *and* a plebeian poet, while limiting her access to more direct forms of political discourse, liberates her to interrogate, among other things, the cultural elite’s valorization of Burns and his particular Scottish idiom. As I will argue, Little interprets the *literati*’s enthusiastic response to Burns as part and parcel of English political and cultural hegemony in Scotland. She also suggests that Burns, if not overtly complicit with the elite, actively participates in his insidious assimilation into the English pantheon of “national” poets. His brand of Scottish nationalism, expressed particularly in the Bruce poems and his “Ode for General Washington’s Birthday,” for example, has as little to offer women and the laboring poor as pro-British patriotism. Little’s poetry suggests an inclusive, open, and transnational form of identity remarkably free of local parochialism,

²⁴⁹ J. Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 83; 44 (on Sillar); 29-30 (on Lapraik).

²⁵⁰ See V. Bold, “Janet Little,” 21-22.

²⁵¹ With the notable exception of Moira Ferguson’s chapter on Little in M. Ferguson, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class, and Gender* (Albany, 1995).

while warning of the danger to women of masculine constructions of a martial Scottish nation.²⁵²

Little and Burns: A Woman's a Woman for A' That

Despite Little's lack of even the modicum of formal learning enjoyed by her male counterparts, Paterson had good reason for believing in her literary *bona fides*. In "An Epistle to Mr. Robert Burns, dated July 12, 1789," and subsequently published in her volume, she recites a standard genealogy in honor of the Bard of Coila:

Fair fa' the honest rustic swain,
The pride o' a' our Scottish plain
Thou gies us joy to hear thy strain.
 And notes sae sweet
Oh! Ramsay's shade revived again
 In thee we greet.

Loved Thalia, that delightful muse,
Seem'd lang shut up as a recluse
To all she did her aid refuse
 Since Allan's day,
Till Burns arose, then did she choose
 To grace his lay.

To hear thy sang all ranks desire,
Sae weel you strike the dormant lyre;
Apollo with poetic fire
 Thy breast does warm.
And critics silently admire
 Thy art to charm.²⁵³

This conventional flattery, often shared between Ayrshire poets, appears to align Little with an independent Scottish poetic tradition, equally inspired by classical authority as

²⁵² Here I differ from Moira Ferguson, who argues that Little writes from "a recognizably Scottish patriotic position" in addition to her gender and class opposition to the *literati*. Ferguson, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, 4-5.

²⁵³ Janet Little, *The Poetical Works of Janet Little, The Scotch Milkmaid* (Ayr, 1792), 160-61.

that of the English and now reanimated by Burns's genius. Those English critics, stuck in formal modes of Augustan prosody, nevertheless "silently admire" the authenticity of Burns's Scottish verse. It is important to note that Little judges such authenticity in terms of the Greek muses, not indigenous Scottish ones. In other words, it is Apollo's breast that warms to Burns's verse, not Scotia's. Indeed, Burns's poetry is more British than that of the pantheon of English national poets:

Did Addison or Pope but hear,
Or Sam, that critic most severe,
A ploughboy sing with throat sae clear,
 They in a rage
Their works would a' in pieces tear,
 And curse your page.

Sure Milton's eloquence were faint
The beauties of your verse to paint:
My rude unpolish'd strokes but taint
 Their brilliancy;
Th' attempt would doubtless vex a saint,
 And weel may thee.²⁵⁴

In exceeding Addison, Pope, and Johnson, Burns has restored classical vitality to British poetry, his "bonnie homespun speech,/Wi' winsome glee the heart can teach/A better lesson,/Than servile bards who fan and fleech/Like beggar's messin.'" Though admittedly hyperbolic in the convention of epistolary effusions of this type, Little's version reveals a sharp political edge that cuts deeply. Milton, also a dissenting poet, is the only English versifier whose eloquence approaches that of Burns. Moreover, Milton's identification with the radical politics of the Interregnum distinguishes him from the English poets who curried favor with one or the other political factions of the eighteenth century. Despite the

²⁵⁴ J. Paterson, *Contemporaries of Burns*, 81; Little, *Poetical Works*, 162. The version of the poem printed in Little's volume omits the Milton stanza.

efforts of these “servile bards” to appropriate Milton to English national status, the true British poet knows better. Little implies that Milton expresses an authentic British identity, symbolically handing the torch to Ramsay and then to Burns. Just as the center of British learning moved from London, Oxford, and Cambridge to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and other seats of Scottish higher education in the first half of the eighteenth century, British art relocated to the north as well. As if to punctuate this point, the erstwhile English bards tear their own works to pieces, leaving intact those of the Scottish upstart. It will be Burns’s poetry that inspires the next generation of British poets, while the effete and pedantic productions of the Johnsonian anglicizers will pass away.²⁵⁵

This commentary on Augustan or Johnsonian norms is continued from a distinctly gendered perspective in “On Reading Lady Mary Montague and Mrs. Rowe’s Letters”:

As Venus by night, so MONTAGUE bright
Long in the gay circle did shine:
She tun’d well the lyre, mankind did admire;
They prais’d, and they call’d her divine.

This pride of the times, in far distant climes,
Stood high in the temple of Fame:
Britannia’s shore, then ceas’d to adore,
A greater the tribute did claim.

To sue for the prize, fam’d ROWE did arise,
More bright than Apollo was she:
Superior rays obtain’d now the bays,
And MONTAGUE bended the knee.

O excellent ROWE, much Britain does owe
To what you’ve ingen’ously penn’d:
Of virtue and wit, the model you’ve hit;

²⁵⁵ Moira Ferguson likewise reads this poem as valorizing the Scots vernacular, although I argue that Little does this in order to emphasize Burns’s “Britishness.” See Ferguson, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, 96-8.

Who reads must you ever commend.

Would ladies pursue, the paths trod by you,
And jointly to learning aspire,
The men soon would yield unto them the field,
And critics silently admire.²⁵⁶

While this poem might be read as a straightforward acknowledgement of a woman poet's debt to her illustrious predecessors, reading it in the context of Little's critique of Englishness yields a more ambiguous interpretation. In the first two stanzas, the poet lauds Lady Montague for winning "mankind's" praise in her "gay" circle, thus emphasizing her class position, as well as her dependence upon the critical judgment of the male framers of aesthetic standards. When Elizabeth Rowe eclipses Lady Montague as Britain's most popular poet, she likewise commands the admiration of critics such as Addison, Pope, and Johnson for her "virtue and wit," conforming to the very "model" of Augustan poetic success. Though her first volume of poetry, published in 1696 under the pseudonym Philomela, defends a woman's prerogative to write poetry, Rowe's most famous poem, "On the death of Mr Thomas Rowe" (published in 1717 and again in 1720 as an appendix to Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*) deploys impeccable Augustan rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter. As Little implies, such imitation is "ingen'ous" but somehow wanting. To follow in the footsteps of Montague and Rowe, the poet suggests, might earn the "silent" admiration of male critics, but it would hardly liberate aesthetics from the Johnsonian straightjacket that constrains, among others, working class women seeking to join the ranks of the poets. Indeed, the form of the poem—four-line stanzas featuring couplets consisting of one line of iambic pentameter and an adjoining line of

²⁵⁶ Little, *Poetical Works*, 153-54.

iambic tetrameter, rhymed *abcb*—varies and enlivens the stately Augustan didactic verse for which Rowe has been praised, implying that Little’s versatility in the use of rhyme and meter differentiates her from those poets who dutifully compose the standard English line.²⁵⁷

English practitioners of Augustan aesthetics come in for yet another round of vernacular guff in “Given to a Lady Who Asked Me to Write a Poem.” The first two stanzas of poem, composed in rhymed couplets of iambic tetrameter, edgily emphasize the imitative, derivative, and superficial qualities of Augustan verse:

In royal Anna’s golden days,
Hard was the task to gain the bays;
Hard was it then the hill to climb;
Some broke a neck, some lost a limb.
The vot’ries for poetic fame,
Got aff decrepit, blind, an’ lame:
Except that little fellow Pope,
Few ever then got near its top:
An’ Homer’s crutches he may thank,
Or down the brae he’d got a clank.

Swift, Thomson, Addison, an’ Young
Make Pindus echo to their tongue,
In hopes to please a learned age;
But Doctor Johnson, in a rage,
Unto posterity did shew
Their blunders great, their beauties few.
But now he’s dead, we weel may ken;
For ilka dunce maun hae a pen,
To write in hamely, uncouth rhymes;

²⁵⁷ Moira Ferguson’s reading of the panegyric to Rowe emphasizes Little’s preference for Rowe’s “piety” over Lady Mary’s aristocratic social *milieu*, though the poem acknowledges the importance of Montagu’s importance as a woman poet. In this respect, Ferguson argues, Little “prioritizes a precarious gendered subjectivity over a nationalist politic.” *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, 101. I agree with this aspect of her reading, though I also interpret the poem to sharply differentiate herself from the Augustan tradition that Rowe exemplifies.

An' yet forsooth they please the times.²⁵⁸

The poem's harsh dismissal of the most popular early eighteenth-century English poets, as well as the debilitating aesthetic standards that afflict Augustan verse more generally, go well beyond satire or the self-justificatory conventions of poetic modesty often found in plebeian poetry. As in the epistle to Burns, Little yokes English aesthetic standards to the social pretences of aristocratic society and its pedantic confusion of real learning with the empty imitation of Greek and Roman genre poetry (which Little herself imitates in other poems, as we shall see). Johnson's denunciation of artificial verse forms in favor of literature he believed faithfully mirrored nature, most famously Shakespeare, seems little improvement, primarily because it privileges linguistic purity (metropolitan London English) and moral uniformity over local, regional, and even national language variants and traditional poetic forms and subject matters.²⁵⁹

The "hamely, uncouth rhymes" that Johnson detests, however, "please the times," just as the "decrepit, blind, an' lame" verse of the Augustans slaked the public thirst for poetry in the early eighteenth century. The great Doctor, it appears, has proved incapable of laying down a law of aesthetic enjoyment to accompany his canon-building endeavors. In the absence of Johnsonian interdiction, the dunces re-emerge in response to public demand:

²⁵⁸ Little, *Poetical Works*, 113-14.

²⁵⁹ For a perceptive analysis of this poem, see M. McCulloch, "The lasses reply to Mr Burns: women poets and songwriters in the Lowlands," *Crossing the Highland Line: cross-currents in eighteenth-century Scottish writing*, selected papers from the 2005 ASLA Annual Conference 14.1 (2009), 137-52. McCulloch similarly argues that Little "makes an assault on all three hierarchies in relation to literary recognition—nation, class and gender." 143.

A ploughman chiel, Rab Burns his name,
Pretends to write; an' thinks nae shame
To souse his sonnets on the court;
An' what is strange, they praise him for't,
Even folks, wha're of the highest station,
Ca' him the glory of our nation.²⁶⁰

But Burns appeals to a Scottish public hungry for its *own* national aesthetic. While some English of high station may desire to claim Burns for “Britain,” particularly given the uncertain state of Scottish loyalty in a period of reactionary paranoia, the poet asserts that Burns’s poetry (and by implication her own) cannot be reconciled with Johnsonian standards; it quite simply can never be “English.” The poet thus squarely confronts the problem with using Scottish materials to construct a distinct and broadly representative British poetic discourse in the context of national emergency. While England certainly had its own weaver and artisan poets who could not be assimilated into a loyalist discourse, which speaks to a certain class affinity across the English-Scottish national border, poets such as Blake, even if willing to seek it, could never hope to attain the patronage necessary to enjoy the slightest commercial and popular success. Scottish plebeian poets such as Burns, Lapraik, Sillar, and Little, by contrast, could and did (Pagan, alas, could not). The fever of political ferment and suppression that swept Scotland in the early 1790s had some but by no means a decisive effect on the willingness of Scottish poets to declare national aesthetic independence, whatever their views on the revolution in France might have been. That in 1792 Janet Little appeared so little daunted by the prospect of offending her potential patrons and subscribers (the long list of which can be found at the beginning of her volume) speaks volumes about the

²⁶⁰ Little, *Poetical Works*, 114.

tension between the Scottish, English, and British conceptions of self and national identification. One could simultaneously be hostile to arrogant English aesthetics and politics, respectful of vestigial Scottish feudal hierarchies, and loyal to the composite British polity created by the Anglo-Scottish Union in the face of the Gallic threat. What rankles, rather, is imperial subordination and a mistaken English perception of Scottishness.

Yet at the same time the poem betrays a distinct awareness of the risks associated with Burns's fame and a too close self-identification with the particular circumstances under which the Edinburgh *literati* have constructed Burns's popularity:

But what is more surprising still,
A milkmaid must tak up her quill;
An' she will write, shame fa' the rabble!
That think to please wi' ilka bawble.
They may thank heav'n, auld Sam's asleep;
For could he ance but get a peep,
He, wi' a vengeance wad them sen'
A' headlong to the dunces' den.²⁶¹

The awkward rhyme of “rabble” and “bawble” stands out here. Is it a “shame” for a milkmaid to presume to the poetic arts or seek a commercial market for her wares among the rabble? Or do the guardians of aesthetic and political uniformity fear the effect of a milkmaid's poetry on the “rabble” itself—the same threatening mob so prone to subversive activities? The issue, the poet tells us, is what type of challenge the vernacular poetics of Burns and his counterparts actually pose to dominant discourses of art and politics. There is no evidence that the “Scotch Milkmaid” ever engaged in the slightest bit of political activism. She remained loyal and deferential to her patrons, her landlords, and

²⁶¹ Little, *Poetical Works*, 114.

her “betters.” Yet subversion comes in packages of various size and may be received in very different ways than the giver intends. Burns’s flirtation with Jacobinism and Scottish nativism may prove far less subversive than the milkmaid’s “bawble,” obscuring his surrender to—and her defiance of—the metropolitan elitism of the capital:

Yet Burns, I’m tauld, can write wi’ ease,
An’ a’ denominations please;
Can wi’ uncommon glee impart
A usefu’ lesson to the heart;
Can ilka latent thought expose,
An’ Nature trace whare’er she goes;
Of politics can talk with skill,
Nor dare the critics blame his quill.²⁶²

This curiously second-hand recounting of Burns’s broad popularity in Scotland inserts a critical distance between the poet and the ploughman, marking the uneasy relationship Burns’s others shared with their vastly more popular rival. One can even detect a note of resentment, as the poet anticipates the savage criticism she is likely to receive in response to her poetic offering, while the arbiters of Scottish taste grant Burns free passage:

But then a rustic country quean
To write—was e’er the like o’t seen?
Mair fit she wad her dairy tent;
Or labour at her spinning wheel,
An’ do her wark baith swift an’ weel.
Frae that she may some profit share,
But winna frae her rhyming ware.
Does she, poor silly thing, pretend
The manners of our age to mend?
Mad as we are, we’re wise enough
Still to despise sic paultry stuff.
“May she wha writes, of wit get mair,
An’ a’ that read an ample share
Of candour ev’ry fault to screen,
That in her dogg’ral scrawls are seen.”²⁶³

²⁶² Little, *Poetical Works*, 115.

This stanza marks the poet's gender in the strongest possible terms. Not only is poetry a vocation unfit for rural boobs and dunces—Burns the exceptional ploughman-poet proves the rule—but, as Leith Davis has argued, a woman poet is especially suspect and subject to even more exacting critical scrutiny than her male counterparts.²⁶⁴ Indeed, Johnson's dictum about women poets constitutes sufficient commentary in a poem that rejects Johnsonian categories altogether. Yet the critic's choral voice in the poem is not even Johnsonian; it is Scottish and belongs to the Edinburgh *literati* who have canonized Burns while disdaining all other similarly situated poets. Indeed, from the perspective of this poem Burns himself proves to be a trimmer, producing pleasant, moral, and politically neutral "scrawls" designed to propitiate the intellectual and cultural elites and confirm their own critical genius. Indeed, Little's patron, Mrs. Dunlop, chastised Burns for his dismissive condescension toward Little and her verse, writing to him in late 1792 following his visit to Loudon House:

Methinks I hear you ask me with an air that made me feel as I had got a slap in the face, if you must read all the few lines I had pointed out to you of notice in Jenny's book. How did I upbraid my own conceited folly at that instant that had

²⁶³ Little, *Poetical Works*, 115-16.

²⁶⁴ See Leith Davis, "Gender and the Nation in the Work of Robert Burns and Janet Little," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38.4 (1998), 621-45. In a reading inspired by Benedict Anderson's thought, Davis connects Burns's privileged gender position with political agency to produce a powerful Scottish national poetics capable of undermining dominant English cultural discourse. As a woman poet of low social standing, Little has neither, viewing "the alignment of masculinity, literary power, and national identity at the same time as she demonstrates the construction of women within the nation." See also Kord's discussion of this poem in *Women Peasant Poets*, 220-23. Kord places Little in context with primarily English and German women lower-class poets, such as Mary Collier, Molly Leapor, Ann Yearsley, Jane West, and Anna Louisa Karsch, though she briefly discusses Jeanie Glover, Christian Milne, Jean Murray, and Isobel Pagan.

never subjected one of mine to so haughty an imperious critic! I never liked so little in my life as at that moment the man whom at others I delighted to honour . . . I then felt for Mrs. Richmond, for you, and for myself, and not one of the sensations were such as I would wish to cherish in remembrance.²⁶⁵

In a deft turnabout, the poet turns inside out the mythology already developing around Burns and his poetry. Burns has become the very critic he purports to despise, and his poetry the consummation of Johnsonian orthodoxy: true to nature, apolitical, morally purposeful, even quaint. In this sense Burns himself stifles the voice of the milkmaid, the rustic country quean, who in reality lives close to nature and produces poetry from direct experience:

All this and more, a critic said;
I heard and slunk behind the shade:
So much I dread their cruel spite,
My hand still trembles when I write.²⁶⁶

Little's implicit criticism of Burns becomes clearer when read in conjunction with the immediately preceding poem in the volume, entitled "On a Visit to Mr. Burns." When her efforts to establish a correspondence with Burns failed, Little attempted to visit him at Ellisland, only to find him debilitated by a fall from his horse. This lively poem, written in the common meter or ballad form well known to English and Scottish readers, appears to begin with the giddy effusions of an overawed enthusiast but quickly dissolves into irony:

Is't true? or does some magic spell
My wond'ring eyes beguile?
Is this the place where deigns to dwell
The honour of our isle?

²⁶⁵ Quoted in M. Lindsay, *The Burns Encyclopedia* 3rd ed. (New York, 1980), at 218, and in V. Bold, "Janet Little," at 24.

²⁶⁶ Little, *Poetical Works*, 116.

The charming BURNS, the Muse's care,
Of all her sons the pride;
This pleasure oft I've sought to share,
But been as oft deni'd.

Oft have my thoughts, at midnight hour,
To him excursions made;
This bliss in dreams was premature,
And with my slumbers fled.²⁶⁷

With palpable sarcasm, the poem notes Burns's failure to acknowledge Little's prior communications or assist with her poetry. The poet's anticipatory elation at the long-sought meeting flees before an imagined encounter with the injured party:

Hark! now he comes, a dire alarm
Re-echoes through his hall!
Pegasus kneel'd, his rider's arm
Was broken by a fall.

The doleful tidings to my ears
Were in harsh notes convey'd;
His lovely wife stood drown'd in tears,
While thus I pond'ring said:

"No cheering draught, with ills unmix'd,
Can mortals taste below;
All human fate by heav'n is fix'd,
Alternate joy and wo."²⁶⁸

Mock tragedy has rarely been more exquisitely expressed.²⁶⁹ The poem serves up the almost ludicrous image of Scotland's national poet falling off a pretentiously named yet stumbling horse. While the poet's wife weeps uncontrollably, the milkmaid delivers a

²⁶⁷ Little, *Poetical Works*, 111.

²⁶⁸ Little, *Poetical Works*, 112.

²⁶⁹ McCulloch reads the poem as a "balance between the mock heroic portrait of the national icon and a genuine non-ironic acknowledgement of his achievement." M. McCulloch, "The lasses reply to Mr Burns," 142. I interpret the poem as more ironic and self-reflexive in this respect.

solemn moral platitude, but for whose benefit? It appears that Little is consoling *herself* for her fantasy that the real Burns would live up to the idealized icon, not the suffering poet or his hapless wife. Even if meant for Burns, her deterministic “pond’ring” can still be read in the larger context of her subordinate position as a woman plebeian poet. Poetry cannot be extracted from the politics of class and gender that produces and classifies it; no independent Republic of Letters exists outside of established hierarchies. The poem’s final stanza dribbles away in ambiguity, as Little vaguely imagines addressing him:

With beating breast I view’d the bard;
All trembling did him greet:
With sighs bewail’d his fate so hard,
Whose notes were ever sweet.²⁷⁰

While Little quotes her self-reflexive dialogue, she omits what she said to Burns when she “did him greet.” Instead, she recounts the physical manifestations of an intense anxiety, even suggesting that Burns’s presence is already past. His “sweet notes” once existed for Little in her dream-like illusions, but all that remains is a fallen idol. This sense of Burns’s absence reinforces the mock tragedy of Burns’s fall and emphasizes the poem’s real tragedy: the exclusivity of Burns’s critical aesthetic judgments.

A lesser-known poem, “On Seeing Mr. --- Baking Cakes,” mirrors “On a Visit to Mr. Burns,” this time in a comic mode:

AS Rab, who ever frugal was,
Some oat-meal cakes was baking,
In came a crazy scribbling lass,
Which set his heart a-quaking.

“I fear,” says he, “she’ll verses write,
An’ to her neebors show it:

²⁷⁰ Little, *Poetical Works*, 112.

But troth I need na care a doit,
Though a' the country knew it.

My cakes are good, none can object;
The maids will ca' me thrifty;
To save a sixpence on the peck
Is just an honest shifty.

They're fair an' thin, an' crump, 'tis true;
You'll own sae when you see them;
But, what is better than the view,
Put out your han' an' pree them."²⁷¹

The silent Burns of the previous poem finds his voice here, and it is one of insecurity and self-vindication. Not only is the baker Rab paranoid that a “crazy scribbling lass” might compete with him for the laurels of poetry, but also for the attentions, even the affections, of women readers. In this respect the poem emasculates the universal male poet in general, and the overtly masculine Burns in particular. Moira Ferguson has pointed out that Little may have felt some sexual attraction to Burns, but even if this is the case, Little nevertheless critically examines this reaction as part of the Burns phenomenon as a whole.²⁷² For Little, Burns’s supposed appeal to women goes hand-in-hand with the aesthetic standards that have set him up as an untutored, natural genius. His very masculinity enables this elevation; the same verse written by a milkmaid would suffer

²⁷¹ Little, *Poetical Works*, 171-72.

²⁷² Moira Ferguson argues that Little’s “second poem to Burns suggests an attraction for Burns that collides with her opposition to his sexual conduct. Put more bluntly, Little’s understated challenge to Burns is freighted with unstated feelings for the poet whose attentions to women she deplors.” M. Ferguson, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, 107. Ferguson’s larger point is that Little’s engagement with Burns assisted her development as a poet: “Through personal negotiations with Burns, she begins to see the construction of her gendered and class identity, and, by extension, how she might oppose that construction through braiding social with confrontational verse.” *Ibid.*, 108.

unendurable derision, if it were noticed at all.²⁷³ The contradictory characterization of Rab's poetic economy as an "honest shifty," as opposed to that of the "crazy scribbling lass," further unravels the seeming objectivity of aesthetic norms. Literary criticism, at least that practiced by the guardians of culture in Edinburgh and elsewhere, masks an exercise in identity politics. Rab's "shiftiness" suggests that he is unreliable and manipulative, and his vindictory self-confidence boasts of his ability to put one over on both the maids and the arbiters of polite culture. One may excuse a randy baker for practices that would condemn a maid. Moreover, Rab shamelessly manufactures and markets his "cakes" for public consumption. Rab's overt commercialism indicates an aesthetic economy at odds with the idealized conception of the poet as a divinely inspired and naïve medium of Scottish identity. Instead, in the poem Rab's cake becomes a fetish, an object of fickle popular taste, a momentary fad, a commodity. The cult of celebrity surrounding the baker Rab is as fleeting as the cakes are "thin" and "crump"; the poet, it seems, reveals himself little more than a huckster hawking his wares at market.

The poem concludes with a blunt admission of the baker's motives, which have little do with the production of culinary art:

And i' the corner stan's a cheese,

²⁷³ Kord argues that for lower-class women who aspired to write poetry in the late eighteenth century, including Little, "gender becomes the crucial aspect sanctioning the poetic activity of the male peasant and banning that of the female. What is withheld from the writing of lower-class women in the creation of this gender divide is a contextualization of their work that could lead to an interpretation of that work, read collectively, within a *tradition* of lower-class writing. Without such a tradition, aspirations to posthumous fame are futile; preempted by the critical response, there is literally no context in which the work of peasant women can be read." *Women Peasant Poets*, 230. Kord briefly notes Little's satire of Burns in "On Seeing Mr. ---- Baking Cakes" at 218.

A glass an' bottle by me;
Baith ale and porter, when I please,
To treat the lasses slily.

Some ca' me wild an' roving youth;
But sure they are mistaken:
The maid wha gets me, of a truth,
Her bread will ay be baken.²⁷⁴

Rab's interest in sexual exploitation is thus intimately connected to his art. Underneath his fear of figurative emasculation by the "crazy scribbling lass" lies the fear of *actual* emasculation, a loss of sexual prowess. A woman poet, as Johnson says, must be put down like the animal she is, else the whole hierarchy must fall. In light of this poem, Burns's broken arm in the *Visit* takes on additional meaning; the instrument used to write poetry can be equated with the instrument used to bake a maid's bread. In both cases the presence of the female competitor threatens Rab's identity as a poet and a man. As Pagan does with respect to formal state institutions, Little shrewdly demonstrates the inexorably gendered nature of aesthetic standards, created by elite men for their own self-preservation. God forbid that a woman should crash the party.

"De-Burnsing" Scottish Poetry

We now begin to see why so many of Little's poems occupy themselves with the question of critical reading and her resistance to the exclusivity of an essentially masculine poetics: she can rely on the sympathy of neither her fellow poet nor the marketplace of critics and consumers. Consider the poem "To My Aunty," which immediately follows "An Epistle to Mr. Robert Burns" in the volume. The poem begins with an invocation to the poet's aunt, who despite her intellectual limitations (as the Scots

²⁷⁴ Little, *Poetical Works*, 172.

vernacular indicates, she cannot boast of either wit or learning) has the uncanny ability to interpret dreams:

My ever dear an' worthy aunty,
Wha ne'er o' wit nor lear was vaunty;
Yet often could, like honest grandam,
Unravel dreams; an' whiles, at random,
Did truth in mystic terms declare,
Which made us aft wi' wonder stare.²⁷⁵

The poem broaches the possibility that aunty may be a witch, but it is equally possible that she is just a harmless but gossipy old woman ("honest grandam"). This ambiguous characterization of the dream's reader perhaps suggests that the only true judge of a working class woman's poetry is another woman with experience of the poet's world. As she recounts to her aunt, her anxiety over critical standards manifests in a dream as a sort of panic attack:

Last night, when Morpheus softly hurl'd that
His silken sceptre o'er the world,
Some anxious cares within my breast
Were silently consign'd to rest;
Yet did in sleep their pow'r retain,
As shews the visions of my brain.

My works I thought appear'd in print,
And were to diff'rent corners sent,
Whare patrons kind, but scant o' skill,
Had sign'd my superscription bill.
Voracious critics by the way,
Like eagles watching for their prey,
Soon caught the verse wi' aspect sour,
An' did ilk feeble thought devour;
Nor did its humble, helpless state,
One fraction of their rage abate.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Little, *Poetical Works*, 164.

²⁷⁶ Little, *Poetical Works*, 164-65.

Here the dreamer imagines her well-meaning but aesthetically challenged subscribers, whose investment in the poet's verse makes its publication possible, not as a community of readers, but as a means to publication in an aesthetic economy that depends in the first instance on capital, and in the second on a favorable reception from literary critics.²⁷⁷ The poet's anticipatory defensiveness is striking, her self-doubt at the wisdom of women attempting to publicize their poetry at all for fear of the all-too-predictable consequence: aesthetic death. The following stanzas make clear once again that men control this economy and, ultimately, both its products and producers:

Tom Touchy, one of high pretence
To taste an' learning, wit an' sense,
Was at the board the foremost man,
Its imperfections a' to scan.
Soon as the line he seem'd to doubt,
The meaner critics scratch'd it out;
Still to be nam'd on Touchy's side,
Was baith their int'rest and their pride.

Will Hasty, in an unco rage,
Revis'd the volume page by page;
But aft was deem'd a stupid ass,
For cens'ring what alone might pass.

Jack Tim'rous gladly would have spoke,
But quiv'ring lips his sentence broke;
So much he fear'd a brother's scorn,
The whole escap'd his claws untorn.

James Easy calm'd my throbbing heart,
An' whisp'ring told each man apart,
That he the volume much esteem'd;
Its little fault he nothing deem'd:
An' if his vote they would receive,

²⁷⁷ A list of subscribers, which includes Burns, appears at the beginning of Little's volume.

It might through countless ages live.²⁷⁸

Just who is Tom Touchy and why does he dominate the “meaner critics”? The dreamer suggests that Touchy controls critical patronage among the *literati*, whom the dreamer imagines as an organized corporate hierarchy with Touchy as chief executive officer and dispenser of favors. Touchy uses his position to delegate the hard work of “scratching out” the lines to his subordinates, who seek to propitiate him. It soon becomes clear, however, that Touchy’s assistants are as incompetent as he is at the difficult task of literary criticism. Hasty takes criticism too far, instead revising the verse “page by page” and overstepping the boundaries between enforcing public taste and producing the goods to gratify it. Fearing Touchy’s repudiation, Tim’rous declines to comment at all, likewise failing in his responsibility as a critic. And Easy panders to the poet’s vanity, finding “little faults” but willing to puff the product nevertheless. Once again the capitalistic nature of aesthetic production rears its head, revealing a division of labor in the culture factory that criticism has become. The reduction of poetry to commodity has the concomitant effect of converting criticism into advertising. Touchy, it turns out, really is a corporate CEO (perhaps a Henry Mackenzie figure), and, as the following stanza demonstrates, his lackeys are out for his head:

While I poor James’s speech admir’d,
Tom Touchy at the sound was fir’d:
And ah! it griev’d me much to find,
He prov’d himself senseless, deaf, and blind:
Then quick as thought, ere I could tell him,
Ilk critics club was up to fell him;
An’ as he, helpless, met the stroke,
I, starting, trembl’d, syne awoke.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Little, *Poetical Works*, 165-66.

Touchy's anger appears to provoke a revolt, but on whose behalf? The once unified critics, "like eagles watching for their prey," have turned on themselves in response to the dreamer's verse. Touchy, "senseless, deaf, and blind," proves incapable of proper critical reading. The lesser critics who rise up against him refuse to sanction Touchy's "taste an' learning, wit an' sense," but seem to offer little in their place: the frustrated poet Hasty, the cipher Tim'rous, or the puffer Easy. Consequently, it seems unlikely that the dreamer-poet will benefit from the insurrection or Touchy's apparent demise. If a revolution has occurred, it is internal to the closed loop that constitutes literary criticism organized for profit-making purposes. The dreamer awakes unedified and unable to extract meaning from this impenetrable, circular system; "criticism" is no more than part of the entertainment, a contrived response within a structure of dominant and subversive personalities vying for celebrity. This structure effectively seals off poetry and the poet from direct experience and knowledge of the public, performing a one-way mediation that accepts certain aesthetic material that can be packaged and sold. The poem concludes where it began, with an appeal to the possibly loony aunty for interpretation:

Now aunty, see this sad narration,
Which fills my breast wi' fair vexation;
An' if you can some comfort gie me,
Make nae delay, but send it to me:
For I'm commanded by Apollo,
Your sage advice to follow.²⁸⁰

What advice and comfort can aunty possibly give? If Touchy's downfall in the dream means that critical opinion will ultimately vindicate the dreamer's poetry, this result

²⁷⁹ Little, *Poetical Works*, 166.

²⁸⁰ Little, *Poetical Works*, 166.

certainly does not appear promising given the qualities of his eligible successors. On the other hand, if aunty's verdict is that literary criticism is so ephemeral and such an inside game that good poetry will always survive, this conclusion does nothing to assist the dreamer in selling his or her work in an admittedly capitalistic market for aesthetic goods. Apollo's command, therefore, may well be for the poet either to give up poetry or to write only verse produced for mass consumption, as mediated by intellectually and aesthetically bankrupt critics in the pay of capitalist publishers. As the poet recognizes, long gone are the days when kind patrons, though "scant o' skill," could support a poetic vocation. The question remains whether poetry is even possible in a capitalist environment, much less one that is as gender-determined as this.

Little's love poems evince similar anxieties about poetry's status as art. Many of these are composed in a conventional pastoral mode in which characters discourse about love. But whereas in classical pastoral the aristocratic lovers perform the part of rustic shepherds and shepherdesses, in Little's poems the characters, despite their classical names, are far more ambiguous and even heterodox in their attitudes toward love and its centrality to aesthetic and cultural constructions of gender. Consider, for example, "From Flavia to Carlos":

Dear sir, accept this missive sent
From one whose mind's sincerely bent,
On ever acting so with you,
As shall evince friendship true.
But how shall Carlos really know,
That friendship in her breast doth glow?
A friend is more than empty name:
Few justly can the title claim.
Were Flavia born in station high,
Her friendship soon you would descry:

Her op'lence quickly would reveal,
What pen'ry bids her now conceal.
Then Carlos would her favour boast,
Nor be so much by fortune cross'd.

Thus Flavia talks of her esteem,
As heroes conquer in a dream;
Or as a culprit, doom'd to die,
In dungeon where he forc'd to lie,
Might boast of what he could effect,
Were kings attentive to his beck.²⁸¹

The woman poet's self-conscious, self-condemnatory voice that we hear in "To My Aunty" returns here, indicating the poet's inferiority in terms of both gender and class. While it might be possible, at least in the abstract, for a poet such as Burns to level ranks through poetry, the woman poet's choices are much more limited. In the first instance, friendship for a man cannot be a proper subject for poetry, unless the woman's class position confers the status of a patron. But even such a class position would be passive, convertible to social or aesthetic capital only through the man's "boast." Moreover, a man's enslavement by love for a woman of a lower class is aesthetically figured as tragedy, or "fortune cross'd" (unless redeemed, as in comedy, by mistaken identity in which class alignments are preserved). On the other hand, the inverse relation—a woman's love for a man of higher class—is simply ludicrous. Similarly, poetry describing a man's friendship for another man conforms to accepted aesthetic standards, but that expressing friendship between women or by a woman for a man must remain on the margins. Women may speak of love and friendship only where the beloved is gendered male and shares the same class identity; otherwise they run the risk of critical oblivion, as the poet notes in the next stanza:

²⁸¹ Little, *Poetical Works*, 192-93.

You laugh, dear Sir, and pray what then,
Must Flavia call you best of men?
Must high encomiums grace her lays,
And all her notes be swell'd with praise?
Know Sir, when friendship does commence,
All flatt'ry must be spurn'd from thence:
No real friendship can exist,
In the dissembling flatt'rer's breast.
What can poor Flavia then bestow,
But with you still may better grow?
Your wit still more and more refine,
And all the beauties of your min',
With radiant lustre ever shine;
In virtue's paths, still on to tread,
Which to their fair Elysium lead;
May every action justly claim
The poet's wish, that thing call'd Fame.²⁸²

This stanza asks whether “poetry” is really available to women at all. Within the tradition of chivalric romance, the poet notes, she should praise her lover according to the standard formula, the same formula that has produced the objectified ideal woman of romance. “Real friendship” cannot run *either* way within this circuit of male desire, whose aesthetic medium consists exclusively of “flatt’ry,” and “praise,” confirming Virginia Woolf’s observation more than a century later that a woman is a mirror in which a man views his reflection at twice its normal size. Indeed, as the poem demonstrates, literary language and conventions cannot be abstracted from gender relations: they are the same thing. It should not be overlooked, either, that in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in the same year as Little’s poems, Mary Wollstonecraft argues that “the understanding of the [female] sex has been so bubbled by this specious homage, that the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire

²⁸² Little, *Poetical Works*, 193.

love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect.”²⁸³ As Wollstonecraft points out, this “specious homage” is the praise of men for women’s beauty, delivered in literature and inculcated by a “false system of education.” Women thus become nothing more than the sum of their representations, not the “human creatures” they actually are. Similarly, Little’s point here is that women, whom polite culture bars from genuine friendships with men, function only as signs in a closed masculine language that corrupts true virtue, beauty, and refinement. Just as in “To My Aunty,” where the oppressed rise up against Touchy’s cultural authoritarianism, Flavia revolts against the masculine aesthetic itself and its exclusion of women as “human creatures” capable of making and inspiring poetry truly worthy of “Fame.”

The poem concludes with a benediction:

As through life’s winding vale you rove,
May still your stars propitious prove,
And richest blessings on you shower;
May sweet contentment grace your bower;
By love and fortune ever crown’d,
May honour all your wishes bound.
Nor access find within your breast,
One thought your friend would wish suppress;
And may they soon at Tyburn swing,
Who would not sign what here I sing.²⁸⁴

The final couplet jars violently with the foregoing lines. Precisely what does the poet “sing” that to deny would incur capital punishment? One thinks of the sedition trials of the period, for example, and the very real threat of execution or transportation for distributing proscribed literature, such as Paine’s *Rights of Man*. The poem’s conclusion

²⁸³ M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Introduction.

²⁸⁴ Little, *Poetical Works*, 194.

challenges readers to endorse its reversal of literary conventions. By offering a new orthodoxy—a woman speaking of friendship to a man—the poet appears to proclaim a new republic of letters that abolishes monologic romance and the gender hierarchy it instantiates. The juxtaposition in the poem’s final verse between “sign” and “sing” reinforces this reversal, requiring readers to recognize the sign within the song and interpret poetry using a different code. The penalty for reading in the old language is death; the *ancien régime* of polite literary culture must fall, just as it has in France.

This complex of gender, language, and politics is taken up again in “From Philander to Eumenes.” The epistolary poem begins with the reflections of a disappointed lover on a letter he has received from a friend:

With pleasure I your welcome letter read,
While Cupid for a little from me fled.
With freedom write, dispel your trivial fears;
There’s nought presumptuous in your song appears;
Tho’ strange th’ideas which you now convey,
While you our lovely females thus portray.

No doubt, there are, in the promiscuous crowd,
The worthless fair, the virtuous and the good;
The haughty nymph, the maid of humble mind;
Th’ imperious, yea, the gentle and the kind;
Such as an adamant heart could charm,
And furious tygers of their rage disarm.
In all vicissitudes of human life,
Man’s greatest blessing is a virtuous wife:
Her smiles can’t fail to sooth his anxious breast,
Diffusing joy, while various cares molest:
Her prudent counsel swift relief can bring,
As Abigail appeased Isr’el’s king.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁵ Little, *Poetical Works*, 144-45.

The Petruchio-like writer, commenting on the proverbial mutability of women, evinces a certain world-weariness. Cupid has “fled,” leaving the writer in a sober mood for moralizing, imagining the ideal wife as a virtuous counselor, as “Abigail appeased Isr’el’s king.” On its face this analogy appears apt; in Samuel 1:25, Abigail reassures David, fleeing before Saul’s vengeance, that he will be king. She saves him from shedding the blood of her husband, the wealthy but evil-doing Nabal, who has denied David and his men food and refuge. When Nabal is struck dead shortly thereafter, David marries the fabulously rich widow. This episode has commonly been read as exemplary of female virtue; Abigail rescues David from a needless effusion of blood and her husband from almost certain death (although when she tells Nabal the news, he turns to “stone” and soon dies anyway). One might reasonably question whether Abigail’s “prudent counsel” in this instance has best served her current husband or her future one, and in which sense the poet intends for us to read this exemplum. Indeed, as Philander tells us, Eumenes’ letter, which we do not see, conveys “strange ideas” in its portrayal of “our lovely females,” suggesting the possibility of a more ironic, if not misogynistic, reading of the well-known Bible story.

In the next stanza, Philander seems to reverse course, becoming ever warmer in his praise of women:

Nor need I thus the sacred annals trace,
In Britain’s Isle they claim the highest place;
When dire oppression, with uplifted hand,
His yoke extended o’er our native land,
Our sires to abject slavery were doom’d,
Our mothers all their ancient claims resum’d:
You’ll say my speeches do me partial prove,
And so ascribe the cruel cause to love.

Are you alone exempt from such a guest?
Are you of every antidote possess'd
T' effect a cure, or mitigate the pain?
Then may the archer cast his shafts in vain.²⁸⁶

Here Philander presumably appeals to Britain's chivalric tradition, though it is difficult to specify what "dire oppression" may have required British mothers to redeem their husbands from slavery. Still, the power of the image is striking, as it suggests that British civilization rests on a text-based, cultural mythology of female sanctity that underpins its hierarchical public and domestic structures. Philander worries that Eumenes will question his motives but does not deny that love, or more accurately, disappointed love, is the "cruel cause" of his panegyric. His intensity rises during the course of his peroration; the questions he throws at the seemingly feckless Eumenes resemble the archer's shafts, a volley of rhetoric that in its contradictoriness (is love redemptive? an unwelcome guest? a sickness or wound?) indicates both Philander's confused emotional state and his inability to articulate the meaning of the "annals" to which he alludes.

The poem concludes with a reassertion of the misogyny evidently attested to in Eumenes' original text:

Of late dear friend I did such valour boast;
But by one fatal glance the field was lost.
While you are free of dangers, still beware;
Be warn'd by me, and shun th' alluring snare.
It is by some deem'd cowardice to fly,
But sure it more ignoble is to die:
To die, I'm frantic, sir; what did I say?
Reason once more resume thy wonted sway;
Kind heaven defend us from such dire alarms;
Who would a victim fall to female charms?
I find I'm better while your lines I read,

²⁸⁶ Little, *Poetical Works*, 145.

I'm almost from my Gallic fetters free'd.
As you alone were partner of my grief,
Pray now congratulate my quick relief.
I would not by prolixity offend;
Both bound and free, Philander is your friend.²⁸⁷

Philander easily dispenses with tales of chivalry and feminine virtue. The poem returns to its starting point, with a recognition that love and its elaborate cultural and narrative trappings cover the mundane and often brutal reality of asymmetrical gender relations. Even Philander can no longer parrot the conventional literature of love, with its melancholic and suicidal lovers; men speaking to men know better than to fall for “Gallic” tales of romance. Philander is a “friend” whether bound or free, unlike women, who only exist in relation to men as lovers or mothers.

Philander's appeal to reason and male-to-male friendship as an “antidote” to feminizing love once again reveals Little's suspicion of the aesthetic forms she both imitates and critiques. In poem after poem she rehearses conventional poetic discourse while revealing its misogynistic cultural assumptions. For Little, the kind of poetry prized by the *literati* participates in the oppression that it causes and describes. This oppression falls hardest on laboring women, who face the double exclusion of gender and class. Little makes this exclusion most explicit in the apparently innocuous poem “An Epistle to a Lady,” addressed to her patron who is away from Loudon caring for her ill daughter. Following the standard self-deprecating introduction begging pardon for the poet's presumption in composing the poem, the poet turns to news from the estate:

Would you from Morcham cast your mental eye,
And the recesses of our castle spy,

²⁸⁷ Little, *Poetical Works*, 145-46.

You'd see Honoria, in her elbow chair,
 A mind at ease, thoughts unperplex'd with care;
 With aspect mild, explore the saced page,
 Guide of her youth, and comfort of her age:
 In conduct prudent, and in counsel wise;
 Her friendship ev'ry virtuous mind must prize,
 Then view the pair, in bonds of Hymen blest,
 With little Cupid's flutt'ring round their breast.
 The bliss that's mutual, all their thoughts employ,
 Whose social hearts partake no selfish joy.
 To please each other proves their constant aim,
 While ev'ry act endears the tender claim.²⁸⁸

Here we see a pleasant scene contrasting an old matron reading the Bible and a young pair still in the first blush of post-nuptial mutual satisfaction. The poem appears to harmonize the spinster's chaste piety and the couple's hymeneal virtue, though the juxtaposition of the "sacred page" and the "little Cupid's" produces a somewhat jarring pair of images. Furthermore, the matron's "ease" and "thoughts unperplex'd" contrast with the couple's "social hearts," though the matron's friendship, the poet insists, "ev'ry virtuous mind must prize," while the couple "each other proves their constant aim." The placidity of the description veils an underlying solipsism, a resistance to real community and, perhaps more importantly, to work. With only the slightest of ironic readings, the "prudent" spinster, comfortably ensconced in her "elbow chair," may be rendered self-righteous and officious, the couple, entirely absorbed in their desire, cloying and mawkish. Indeed, the almost complete absence of sentimentalism elsewhere in Little's *oeuvre* suggests that the poet's report indicates that while the mistress is away, the servants will play.

This irony becomes more explicit in the next stanza:

²⁸⁸ Little, *Poetical Works*, 125-26.

Matilda, too, your notice must demand;
 To paint would here require a Raphael's hand:
 To trace the radiant beauties of her mind,
 Shall be a task for nobler pens assign'd.
 I'd rather far her little foibles scan,
 Though strict inspection finds no more than one.
 Such anxious care on others she bestows,
 She quite forgets what to herself she owes.
 Vouchsafe the charming Celia next a look,
 Her mind serene, and in her hand a book:
 Eyes, which at will, can give pleasure or pain,
 On stupid Humphry Clinker shine in vain.²⁸⁹

The awkward rhyme in the third couplet of this stanza (“scan/one”) draws attention to the poem’s increasingly satiric mode. Indeed, “little foibles” are the stuff of domestic satire, mocking the initially pietistic description of the virtuous spinster and newlyweds and revealing the poet’s real intent: to subject her counterparts on the estate to “strict inspection” and moral evaluation. Whereas a Raphael or Dante would allegorize the beauty of Matilda’s mind or Celia’s eyes, the milkmaid’s rural pen is content to expose the one’s affectation and the other’s frivolity. In any case, everyone is wasting an enormous amount of time nosing around in each other’s business and reading “stupid” novels. The profligacy going on upstairs is mirrored downstairs as well:

As through the hall and kitchen now you pass,
 Pray deign to peep among the lower class:
 The cook’s at work; but madam, who can know
 Whether her hands or tongue more swiftly go?
 They’re nimble both; but diff’rent is th’ effect;
 One merits praise, the other disrespect.
 Poor Mary sighs beneath a load of woes,
 Hard and uneasy ev’ry turn she does;
 How light soe’er the talk, she’ll pond’ring say,
 “Ah! Is there not a lion in the way?”

²⁸⁹ Little, *Poetical Works*, 127.

Will seems to haste his master's boots to clean,
Old James is driving Turkeys o'er the green,
Our crazy-pated dairy maid just now
Is scribbling o'er these senseless lines to you.
Hark! there's a call, O pardon what I've penn'd;
I'm sure you're glad my letter's at an end.²⁹⁰

What kind of work is writing poetry? Is poetry written by a “dairy maid” intrinsically more valuable than the cook’s gossip or the chambermaid’s complaints? Interestingly, and I believe uniquely in Little’s volume, the poem explicitly marks the “lower class,” though everyone identified in the poem seems equally otiose. But here the poet names herself, not for the first time as “crazy” (recall our discussion of “On Seeing Mr.--- Bake Cakes”), but as a servant. Should we consider this identification as self-abasing or, in the ironic mode we have noted in many of Little’s poems, as self-constitutive—or perhaps both? In other words, does the poet’s self-identification as a member of the “lower class,” as well as her repeated apologies throughout the volume, assert the positive value of plebeian literature vis-à-vis works of a privileged caste, whether the paintings of Raphael or the satires of Smollett? If so, just what is its value? As the poet says with respect to the cook, servants should work and not speak, yet the Scotch milkmaid persistently presses her “senseless lines” on her patron and the public.

The poem that follows is likewise a servant’s report to his master, this time in the idiom made famous by Burns, the domestic animal that speaks its mind. “From Snipe, A Favourite Dog, To His Master,” however, presents a somewhat different version of the political allegory Burns constructs in “The Twa Dogs: A Tale” and similar poems that pit a rapacious and effete aristocracy against an abused and exploited laboring class:

²⁹⁰ Little, *Poetical Works*, 127-28.

O Best of good masters, your mild disposition
 Perhaps may induce you to read my petition:
 Believe me in earnest, though acting the poet,
 My breast feels the smart, and mine actions do shew it.
 At morn when I rise, I go down to the kitchen,
 Where oft I've been treated with kicking and switching.
 There's nothing but quiet, no toil or vexation,
 The cookmaid herself seems possess'd of discretion.
 The scene gave surprise, and I could not but love it,
 Then found 'twas because she had nothing to covet.
 From thence to the dining-room I took a range sir,
 My heart swells with grief when I think of the change there;
 No dishes well dress'd, with their flavour to charm me,
 Nor even so much as a fire to warm me.
 For bread I ransack ev'ry corner with caution,
 Then trip down the stair in a terrible passion.
 I go with old James, when the soss is a dealing,
 But brutes are voracious and void of all feeling;
 They quickly devour't; not a morsel they leave me,
 And then by their growling ill nature they grieve me.²⁹¹

This poem has the same upstairs-downstairs view of the manor house as “An Epistle to a Lady,” and, though the tone is strikingly different, the same otium prevails in the absence of the master. Accustomed to being chased out when he invades the kitchen around meal times, Snipe finds the cook idle and the upper house deserted. He then proceeds downstairs to try his luck with the lower servants, where old James, whom we last saw driving turkeys o'er the green, is feeding swill to the pigs (“the soss is a dealing”). The pigs’ “voracious” appetites and bad manners mark not only their vulgarity and lack of “feeling,” but perhaps an existential threat to the refined upstairs Snipe. There is a Burkean whiff of revolution in the air, as the sullen swine turn unchivalrously on the refined Snipe, showing him no deference or respect for rank. The poem continues with a plea for the patron’s speedy return:

²⁹¹ Little, *Poetical Works*, 129-31.

My friend Jenny Little pretends to respect me,
And yet sir at meal-time she often neglects me:
Of late she her breakfast with me would have parted,
But now eats it all, so I'm quite broken hearted.
O haste back to Loudoun, my gentle good master,
Relieve your poor Snipy from ev'ry disaster.
A sight of yourself would afford me much pleasure,
A share of your dinner an excellent treasure.

Present my best wishes unto the good lady,
Whose plate and potatoes to me are ay ready:
When puss and I feasted so kindly together;
But now quite forlorn we condole with each other.
No more I'll insist, lest your patience be ended;
I beg by my scrawl, sir, you'll not be offended;
But mind, when you see me ascending Parnassus,
The need that's of dogs there to drive down the Asses.²⁹²

Jenny Little appears in cameo once more, this time not as a crazy scribbler, but as what she is: a hungry farm worker. When the master is present, the lower servants begrudge something to the master's domestic pet. When he is gone, they hoard the food for themselves. We have noted that it can be easily forgotten that late eighteenth-century Scotland could be a very hungry place, suffering periodic food shortages and the social unrest that came with them. As Snipe "ransacks" the house for something to eat, even willing to eat pig scraps if necessary, we catch a glimpse of this scarcity and the anxiety it produces. Even the lady of the house, it seems, must eat potatoes, increasingly the staple food of the poor in a country hard-pressed by recurring famine and economic vulnerability. We thus sense in the poem the insufficiency of the economic base supporting the social hierarchy. What appears as laziness in the servant class in "An Epistle to a Lady" is rendered here as dearth, but in both cases class antagonism rises

²⁹² Little, *Poetical Works*, 131-32.

quite close to the surface. When only “soos is a dealing,” just how close to a French-style revolution might Scotland be? This is not just a rhetorical question, as the poem’s final couplet indicates. Snipe’s apology to his master turns into a menacing word of warning: every dog will have its day, and poets who are treated like dogs will ultimately “drive down the Asses” whose taste for Augustan refinement allies them with aristocratic privilege. The poem thus assumes that hierarchy is all of a piece. Culture follows economics, art follows power, and power eventually follows popular will.

But not without a fight. As Andrew Noble points out:

The triumph of loyalism in this period was so complete that it could postulate—the ultimate victory—that no struggle had taken place. If there had been no past or present opposition, the future was indisputably theirs. Therefore, there had to be a constant pervasive censorship of memories and texts which suggested an alternative reality. This is the fundamental basis of subsequent Burns scholarship in particular, and of Scottish radical writing in general, from which much of it has never deviated.²⁹³

One way to censor a text is to ignore it, which, as we have seen, has been the fate of much of the so-called Scottish plebeian or weaver poetry of the period (especially if the poet is a plebeian and a woman). But let us suppose, and there is good historical evidence for doing so, that late eighteenth-century Scotland, while perhaps not exactly the revolutionary tinderbox the reactionary ruling class imagined, was a good deal more dangerous than historians once thought.²⁹⁴ Might a plausible radical counter-narrative be constructed from the kind of poetry we are attempting to recover here?

²⁹³ A. Noble, “Displaced Persons: Burns and the Renfrew Radicals,” *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution*, 198.

²⁹⁴ David J. Brown and Val Honeyman are among the most recent historians to take this view. See Brown, “The government response to Scottish radicalism, 1792-1802,” and Honeyman, “‘A Very Dangerous Place’?: Radicalism in Perth in the 1790s.”

Little and History: Scotland as Matriarchy

These readings suggest that Janet Little's poetry, when read in context with that of her plebeian contemporaries, possesses radical implications at least as significant as Burns's most explicit expressions of Scottish nationalism in "Scots Wha Hae," the implicit republicanism of "A Man's a Man for A' That," or the posthumously published "The Tree of Liberty." Part of the basis for this argument is Little's determined refusal, as we have seen, to accede to the very "censorship of memories and texts" to which Noble refers, censorship already in full swing during her and Burns's lifetime. If we are to use the term "radicalism" to refer to Little, however, we need to be clear about the sense in which we are doing so. Recall Liam McIlvanney's contention that Burns's radicalism derives in part from "New Light" Presbyterian doctrine that religious orthodoxy must stand the test of individual reason, as well as to narratives celebrating egalitarianism and Scotland's heroic past. We have seen thus far that poets such as Lapraik, Sillar, Pagan, and Maxwell do not share with Burns this particular configuration, but express dissent from dominant anglicization by various other means: Lapraik's populist anti-landlordism, Sillar's cultural and aesthetic nationalism, Pagan's social satires, or Maxwell's millenarian theology. Little, by contrast, yokes together aspects of each. Her poems detailing quotidian life in the service of the house, while perhaps more subtle than Lapraik's lamentations of the poor or Pagan's lampoons of the rich, just as effectively describe and decry a social and economic hierarchy, in which a small and privileged possessory class lords it over destitute laboring and servant classes. Her trenchant critique of English aesthetic standards and the easy assimilation of Burns into polite, literate,

metropolitan culture suggest, as Sillar does, that Scottish poets must reclaim their cultural birthright. There is little in Little's corpus to compare with Maxwell's brand of Puritan politics (though Little was a dissenter in religion), but one poem in particular suggests a possible political orientation. In the ponderously titled "Verses Written on a Foreigner's Visiting the Grave of a Swiss Gentleman, Buried Among the Descendents of Sir William Wallace, Guardian of Scotland in the Thirteenth Century," the poet appears in the persona of Dame Scotia:

Our regal seat to Edward fallen a prey,
Our Chief's insulted corse his victim lay;
Our ruin'd land no monument could raise;
Yet grateful bards still sung his heart-felt praise.
Long ages hence her hero still she'll mourn;
Still her brave sons with emulation burn.
His spirit guarding still our native place,
Proclaims this mandate to his latest race:
"Let sacred truth bid living fame be thine;
"Ne'er trust for honour to a sculptur'd shrine.
"Those modest merits marbles ne'er impart,
"Love writes them deepest on the human heart."²⁹⁵

In the first two couplets we see the familiar appropriation of Wallace as the embodiment of an almost mystical "Scotland," the freedom fighter whose martyrdom at the hands of Edward Longshanks cost Scotland her "regal seat" but bought her nationhood. Yet the collective "our" of Dame Scotia's lament in these couplets gives way to a third person characterization in the third couplet, which describes "long ages" of mourning and rising resentment against her English overlords. The poem's narrative point of view shifts again in the fourth couplet, as Wallace's spirit addresses today's Scotland. Though somewhat non-specific, Wallace urges his "latest race" not to waste time and energy memorializing

²⁹⁵ Little, *Poetical Works*, 142.

him, but to act in the present on “sacred truth.” Such memorials include poems by Burns and others, who rehearse Dame Scotia’s lament in praise of Wallace’s defiance, but do little else to advance the cause of Scottish independence. This call to arms can be read in different ways, but in my reading Wallace encourages Scotland’s “brave sons” to rise up and restore the nation’s political freedom. Scottish patriotism mandates no less, the “Love” that is written “deepest on the human heart.”

As if to enact Wallace’s urgent plea, the poem turns away from Wallace to eulogize the “Swiss gentleman”:

Thus mid thy race did their lov’d Henry dwell,
Whose dust shall mix thy memory with Tell:
Truth, honour, spirit, animate that form,
Which beauty, grace, and symmetry adorn.
Here that rich blossom dropp’d, scarce fairly blown;
The friend, the husband, father we bemoan!
Wail by the grave a mother’s cheerless throes,
And share a widow’s agonizing woes!²⁹⁶

The narrative perspective shifts once more, this time to an observer (perhaps the poet) who directs Scotland’s brave sons (“thy race”) to take notice of the foreign tomb. The observer evokes Switzerland’s national past, comparing “their lov’d Henry” to William Tell²⁹⁷ and praising him in the same terms used earlier in the poem to exhort Scottish youth to seek “living fame” in Wallace’s memory. This explicit nexus between Swiss and Scottish history suggests the possibility of a republican future. Moreover, the observer implies that republicanism transcends national histories when she declares, “*we* bemoan” the “mother’s cheerless throes” and “share a widow’s agonizing woes!” Identifying with

²⁹⁶ Little, *Poetical Works*, 143.

²⁹⁷ Little appended a footnote at this point, identifying Tell as “A famous Swiss chief.”

both the Scottish race, who with “emulation burn,” and the bereaved Swiss family, whose husband and father has sacrificed himself for Wallace’s cause, the poet implores each to recognize and celebrate a sacred devotion to the universal republican ideal.

But as soon as the republican moment appears, it just as quickly disappears, giving way to a merely private expression of grief:

Dear youth, thy name to latest time descends,
Where gentle virtues made mankind thy friends.
From no vain marble need you borrow fame;
Truth, love and friendship, here embalm thy name.
A parent’s silver hairs bestrew thy shrine;
Her griefs were mortal, but her joys sublime:
In tears we mourn the body laid to rest;
She hails thy spotless soul ‘mid angels blest.²⁹⁸

This final stanza is the stuff of conventional eulogy and consolation: a virtuous life nobly led, an eternal soul at peace, spiritual transcendence displaces temporal grief. And like a conventional eulogy for a fallen soldier, the poem washes out the political, social, and economic facts of war, in this case stifling the revolutionary possibilities that Dame Scotia and Wallace’s spirit evoke. Indeed, the “marble” memorials to Wallace and Henry erase that history, sealing it off from the present: “here embalm thy name.” The poem’s multiple perspectives, moving from Dame Scotia to Wallace to the poet, likewise mimic the British cultural process of attempting to sanitize a violent revolutionary past into acceptable and harmless aesthetic forms that do not incite fresh insurrection. Dame Scotia embodies the nation as a grief-stricken mother, perpetually mourning her dead sons. Wallace stands in for the heroic, chivalrous past that inspires not taking up arms but (in true Scottish Enlightenment fashion) sympathetic identification, frozen in time, inert to

²⁹⁸ Little, *Poetical Works*, 143.

violent reactivation. Rather than the restoration of a politically and culturally independent Scotland, the poem appears to imagine a utopian republic of virtue, bound by “truth, love, and friendship.”

Although Little’s poetry does not in any sense boil Scottish national blood like Burns’s Bruce poems, for example, that does not mean it steers clear of dangerous political ground. One might argue to the contrary, as I have, that Little fully appreciates the risk of the cultural appropriation of Scottish nationalism for English purposes, amply demonstrated in Little’s critique of the *literati*’s canonization of Burns.²⁹⁹ Indeed, for a woman poet to write martial poetry directly invoking Bruce, Wallace, and the heroic Scottish past, as Little knows, would subject her to even greater critical derision than she risks by offering her poetry to the public in the first place. Her strategy, like that of later British women poets who recount the revolutionary and Napoleonic era, such as Felicia Dorothea Hemans, involves the complex perspective we see in the *Verses*. Unable as a woman poet to draw “Freedom’s sword,” Little must, as Hemans does in *Casabianca*, express the revolutionary struggle in more traditionally feminine, domestic terms: a mother’s, wife’s, or daughter’s grief, sympathy, and consolatory power. In the “Verses” she further displaces the struggle by locating it in parallel national pasts, suggesting perhaps that women self-identify much more easily on an extra-national basis than men do. The universalist appeal of the French Revolution, which British authorities so feared

²⁹⁹ Indeed, as Andrew Noble points out with respect to “Scots Wha Hae,” Burns’s posthumous publishers, such as George Thomson, “had no compunction in impertinently perverting its political meaning into an *anti-French* song in a manner symptomatic of the whole nineteenth-century tendency in ‘domesticating’ the poet to Anglo Scottish tribal pieties.” Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 468.

and whose expression they assiduously suppressed, escapes detection in Little's poem because the tradition-bound *literati* do not know it when they see it in woman's verse.

"The Captivated Soldier" further illustrates Little's skill at deploying traditional genres—in this case a pastoral love poem—to upset cultural hierarchies. The poem begins with the seemingly standard lamentation of a frustrated lover. One day a carefree swain catches a glimpse of a maiden in a wedding party, whose beautiful image smites him:

Ye swains unacquainted of love,
Attend to my pitiful lay:
My pipe shall resound through the grove,
And my woes in sad accents display.

Long time I with freedom did range;
With indiff'rence I gaz'd on the fair:
Now my heart, how affecting the change!
Matilda has caught in the snare.

Ah me! how unlucky the day,
When thoughtless I hasten'd to view?
A wedding was coming this way,
Nor dream'd I of what did ensue.

Matilda appear'd in her charms;
Her cheeks with soft blushes did glow:
My bosom was fill'd with alarms,
Nor knew I who wounded me so.

Her shape it is handsome; her air
Excels all the nymphs of the town:
Her eyes may with diamonds compare;
Her locks of the loveliest brown.³⁰⁰

Here as elsewhere in her love poetry, Little eschews the Scots vernacular (in contrast to Burns), marking the lover as rustic but not specifically local. Though anglicized in this

³⁰⁰ Little, *Poetical Works*, 150-51.

fashion, the lover does not seem to know the usual tropes and figures of pastoral love poetry. Though he refers to the “nymphs of the town,” he does not attribute his attraction to Matilda to Cupid’s arrows, but to an unknown yet alarming and irresistible compulsion, like a “snare.” The absence of the classical figure, which Little deploys in other poems, shifts agency specifically to Matilda, who figures as a far more powerful natural force than the arbitrary intervention of the gods would ordinarily suggest. The remaining stanzas of the poem explore this feminine power over the lover:

She swift from my presence did fly.
I call’d, but she answer’d me not:
She fear’d that some danger might be
Sly lurking beneath the red coat.

If red will affrighten my dear,
I’ll dress in the good russet grey,
Abandon my sword and my spear,
And cast my bright armour away.

No more I’ll attend to the drum;
But take up my shuttle and weave:
From that sure no danger can come,
Such clowns have no art to deceive.

No razor shall come on my face,
Nor powder be seen on my hair:
I’ll walk at no regular pace;
In brogues to my love I’ll repair.

O then, will she hear my soft tale?
O then, will Matilda prove kind?
If rustics with her can prevail,
The rustic in me she shall find.³⁰¹

Matilda here engages the lover in an extraordinary (and graphic) cat-and-mouse game that reverses the conventional male assumption of martial vigor in the face of feminine

³⁰¹ Little, *Poetical Works*, 151-52.

passivity. She emasculates him, refusing to respond to his “call,” shying from the “danger . . . lurking beneath the red coat.” If the nature of the danger is not sufficiently clear, the lover makes it explicit in the following stanza, offering to cover his “red coat” in “good russet grey,” surrender the tools of war, and abandon the “bright armour” of aggressive masculinity. Thus covered and unmanned, the lover offers to “take up my shuttle and weave,” transforming himself from an instrument of British military repression into its potentially seditious opposite: a weaver. As if to emphasize the politics of this identity exchange, the poet disingenuously reassures us that from weaving “no danger can come./Such clowns have no art to deceive.” Unshaven, unpowdered, and shod in brogues, it would appear that the poet plans to repair not only to his love, but to the nearest chapter meeting of the Scottish Friends of the People.

Little’s poems suggest that, unlike in England, where the ubiquitous red-coats, whether professional soldiers or amateur militiamen, seduce maids and leave them, if a Scot dons the uniform of the oppressor, the maids take a page from *Lysistrata*. Moreover, they force their swains to make radical political associations linked with resisting British tyranny (in which many Scots enthusiastically participated) and aristocratic privilege. Similar to the “Verses,” where she disarms Burns’s incipient radicalism by domesticating it and associating it with the transnational category of women, here Little codes resistance as “rustic” and artisanal, once more reaching across national boundaries to embrace republican political movements all over Britain. Additionally, the poem specifically cautions young Scots to look askance at one of the few occupations in which they might acquire a measure of acceptance in the British imperial enterprise: the military. As the

lost Scottish heir Vanbeest Brown/Harry Bertram in Scott's *Guy Mannering* (1814) shrewdly observes to his friend, ironically (in Little's context) a Swiss mercenary with whom he served in the East India Company army:

The English are a wise people. While they praise themselves, and affect to undervalue all other nations, they leave us, luckily, trap-doors and back-doors open, by which we strangers, less favoured by nature, may arrive at a share of their advantages. And thus they are in some respects like a boastful landlord, who exalts the value and flavour of his six-years-old mutton, while he is delighted to dispense a share of it to all the company. In short, you, whose proud family, and I, whose hard fate, made us soldiers of fortune, have the pleasant recollection that in the British service, stop where we may upon our career, it is only for want of money to pay the turnpike, and not from our being prohibited to travel the road.³⁰²

As Bertram/Brown recognizes, the English welcome Scots and other "colonials" when the dirty work of extending the empire and suppressing rebellion must be done abroad *or* closer to home, to the extent of supplying them a red coat, sword, and spear. But like the lover in Little's poem, in Scott's novel Brown/Bertram must shed his military uniform and assume the garb of a "rustic" to reclaim his Scottish patrimony and, incidentally, to marry the daughter of his English East Indian commander, the aristocratic Mannering. Little's poem anticipates Scott's tale of a Scot's exile and return, his movement into Britain's empire as its servant and return home as its potential adversary. In the poem the loyal soldier becomes a republican weaver; in the novel he transforms into a powerful feudal lord whose politics are at least ambiguous, if not overtly anti-imperial. In Little's and Scott's fictions of Scottish identity we see a chameleon-like quality in the soldier-lovers, a self-consciousness that the red uniform does not belong to them, and a growing awareness that the British culture they once fought for is not their own.

³⁰² This passage appears in Chapter 21.

Burns's rousing evocation in the Bruce poems of a lost era of Scottish independence have lost none of their inspirational power, but Little, and later Scott in the same way, project more "realistic" alternatives for national recovery under the weight of overbearing imperial power. Each of Little's Swiss nobleman, who dies fighting for Wallace's cause, her rural piper, who rejects martial glory for rustic virtue and (possibly) radical politics, and Scott's restored laird, who swears off imperial service to rescue his family's wealth, history, and influence from centuries of disastrous mismanagement and waste, suggests that "Scottish" identity does not necessarily refer primarily to the nation. The character of one's commitments, rather, determines one's identity as a Scot. In this vision Bruce and Wallace remain undiminished in their "Scottishness," although the poem strips such an identity of any particular national parochialism. That sort of nationalism characterizes the English, who grant Scots limited membership in the imperial club called "Britain" but deny them the means to purchase a full share. Little's poetry raises the question of whether the game is worth the nickel—and whether Scots who happen to be women and poor can be admitted at all.

This sense of permanent exclusion from overdetermined categories of identity such as nation, class, and gender dominates the final poem in Little's volume. "To a Lady Who Sent the Author Some Paper With a Reading of Sillar's Poems" commences in a valedictory mode:

Dear madam, with joy I read over your letter;
Your kindness still tends to confirm me your debtor;
But can't think of payment, the sum is so large,
Tho' farthings for guineas could buy my discharge.
But, madam, the Muses are fled far away,
They deem it disgrace with a milkmaid to stay.

Let them go if they will, I would scorn to pursue,
And can, without sighing, subscribe an adieu.
Their trifling mock visits, to many so dear,
Is the only disaster on earth I now fear.³⁰³

Here the poet acknowledges the futility of a “milkmaid” pretending to write poetry. Not only have the Muses abandoned her, but their prior visitation “mocked” her, humiliating her so deeply that she fears the “disaster” attendant on further poetic composition. This anticipation of failure goes beyond the conventional humility trope evident in other poems in the volume. For a milkmaid and a woman to invoke the Muses is “disgraceful” in at least two senses: as representatives of a privileged, masculine poetic tradition, they do not “grace” women poets, even aristocratic ones like Lady Montague or Elizabeth Rowe; and as guardians of that tradition, they deploy “disgrace” and “mockery” to shore up cultural boundaries against incursions by alien elements, primarily women and the laboring poor.

The poet goes on to claim kinship with other contemporary plebeian poets who have presumed to impose themselves on the aesthetes:

Sure Sillar much better had banish'd them thence,
Than wrote in despite of good manners and sense.
With two or three more, whose pretensions to fame
Are slight as the bubble that bursts on the stream
And lest with such dunces as these I be number'd,
The task I will drop, nor with verse be incumber'd;
Tho' pen, ink and paper, are by me in store,
O madam excuse, for I ne'er shall write more.³⁰⁴

As we have seen, David Sillar, just as Lapraik and Little did, gave up poetry after a single foray into the market that Burns so thoroughly monopolized. The poet leagues herself

³⁰³ Little, *Poetical Works*, 206-7.

³⁰⁴ Little, *Poetical Works*, 207.

with Sillar and “two or three more,” the “dunces” who thought they could compete with the gifted ploughman. But whereas Sillar seems to have the power to “banish” the Muses, the milkmaid has no choice. The double bind of the milkmaid’s gender and class position closes off even the limited access granted to the select few male poets, or perhaps simply the one. Without bitterness, it seems, the milkmaid bids adieu to the aesthetic edifice constructed and maintained by the cultural elites in Edinburgh and London.

Chapter 3 Caroline Oliphant and the Abuses of History

The dairymaid Janet Little found it easier to publish her work than the aristocratic poet, Carolina Oliphant, Lady Nairne, whose status as a gentlewoman inhibited her from publishing under her own name. Indeed, as Kirsteen McCue points out, Oliphant “was serious about her alter-ego and dressed as Mrs Bogan of Bogan, a ‘country lady of a former generation’, for meetings” with her publisher. She also used a distinct hand for her manuscripts and “tried to conceal from the committee who read them that they were the work of a woman.”³⁰⁵ Only after Oliphant’s death in 1845 was she revealed as the author of numerous songs published initially in Robert Smith’s six-volume collection *The Scottish Minstrel* (1821-24).³⁰⁶

Born in 1766 into the staunchly Jacobite family of Laurence Oliphant, laird of Gask, and Margaret Robertson Oliphant, a daughter of the chief of clan Donnachie (who were married while in exile in France, refugees of the ’45), Oliphant had the advantage of a private tutor and a dancing master from an early age. Oliphant avidly followed Burns’s recovery, revision, and production of Scottish songs and began writing both original verse and adapting existing verses to traditional music. As her biographer William Donaldson notes, “song-making was often a collective process, making individual

³⁰⁵ K. McCue, “Women and Song,” 66. Here she cites Margaret Stewart Simpson’s biography of Oliphant, *The Scottish Songstress: Caroline Baroness Nairne* (Edinburgh and London, 1894).

³⁰⁶ Most of Oliphant’s songs were composed prior to her marriage in 1806. See C. McGuirk, “Jacobite History to National Song: Robert Burns and Carolina Oliphant (Baroness Nairne),” *The Eighteenth Century* 47.2-3 (2006), 255.

attribution difficult,” so “the exact extent of her work and its links with the rest of the tradition have never been clearly established.”³⁰⁷ Indeed, some of Oliphant’s most popular songs, such as “The Land of the Leal,” were attributed to Burns, but subsequent nineteenth-century compendia of Scottish songs, such as Graham’s *The songs of Scotland* (1861), Tytler and Watson’s *The songstresses of Scotland* (1871), Wilson’s *The poets and poetry of Scotland* (1876-77), and Henderson’s *Lady Nairne and her songs* (1901) leave little doubt of her central importance to that tradition.³⁰⁸

Oliphant’s class position and education clearly distinguish her from the plebeian poets, both men and women, we have studied thus far. As Margery McCulloch points out, the reception history of her poetry has been deeply influenced by the eminent Scottish literary historian, biographer, and educator David Mather Masson (1822-1907), who wrote:

There is real moral worth in them all, and all have that genuine characteristic of a song which consists of an inner tune preceding and inspiring the words, and coiling the words, as it were, out of the heart along with it.³⁰⁹

Masson’s commentary, neatly complemented by George Henderson’s assertion that Oliphant contributed to “purifying the national song” from “coarse and worthless words,” oddly tracks the nineteenth-century preoccupation with laundering the radical Scottish nationalist Burns to make him suitable for bourgeois “British” readers.³¹⁰ That Masson advances a “moral worth” standard and Henderson assumes a general consensus that

³⁰⁷ See W. Donaldson, “Oliphant, Carolina, Lady Nairne (1766-1845),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004-2011).

³⁰⁸ See M. McCulloch, “The lasses reply to Mr Burns,” 149.

³⁰⁹ Quoted in M. McCulloch, “The lasses reply to Mr Burns,” 149.

³¹⁰ See Rev. George Henderson, *Lady Nairne and her songs*, 3rd ed. (Paisley, 1905), 51.

eighteenth-century Scots songs required “purification” perhaps tells us more about nineteenth-century social anxieties, however, than it does about Oliphant’s poetry.

At the same time that they seek to elide interpretations of “national” poetry in terms of a specifically *Scottish* nationalist discourse, these readings tend to emphasize the tune at the expense of the verse. Even McCulloch argues that Burns “felt that the *tune*—often a traditional fiddle tune—was the locus of national identity. Where he felt that the words which had come with the tune were inferior to the quality of the tune itself, then he rewrote them to make them worthy.”³¹¹ McCulloch exemplifies this insight by comparing Burns’s use of the traditional tune “Hey, tutti taitie” as the musical setting for “Scots Wha’ Hae” with Oliphant’s adaptation of the same tune for “The Land of the Leal.” This adaptation produces, in McCulloch’s reading, a “beautiful and moving song” that evokes “that eighteenth-century belief in our capacity to empathise with those less fortunate than ourselves.”³¹² By here alluding to the eighteenth-century genre of the sentimental novel, McCulloch suggests, in terms similar to those of Masson, Stevenson, and other Victorian critics, that Oliphant’s songs shy away from the more radical implications of their nationalism, instead embracing “real moral worth.” Whereas Burns uses traditional tunes to emphasize his Scottishness, Oliphant uses them to deracinate herself and the indigenous sources of her art.

Scottish Faces, British Masks

My reading of Oliphant takes a different approach than do prior critics. Rather than displacing it, the beauty of Oliphant’s verse preserves and accentuates its political

³¹¹ M. McCulloch, “The lasses reply to Mr Burns,” 148.

³¹² M. McCulloch, “The lasses reply to Mr Burns,” 151.

content. The question becomes not whether her poetry compares favorably with that of Burns or other poet-composers who worked in the same genre, or whether it can be harmoniously yoked to an Anglicized version of post-Union North British history, but how the poetry articulates and contests, explicitly or implicitly, late eighteenth-century aesthetic, political, and social values in Scotland.³¹³ Read from this perspective, Oliphant's poetry reveals a more ambivalent discourse about Scotland's past, present, and possible futures than commentators, with the exception of Carol McGuirk, have previously recognized. McGuirk invokes Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity to argue that Oliphant's (and Burns's) songs imagine "'Scotland' as a site of stubborn yet evocative dissonance, a place where fish vendors inspire art songs, royal princes weep as homeless outcasts, and every single speaker ... has a problem with social consensus and/or historical outcome.... Burns's and Nairne's neo-Jacobite songs are hybrid in their emphasis on interaction between what were (historically) divided or antagonistic Scottish communities."³¹⁴

I concur with McGuirk's post-colonial reading, and I will argue further that Oliphant, to a much greater extent than her more celebrated contemporary, inflects this "dissonant" Scottish consciousness with an acute awareness not only of social, doctrinal,

³¹³ While naming Oliphant as "one of Scotland's greatest songwriters" whose "social status did not prevent her from imaginatively identifying with other people in a variety of very different situations, not the least those of suffering women," Robert Crawford classes her with the aristocratic, "sentimental Jacobite," Lady Anne Barnard. R. Crawford, *Scotland's Books*, 374-75.

³¹⁴ C. McGuirk, "Jacobite History to National Song," 254.

and national spaces of contestation, but with that of gender as well.³¹⁵ The centrality of gender to the transmission of traditional Scottish oral culture in the medium of print has received a significant amount of critical attention in recent years. As Catherine Kerrigan points out in her groundbreaking anthology of Scottish women's poetry, the ballad form (in which much women's poetry of the period appears) enables "a chorus of voices, different in class and education, but which offers a broad and complex picture of the psyche of women."³¹⁶ Following Kerrigan's lead, Kirsteen McCue's discussion of Joanna Baillie, Elizabeth Hamilton, Anne Grant, and Oliphant stresses the gendered provenance of balladry in the "folk songs or ballads which were most often performed by other women, such as grandmothers, aunts, mothers and nannies."³¹⁷ And Mary Ellen Brown suggests that associating balladry with women composers, performers, and readers has deeply influenced the "genres known and performed, the subject matter chosen, the style and venue of performance, and the meaning/significance of the material."³¹⁸ This close examination of Oliphant's poetry will reveal the specific aspects of this influence.

³¹⁵ Maurice Lindsay previews something of the post-colonial potential of Oliphant studies when, in a reference to her Jacobite lyric "Will ye no come back again?" he observes that because of "a disastrous quirk in the native temperament, which enables Scots to profess sentimental devotion to one cause while giving practical support to another, often diametrically opposed, this song has long been used to sublimate regret, not merely for an unrestorable monarchical house, but for that 'auld sang' the ending of which Lord Seafield proclaimed so contemptuously to the last Scottish Parliament in 1707." M. Lindsay, *History of Scottish Literature*, 228. Lindsay also ascribes this sense of "regret" to songs such as "The Rowan Tree," "The Auld Hoose," and "The Land o' the Leal." *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ C. Kerrigan, *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets*, 5.

³¹⁷ K. McCue, "Women and Song," 59.

³¹⁸ M. E. Brown, "Old Singing Women and the Canons of Scottish Balladry and Song," *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, 51.

Moreover, as we shall see, Oliphant's poetry becomes even more complex when it negotiates discourses of nation as well. As Jane Rendall has pointed out, eighteenth-century Scottish women writers do not appear in the ranks of the Enlightenment historians who applied stadialist theory to North Britain's historical development in order to demonstrate Scotland's transformation from barbarism to modern civil society.³¹⁹ Richard Sher likewise notes the professional barriers to women's participation in eighteenth-century enlightened discourses, particularly in Scotland and England.³²⁰ But this absence does not mean that women could not or did not participate in the construction or contestation of the roles and functions assigned to them by their professorial counterparts. Following Rousseau, works such as John Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1774), and Lord Kames's *Loose Hints upon Education* (1781) stressed the civilizing moral influence

³¹⁹ See J. Rendall, "Clio, Mars and Minerva: The Scottish Enlightenment and the Writing of Women's History," *Eighteenth Century Scotland: New Perspectives*, especially 145-47.

³²⁰ Both Rendall and Sher observe that male writers generally patronized women and believed them unfit for the rigors of intellectual activity. According to Sher, "Women in eighteenth-century England also constituted a minority among the authors of books, but their numbers were substantial, especially in literary genres. In Paris, where there were relatively few women authors, a handful of women played crucial roles in enlightened society through their work as salon managers. By comparison, Scottish society remained provincial, and women not only had limited opportunities to participate in primary institutions of Scottish intellectual life but also found it difficult to cultivate other institutions that might have served the same purpose. Alison Cockburn may have attracted some of the Edinburgh literati to her parlor, but evidence of a salon life in the French or English sense is lacking until the early years of the nineteenth century. Although a number of male authors encouraged the efforts of women who dared to join their ranks, few seem to have tried. The prevailing view toward female intellectual activity was still the cautious one articulated in John Gregory's best-selling *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (no. 163): 'if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret.'" R. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors & Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America* (Chicago, 2006), 102-03.

of middle- and upper-class women within the family and cited the ideal of companionate marriage to mark the difference between modern (Protestant and western) and backward (eastern) societies. While commercial and empire-building pursuits necessarily exposed men to moral corruption, their domestic partners provided compensatory instruction in virtue and thus served a critical social function. Occasionally, a woman writer such as Elizabeth Hamilton in her *Memoirs of the Life of Agrippina, the wife of Germanicus* (1804) might enter the lists to engage masculinist history on its own ground, but women could take a more active part in the construction of national and domestic history through other media, such as poetry.³²¹ Oliphant's poetry constitutes an intervention of this kind, challenging and reshaping Enlightenment history's narrative of civil society and the nation.

We begin with "The Land O' The Leal," one of the songs on which Oliphant's nineteenth-century reputation as a "moral" or sentimental poet is largely based (though even after Oliphant's death some of Burns's biographers continued to claim that the poem was composed by the dying poet):

I'm wearin' awa', John,
Like snaw-wreaths in thaw, John,
I'm wearin' awa'
 To the land o' the leal.
There's nae sorrow there, John,
There's neither cauld nor care, John,
The day is aye fair
 In the land o' the leal.

Our bonnie bairn's there, John,
She was baith gude and fair, John,

³²¹ For an extensive treatment of this subject, see Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution*.

And oh! we grudg'd her sair
To the land o' the leal.
But sorrow's sel' wears past, John,
And joy's a-comin' fast, John,
The joy that's aye to last,
In the land o' the leal.

Sae dear that joy was bought, John,
Sae free the battle fought, John,
That sinfu' man e'er brought
To the land o' the leal.
Oh! dry your glist'ning e'e, John,
My saul langs to be free, John,
And angels beckon me
To the land o' the leal.

Oh! haud ye leal and true, John,
Your day it's wearin' thro', John,
And I'll welcome you
To the land o' the leal.
Now fare ye weel, my ain John,
This world's cares are vain, John,
We'll meet, and we'll be fain,
In the land o' the leal.³²²

As noted above, McCulloch observes that the “sentiments in the song draw on that eighteenth-century belief in our capacity to empathise with those less fortunate than ourselves.”³²³ But we need not identify this sentiment solely with eighteenth-century moral philosophy, nor with literary sentimentality in its eighteenth-century Mackenzian sense. Alternatively, the poem may be read to refer to the concrete social and economic conditions which late eighteenth-century Scots, particularly those of the lower ranks of society, had to endure. The speaker, “wearin’ awa’” from cold, hunger, deprivation, and grief, tells her husband that she desires death over a life of bodily and emotional

³²² Charles Rogers, ed., *Life and Songs of the Baroness Nairne* (London, 1869), 4-5.

³²³ M. McCulloch, “The lasses reply to Mr Burns,” 151.

suffering. Her dead child, “baith gude and fair,” has only achieved “joy” by exiting life, though her parents “grug’d her sair.” While the speaker now appears to accept her daughter’s death as the will of heaven (“But sorrow’s sel’ wears past”), she hints at an underlying and unremitting anger at its injustice: “Sae dear that joy was bought, John./Sae free the battle fought, John.” This language of violent struggle (the internal rhyme bought/fought/brought) contrasts sharply with the preceding verse “The joy that’s aye to last,” and the speaker’s appeal “to be free” echoes the defiance implicit in “Sae free the battle fought.” Though the poem returns to quiescence in the final verse (“We’ll meet, and we’ll be fain”), such gladness as the poem offers seems little compensation for the burden of life that is always “wearin’ thro’.”

The poem likewise indicates a traditional expression of *contemptus mundi*, but we should not ignore the availability of a political reading as well. Though in the terms of the poem the universal Christian man is “sinfu’,” the *sins* to which the speaker refers—those that produce hunger, poverty, and oppression—come at the hands of historically specific men. The “land o’ the leal” may be heaven, but it is a Scottish heaven or, perhaps more accurately, a Scottish haven. The idea of the “leal Scot” who returns from exile to his native land politically codes this explicitly religious allegory as oppositional to the English hegemon. Scottish subordination to English rule, obtained by trickery and blackmail in 1707 and enforced by military coercion in 1715 and 1745, makes all “leal” Scots exiles, whether they are forced to emigrate to clear sheep walks and hunting grounds for the benefit of their English overlords (and Scottish *compradors*), to fight English imperial and continental wars, or to leave the land for entombment as wage

laborers in squalid industrial or commercial towns. The “land o’ the leal” is thus an alternative Scotland, one free of English domination and inhabited by native Scots with communitarian national values. Only in a Scottish community of the faithful might a child’s death from cold and starvation—or a parent’s from grief and overwork—ever stand redeemed.³²⁴

While allegorically shadowed in “The Land O’ the Leal,” Scotland’s social and political status takes material shape in “Caller Herrin’.” The poem begins with the call of a fishwife hawking the fisherman’s catch:

Wha’ll buy my caller herrin’?
They’re bonnie fish and halesome farin’;
Wha’ll buy my caller herrin’,
New drawn frae the Forth?

When ye were sleepin’ on your pillows,
Dream’d ye aught o’ our puir fellows,
Darkling as they fac’d the billows,
A’ to fill the woven willows?
Buy my caller herrin’,
New drawn frae the Forth.

Wha’ll buy my caller herrin’?
They’re no brought here without brave daring;
Buy my caller herrin’,
Haul’d thro’ wind and rain.
Wha’ll buy my caller herrin’?
New drawn frae the Forth?³²⁵

In these stanzas the fishwife praises the “halesome” quality of her “bonnie fish,” as one might expect, but then she turns to the working conditions in which they are produced.

While the gentry and professional classes sleep, fishermen risk their necks to supply their

³²⁴ For a reading of the poem’s Jacobite shadows, see McGuirk, “Jacobite History to National Song,” 262-63.

³²⁵ Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 6.

well laden tables. “Dream’d ye aught,” the fishwife asks, o’ our puir fellows/Darkling as they fac’d the billows,/A’ to fill the woven willows?” The marvelous rhymed quatrain in the second stanza, which couples the bourgeois “pillows” with the consumer product display (the baskets full of fish), while pairing the brave fishermen with the violent elements, indelibly inscribes class and economic hierarchies into the very bones of the poem. Buying fish caught by “our puir fellows” becomes an expression not only of Scottish national loyalty, but a matter of survival for a generation of Scottish “fellows” and their families.³²⁶

But as the following stanzas indicate, bourgeois imitation of English taste and polite manners now enables England to subject the Scots culturally without the militarization of the country that occurred in the immediate wake of the Jacobite uprisings:

Wha’ll buy my caller herrin’?
Oh, ye may ca’ them vulgar farin’,
Wives and mithers maist despairing,
Ca’ them lives o’ men.
Wha’ll buy my caller herrin’?
New drawn frae the Forth?

When the creel o’ herrin’ passes,
Ladies, clad in silks and laces,
Gather in their braw pelisses,

³²⁶ The Scottish commercial herring industry did not experience a “take-off” until the turn of the nineteenth century, with the incorporation of the British Fishery Society (1787) and increased capital investment (financed substantially by Highland landowners) in ports such as Wick Harbor. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Dutch dominated commercial fishing in Scottish waters. In this respect, the poem emphasizes the relative poverty and inadequate capitalization of Scottish fishermen. See Angus Macleod, “Herring Fishing” (1998), Series G, File 4, Section 30 NRAS reference: NRAS 4336/1/7/x (additional file). On the tenuousness of the Scottish fishing industry during the period, see T. Dickson, et al., *Scottish Capitalism*, 151-52.

Cast their heads and screw their faces.
Wha'll buy my caller herrin'?
New drawn frae the Forth?³²⁷

These stanzas powerfully articulate the fishwife's frustration that the bourgeois women in the market ignore her "vulgar farin'" (which at the beginning of the poem the more optimistic fishwife lauded as "halesome") in favor of more refined delicacies.³²⁸ The fishwife's appeal to the occupational hazards of fishing, expressed in the second and third stanzas in terms of national pride, turns bitterly to a more fundamental concern: the herring represent the death of men, the despair of wives and mothers, the destitution of orphan children. This metonymic substitution, the poem's slippage between the dead fish and the dead fishermen, becomes graphically clear when the "Ladies, clad in silks and laces" turn away in disgust from passing baskets full of mangled remains, which could be fish or men. The fishwife's refrain likewise takes on new meaning, as she now asks who will pay for the lost lives (and livelihoods) that overflow the baskets/caskets.

Yet the fishwife does not give in to despair, it seems:

Caller herrin's no got lightlie,
Ye can trip the spring fu' tightlie,
Spite o' tauntin', flauntin', flingin',
Gow has set you a' a-singing.
Wha'll buy my caller herrin'?
New drawn frae the Forth?

Neebour wives, now tent my tellin':

³²⁷ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 6-7.

³²⁸ McGuirk reads the poem as a satire "on material prosperity that for her taints post-Union, post-Stuart Scotland. In this song, descendants of the winners in the eighteenth-century conflicts parade in their imported silks and laces, turning with contempt from Scottish workers and their traditional diet. Her subtext is clear enough: these scorners-of-herring are not 'Scottish' at all; the fishwives and their families are the real thing." C. McGuirk, "Jacobite History to National Song," 276.

When the bonny fish ye're sellin',
At ae word be in ye're dealin'---
Truth will stand when a' thing's failin'.
They're bonnie fish and halesome farin'.
Wha'll buy my caller herrin'?
New drawn frae the Forth?³²⁹

Here the fishwife appears to affirm the sanctity of fishing as an apostolic occupation. If fishing costs men their lives, it also saves their souls. Bourgeois taste is as ephemeral as the “gow” that conceals the stench of dead fish in baskets or dead bodies in caskets; the honest deaths of men need no explaining away, no justification beyond the moral purity of their labor. The metonymic substitution of men for fish shifts again, this time to the transcendent beauty and purity of *eternal* fare: “Truth will stand when a' thing's failin'.” As in “The Land O' the Leal,” the allegory of the community of the faithful is at once eschatological and national. In sharp contrast to the fine ladies who hold the lives of fishermen cheap, the “Neebour wives” (perhaps the widows of those men) remain faithful to their own, faithful to indigenous Scottish labor and indigenous Scottish life. In this Scottish community, the fishermen live, work, and die for the community that thrives on the fruits of their labor, mourns them dead, and redeems them through communal solidarity against bourgeois and “foreign” products, manners, and ideologies. While the battle might be a losing one, that does not make it any less worth fighting.

We find another variant of this communitarianism in “The Auld House.” Just as its English and Anglo-Irish counterparts by poets such as Cowper, Crabbe, and Goldsmith, the poem laments the decline of aristocratic paternalism and a “free” peasantry:

³²⁹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 7.

Oh, the auld house, the auld house,
What tho' the rooms were wee?
Oh! kind hearts were dwelling there,
And bairnies fu' o' glee;
The wild rose and the Jessamine
Still hang upon the wa',
How mony cherish'd memories
Do they, sweet flowers, reca'.

Oh, the auld laird, the auld laird,
Sae canty, kind and crouse,
How mony did he welcome to
His ain wee dear auld house;
And the leddy too, sae genty,
There shelter'd Scotland's heir,
And clipt a lock wi' her ain hand,
Frae his lang yellow hair.³³⁰

These stanzas emphasize the relative modesty of the Scottish gentry, in contrast to the rather grander proportions of the English squirearchy. They also relocate social adhesion, family piety, and filial affection from the yeoman farmers humbler social classes, as in the English poems, to the gentry itself.³³¹ The laird's hospitality extends to one and all, while the leddy's grace and gentility imbue the community with domestic sanctity and racial purity, fetishized in the form of the young heir's lock of blonde hair. Just as in "The Land O' the Leal" and "Caller Herrin'," the poem envisages the community of faithful as Scottish and traditional, untainted by foreign or English interference, although the flora—"wild rose and the Jessamine"—connotes a broader literary association with

³³⁰ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 14.

³³¹ The best discussion of the loss of rural values in eighteenth-century English poetry may still be found in Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford, 1973), ch. 8.

English roses and white jasmine.³³² This floral *locus classicus* of British poetry is extended in the next two stanzas:

The mavis still doth sweetly sing,
The blue bells sweetly blaw,
The bonny Earn's clear winding still,
But the auld house is awa'.
But the auld house, the auld house,
Deserted tho' ye be,
There ne'er can be a new house
Will seem sae fair to me.

Still flourishing the auld pear tree
The bairnies liked to see,
And oh, how aften did they speir
When ripe they a' wad be?
The voices sweet, the wee bit feet
Aye rinnin's here and there,
The merry shout---! whiles we greet
To think we'll hear nae mair.³³³

The ubiquitous song thrush (mavis), blue bells, and pear tree deepen the poem's "Britishness," but at the same time they accentuate the emptiness of the landscape. Whereas the first two stanzas associate the flora with "cherish'd memories" of hearth and home, in the second they reveal the social and economic changes that have wrent the old feudal hierarchy. Moreover, the poem's use of common metre mimics the English hymn form, but without the standard *abab* rhyme pattern. Instead, the rhyme varies somewhat, but generally follows an *abcb* scheme (though the fourth stanza, for example, contains one variant of *aaba* and one standard *cdcd*). These variations indicate a parallel disruption of literary and aesthetic traditions, as the very form of the poem distorts under

³³² See, for example, S. T. Coleridge, *Refl. Place Retirem* at 6: "In the open air Our myrtles blossomed; and across the porch Thick jasmins twined" (1796); and G. Crabbe, *Parish Reg.* iii, in *Poems* at 107: "Where Jasmine trails on either side the Door" (1807).

³³³ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 14-15.

the pressure of Scotland's cultural subordination to English (or, more euphemistically, "British") standards. The auld house deserted and the children's voices forever silenced, the beauty of the "bonnie Earn's clear winding" is preserved only as an aesthetic production, a picture postcard featuring British rural scenery, mass produced for an increasing number of tourists and travelers from the south. Unlike in the English empty landscape poems, where the rural peasantry has been driven from the land by rapacious, capitalist landlords who enclose common land and tear down cottages, here the land has been lost altogether as Scotland's traditional economy assimilates into the English commercial system.³³⁴

The poem concludes with an elegiac pronouncement on the irreversibility of this assimilation:

For they are a' wide scatter'd now,
Some to the Indies gane,
And ane alas! to her lang hame;
Not here we'll meet again,
The kirkyaird, the kirkyaird!
Wi' flowers o' every hue,
Shelter'd by the holly's shade
An' the dark somber yew.

The setting sun, the setting sun!
How glorious it gaed doon;
The cloudy splendour raised our hearts
To cloudless skies aboon!
The auld dial, the auld dial!
It tauld how time did pass;
The wintry winds hae dung it doon,

³³⁴ McCue sees this song as "anticipating nineteenth-century Kailyard sentimentality . . . The migration of families from country to city, or to foreign lands, naturally encouraged this highly charged emotional view of home and nation." K. McCue, "Women and Song," 64.

Now hid ‘mang weeds and grass.³³⁵

Their society destroyed, the sons of the gentry have scattered to the four corners of the Empire, seeking their fortunes as soldiers and sailors, merchants and planters, colonial administrators and East India Company clerks. Even the regulation of the seasons that governed the economic and social rhythm of the old agrarian society has lost its relevance in the new commercial, capitalist Scotland. Nothing here is cultivated except a romantic imagery of picturesque ruins; even the tropes and imagery of English landscape poetry have invaded and colonized the Scots vernacular. At the same time it celebrates Scottish musical, poetic, and linguistic national traditions, the poem eulogizes their demise.

This colonization of Scottish culture, imagined as in transition in “The Auld House,” appears more complete in “Her Home She Is Leaving.” This poem, composed in rhymed hexameter couplets, dispenses altogether with vernacular Scots (the only archaisms are the personal pronouns “thee” and “ye”) in favor of elegant Augustan English:

To the hills of her youth, cloth’d in all their wildness,
Farewell she is bidding, in all her sweet mildness,
And still, as the moment of parting is nearer,
Each long-cherish’d object is fairer and dearer.
Not a grove or fresh streamlet but wakens reflection
Of hearts still and cold, that glow’d with affection;
Not a breeze that blows over the flow’rs of the wild-wood,
But tells as it passes, how blest was her childhood.³³⁶

The Anglicized observer might be anywhere; unlike many of Oliphant’s (and her English counterparts’) nature poems, this poem strips away the insistent localism of particular

³³⁵ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 15.

³³⁶ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 12.

river valleys, along with their national and linguistic associations. In this sense the poem deracinates its origins, fully realizing the English colonization of Scottish poetic forms and vernacular still extant in “The Auld House.” The predominant mood of the poem is elegiac detachment, a favorite Augustan mode that further identifies the poem with the dominant South British cultural tradition. Even the voice of the breeze, which the speaker rightly or wrongly assumes is narrating the blessedness of the old woman’s youth, communicates to her in a language that does not seem to belong to her: it “tells as it passes, how blest was her childhood,” but its primary effect is to conjure a dead past whose associations can only find expression in a dead language.

In the second stanza the poem’s perspective shifts from the observer of the aged woman to the woman herself:

And how long must I leave thee, each fond look expresses,
Ye high rocky summits, ye ivy’d recesses,
How long must I leave thee, thou wood-shaded river,
The echoes all sigh—as they whisper—for ever!
Tho’ the autumn winds rave, and the seared leaves fall,
And winter hangs out her cold icy pall---
Yet the footsteps of spring again ye will see,
And the singing of birds---but they sing not for me.³³⁷

Allowed to speak for herself for the first and only time in the poem, the woman seems curiously disassociated from the landscape. She does not refer back to the affective bonds that the speaker identifies in the first stanza as one source of the woman’s “blessedness.” It appears that the woman simply has no words for that kind of blessedness, and the speaker’s imposition of an alien language on the woman effectively silences her. She queries the landscape of her native place, only to receive an echo of her own alienation

³³⁷ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 12.

from it: an exilic sigh and a whisper. We now see that the speaker has misconstrued the nature and meaning of the woman's reflections from the beginning: this final parting does not sanctify past associations, but completes a process of erasure. When spring comes, the birds will sing once more, but the song no longer has meaning for the woman—it can never be “hers.” As if to affirm this appropriation, the poem shifts back to the observer in the final stanza:

The joys of the past, more faintly recalling,
Sweet visions of peace on her spirit are falling,
And the soft wing of time, as it speeds for the morrow,
Wafts a gale, that is drying the dew drops of sorrow.
Hope dawns---and the toils of life's journey beguiling.
The path of the mourner is cheered with its smiling,
And there her heart rests, and her wishes all centre,
Where parting is never---nor sorrow can enter!³³⁸

Here the observer naturalizes the old woman's imminent death in conventional terms of consolation. But note the dramatic contrast between this version of the *contemptus mundi* narrative and the one we see in “The Land O' the Leal.” There the affective relations between the woman, her husband, and their lost child materialize in the Scots vernacular of the poem; they are felt through the woman's native language speaking *for itself*. In “Her Home She Is Leaving” none of this feeling survives. We get no sense of the woman's lived experience, suffering, and loss. The poem instead speaks over the woman, substituting pious sentiment for authentic mourning, cultural domination for self-representation.

³³⁸ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 13.

Madwoman in the Castle: Scotland as Gothic Nightmare

Oliphant's poetry, however, continuously resists the forces of Anglicization. In sharp contrast to the deracination effected in "Her Home She Is Leaving," "The Banks of the Earn" projects a rousing Scottish patriotism in the martial vernacular of "Scots Wha Hae":

Fair shone the rising sky,
The dew drops clad wi' mony a dye,
Larks lifting pibrochs high,
To welcome day's returning.
The spreading hills, the shading trees,
High waving in the morning breeze;
The wee Scots' rose that sweetly blows,
Earn's vale adorning.³³⁹

This is Scotland resplendent; if the Augustan mode of the prior poem elides all traces of nativity, "The Banks of the Earn" renders Scotland as "Nature" itself. With the rising sun the larks's song transforms into the sound of pipes, the landscape flaps in the breeze like the Saltire. In the first stanza the poem deploys three of Scotland's "national" languages, Scots, Gaelic, and English, embracing a composite linguistic, historical, and cultural idea of the nation that unifies Lowlands and Highlands, Scots and Celts, country and city. The poet, who might be read as Dame Scotia, personifies the River Earn (*Uisge Eireann* in Scottish Gaelic)³⁴⁰ in terms of the heroes of the Wars for Scottish Independence:

Flow on sweet Earn, row on sweet Earn,
Joy to a' thy bonny braes,
Spring's sweet buds aye first do blow
Where thy winding waters flow.
Thro' thy banks, which wild flowers border,

³³⁹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 17.

³⁴⁰ The Earn empties out of Loch Earn near St. Fillans in Perthshire and flows east and south through Strathearn, joining the Tay near Abernethy.

Freely wind, and proudly flow,
Where Wallace wight fought for the right,
And gallant Grahams are lying low.³⁴¹

O Scotland! nurse o' mony a name
Rever'd for worth, renown'd in fame;
Let never foes tell to thy shame,
Gane is thine ancient loyalty.
But still the true-born warlike band
That guards thy high unconquer'd land,
As did their sires, join hand in hand,
To fight for law and royalty.

It is instructive to compare Oliphant's voice in the poem with that of Burns in "The Scotian Muse: An Elegy." This poem was first printed in the *Edinburgh Gazetteer* on October 1, 1793, in response to the sedition trials of Thomas Muir and the Rev. Thomas Fysche Palmer:

For him, who warm'd by *Freedom's* genial fire,
With soul unfetter'd, drags the *Despot's* chain,
Perhaps thy hand attunes the living lyre
To soothe his woes by music's magic strain.

* * *

Say (and, ye *Powers of Truth*, accordant join!)
'The time will come—that *Fate* has fix'd the doom—
'The *Friends of suffering virtue* shall combine,
'And hurl each blood-stained Despot to the tomb!'³⁴²

As Noble observes, "this is absolutely the only Scottish public radical poetry derived from the high Miltonic style."³⁴³ But Oliphant's lyric ode, while not "public radical poetry" in Noble's sense of the term, certainly participates in the "high" style favored by

³⁴¹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 17.

³⁴² Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 474.

³⁴³ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 475. See also McIlvanney's discussion of Burns's response to the "crisis" brought on by the sedition trials in *Burns the Radical*, 212-15.

Burns in much of his political poetry. I would argue that it, too, contains radical implications, but not of the same republican stamp as Burns's poem. The ostensible subject of the poem, the River Earn, embodies both Scotland's history of freedom from foreign domination and Burns's Scotian muse, whose song both recounts the "ancient loyalty" of the Scots and prophesies a new dawning of freedom through "suffering virtue." The kind of harmless nostalgia commonly associated with the safe domestication of Scottish heroes from the past, while present in the poem's memorialization of Wallace and the Grahams, only accentuates the shift to the *present* tense in the third stanza: "But still the true-born warlike band/That guards thy high unconquer'd land./As did their sires, join hand in hand,/To fight for law and royalty." These yet-to-be-sung heroes, like Burns's Scottish Friends of the People, fight tyranny in the here and now.

Oh, ne'er for greed o' wardly gear,
Let thy brave sons, like fugies, hide
Where lawless stills pollute the rills
That o'er thy hills and valleys glide.
While in the field they scorn to yield,
And while their native soil is dear,
Oh, may their truth be as its rocks,
And conscience, as its waters clear!³⁴⁴

But what is the nature of this tyranny? Does the poem suggest a return to the royal prerogative and the Stuart monarchy, as fealty to "law and royalty" might suggest? For the poet, it seems, the immediate threat to Scotland's sovereignty is the "cult of commerce" that characterizes the modern composite British state. Seduced by "greed o' wardly gear," Scotia's sons are faced with the choice of either preserving their nativity or engaging in British enterprise. Curiously, "British" enterprise appears limited in the

³⁴⁴ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 18.

poem to the business of the illegal distillation of whisky, which flourished (especially in the Highlands) during the post-Union regime of licenses and excise duties on spirits, both imported and locally produced. Here the poet's somewhat priggish allegation that those brave Highlanders who once fought for Scotland's ancient freedoms are now too busy selling illicit moonshine to notice their loss masks a deeper estrangement caused by the Union. While the 1707 Treaty of Union opened the way for free trade and navigation with England and the empire, it also subjected Scots to liability for a portion of the English National Debt. Though the treaty temporarily softened the blow by exempting Scotland from temporary duties on stamped paper, windows, coal, and malt and (controversially) granted compensation for losses incurred by investors in the *Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies* and for private individuals as a result of the recall of Scots coinage, it eventually burdened Scottish consumers with substantially higher excise taxes on consumables. "What Scots objected to," notes Bruce Lenman, "was the very existence of an institution [the new customs and excise service] to which their previous history offered no parallel."³⁴⁵ Even the advance of a century does not seem to have erased the humiliation of economic subordination, which has emasculated Scotland's "brave sons" and "polluted" its former independence with the stain of economic dependency and illegal commerce.

Unlike Burns's rhetoric of republican "truth" and "virtue," Oliphant's Scottish muse calls for a return to traditional "truth" and "conscience," a decidedly conservative, patrician radicalism that, while it shares some of the rhetorical attributes of Jacobitism,

³⁴⁵ See B. Lenman, *An Economic History of Scotland*, 58-61.

accepts the political reality of the British state and recasts the argument in terms of a return to the moral economy. Thus the poem targets not the “blood-stained Despots” but the tyranny of the fiscal-bureaucratic state, which has burdened the Scottish nation with the debts of French and American wars while stifling its economic freedom through punitive excise taxes and English protectionism.³⁴⁶ The insidious effect of commercial (and later industrial) capitalism, directed and enforced by the terms of the Treaty of Union, may have found expression in the Jacobite politics of 1715 and 1745, but by century’s end Oliphant’s *Dame Scotia* engages in neither wishful republican thinking nor hazy feudal nostalgia. Her conservatism lies rather in a clear-eyed assessment of Scotland’s actual condition as an economic colony of the British state and empire. Although the glittering promise of profits from trade and industry may have been realized by some Scottish participants in British enterprise, the true measure of Scotland’s predicament is found in the squalid Highland villages sustained by illegal distilling, the continuous low-grade warfare between smugglers and excise officers, and the diminishing social cohesion once fostered by feudal political and economic ties. In order to clear its collective conscience and purge the pollution from the social body, Scotland must liberate herself from English fiscal and economic policies. While one is reminded of Scott’s surge of nationalist vitriol against an English proposal in 1826 to restrict the ability of Scottish banks to issue currency (*The Letters of Malachi Malagrowth*), Oliphant’s poem points to a more fundamental structural weakness in the Anglo-Scottish political and economic relationship and one that informs contemporary debates over

³⁴⁶ See John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, money and the English state, 1688-1783* (London, 1989).

Scotland's role in the United Kingdom. In his fiction Scott constructs Britain in terms of an equal partnership that preserves the native cultures of the partners, at least in their external forms, within a "modern" capitalist state. But even in Scott's most optimistic tales of the necessity of political and economic assimilation (*Waverley*, *The Antiquary*, *Guy Mannering*, and, perhaps less clearly, *Redgauntlet*), there is little illusion about the identities of the senior and junior partners. Oliphant, at least in *The Banks of the Earn*, sees no partnership whatever; Scotland is little more than an aesthetic accessory, an economic satellite, a labor pool, a sheepwalk, a recruiting depot, and a graveyard where impotent and polluted "fugies" go to die.

If there were an argument for the Caledonian Antiszygy to be made in Oliphant's case, one might find it in the series of poems memorializing Wallace and Scotland's heroic past even as the poems of contemporary Scotland bemoan their loss.³⁴⁷ But regardless of the usefulness of this particular antithesis as an analytical framework in this or any other context, we can see that the English overwriting of Scottish history implicit in the Union project produces a present dislocation from this heroic past that has severed Scots from any sense of localized self-identification. The beautiful elegy "Bonny Gascon Ha'" strongly registers this effect, as a familiar ruin associated with Wallace's martial feats is imagined in the present as a sign of the completed and inaccessible epic past:

Lane, on the winding Earn, there stands
An unco tow'r, sae stern an' auld,
Biggit, by lang forgotten hands,---
Ance refuge o' the Wallace bauld.

³⁴⁷ On the Caledonian Antiszygy, see G. Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London, 1919).

Time's restless finger sair hath waur'd,
And riv'd thy grey disjaskit wa';
But rougher hands than Time's ha'e daur'd
To wrang thee, bonny Gascon Ha'.

O! may a muse unkent to fame,
For this dim gruesome relic sue:
'Tis linkit wi' a Patriot's name,
The truest Scotland ever knew.³⁴⁸

“In ancient literature it is memory, and not knowledge, that serves as the source and power for the creative impulse,” Mikhail Bakhtin observes. “That is how it was, it is impossible to change it: the tradition of the past is sacred. There is as yet no consciousness of the possible relativity of any past.”³⁴⁹ I would suggest that Bakhtin's conception of epic poetry as a “dead language” of the past that is also powerfully “national,” in contrast to the youthful anti-genre of the novel with its open-endedness, comic and parodic inversions, and linguistic chaos, provides an apt hermeneutic approach to the supposed antithesis we are discussing here. Although “Bonny Gascon Ha” is obviously not an epic poem, it does take the form of another antique genre, the elegy. The poem begins in “Ozymandias” fashion with the striking image of the “unco tow'r, sae stern an' auld./Biggit, by lang forgotten hands,---/Ance refuge o' the Wallace bauld.” In this “epic zone,” as Bakhtin puts it, there is no need for explanation of the hero's historicity:

The epic is indifferent to formal beginnings and can remain incomplete (that is, where it concludes is almost arbitrary). The absolute past is closed and completed in the whole as well as in any of its parts. It is, therefore, possible to take any part and offer it as the whole. One cannot embrace, in a single epic, the entire world of the absolutely past (although it is unified from a plot standpoint)—to do so would

³⁴⁸ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 42.

³⁴⁹ M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin, 1981), 15.

mean a retelling of the whole of national tradition, and it is sufficiently difficult to embrace even a significant portion of it. But this is no great loss, because the structure of the whole is repeated in each part, and each part is complete and circular like the whole. One may begin the story at almost any moment, and finish at almost any moment.³⁵⁰

Wallace defeats the English at every turn, always against impossible odds and in the name of the Scottish nation that he eternally embodies. As Bakhtin says about *The Iliad*, “the plot-line of the tradition is already well known to everyone.”³⁵¹ Thus, when we see in Oliphant and other poets references to Wallace and other Scottish “national” figures, the associations invoked in terms of the present condition of honorless subjection to the English do not merely register on an historical plane, but as an absolute, irrevocable bereavement of national character. To put it in terms of an “English” national tale—the Arthurian cycles—the Norman aristocrats and courtiers who devised the Arthur legends to legitimize their conquest may have constructed a story that has many of the characteristics of epic, but it refuses the severance from the deep past, the closed circle, that for Bakhtin marks the national epic. Arthur’s return remains open, the rise will inevitably follow the fall. In this respect, the Arthur legends are comic in nature and closer relatives to the modern novel. If we think in terms of this paradigm, as poets the Scots are indeed a tragedy-minded people. Their national tale is a true epic: Wallace will not come back, the circle is closed, those were indeed the “good times.”

When in the second quatrain the poem turns from the Wallace plot that everyone already knows to the fate of its signifier, we see that “Time” (which is rigidly excluded from epic because it denotes movement, a lessening of distance, a collapse of the

³⁵⁰ M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 31-2.

³⁵¹ M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 32.

absolute) has the ability to decay the signifier (the tower) but not its signified (Wallace). This conventional allusion reaffirms the sanctity and immunity of the sealed epic past, but, unlike *Ozymandias*, the poem does not stop with convention. The poet ruefully adds, “But rougher hands than Time’s ha’e daur’d/To wrang thee, bonny Gascon Ha’.” Here the poet may refer to the immediate depredations of vandals or local builders looking for materials, but it would likewise appear that attempts are at work to repress the Scottish epic past in the service of promoting the modern British state. In the next quatrain the poet implores a “muse unkent to fame” to resist these attempts to overwrite Scottish national epic and, inspired by the tower, to sing the old songs once more. It is interesting that the poet should call upon an *anonymous* voice for this purpose, as if calling out the poet’s more notorious contemporaries for failing in this presumably national duty. The sought-after unknown muse likewise harkens back to the “lang forgotten hands” that built the tower, and by implication, Scotland’s heroic past. Indeed, the poet seems to suggest that poetry that is not so inspired, that is wedded to the open, assimilationist impulses of the present, cannot be considered as part of the national tradition. In this sense, the poet of “Bonny Gascon Ha” strikes a pose similar to that of “The Banks of the Earn,” calling on Scotland’s “brave sons” to turn to the epic past for a means of self-identification and national expression.

At this point the poem also performs a semiotic transference in which the hall tower’s signification of Wallace the “bauld” hero passes through the “unkent muse” back through the tower to a new signified, “a Patriot’s name/The truest Scotland ever knew.” This substitution for Wallace may seem too close an approximation for comment, but it

functions not only to sharpen the opposition between the “true” muse/poet/patriot and the “rougher hands” of the second quatrain. Indeed, the “dim gruesome relic” is itself sanctified by the “Patriot’s name” in a kind of ritual of transubstantiation. It is not that Wallace has transcended epic to become a sacrificial figure within a Christian soteriology (this might be a productive reading as well, though it would convert the Scottish national tale from tragedy to comedy, which does not seem quite appropriate to the poem), but that “true” Scottish literature, like Scottish patriotism, must meet the preemptory demands of its own *logos*, just as Christian allegory begins and ends with the Word incarnate.

Just leave in peace ilk mossy stane,
Tellin’ o’ nation’s rivalry;
And for succeeding ages hain* *to spare, save
Remains o’ Scottish chivalry.

What tho’ no monument to thee
Is biggit by thy country’s hands,---
Engrav’d are thine immortal deeds
On ev’ry heart in this braid land.³⁵²

One can well imagine what Oliphant would have thought of the Victorian Gothic tower that now stands as the national monument to Wallace or of the authenticity of the “national” feeling that raised the money to build it. This kind of forgetting in empty memorialization is precisely what the “rougher hands” of the poem seek to accomplish. The only true national response, the only way to “hain/Remains o’ Scottish chivalry,” is to leave the tower as it is. Moreover, the “mossy stane/Tellin’ o’ nation’s rivalry” is the form of Scottish epic itself, the irreducible element that cannot be added to or detracted

³⁵² C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 42.

from. As Bakhtin puts it, “The epic world knows only a single and unified world view, obligatory and indubitably true for heroes as well as for authors and audiences.”³⁵³

Imitation, interpretation, and agrarian capitalism are violations.

Rude Time may monuments ding down,
An’ tow’rs an’ wa’s maun a’ decay;
Enduring---deathless---noble Chief,
Thy name can never pass away.

Gi’e pillar’d fame to common men,---
Nae need o’ cairns for ane like thee;
In ev’ry cave, wood, hill, and glen,
Wallace! remembered aye shall be.³⁵⁴

It appears that the “unkent muse” has come forth: William Wallace. The poet turns in disgust from memorialization and directly addresses the chieftan by name, collapsing the chain of signification in the poem that batters at the “deathless” chieftan in a vain effort to overwrite Scotland’s epic narrative. The elegy is not *for* Wallace or the heroic past he embodies, but *by* Wallace for the country—and the nation—that its people have forgotten by talking “about it” too much. As in epic, there can be no distance between thought and action, no consciousness of time and history, no “about it.” To narrate a memory is to destroy it, to subject it to the solvent of time and “interest.” “Bonny Gascon Ha” describes nothing, remembers nothing, signifies nothing. It can only gesture in the direction of an epic wholeness entirely embodied in and identical with the nation itself.

We have reached an impasse. If poetry of the nation in its epic sense can only degrade it, then what, if anything, can be recuperated through the kind of literary nationalism in which Burns, Oliphant, and others appear to be engaged? To ask this

³⁵³ M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 35.

³⁵⁴ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 43.

question another way, if one objective of poems such as “Bonny Gascon Ha” is to preserve in pristine form the representation of national memory from assimilationist overcoding, what form should it take? As we have seen, each of the poets we have read thus far takes multiple formal approaches to Scottish national subjects, including those we may think of as “British” or “English.” This fact alone suggests the enormously productive nature of this impasse. But it should come as no surprise that eighteenth-century Scottish poets such as Oliphant appear to have responded to the loss of national history in much the same way their counterparts in other small European nations dominated by powerful composite states did: they make the impasse itself the central subject of art. Because the completeness of the national idea, which is only available in “ancient” forms, cannot be approached through art, the task of the poet is no longer to sing of the nation but to strip of meaning, with violence if necessary, any contemporary use of that term to signify the existence of a political or cultural entity that is the putative heir of its “traditions.” Oliphant comes not to praise Scotland, but to bury it.

Two poems indicate just how violent this work can be. The first, “The Attainted Scottish Nobles,” takes a standard Jacobitical pose, a lament in ballad metre for the unsung and unmemorialized sacrifices of the Scottish nobility on behalf of the Stuart cause.³⁵⁵ But as we saw in “Bonny Gascon Ha” with respect to Scotland’s ancient independence, the nobles—and indeed Jacobitism itself—are purely formal elements that address the absence of the history they once signified:

³⁵⁵ “Castell Gloom” and this poem are composed in common metre double, which repeats the four-line stanza of common metre. Both poems generally employ alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter.

Oh, some will tune their mournfu' strains,
To tell of hame-made sorrow,
And if they cheat you o' tears,
They'll dry afore the morrow.
Oh, some will sing their airy dreams,
In verity they're sportin',
My sang's o' nae sic thewless themes,
But wakin', true misfortune.³⁵⁶

As in the elegy that refuses to eulogize, this ballad refuses to narrate. Instead of invoking the bardic muse, the singer critiques popular balladry for its fatuous sentimentality, manipulateness, and—perhaps a shot at Burns?—low and “thewless” subject matter. The singer’s use of the term “wakin’,” which denotes in Scots law a legal matter in which a summons has been issued and may be revived after laying inactive (or “asleep”) for a year and a day, to describe the nobles’ “misfortune” suggests not only that the subject of attainder remains an open historical wound in Scotland, but also that it is continuously subject to *reopening* and can (or should) never be put to rest. In this specific sense the ballad “wakens” or revives the case of the attainted Scottish nobles in order to subject it to some form of poetic judgment. And just as elegy is used in “Bonny Gascon Ha” to attack misrepresentations of the Scottish nation that seek to overwrite its true, patriotic past in the service of British commercial and imperial interests, here ballad is deployed to nullify the extension to Scotland of the constitutional norms of the British state. And like the invocation of Wallace to refer to the sealed epic past in the prior poem, the poem’s allusion to the illegality—indeed, the unconstitutionality—of the English cancellation of heritable jurisdiction under Scottish law, the preservation of which was thought to have preserved some mark of national distinctiveness in the post-Union era (the educational

³⁵⁶ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 40.

system and the independent Kirk being the others), once again marks the bankruptcy of the Union settlement as a reconstitution of the nation.

In the next stanza, the attainted nobles are finally identified as the ostensible subjects of the song, but again the bard declines actually to lament them:

Ye Scottish nobles, ane and a',
For loyalty attainted,
A nameless bardie's wae to see
Your sorrows unlamented;
For if your fathers ne'er had fought
For heirs of ancient royalty,---
Ye're down the day that might hae been
At the top o' honour's tree a'.³⁵⁷

Named collectively, "Ye Scottish nobles" will have to be satisfied with knowing who they are because there is no epic story of their national struggle, as there is for Wallace, that everybody already knows. In Bakhtinian terms, their erasure by the Hanoverian state occurs within the zone of the present and is the stuff of the novel, parody, and ironic inversion. In other words, there is nothing more laughable or ludicrous than a Scottish noble in a British state. Indeed, the "nameless bardie," who recalls the "unkent muse" of "Bonny Gascon Ha'," reserves her "wae" not for those who fought for the heirs of James II and VII, but for *their* impoverished heirs one or two generations removed. In its painful attenuation, this tribute to Scotland's old aristocracy appears sardonic at best. Moreover, the bard's almost constant reminders that the nobles are heirs to nothing, not even "honour," hardly seem reassuring or particularly consolatory. If this is what it means to be the subject of a lament, how would it feel to be the butt of a joke?

³⁵⁷ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 40.

The bard elevates her language in the third stanza, the first six lines of which eschew Scots vernacular altogether before reverting to the final refrain:

For old hereditary right,
For conscience' sake they stoutly stood;
And for the crown their valiant sons
Themselves have shed their injured blood;
And if their fathers ne'er had fought
For heirs of ancient royalty,
They're down the day that might ha' been
At the top o' honour's tree a'.³⁵⁸

The heroic strain that we have expected all along is ironized by the “bardie’s” explicit Anglicization of the lament and tribute, while the “old hereditary right” for which the nobles fought pales before the nation embodied by Wallace. There is a strong sense that the Jacobite risings, though they certainly channeled national feeling of a sort, did not involve the kind of national self-determination that bears comparison with the Wars of Independence. The bearer of the English “crown” may have once been a Scottish noble—and indeed the originary attainted Scottish noble at that—but a trapping of power can in no way be conflated with the idea of the “nation” and its singular embodiment in epic history. The true importance of the Jacobite song, as Oliphant practices it so expertly, inheres not in its expression of national experience, historical trauma, aristocratic nostalgia, or revolutionary intent, but in its clear-eyed and often violent opposition to any such sentimentalism, especially of something as fundamental to Scottishness as its independent national past.

The second ballad, “Castell Gloom,” recalls “Bonny Gascon Ha” in its elegiac invocation of a ruined monument. Here the deserted shell of Castle Campbell, the

³⁵⁸ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 40.

lowland home of the the western highland clan of that name that was sacked by Scots royalists in 1654, directs us not to the closed national past but, once again, to a post-national “present” that has characterized Scottish experience since the Wars of Independence:

Oh, Castell Gloom! thy strength is gone,
The green grass o'er thee growin',
On hill of Care thou art alone,
The Sorrow round thee flowin'.
Oh Castell Gloom! on thy fair wa's
Nae banners now are streamin'.
The houлит flits amang thy ha's,
And wild birds there are screamin'.
Oh! mourn the woe, oh mourn the crime,
Frae civil war that flows;
Oh! mourn, Argyle, thy fallen line,
And mourn the great Montrose.³⁵⁹

Just as “The Attainted Scottish Nobles” only masquerades as a national song, this poem pretends to lament the violent internecine struggles that have riven the country for so long. The refrain dictates the obligatory mandate to reflect on civil war (“Oh! mourn the woe, mourn the crime, / Frae civil war that flows”) as a great and recurring tragedy in which Scotland’s nobility, rather than unifying under the true sign of the nation, deracinate one another in bloody and irrelevant disputes. Castell Gloom refers to the name of the castle as it existed prior to the Campbells’ acquisition of the property and its late fifteenth-century change of name by Act of the Scottish Parliament under James IV. What is the significance of this detail? On one level, the vicissitudes of the castle’s history mirror the endemic political instability that brought the Campbells (titled Argyle) and Montrose into conflict. Oliphant’s reversion to the castle’s original association

³⁵⁹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 44.

reflects the decline of the Campbell influence (though they continued to own the land after the castle's destruction and resided instead in Stirling). At the same time, this more ancient identity, established in the days before Flodden and the increasing subjection of the nation to English overlordship during the sixteenth century, gestures not (as Gask Hall does in *Bonny Gascon Ha'*) towards an originary nationhood that once existed in the closed epic past, but to a continuous present already embraided with the narrative of decline implied in the allegorically overdetermined appellation of "Gloom" (not to mention the Burns of Sorrow and Care on either side of the castle). The portentous presence of the flitting owlets and screaming "wild" birds that now inhabit the pile no longer call attention to a future fall, a tragic "fate," but to the inability of narrative—of poetry—to reinhabit the epic space and repopulate the chain of signifiers that constitute the nation.

In the second stanza the poem continues to recite additional moments of historical efflorescence:

Here ladies bright were aften seen,
Here valiant warriors trod;
And here great Knox has aften been,
Who feared nought but his God.
But a' are gane! the gude, the great,
And naething now remains,
But ruin sitting on thy wa's,
And crumblin' down the stanes!
Oh! mourn the woe, &Cc.³⁶⁰

Allusions to the brief residence at the castle in 1563 of Mary and her court and to that of Knox's in 1556, with no sense of whether or how these events may be situated in the

³⁶⁰ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 44.

same historical context, indicate the essential randomness of the “history” the poem rehearses. The lifeless representations of “ladies bright,” “valiant warriors,” and Knox (complete with the standard epithet “Who feared nought but his God”) appear in serial form, mechanically filling their places in the ballad, much as the Argylls and Montrose occupy their predetermined places in the civil war narrative of the first stanza. The stanza recalls once again the overgrown and deteriorating ruins, but this time the refrain seems oddly misplaced. Whereas in the first stanza it follows the *specific* history of the castle’s (and metonymically the nobility’s) destruction in the War of the Three Kingdoms, here it describes “the gude, the great” with no such specificity or necessary relation to the personages and events to which the preceding lines cursorily refer. Thus the poem’s putative historical narrative not only circles around the historical subjects it minimally registers, it engages in a kind of free substitution of signs in a chain identified initially as “civil war.” Each time the poem returns to this term in the refrain, it has added something else to the series of equivalences for this term. In contrast to “Bonny Gascon Ha’,” which requires only a single signifier (Wallace) to establish the solidity of Scotland’s epic history, this poem reveals that outside this closed circle Scotland has no history. The markers of this absence—Argyle, Montrose, Knox, Mary—emphasize both the irretrievable pastness of Scotland’s true history and the assimilationist designs that lurk behind their invocation in the conventional language of “patriotism.”

The poem ends with a conflagration and an interment:

The lofty Ochils bright did glow,
Tho’ sleepin’ was the sun:
But mornin’s light did sadly show
What ragin’ flames had done!

Oh! mirk, mirk, was the misty cloud,
That hung o'er thy wild wood;
Thou wert like beauty in a shroud,
And all was solitude.
Oh! mourn the woe, oh mourn the crime,
Frae civil war that flows;
Oh! mourn, Argyle, thy fallen line,
And mourn the great Montrose.³⁶¹

The flatness of the second stanza, with its contentless allusiveness, here gives way to a palpable emotional response to loss without hope of consolation or recuperation. Fired by Montrose's men, the old castle is transfigured and rendered as an object of aesthetic contemplation. The beautiful couplet "Thou wert like beauty in a shroud./And all was solitude" reverses the curiously distancing effect of the first two stanzas and seems to establish a distinct signifying chain for internecine war, one that disassociates the narrative history of Scotland's troubles from Castle Gloom and, as in "Bonny Gascon Ha'," transfers the true signifier of Scotland's history onto the plane of art, i.e. epic. In other words, the ineffable, diaphanous image of "beauty in a shroud" now signifies the encased narrative of ancient Scottish national freedom, held up by the imperial British state in modern poetry as an achievement of "civilization." For the Scots, however, the only truly national response is the solitude that pays homage to the history that no longer is and cannot be narrated. The antidote to civil war, it seems, is art, but art that mutely recognizes itself as memory.

Jacobitism and the Aesthetic of National Trauma

If poetry must be silent in order to represent Scotland's true history, however, the experience of exile so prominent in the Jacobite song genre may still provide a basis for

³⁶¹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 45.

an art of national trauma.³⁶² “Songs of My Native Land” eschews the kind of objectless historical narrative we see in “The Attainted Scottish Nobles” and “Castell Gloom” and suggests that the memory traces of Scotland’s deep past can only be recuperated through transposition to an equally distant and inaccessible future:

Songs of my native land,
To me how dear!
Songs of my infancy
Sweet to my ear!
Entwined with my youthful days,
Wi’ the bonny banks and braes,
Where the winding burnie strays
Murmuring near.

Strains of my native land
That thrill the soul,
Pouring the magic of
Your soft control!
Often has your minstrelsy
Soothed the pang of misery,
Winging rapid thought away
To realms on high.³⁶³

The first two stanzas of the song rehearse the familiar nostalgia of old age for lost youth, the powerful yearning of an exile for the homeland, the consciousness of experience lamenting a former state of innocence, the memory of paradise. The song marks the nativity (in its national sense) of the singer by briefly dropping from the impeccable Augustan verse to the vernacular description of the “bonnie banks and braes/Where the winding burnie strays,” but this is the only verse that betrays a particular national identification. Thus the “native land” of the first verse of the second stanza, while not

³⁶² On the development of this art in the form of Macpherson’s *Ossian*, see M. Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 1994), 178-86.

³⁶³ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 24.

geographically specific, may suggest local associations, but it may also suppress such associations in favor of an allegorical region, one that transcends and erases national difference. Moreover, it is curious that the “Strains of my native land,” while they “thrill the soul,” appear to regulate or confine the singer’s imagination in some way. The singer apostrophizes these native “strains,” lauding the “magic of /Your soft control.” This “control,” the singer tells us, has often “Soothed the pangs of misery,/Winging rapid thought away/To realms on high,” implying that the native “minstrelsy” should distract and console with promises of eternal rest rather than reopening old historical wounds.

This distraction or consolation, though, is likewise another means of restraining the dogs of war pricked and provoked by poetic nationalism. By way of contrast, consider Burns’s approach in his song “Frae the Friends and Land I Love” (1792):

Frae the friends and Land I love,
 Driv’n by Fortune’s felly spite,
 Frae my best Belov’d I rove,
 Never mair to taste delight.—
 Never mair maun hope to find
 East frae toil, relief frae care:
 When Remembrance wracks the mind,
 Pleasures but unveil Despair.

Brightest climes shall mirk appear,
 Desart ilka blooming shore;
 Till the Fates, nae mair severe,
 Friendship, Love, and Peace restore.—
 Till Revenge, wi’ laurell’d head,
 Bring our Banish’d hame again;
 And ilk loyal, bonie lad
 Cross the seas, and win his ain.³⁶⁴

³⁶⁴ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 360.

This counterpart to Burns's better known (and generally held to be superior) Jacobite song "Strathallan's Lament" (1788)³⁶⁵, seeks not to calm blood still hot from civil conflict but to arouse it. Here the exile's return comes in a storm of steel and shot, his nativity inextricably linked to a specific national relationship with the Stuart cause rather than the sacralized pre-lapsarian Scotland of childhood. Moreover, Burns's singer equates the "Fates" with "Revenge," and "Friendship, Love, and Peace" with the restoration of the Stuart heir; the song gives no indication of a transcendental space in which the grievances of civil war may be reconciled either in the past or the future, which, as in Oliphant, remain inaccessible to both poetry and politics. In this regard, it can be argued that Oliphant and Burns approach the question of Scotland's past in much the same fashion (the past is epic and thus closed off to authentically national art), but they part ways in terms of the political uses of that past. To cite another example, the following song appeared without attribution in the *Morning Chronicle* in August, 1795. Entitled "Exiles," the song laments the exile of Muir and Palmer following their conviction for sedition:

Scotland, once our boast, our wonder,
 Fann'd by Freedom's purer gale,
When thy Wallace, arm'd with thunder,
 Bade the baffl'd TYRANT wail:
O, our Country! Vultures rend thee,
 Proudly riot on thy store;
Who deluded, shall befriend thee?
 Ah! do we thy lot deplore.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ See Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 360-61.

³⁶⁶ *Morning Chronicle* (Edinburgh), August, 1795.

Hogg, who found the song in 1996, has identified a number of markers that indicate Burns's authorship, both in its metrical and musical context and its use of the Wallace iconography in the Bruce poems.³⁶⁷ And as Noble and Hogg point out, "It is also wholly characteristic of Burns to take a Jacobite theme and recontextualise it in a Radical context."³⁶⁸ As we have seen, Oliphant does not make similar use of Wallace in "Bonny Gascon Ha" and other patriotic songs, but rather walls off this history and treats subsequent conflicts as essentially random events in an interminable civil war narrative. At the same time, it might not quite be accurate to say that Burns (if we accept Burns as the source of the song) in "Exiles" adapts a Jacobite theme to the republican and anti-British context of the mid-1790s. Muir's and Palmer's radicalism, after all, was both cosmopolitan and pan-British, in that it sought to unite the Friends of the People movements in Scotland, Ireland, and England.³⁶⁹ This ecumenicism seems a long distance from Wallace's Scottishness and the assertion of Scottish national independence, and the promiscuous use of Wallace would seem to weaken the persuasiveness of the national epic. For Oliphant, it is more sincere to submit to assimilation into British state culture than to brandish Scotland's "Holy of Holies" to even political scores.

Indeed, returning to "Song of My Native Land," "Freedom's purer gale" is refigured not in terms of political struggle but of a Christian struggle with sin:

³⁶⁷ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 298.

³⁶⁸ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 290-99.

³⁶⁹ On links between the Scottish and Irish radicals in the 1790s, see E. McFarland, "Scottish Radicalism in the Later Eighteenth Century: 'The Social Thistle and Shamrock,'" *Eighteenth Century Scotland: New Perspectives*. John Stevenson puts Scottish radicalism in the larger context of the Atlantic world in "Scotland and the French Revolution, An Overview," *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution*.

Weary pilgrims *there* have rest,
Their wand' rings over;
There the slave, no more oppressed,
Hails Freedom's shore.
Sin shall there no more deface,
Sickness, pain and sorrow cease,
Ending in eternal peace,
And songs of joy.

There, where the seraphs sing
In cloudless day,---
There, where the higher praise
The ransom'd pay.
Soft strains of the happy land,
Chanted by the heavenly band,
Who can fully understand
How sweet ye be!³⁷⁰

This transcendentalism is a far cry from the “Fates” and “Revenge” of Burns’s Jacobite muse and its republican reverberations of the revolutionary period. But is this apparently apolitical approach equivalent to avoidance, to quiescence in the face of the hegemony of the dominant power? If the query is put this way, the answer has to be yes. Yet placing Burns on one side and Oliphant on the other does not dispose of the questions they both ask, nor does it imply that one response is more “patriotic” or “Scottish” than the other. As we have seen, while republican fervor does not hold out much appeal for the aristocratic Lady Nairne, in whatever terms it is packaged for Scottish consumption, neither does sentimental Jacobitism or Knoxian Calvinism. Freedom from feudal subjection appears to be the limit of Oliphant’s political imagination, but there is no sense of a medievalistic return to work, duty, and obedience to the “natural” aristocracy, either. In any event, one should not expect a political program from a poet any more than from a

³⁷⁰ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 24-25.

composer, sculptor, or painter. What one may expect is a sincerity of vision, a disdain for hypocrisy, a reverence for form, language, and the intelligence of a reader.

Oliphant's Jacobite songs, for which she is best known, thus evince a deep ambivalence toward the ethical propriety of using poetry to arouse nationalistic desire, whether in terms of a return to feudal independence or an advance to egalitarian republicanism.³⁷¹ What then is the precise function of reviving memories of the lost cause, particularly in the political climate of the revolutionary period? Or to ask the question in another way, how do Oliphant's Jacobite songs assess the permissible uses of the "Charlie trope" and help to establish a poetics of memory that refuses the violence at the heart of the national project itself?

Set to a traditional tune popular in Ireland and Scotland, Oliphant's lyrics for "Wha'll Be King But Charlie?" begin by heralding the prince's landing in Scotland and summoning the clansmen to his standard:

The news frae Moidart cam yestreen,
Will soon gar mony ferlie;
For ships o' war hae just come in,
And landit Royal Charlie.
Come thro' the heather, around him gather,
Ye're a' the welcomer early;
Around him cling wi' a' your kin;
For wha'll be king but Charlie?
Come thro' the heather, round him gather,
Come Ronald, come Donald, come a' thegither,
And crown your rightfu', lawfu' king!
For wha'll be king but Charlie?³⁷²

³⁷¹ As McCue puts it, Oliphant and other women songwriters "were generally uninterested in the nationalist element of Jacobitism, but they were clearly attracted by the idea of the Highland soldier and the Prince himself." K. McCue, "Women and Song," 64.

³⁷² Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 119.

Already in this summons, however, lurks the threat of coercion. While the clansmen and “a’ your kin” are invited to “round him gather,” the intervening verse warns them that the warmth of their “welcome” will depend on the haste with which they muster to the royal presence. The song thus establishes from the outset a hierarchy that valorizes the true believers, while marginalizing the hesitant trimmers. Viewed through this lens, the herald’s call to “crown your rightfu’, lawfu’ king” implies that putting a Stuart on the throne will merely substitute one system of patronage for another, and the question with which the first stanza concludes—“For wha’ll be king but Charlie?”—seems too open-ended and ambiguous to elicit the fanaticism necessary to topple the British monarchy. Moreover, the herald’s specific appeal to the MacDonalds anticipates the conflicting loyalties that that would divide Clan Donald between the Jacobites and Hanoverians during the 1745 rising.³⁷³ The herald’s nearly palpable anxiety that that the clan will *not* turn out “a’ thegither,” coupled with the herald’s ambivalence toward the question of right, invests the song with a proleptic sense that the cause has already been lost. This prolepsis continues in the following two stanzas, as the herald seeks to shore up the wavering:

The Hieland clans, wi’ sword in hand,
Frae John o’ Groat’s to Airlie,
Hae to a man declared to stand
Or fa’ wi’ Royal Charlie.
Come thro’ the heather, &c.

The Lowlands a’, baith great an’ sma,

³⁷³ The MacDonalds of Sleat fought on the Hanoverian side and retained their property, though the majority of MacDonalds were out for Charlie. Angus MacDonald and Archibald MacDonald, *The Clan Donald*. Vol 3. (Inverness, 1900), 84-92.

Wi' mony a lord and laird, hae
Declar'd for Scotia's king an' law,
An' speir ye wha but Charlie.
Come thro' the heather, &c.³⁷⁴

Note the distinction between the alleged commitment of the “Hieland clans” and that of the “Lowlands a', baith great an' sma.” With their swords in hand, the clansmen have “to a man declared to stand/Or fa' wi' Royal Charlie,” whereas only “mony a lord and laird” have “Declar'd for Scotia's king an' law.” This distinction makes explicit the questioning ambivalence of the herald in the first stanza. Does the cause consist in feudal loyalty to the person of the supposed anointed monarch (“Royal Charlie”) or in a juridical understanding of succession (“king an' law”)? The answer would seem to be both—or neither. When the herald returns again to the question “wha but Charlie,” she prefaces it not in the future tense as before (wha'll be), but as a self-interrogatory (speir ye). Charlie's arrival in Scotland will force each Scot to examine his or her own historicity, the relation of each self to a complex of identities informed by authoritative discourses that appear to justify the destructive conflicts that divide them. For one to declare, to take a stand, requires an answer, not to the question of “wha'll be,” but to that of “wha is.” The herald's rhetorical query, rather than eliciting an affirmative response prepared in advance and conditioned on an uncertain contingency, functions instead to dissolve the factitious subjectivities that Jacobitism evokes in the minds of auditors to whom the herald appeals. In this sense the song *ostensibly* operates, in Althusserian terms, to interpellate subjects as Jacobites, to remind them that they are in fact the subjects they always have been and will be again. But, at the same time, the belated recognition of this

³⁷⁴ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 119.

subjectivity—I was a Jacobite and will declare myself a Jacobite once more—defers its actuation, shifting the ground in which Jacobitism is rooted in both the distant past and the indefinite future. The present, the question of *wha is*, exists rather in the moment in which variant discourses of Jacobite authority—Highland vs. Lowland, personal loyalty to “Royal Charlie” vs. allegiance to Scotia’s “king an’ law”—are placed in direct contradiction. The one cancels out the other, and in the empty space of the present sits the historical fact of the Treaty of Union, the Hanoverian succession, and the British fiscal-military state. By forcing the subject to confront its immediate historical relations in this manner, Oliphant’s Jacobite song renders the historical impossibility of Jacobitism.

The poem ends as a drinking song:

There’s ne’er a lass in a’ the lan’,
But vows baith late an’ early,
She’ll ne’er to man gie heart nor han’
Wha wadna fecht for Charlie.
Come thro’ the heather, &c.

Then here’s a health to Charlie’s cause,
And be’t complete an’ early;
His very name our heart’s blood warms;
To arms for Royal Charlie!
Come thro’ the heather, around him gather, etc.³⁷⁵

We may presume that the herald’s alternative appeals to Highland feudal reminiscences (or more accurately, warm feelings aroused by the prospect of feudal patronage) or Lowland legal proprieties have not entirely succeeded in stimulating interest in Charlie’s cause. The final appeal goes directly to the heart of the matter: masculine aggression and domination of women. Charlie’s cause must be “complete an’ early,” not in order to

³⁷⁵ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 120.

restore the monarchy, Scottish law, or feudal tradition, but as a test of manhood. What rouses men to fight, in terms of the poem, is the threat to masculine dominion, not abstract political theory. Moreover, this dominion must be continuously asserted or forever lost, and it is asserted always and everywhere through warfare undertaken in the name and for the sake of women. Jacobitism, then, refers not only to an historical impasse but to the misogyny intrinsic to the grammar of gender. To fight for a woman is not to protect her, but to reinforce her absence from the competitive masculine order of things. Whether this affirmation flies the flag of Jacobitism or something else matters little, as long as there is another battle to fight.

A second arrival song, “Charlie’s Landing,” registers a much more tentative response to the prince’s appearance on Scottish shores. Rather than carrying the news of the landing into the countryside for the purpose of gathering the troops for military action, here the narrator initially reflects on the unpropitious prospects that surround the prince’s quixotic sally:

There cam a wee boatie owre the sea,
Wi’ the winds an’ waves it strove sairlye;
But oh! it brought great joy to me,
For wha was there but Prince Charlie.
The wind was hie, and unco chill,
An’ a’ things luiket barely;
But oh! we come with right good-will,
To welcome Bonnie Charlie.³⁷⁶

What seems to be important to the narrator is not the prince’s temporal power, but the “great joy” the narrator feels at his return. Thus the Charlie trope, deployed in “Wha’ll Be King But Charlie?” as a figure for national unification and collective celebration, appears

³⁷⁶ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 118.

in this guise as one of spiritual consolation. For the group of disciples who greet the prince “with right good-will,” Charlie comes as an apostle, a symbol of faith, an allegorical figure—or as Murray Pittock puts it, “a millenarian voice for royalty.”³⁷⁷ The narrator addresses this allegorical figure in the second stanza:

Wae’s me, puir lad, yere thinly clad,
The waves yere fair hair weeting;
We’ll row ye in a tartan plaid,
An’ gie ye Scotland’s greeting.
Tho’ wild an’ bleak the prospect round,
We’ll cheer yere heart, dear Charlie;
Ye’re landed now on Scottish grund
Wi’ them wha lo’e ye dearly.³⁷⁸

Consistent with the rhetoric of discipleship introduced in the first stanza, the narrator’s address invokes a Christian typology of rebirth and salvation, the return of the martyred prophet to his company of true believers, the leader of pilgrims crusading in an unholy land. “Scotland’s greeting”—the salvatory discourse now realized by the prince’s resurrection—has been achieved regardless of the outcome of the military expedition. Indeed, the geographical, political, and historical “Scotland,” a “wild an’ bleak prospect,” appears to be of little interest to the narrator. The poem appropriately concludes with a vision of the City of God:

O lang we’ve prayed to see this day;
True hearts they maist were breaking;
Now clouds an’ storms will flee away,
Young hope again is waking.
We’ll sound the Gathering, lang an’ loud,
Your friends will greet ye fairlie;
Tho’ now they’re few, their hearts are true,

³⁷⁷ M. Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland*, 143.

³⁷⁸ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 118.

They'll live or die for Charlie.³⁷⁹

The millenarian strain is unmistakable: God has answered the prayers of the faithful, the corrupted world will pass away, and the community (“the Gathering”) will be reconstituted in a renewed state of innocence. The narrator’s emphasis on “true hearts” and “young hope,” his recognition of the prince’s followers as both “few” and “friends,” reinforce the absence of secular reference in the poem. To “live or die for Charlie” is an article of faith, not a political program. It is also striking that, unlike in many of the other Jacobite poems discussed here, the narrator’s gender escapes clear identification, disappearing into the ecstatic, transcendental mode of the poem. Though the object of worship may be masculine, his rebirth as a “puir lad” significantly weakens the complex appeals to gendered subjectivities intrinsic to so much Jacobite art in general and to these poems and songs in particular. That is not to say that the transcendental discourse of this poem does not contain its own inflections of gender. Nevertheless, Oliphant’s treatment of its multiplicity persistently interrogates and complicates this masculinity, offering alternative figures of the same trope with very different gender resonances and effects.

In “Will Ye No Come Back?” Oliphant contrasts the allegorical treatment of Charlie’s return, with its reaffirmation and apotheosis of true faith, to the irreversible loss and doubt associated with the prince’s exile:

Bonnie Charlie’s now awa,
Safely owre the friendly main;
Mony a heart will break in twa,
Should he ne’er come back again.
Will ye no come back again?
Will ye no come back again?

³⁷⁹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 118.

Better lo'ed ye canna be,
Will ye no come back again?

Ye trusted in your Hieland men,
They trusted you, dear Charlie;
They kent you hiding in the glen,
Your cleadin was but barely.
Will ye no, &c.³⁸⁰

The first two stanzas of the song have some of the same resonances as we find in “Charlie’s Landing.” The narrator refers to the prince as “barely” clad, hidden and protected by his loyal “Hieland men,” those who trust and love him best, those who recognize him even when stripped of his regalia. But the narrator’s plaintive and repetitive questioning seems to weaken the language of devotion; somehow the prince has disappointed the unwavering and fervent love of his followers. Moreover, the icy and turbulent sea from which Charlie emerges in the previous poem has become the “friendly main” over which he vanishes. This shift appears paradoxical, for the same sea that impedes his arrival in the previous poem facilitates his flight. It saves him from the pursuing Hanoverian army, but it divides him from his followers, leaving them alone to suffer their fate. Thus the sense of disappointment we see in the refrain, when read back through the song’s opening couplet, produces a tone of reproach and self-doubt that becomes stronger in the final three stanzas:

English bribes were a’ in vain,
An’ e’en tho’ puirer we may be;
Siller canna buy the heart
That beats aye for thine and thee.
Will ye no, &c.

We watched thee in the gloaming hour,

³⁸⁰ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 136.

We watched thee in the morning grey;
Tho' thirty thousand pounds they'd gie,
Oh there is nane that wad betray.
Will ye no, &c.

Sweet's the laverock's note and lang,
Lilting wildly up the glen;
But 'aye to me he sings ae sang,
Will ye no come back again?
Will ye no come back again?
Will ye no come back again?
Better lo'ed ye canna be,
Will ye no come back again?³⁸¹

Here the narrator dwells on the proffered English bribes and the steadfast refusal of the “puirer” Highlanders to follow the example of Judas, the “thirty thousand pounds they'd gie” echoing the Scriptural thirty pieces of silver. Moreover, unlike the disciples in Gethsemane, who slept while Jesus prayed, the Highland men have remained vigilant and unfailing in their attendance on the prince in his time of trial. The lark (“laverock”), long associated in mythology with the breaking dawn, might also refer to Christ's prophecy to the disciples at the Passover feast in John 16:16: “A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.”³⁸² For the bereft narrator, the lark's song speaks prophetically as well, but only the first half of the verse: will ye no come back again? In John 16:31 Jesus asks the disciples, “Do ye now believe?” They respond affirmatively, but Jesus tells them, “Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me

³⁸¹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 136-37.

³⁸² King James Version. In her analysis of the fifteenth-century Florentine painter Domenico Ghirlandaio's mural *The Last Supper*, art historian Jean Cadogan notes that the larks' recession into the distant sky connotes Christ's passion and transcendence as prophesied in John 16:16. J. K. Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio: Artist and Artisan*, (New Haven, 2001), 215.

alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”³⁸³ But perhaps, after all, Charlie is not Christ and will not come. Though the Highland men be scattered, every man to his own, they never left him alone, but he left them. “In Will Ye No Come Back?” Oliphant inverts the millenarianism of “Charlie’s Landing,” bringing the prince back to earth and exalting those who kept the faith nonetheless.

If, as we have suggested, “Wha’ll Be King But Charlie?” invokes the Charlie trope as an instrument for reinscribing patriarchal discourse, what can we make of a song such as “The Women Are A’ Gane Wud?” In this version of the Jacobite song, a male narrator bemoans Charlie’s arrival in town as disrupting his domestic tranquility:

The women are a’ gane wud,
Oh, that he had bidden awa!
He’s turn’d their heads, the lad,
And ruin will bring on us a’.
I aye was a peaceable man,
My wife she did doucely behave;
But noo, dae a’ that I can,
She’s just as wild as the lave.

My wife noo wears the *cockade*,
Tho’ she kens ‘tis the thing that I hate;
There’s ane, too, *prin’d* on her maid,
An’ baith will tak their ain gate.
The wild Hieland lads as they pass,
The yetts wise open do flee;
They eat the very house bare,
And nae leave’s speer’d o’ me.³⁸⁴

Here the Prince figures as a sexual rival, the cockade as a mark of sexual possession. While Charlie has stolen his wife, the “Hieland lads” who follow in his train have literally eaten the narrator out of house and home; both have deprived him of the property

³⁸³ John 16:32, King James Version.

³⁸⁴ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 85.

that identifies him as a “man.” It is interesting to note that the narrator uses the same term to describe the women and the Highlanders (“wild”), perhaps implying that Charlie is as sexually attractive to the lads as he is to the lasses, and that the nature of his power lies very much in a charismatic personality that promotes itself as an object of desire, or, to put it another way, as a pure expression of masculine desire that can only be explicitly recognized in the terms of compulsory heterosexuality. As in the previous song, which likewise deploys Jacobite appeals to elicit an emotional response founded on threatened male sexuality, this song carries through on the threat, emasculating the “peaceable man” who refuses to declare himself one way or the other. Having lost the ability to brandish his property as a badge of masculinity, the woeful narrator, who takes “nae side at a’,” can no longer function within a political and economic system that demands that he take a side, if only to prove that he is a man:

I’ve lived a’ my days in the Strath,
Now Tories infest me at hame,
And though I take nae side at a’,
Baith sides will gie me the blame.
The senseless cratur’s ne’er think
What ill the lad wad bring back;
The Pope we’ll hae, and his hounds,
And a’ the rest o’ his pack.³⁸⁵

Here the narrator concludes the poem by attempting to turn the tables on the persecutors who beset him from “baith sides.” By associating the Jacobite cause with the return of papal authority, he rearticulates the anxiety of emasculation in terms of the threat of invasion by Catholic predators who seduce innocent Protestant women into acts of unspeakable horror and debauchery. This association also links back to the suggestion in

³⁸⁵ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 85.

the second stanza that Charlie's potentially homoerotic appeal is part and parcel of his false religious doctrine; indeed, as he passes by, Charlie leaves a lingering whiff of brimstone in the air. By positing Jacobitism as *itself* emasculating, "The Women Are A' Gane Wud" reverses the appeal to the auditor's manhood in "Wha'll Be King But Charlie?" and refigures authentic masculinity as a refusal of political commitment. But in both cases women lie at the heart of contending models of male self-assertion, in which the positive and negative uses of Jacobitism to define masculinity share common ground.

A wonderfully comic dialogue poem, "Ye'll Mount, Gudeman," reverses the polarity of "The Women Are A' Gane Wud," positioning its feminine protagonist as a rational actor faced with her husband's Jacobite "madness":

Leddy.

"Ye'll mount, gudeman; ye'll mount and ride;
Ye'll cross the burn syne down the loch side,
Then up 'mang the hills and thro' the muir an' heather,
An' join great Argyle where loyal men gather."

Laird.

"Indeed, honest luckie, I think ye're no blate,
To bid loyal men gang ony sic gate;
For I'm gaun to fecht for true loyaltie,
Had the Prince ne'er anither, he still will hae me."

Leddy.

"About Charlie Stuart we ne'er could agree;
But, dearie, for ance, be counseled by me;
Tak nae pairt at a'; bide quietly at hame,
An' ne'er heed a Campbell, McDonal', or Graham."

Laird.

Na, na, gudewife, for that winna do,
My Prince is in need, his friends they are few:
I aye lo'ed the Stuarts; I'll join them the day;
Sae gi'e me my boots, for my boots I will ha'e."

Leddy.

"Oh! softly, gudeman, I think ye're gane mad;
I ha'e na the heart to pin on your cockand;
The Prince, as he ca' him, will never succeed;

Ye'll lose your estate, and may be your head!"

Laird.

"Come, cheer ye, my dear, an' dry up your tears!
I ha'e my hopes, an' I ha'e my fears;
But I'll raise my men, an' a' that is given,
To aid the gude cause---then leave it to Heaven!"

"But, haste ye now, haste ye, for I maun be gaun,
The mare's at the yett, the bugle is blawn;
Gi'e me my bannet, it's far in the day,
I'm no for a dish, there's nae time to stay."

Leddy.

"Oh dear! tak' but ane, it may do ye gude!"
But what ails the woman? she surely is wud!
She's lifted the kettle, but somehow it coup'd
On the legs o' the laird, wha roar'd and wha loup'd.

Laird.

"I'm brent, I'm brent, how cam' it this way?
I fear I'll no ride for mony a day,---
Send aff the men, and to Prince Charlie say,
My heart is wi' him, but I'm tied by the tae.

The wily wife fleech'd, and the laird didna see
The smile on her cheek thro' the tear in her e'e---
"Had I kent the gudeman wad hae had siccan pain,
The kettle, for me, sud hae coup'd its lane!"³⁸⁶

Here the "wud" woman, rather than responding conventionally to Jacobitic youth and beauty, assaults her husband in order to save him. As we have seen, the recurring question "But what ails the woman?" seems central to the enterprise of Jacobitism itself, which Oliphant's songs and poems characterize as a complex interrelationship of gender, desire, and lack that produces a wide range of subjectivities. Indeed, Oliphant's refusal to conflate Jacobitism and Scottish patriotism, or to overdetermine it in terms of nostalgia or cultural nationalism, can be viewed as at least as radical a counter-narrative to the post-

³⁸⁶ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 131-33.

Union settlement than, for example, Burns's powerfully tragic "There'll Never be Peace till Jamie Comes Hame" (1792):

My seven braw sons for Jamie drew sword,
But now I greet round their green beds in the yerd;
It brak the sweet heart o' my faithfu' auld Dame,
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.—
Now life is a burden and bows me down,
Sin I tint my bairns, and he tint his crown;
But till my last moments my words are the same,
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.—³⁸⁷

Hogg and Noble suggest that this poem does not merely gesture toward an "irretrievable" past, but may have "a disturbing, resurrectionary potential as a prelude to political action."³⁸⁸ If this is the case, how might we understand Oliphant's comic response to the deeply traumatized experience of Jacobite rebellion related in Burns's song? Oliphant's poem gives agency to the "faithfu' auld Dame" whose bereavement is known only through the masculine perspective of the song. Burns's speaker implies that the Dame gave her sons as a willing sacrifice to the cause, but even he seems to doubt the value of this gift; his "words are the same" but the "burden" that "bows him down" signifies a grief that the old slogans can no longer recuperate. In Oliphant's version, however, the Leddy interdicts the conventional yet inadequate narrative of loss and sacrifice, a self-assertion that, though expressed in terms of property, effectively neutralizes the "resurrectionary potential" of the Laird's "true loyaltie." She asserts the only power available to her in a social order that grants men possessory rights to women as a means

³⁸⁷ Hogg and Noble, *The Canongate Burns*, 367.

³⁸⁸ Hogg and Noble, *The Canongate Burns*, 367. They refer to Alexander Cunningham's commentary on the poem: "When Political combustion ceases to be the object of Princes & Patriots, it then, you know, becomes the lawful prey of Historians & Poets."

of preserving property: she instigates a rebellion *of property* in the defense of *propriety*, the property in herself that lies beyond her husband's proprietorship. Her remark, "Had I kent the gudeman wad hae had siccan pain./The kettle, for me, sud hae couped its lane," points in the direction of a domestic rebellion with far more "resurrectionary potential" than a revolution that simply trades one feudal lord for another. When kettles begin jumping off stoves to attack men-folk bent on killing one another as part of a preening, atavistic display of homoerotic, chivalrous desire, then a space for political action may open without the ritual slaughter of so many sacrificial lambs. It is not much to hope for, but perhaps in the long run the liberatory possibilities of revised gender relations might be the only means of redressing the extreme masculine violence that is the stuff of "history."

As we have seen, Oliphant's scrutiny of the conventions of Jacobite poetry imbricate gender relations into the structure of *both* pro- and anti-Jacobite appeals. She deploys various genres to lay bare this structure, often eschewing the more monologic discourse of exile and return. Oliphant's comic or parodic treatments of Jacobite themes even border on irreverence (not a characteristic ordinarily attributed to Baroness Nairne and her work). This is certainly the case in another comic dialogue poem, "What Do Ye Think O' Geordie Noo? Duet Sung by the Laird and His Daughter Mysie." The duet pits a whiggish laird against his Jacobite daughter, once again demonstrating Oliphant's comprehension of Jacobitism as a domestic conflict in the fullest sense:

Laird.

"O what do you think o' Geordie noo?
O what do you think o' Geordie noo?
Come daughter mine, come tell me true,

O what do you think o' Geordie noo?

Mysie.

“O Geordie we think nought ava,
O what has brought him here at a'’?
We hae ae king, nae need o' twa,
Sae Geordie ye maun march awa.”

Laird.

“Oh daughter of mine, I'm wae to see,
Ye speak sae light o' majestie;
Now Geordie's king o' kingdoms three,
Ye maun obey baith him and me.”

Mysie.

“O faither dear, I need na say,
Your will's a law, I'll aye obey,
But sure they're wud that can compare
King Geordie wi' auld Scotland's heir!”³⁸⁹

Here it is Mysie that characterizes Hanoverian loyalists as “wud,” a term hitherto reserved for women caught up in the glamour of the charismatic militarism associated with the Stuarts. Indeed, Mysie's insurrectionary talk goes right to the heart of Oliphant's presentation of Jacobitism as a specifically gendered discourse. We have seen in the previous songs that the cause intervenes, often violently, in domestic relations of various types. It separates lovers, divides households, and deprives parents of their children. For Mysie, however, Jacobitism offers a language for challenging her father's absolute authority in the household. His backing of King Geordie derives from his unquestioning respect for patriarchal power and hierarchy. By figuring Geordie as the father that determines the allegiance of his children, he feminizes Jacobitism, branding it as illegitimate and womanish. Mysie's response—“O faither dear, I need na say/
Your will's a law, I'll aye obey”—is a comic negation. While her father's authority to command her goes without saying, it is nonetheless illegitimate because anyone “that can

³⁸⁹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 141.

compare/King Geordie wi' auld Scotland's heir" must be out of his right mind. This line of attack on the father appears to unman the laird, who scrambles to recover the lost ground:

Laird.

"Fair faced, I grant, the Stuarts a' be,
But, oh, they're fu' o' treacherie;
O, Mysie, lass, ye little ken
The drift o' Cavaliering men!"

Mysie.

"We're wae to see a foreign loon,
Come over here to take our croun;
Outlandish gibberish on his tongue,
No understood by auld or young.

"O Geordie's stout, and unco braid,
He's no like Charlie in his plaid;
To see him dance, to hear him sing;
O sure he is our rightfu' king!"

Laird.

"It's no to sing, nor yet to dance,
That we will tak' a king frae France;
A bird that's ta'en frae an ill nest,
It aye will do like a' the rest."³⁹⁰

Finding himself impotent to assert his paternal authority, the Laird attributes his daughter's infatuation with the Stuarts to Mysie's supposed sexual attraction to "Cavaliering men." Mysie seems to confirm this view, emphasizing Charlie's youth and beauty as opposed to Geordie's heftiness, but her real counter is that the foreign-born Geordie knows nothing of native ways. In order for the king to be "rightfu'," he must come from the people. Her argument for a kind of popular sovereignty turns the tables on her father's attempt to redefine Jacobitism in terms of feminine sexual weakness. Trying to maneuver onto the same ground as his clever antagonist, the Laird characterizes the

³⁹⁰ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 142.

Stuarts as French, implying their Catholicism and moral libertinism. Indeed, one might even argue that Mysie puts the Laird in the position of defending his own sexual adequacy, thus questioning not only *his* sanity but *her* paternity as well. Viewed in this way, Geordie's illegitimacy implies her own; she is the natural child of the nation and the Stuart monarchy, and only their union can legitimize her. Mysie thus raises the ante, calling for actual insurrection to drive the illegitimate father from the house:

Mysie.

“For nae offence that we can see,
Up in a rage will Geordie flee;
The flames get then his periwig,
That's no denied by ony whig.”

Laird.

“A weel, a weel, and what's a' that,
To them wha promise and draw back?
Nae wiser by adversitie,
O! tyrants a' the Stuarts wad be.”

Mysie.

“O adverse winds round them did blow,
And he has seen and felt it a';
O, dinna believe ill tales are true,
For that we all are apt to do.”

Laird.

“It's true the sun will melt the snaw,
It's true that time will wear awa,
It's true that nicht will day,
O, Mysie, there's truth in a' I say.

“O, Mysie, lass, dry up they tears,
And think nae mair o' cavaliers:
To fecht 'gainst heaven is a' in vain,
The Stuarts will never reign again.”

Together.

“Auld Scotland is unconquered land,
And aye for freedom made a stand;
So let us a' in that agree,
Hurra, hurra, for liberty!³⁹¹

³⁹¹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 142-43.

Here the Laird attempts to patronize his daughter, to repress the potential outbreak of revolutionary violence that he himself invoked by his initial appeal to the absolute imperative of patriarchal authority. His characterization of the Stuarts as “tyrants” shuts down the argument. Legitimate authority, for all of its rationalization, rests ultimately on predominant force, and “[T]o fecht ‘gainst heaven is a’ in vain.” Mysie must submit, not because she is wrong, but because she is right. The Laird’s logic lies in ruins, but he still commands the master discourse, which contains insurrectionary impulses in the “irretrievable pastness” of history (“The Stuarts will never reign again”). The closing cheer for “liberty” reinstantiates the masculine order of things, restores Mysie’s status as property, and inters Jacobitic enthusiasm in an aesthetically beautiful but politically inert casket called poetry. But at the same time, as the silenced Mysie disappears from the song, British “liberty” likewise closes off available avenues for women to claim some form of autonomy for themselves. As inadequate as Jacobitism may be for expressing political aims, it might also provide a means for self-identification in an imagined nation bound by “natural” ties not dependent on force. To that extent, Oliphant’s duet suggests, Jacobitism lives on.

Another fine example of the anti-assimilationist thrust of much of Oliphant’s Jacobite poetry is found in “The Hundred Pipers,” a rousing patriotic march. But even this ostensibly straightforward martial poem betrays a deep-seated anxiety over the social and gender implications of Scottish national claims:

Wi’ a hundred pipers an’ a’, an’ a’,
Wi’ a hundred pipers an’ a’, an’,
We’ll up an’ gie them a blaw, a blaw,

Wi' a hundred pipers an' a', an' a',
Oh! it's owre the Border awa, awa,
It's owre the Border awa, awa,
We'll on and we'll march to Carlisle ha',
Wi' its yetts, its castell, an' a', an' a'.

Oh! our sodger lads looked braw, looked braw,
Wi' their tartans, kilts, an' a', an' a',
Wi' their bonnets, an' feathers, an' glittering gear,
An' pibrochs sounding sweet and clear.
Will they a' return to their ain dear glen?
Will they a' return, our Hieland men?
Second-sighted Sandy looked fu' wae,
And mothers grat when they marched away.
 Wi' a hundred pipers, &c.³⁹²

The song initially represents Jacobitism as a militaristic spectacle. Needless to say, the rag-tag army that Charlie actually took to Carlisle in no way resembles the splendidly accoutred band here represented, nor does the description reflect the composite nature of Charlie's forces. This appropriation of the heroic Jacobite myth as exclusively Highland and clan-based, while a characteristic feature of much Jacobite poetry, does not go unchallenged from within the song itself. Viewed from the perspective of the Highland women whose fathers, husbands, and sons follow in Charlie's train, the noisy pageantry, though aesthetically impressive and gratifying, cannot displace the proleptic bereavement the narrator predicts. The pipers' pibrochs oppose the mothers' weeping, placing an irreconcilable tension at the heart of the poem and positing a potentially antagonistic metonym for Jacobitism. As we have already seen in "Will Ye No Come Back," the apostolic theme works in both directions, figuring Charlie alternatively as a true or false prophet who leads either a righteous or misguided crusade. And as we have also seen, the

³⁹² C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 134.

gender position of the narrator can determine the choice of metonyms deployed to valorize or criticize Charlie's cause.

Having established this metonymic instability at the center of the poem, the narrator shifts to an observation of the prince, the dubious leader of this dubious enterprise:

Oh wha is foremost o' a', o' a',
Oh wha does follow the blaw, the blaw?
Bonnie Charlie, the king o' us a', hurra!
Wi' his hundred pipers an' a', an' a'.
His bonnet an' feather, he's wavin' high,
His prancin' steed maist seems to fly,
The nor' wind plays wi' his curly hair,
While the pipers blaw in an unco flare.
Wi' a hundred pipers, &c.³⁹³

The pipers seem to call forth the prince, just as they have summoned the braw sodger lads in the first stanza, producing him as an object of aesthetic beauty. In this sense Bonnie Charlie is not the leader of the cause, but an effect of it. As long as the pipers blaw, Charlie will appear in costume and perform; he has no agency, pursues no political objective, and leaves no historical trace. Jacobitism has become a *Gesamtkuntswerk*, a complete synthesis of aesthetic forms and expressions, a grand Romantic opera, much as it exists for Edward Waverley before the ugly reality becomes visible. But even here the critical eye of the woman narrator penetrates the work of art. She recognizes Charlie's anachronistic royal pretensions, his pose as a play-king, his modeling of equestrian statuary. Indeed, Charlie is so ephemeral that he disappears from the song altogether in the final stanza:

³⁹³ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 134-35.

The Esk was swollen, sae red and sae deep,
 But shouther to shouther the brave lads keep;
 Twa thousand swam owre to fell English ground,
 An' danced themselves dry to the pibroch's sound.
 Dumfounder'd, the English saw---they saw---
 Dumfounder'd, they heard the blaw, the blaw;
 Dumfoundrer'd, they a' ran awa, awa,
 From the hundred pipers an' a', an' a'.
 Wi' a hundred pipers an' a', an' a',
 Wi' a hundred pipers an' a', an' a',
 We'll up and gie them a blaw, a blaw,
 Wi' a hundred pipers an' a', an' a'.³⁹⁴

All that remains are two thousand “brave lads” on “fell English ground,” doomed and abandoned in the service of an aesthetic idea. The “dumfounder'd” English run away not in military defeat, but in stunned surprise that such a belated work of art could possibly exist in the time and place that it appears. The pipes, like Joshua’s trumpet, sound from the deep mythological past in a text of ancient origin. And it is always the same text: young men dying for one or another illusory cause, leaving nothing behind but a traumatized remnant that is forced to endure the repetition of that same text for all eternity.

This historical trauma is inscribed directly on the bodies of women, as well as in the collective memory of the nation as experienced by women. In the lovely lament, “The Lass of Livingstane,” the prolepsis written into the women’s narrative in “The Hundred Pipers” has, as it always does, become a scar:

Oh! wha will dry the dreeping tear,
 She sheds her lane, she sheds her lane?
 Or wha the bonnie lass will cheer,
 Of Livingstane, of Livingstane?
 The crown was half on Charlie’s head,

³⁹⁴ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 135.

Ae gladsome day, ae gladsome day;
The lads that shouted joy to him
Are in the clay, are in the clay.

Her waddin' gown was wyl'd and won,
It ne'er was on, it ne'er was on;
Culloden field, his lowly bed,
She thought upon, she thought upon.
The bloom has faded frae her cheek
In youthfu' prime, in youthfu' prime;
And sorrow's with'ring hand has done
The deed o' time, the deed o' time.³⁹⁵

Exalted discipleship is reserved for the “lads that shouted joy to him,” recalling the narrator’s joy and true faith in “Charlie’s Landing.” And, as in “Will Ye No Come Back” and “The Hundred Pipers,” the band of brothers who do not forsake their prophet reaps at least the reward of anonymous immortality in art. For the bereft women, however, such artifacts do not console or compensate. The marriage bed has become a grave, the bride’s youth and beauty ravaged by grief and loneliness. With no remaining social function—all the lads “are in the clay”—the Lass of Livingstane becomes the thing she is named. Indeed, her death is predetermined by a kind of cultural *suttee*, an aesthetically beautiful self-immolation, to which the lovers and wives of dead soldiers are condemned, regardless of whose side they are on. Burns’s song “The Sodger’s Return” articulates this expectation in disarmingly conventional terms:

The wars are o'er, and I'm come hame,
And find thee still true-hearted;
Tho' poor in gear, we're rich in love,
And mair,--we'se ne'er be parted!
Quo' she, my grandsire left me gowd,
A mailen plenish'd fairly;
And come, my faithfu' sodger lad,

³⁹⁵ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 138.

Thou 'rt welcome to it dearly!³⁹⁶

Patriotic discourses, whether deployed in the service of the imperial state or other national idea, depend on women remaining bound to property through the patrilineal line. If every time men went to war women declared their independence, there would not be much of a market for the parades, pageants, and ceremonials that glorify the nation. In the poetry of patriotism, men owe a duty of absolute loyalty to a national cause, while women owe that duty to men. Oliphant asks whether women can properly be said to have a nation at all.

Women in Oliphant's Jacobite poetry possess, at best, a derivative form of self-identification. But in "My Bonnie Hieland Laddie," Oliphant extends her analysis of the gendered Scottish nation to question whether women's subjectivity is possible within a national narrative, particularly if that narrative is fundamentally chivalric. The poem begins conventionally with the prince's landing in Scotland, but it quickly becomes evident that the female narrator can only parrot the masculinized rhetorical figures of Jacobitism:

Prince Charlie he's cum owre frae France,
In Scotland to proclaim his daddie;
May Heaven still his cause advance,
And shield him in his Hieland plaidie!
O my bonnie Hieland laddie,
My handsome, charming Hieland laddie!
May Heaven still his cause advance,
And shield him in his Hieland plaidie!³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ Hogg and Noble, *The Canongate Burns*, 411.

³⁹⁷ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 121.

The images and signs of patriarchy overflow the poem's formal structure: Prince, daddie, laddie, God. The prince's "cause" is figured simultaneously as a righteous and an erotic crusade, in which the apostolic character of the prince/Hieland laddie mixes with his charismatic sexual appeal (handsome, charming):

First when he cam to view our land,
The gracefu' looks o' the princely laddie
Made a' our true Scots hearts to warm,
And blythe to wear the tartan plaidie.
O my bonnie, &c.

But when Geordie heard the news,
How he was cum afore his daddie,
He thirty thousand pounds wad gie,
To catch him in his Hieland plaidie.
O my bonnie, &c.³⁹⁸

In the second and third stanzas, the prince's overdetermined masculine beauty also reveals a homoerotic aspect, as his "gracefu' looks . . . /Made a' our true Scots hearts to warm." Indeed, the prince's power and authority seem entirely sourced in his body. Identified in the first stanza by legitimizing discourses of divine right, legal entitlement, and blood, here the patriarch's gaze transfixes the nation, eliciting from all "true Scots" a powerful emotional and physical response.³⁹⁹ By contrast, the emasculated and sexually inadequate Geordie offers a union based on "commerce," recalling the opprobrium

³⁹⁸ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 121-22.

³⁹⁹ See Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland*, 137. Pittock observes this close link between Jacobite eroticism and a "strong, even ferocious nationalism which sits awkwardly with the Stuart aim of being restored in three kingdoms." He also alludes to the homoerotic nature of some Jacobite poetry when he quotes this song from Hogg's *The Jacobite Relics*:

Great James, come kiss me now, now,
Great James, come kiss me now;
Too long I've undone myself these years bygone,
By basely forsaking you.

attached to the exchange of English gold for Scottish independence in 1707. Scottish nationalism thus inheres in a kind of collective unconscious, a deep structure of desire, which awakens when called forth by the God/king/father/lover, rather than in juridical, political, or even feudal arrangements or “constitutions.” One might even argue that this deep structure, as figured in the song, resembles a relationship in which “true Scots hearts” recognize in the father their own lack of a unified subjectivity, a recognition that the poem figures in highly eroticized terms of sexual union:

But tho' the Hieland folks are puir,
Yet their hearts are leal and steady;
And there's no ane amang them a',
That wad betray their Hieland laddie.
O my bonnie Hieland laddie,
My handsome, charming Hieland laddie!
May Heaven still his cause advance,
And shield him in his Hieland plaidie!⁴⁰⁰

The romance thus closes with the language of marital fidelity. But this duty of loyalty runs in only one direction, as one would expect in romance. The “Hieland folks,” whose desire for the God/king/father/lover figure unleashes the insurrectionary Id of Jacobitism and enables the marital union of the father and the Scots, are no more “free” in Charlie’s embrace than they are in Geordie’s. That “there’s no ane amang them a’/That wad betray their Hieland laddie” goes without saying, as the father merges with the nation, subsuming it under the sign of divinely sanctioned “cause.” As we have seen in “The Lass of Livingstane,” where the consequences of masculine aggression always and everywhere fall on the broken women who remain to bear the physical and emotional traces of national trauma, the collectivized bride-nation in *My Bonnie Hieland Laddie*

⁴⁰⁰ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 122.

will suffer the same fate when Charlie, his cause in ruins, betrays it. Jacobitism cannot escape the mandate of its own romantic imaginary. It is about men competing violently with other men to “win” the body of a woman, figured as the girl—or the nation—left behind.

The beautiful lyrics of “The White Rose O’ June” further reveal the gendered violence of representations of Jacobitism. This song recasts the traditional “Ranting Roving Lad,” published by Herd, as well as Burns’s own resetting of that traditional version, “The White Cockade” (1790)⁴⁰¹:

My love was born in Aberdeen,
The boniest lad that e’er was seen,
But now he makes our hearts fu’ sad,
He takes the field wi’ his White Cockade.⁴⁰²

Chorus
O, he’s a ranting, roving lad,
He is a brisk an’ a bonie lad;
Betide what may, I will be wed,
And follow the boy wi’ the White Cockade.

I’ll sell my rock, my reel, my tow,
My guid gray mare and hawkit cow;
To buy myself a tartan plaid,
To follow the boy wi’ the White Cockade.
O he’s a ranting, &c.

The traditional and Burns’s renditions maintain the simple (and lovely) identification of the Jacobite cause with masculine youth and beauty, embodied in the song both by the speaker’s lover and the bonnie prince himself. Indeed, here we see that Jacobitism relies

⁴⁰¹ D. Herd, *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads, etc.*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 1776), 179-80; Hogg and Noble, *The Canongate Burns*, 358.

⁴⁰² In the traditional version published in Herd, the second couplet of the first stanza reads: “O he is forced frae me to gae,/Over the hills and far away.” Burns appears to soften the coercive implication of the original.

on its sartorial attractiveness and its appeal to restless young men, discontented with the poverty and drudgery of life among the laboring poor. The lover's intention to sell her means of subsistence and follow the Pretender's army likewise indicates the decline of the traditional economy and the community it sustains, even if only by the barest margin. The "boy wi' the White Cockade" thus synecdochically figures a confluence of historical, social, economic, and political forces operating on the community, broadly conceived as "Scotland" under the rule of the British state. In Oliphant's version, rather, the sign "white rose" defers such rough and ready identifications:

Now the bright sun, and the soft summer showers,
Deck a' the woods and the gardens wi' flowers---
But bonny and sweet though the hale o' them be,
There's ane aboon a' that is dearest to me;
An' oh, that's the white rose, the white rose o' June,
An' may *he* that should wear it come back again sune!

It's no on my breast, nor yet in my hair,
That the emblem dear I venture to wear;
But it blooms in my heart, and its white leaves I weat,
When alane in the gloamin' I wander to greet,
O'er the white rose, the white rose, the white rose o' June,
An' may *he* that should wear it come back again sune!⁴⁰³

Oliphant suppresses Burns's direct reference to the lover's sweetheart as a soldier in the Jacobite army, bringing it somewhat closer to the traditional song's initial emphasis on the lover's non-specific restlessness. But Oliphant substantially revises both songs by refiguring the "boniest lad" as the masculine third person pronoun "he" and deferring its introduction until the end of the first stanza. While this usage emphasizes the conflation of the lover's and Pretender's respective identities into the more general Jacobite trope of

⁴⁰³ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 139.

youth and beauty, it also concentrates attention on the feminine narrator rather than the “ranting, roving lad” and eliminates any clear indication that the boy is the narrator’s lover. Oliphant further alters and varies the song’s refrain so that it is slightly different in each stanza. The repetition of the phrase “the white rose, the white rose o’ June” remains constant, but its modifiers change. In the first stanza, the narrator distinguishes the rose (“that’s the white rose”) from the other flora in the woods and gardens as “dearest” to her. Only then does she express her desire for the absent presence in the poem, the *he* that wears the rose. In the second stanza, the narrator describes the “emblem” of the Jacobites as “blooming” in her heart, rather than as the external sign of a political commitment. When she walks in the woods at dusk, she weeps “o’er” the white rose as she contemplates *his* return. Oliphant thus reverses the spatial and emotional hierarchy of both traditional settings, which view the “roving laddie”—and Jacobitism itself—as an active force and his lover as pulled into his orbit. In Oliphant’s version, rather, the female narrator’s desire acts on the indeterminate masculine absence, but only to defer, if not to repel, its return. The repetition of the final verse of each stanza, “An’ may *he* that should wear it come back again sune,” further distances the presumed object of her longing through the double usage of conditional modal auxiliaries “may” and “should.” This grammatical deferral emphasizes the fact that the narrator’s desire for the “white rose o’ June” can only be fully satisfied in the melancholic and historical stasis of an eternal present, in which the hypothetical future return of the lover/prince/king is forever held in abeyance.

In the third and fourth stanzas, it becomes clear that the narrator can expect no such return:

Mair fragrant and rich the red rose may be,
But there is nae spell to bind it to me---
But dear to my heart and to fond memorie,
Tho' scathed and tho' blighted the white rose may be,
O the white rose, the white rose, the white rose o' June,
O may *he* that should wear it come back again sune!

An' oh! may the true hearts thy perils who share,
Remember'd wi' tears, and remember'd in prayer,
Whom misfortune's rude blast has sent far awa,
Fair breezes bring back sune to cottage and ha';---
Then, O sing the white rose, the white rose o' June,
An' may *he* that should wear it wear Scotland's auld croun!⁴⁰⁴

As the red rose forces itself into the narrator's field of vision, the lack at the center of her Jacobite desire fully reveals itself as Scotland. Moreover, as we have seen in many of the poems and songs we have discussed to this point, the narrator concedes the historical substitution of the "fragrant and rich" red rose of England for the "scathed" and "blighted" white, while simultaneously denying it emotional allegiance ("there is nae spell to bind it to me"). The song's refrain becomes a dirge in the third stanza, where the fading white rose is apostrophized with the "O", the infinite circle with an absent center, the zero, the absolute and unimaginable state of non-being. The fourth stanza completes this process of exile, eulogy, and entombment. It is not even clear what type of agency exists in this world; the same "blast that tears the skies," while rooting England's "native oak" in Thomson's ode, has scattered Scotland's "true hearts" to the winds. To "sing" the white rose, as the narrator implores, is to sing a silence. The only vestige of Scotland's

⁴⁰⁴ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 140.

ould crown, itself a ring that encloses an absence, is the “O” shape of the singer’s lips as she utters her soundless lament.

In “The Regalia,” Oliphant figures the infinite deferral of Scottish patriotic desire in martial terms. Rather than the strongly gendered feminine voice we hear in “The White Rose O’ June,” this song deploys a masculinized collective narrator:

We hae the crown without a head,
The sceptre’s but a hand, O;
The ancient warlike royal blade,
Might be a willow wand, O!
Gin they had tongues to tell the wrangs
That laid them useless by, a’,
Fu’ weel I wot, there’s ne’er a Scot
Could boast his cheek was dry, a’.
Then flourish thistle, flourish fair,
Tho’ ye’ve the crown na langer,
They’ll hae the skaith that cross ye yet;
Your jags grow aye the stranger.⁴⁰⁵

The song begins with the now familiar trope of the crown without a head and its literal inscription into the poem with the figure “O”. Transforming the symbols of regal authority—the scepter into a hand, the sword into a willow wand—creates a strange, scarecrow-like composite “king,” whose tongue (or the collective sense of the song, “tongues”) can no longer speak of the “wrangs/That laid them useless, a’.” The narrator hypothesizes that possessed of this silent and disembodied regal echo of a voice, the scarecrow’s tales “could” bring tears to a Scot’s eye. The song’s refrain appears incongruously appended to the preceding stanza, apostrophizing the thistle and prophesying the fall of those who have taken its “crown.” Scarecrow kings, it seems, neither speak nor inspire; the heraldic image of the thistle doubles the prickly (“jags”),

⁴⁰⁵ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 112.

noxious plant infesting the ground. Hardly the heroic, independent nation of old, even in distant memory, “Scotland” has become little more than a field of weeds overlooked by a figure of straw.

In the second stanza, the collective narrator invokes a diabolical agency to transform these images of empty lifelessness on the one hand and destructive infestation on the other:

O for a touch o’ warlock’s wand,
The byegane back to bring a’,
And gie us ae lang simmer’s day
O’ a true born Scottish king a’;
We’d put the crown upon his head,
The sceptre in his hand a’,
We’d rend the welkin wi’ the shout,
Bruce and his native land, a’.
Then flourish thistle, &c.⁴⁰⁶

Here “a touch o’ warlock’s wand,/The byegane back to bring” suggests that Scotland can only recover its ancient independence through the intervention of a magician, though in its stronger sense the term “warlock” could be read as a demonic power as well. But even if a conjurer could set back the historical clock, it would produce only the illusion of “ae lang simmer’s day,” perhaps even the Midsummer’s Eve festival that evokes magical powers and supernatural occurrences. The desolate scarecrow king of the first stanza thus becomes the splendid ephemera of the second, a dream king with the imaginary regalia of authority and a loyal cadre of equally imaginary vassals. The “shout,/Bruce and his native land” precedes the refrain, which dissipates the glorious vision and returns us to the

⁴⁰⁶ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 112.

thistle imagery discussed above. The final stanzas of the song abandon the beautiful past, with its syncretic folk traditions and “native” purity:

The thistle ance it flourish'd fair,
An' grew maist like a tree a',
They've stunted down its stately tap,
That roses might luik hie a'.
But tho' its head lies in the dust,
The root is stout and steady;
The thistle is the warrior yet,
The rose its tocher'd leddy.
Then flourish thistle, &c.

The rose it blooms in safter soil,
And strangers up could root it;
Aboon the grund he ne'er was fand
That pu'd the thistle out yet.
Then flourish, thistle, flourish fair,
Tho' ye've the crown nae langer,
They'll hae the skaith that cross ye yet;
Your jags grow aye the stranger.⁴⁰⁷

The thistle stands for a quite different version of the nation than the white rose, just as Bruce's independent Scotland remains an historical standard that Jacobitism, with its explicit concession to the unity of the crowns, can in no sense fulfill. This strikingly masculinized Scottish “warrior” is imagined as subjugating a soft and feminized England, a “tocher'd leddy” whose identity and property disappears as a *femme couverte*. By fantasizing the union as a kind of feudal shotgun marriage, thereby erasing English identity altogether except as a military and sexual domain for testing Scottish manhood, the collective narrator advocates an intoxicating counter-narrative to either Jacobite or Hanoverian discourses of the nation. But at the same time, this counter-narrative is curiously repellent in its overt appeal to violence (“They'll hae the skaith that cross ye

⁴⁰⁷ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 112-13.

yet;/Your jags grow aye the stranger”) and its aggressive gender overdetermination. If the feminine voice of the “nation” in “The White Rose O’ June” defers its national desire in order to gratify it without the threat or act of violence, the masculine nation in “The Regalia” defers its national desire through the fantasy, in a word, of rape. Thus both passive and active renditions of this desire produce a similar result: a permanent state of difference without change, an eternal nation that exists as radically gendered alternatives of the same narrative.

Oliphant’s painstaking exploration of not only the political and national but the gendered aspects of Jacobite poetics can also be seen in her treatment of the anti-Jacobite genre of Covenanter martyrology. Though not nearly as extensive as her engagement with the former, Oliphant’s Covenanter poetry acknowledges a very similar process of suppression through poetic memorialization as she recognizes in traditional Jacobite verse. But in contrast to her manipulation of Jacobite *signs* for the purpose of deconstructing them and unmasking their oppressive effects, particularly on women, Oliphant deploys a specifically historical narrative in the Covenanter poems to foreground the physical violence that attended radical Presbyterianism. In three poems, “St. Andrew’s Toun,” “The Pentland Hills,” and “Lament of the Covenanters,” she links extreme religious and doctrinal self-identification, martyrdom, and lethal violence in a mutually self-annihilating and anti-national aesthetic.

“St. Andrew’s Toun” ostensibly concerns the notorious (and particularly ugly) murders of James Sharp (1613-1679), Archbishop of St. Andrews, and Cardinal David Beaton (1494-1546), who held the same office by papal appointment just prior to the

Scottish Reformation. Both prelates' assassinations were motivated by doctrinal disputes, Sharp's over his betrayal of the Presbyterian Kirk and support for the re-establishment of a Scottish episcopacy at the Restoration, Beaton's in response to his persecution and execution of the Protestant martyr George Wishart (although Beaton's opposition to the Henrician Reformation and Act of Supremacy may have contributed to his demise as well). The poem's speaker addresses a stranger, who asks him if he has heard of the goings on in the neighborhood:

O hae ye been by Magus Muir,
Or by St. Andrew's Toun?
Or hae ye seen the ruin'd wa's
That honest folks pu'd doun?

And o' the bluidy Cardinal,
Ye surely hae heard tell?
And the persecutin' Bishop Sharpe,
And a' that them befell!

The licht that martyr'd Wishart saw
Red risin' owre the sea,
I wat it soon came to the land,
And brake on the Castell hie.

"The death the wicked Bishop dee'd,
Some folks will murder ca';
But by a' it is agreed,---
'The loun was weel awa.'"⁴⁰⁸

The speaker slides between historical events and time periods, referring first to the Sharp murder and subsequent hanging of five Covenanters on Magus Muir. The speaker's attention then shifts to an earlier era, referring first to the decline of the town in the decades following the Scottish Reformation and then to Beaton ("the bluidy Cardinal"),

⁴⁰⁸ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 84.

before reverting to the Sharp's execution of Covenanters taken prisoner during the Battle of Rullion Green (1666). The frame of the poem refocuses on the "martyr'd Wishart" (executed in St. Andrews in 1546), the capture of the besieged castle (in which John Knox and other reformers had taken refuge) by French forces in 1547, and, once more, the death of Sharp. What are we to make of the fluidity of this historical narrative, its synchronic treatment of discrete events drawn from Covenanter lore and Presbyterian martyrology, and its emphasis on historical repetition and sameness rather than linearity? The speaker persistently interrogates the stranger (hae ye been? hae ye seen? Ye surely heard tell?) but registers no response, perhaps because she does not expect one or is not really interested. In either case, I would argue that the poem may be read to record a *self-interrogation* in which the speaker recites a litany of trauma, a jumbled and disordered narrative of the violent history of the former ecclesiastical center of Scotland. Through this form of historical memory, the speaker has internalized this violence, repeating it to herself, reimagining "St. Andrews Toun" not as a geographical location but as a signifier of bloody tales of ritualized and retaliatory murder. The unsettling Gothic fascination of the first three quatrains, however, gives way to a bizarre and incongruous conclusion, in which the speaker excuses Bishop Sharp's assassination as ridding Scotland of a worthless rogue. Dehumanizing the victims of any form of militant intolerance or political retaliation is certainly a time-honored tradition, but here the speaker's glibness uncovers a trace of collective guilt associated with the tales she tells herself. The popular history of Covenanter martyrs, it seems, is no more persuasive than Jacobite romance. And as in Oliphant's Jacobite poems, we find that the lived history of internecine religious and

political feuds, while providing a rich fund of legend and anecdote, leaves little on the ground but dead bodies.

As we see in “St. Andrews Toun,” whereas Oliphant’s representations of Jacobite legacy appears to be centered in a symbology of deferral, in which the coming of Charlie registers as a millenarian event that evades the historical moment and eludes the faithful, the Covenanter past manifests in starkly material signifiers of historical memory: ruined walls and spectral gallows, the corpses and tombs of martyrs and traitors. These images abound in “The Pentland Hills::

The pilgrim’s feet here oft will tread
O’er this sequestered scene,
To mark whare Scotland’s Martyrs lie
In lonely Rullion Green,---
To muse o’er those who fought and fell---
All Presbyterians true---
Who held the League and Covenant---
Who waved the banner blue!

Like partridge to the mountain driven---
Oh! lang and sairly tried!
Their cause they deemed the cause o’ Heaven---
For that they liv’d and died!
Together here they met and prayed---
Ah! ne’er to meet again;
Their windin’ sheet the bluidy plaid---
Their grave lone Rullion Green.

Ah! here they sang the holy strain---
Sweet Martyrs’ melodie;
When every heart and every voice
Arose in harmonie.
The list’ning echoes all around
Gave back their soft reply,
While angels heard the hallow’d sound,
And bore it to the sky.

Oh! faithless King! hast thou forgot

Who gave to thee thy crown?
Hast thou forgot thy solemn oath,
At Holyrood and Scone?
Oh! fierce Dalziel! thy ruthless rage
Wrought langsome misery;
What Scottish heart could ever gi'e
A benison to thee!

Oh, Claverhouse! fell Claverhouse!
Thou brave, but cruel Graham!
Dark deeds like thine will last for aye,
Linked wi' thy blighted name.
Oh, Pentland hills, sae fair and green!
When in the sunrise gleaming---
Or the pensive gloamin' hour,
Aneath the moonbeams streaming!

I love to wander *there* my lane,
Wi' sad and sacred feeling;
While hallowed mem'ries wake the tear,
In waefu' eye soft stealing.
I love thy wild sequester'd glen,
Thy bonny wimplin' burn;
For Scotland's brave and martyr'd men,
Still does it seem to mourn.⁴⁰⁹

I have quoted this beautiful syllabic verse elegy in full because it is another superb example of Oliphant's use of an English poetic form to give voice not only to Scotland's traumatic history, but also to a unique Anglo-Scots bilingualism. This could not have been easy to do. It bears repeating that late eighteenth-century Scottish poets were compelled to negotiate formal and linguistic challenges that their English counterparts simply did not have to face. For the Scottish poets we are studying here, the universal language of "men speaking to men," which Wordsworth declares in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to be the *sine qua non* of "modern poetry," is not available because it assumes

⁴⁰⁹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 109-10.

the centrality of the specifically *English* poet who commands the medium of language. Approaching this Anglican universalism from an experience of linguistic and cultural hybridity (not to mention a great deal of historical trauma), Scottish poets attack the monolith at its weakest point: the unity of the poet and the language he appropriates as his own. They do not predicate “poetry” on the exclusivity of the role and function of the poet, or the poet’s privileged relationship with language. Instead, they impersonate, mimic, and imitate, disappearing into echo chambers, whispering galleries, and halls of infinitely receding mirrors. Burns’s enormous personality sometimes obscures this effect of his poetry, but we can see it fully in these poets about whom we know relatively little. In this sense, Scottish poets find their place in multiple literary and cultural traditions, persistently evading assimilation into any single national literature or, for that matter, literary period. To say that Scottish poetry is *sui generis* would perhaps be too facile, but when confronted with poems as marvelous and variegated as “The Pentland Hills” or “The White Rose O’ June,” one feels that our construction of “British” or “English” poetry requires substantial revision.

Oliphant pairs the contemplative speaker who eulogizes the martyred Covenanters in such high elegiac mode in “The Pentland Hills” with a plebeian voice in “Lament of the Covenanters Widow”:

O weet and weary is the night,
Wi’ soughing wind and rain, O;
And he that was sae true to me,
Is on the hill-side slain, O!

O that the hand that did the deed,
Had lain me where he’s lying,
The green turf o’er my peacefu’ head,

The night winds round me sighing.

But I maun hear and I maun grieve,
And I maun thole the morrow;
This heart's no made o' flesh and blood,
It winna break wi' sorrow.

What's a' this gaudy warld to me?
I canna bide the glare o't;
O gin it were the High Decree,
That I micht see nae mair o't.

For he had ta'en the Covenant
For Scotland's sake to dee, O,
Death to him was gain we ken,
But oh! the loss to me, O!⁴¹⁰

This poem compares favorably with Burns's Jacobite song, "The Highland Widow's Lament," printed posthumously in 1796, with its lovely final stanzas:

Their waefu' fate what need I tell,
Right to the wrang did yield;
My Donald and his Country fell
Upon Culloden field.—

Ochon, O Donald, Oh!
Ochon, Ochon, Ochrie!
Nae woman in the warld wide
Sae wretched now as me.—⁴¹¹

By transposing Jacobite and Covenanter histories in these poems and using the rhetoric of one to represent the other, Oliphant graphically illustrates the essential equivalence of salvatory narratives that justify blood feuds in terms of divine sanction and national aspiration. Jacobites and Covenanters alike invoke God and Scotland in their cause, and

⁴¹⁰ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 111.

⁴¹¹ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 926.

the formulaic elements of elegy and lament contain and sanitize the physical violence and emotional trauma they narrate.

But at the same time, the women who survive to narrate this violence must make their experiences fit into the aesthetic moulds that shape and determine cultural memory. In Oliphant's Jacobite and Covenanter poetry, however, we find that trauma cannot conform to this particular structure of memory: the one that seeks solace in the beatification through poetry of those who die in glorious causes. By contrast, Oliphant's speakers do not concede that either solace or glory can signify the historical experience itself. This refusal is quite clear in "Lament of the Covenanters," where the grieving widow prefers oblivion over the continuous reproduction of memory that her "life" now entails. The elegist in "The Pentland Hills," by contrast, appears far distanced in time and sensibility from the martyred dead. She purports to love "to wander *there* my lane" and "thy wild sequester'd glen," indicating her aesthetic pleasure in ruminating over the "hallowed mem'ries" associated with the site. Indeed, the elegist's detachment from the historical events, her evident poetic sophistication and cultural literacy, and her pleasure in the aesthetic act of memorialization re-enact the violent suppression of the Covenanters that history records. The elegist's denunciation of the loyalist victors in the fifth stanza carries no sting, as it is oddly juxtaposed with a panegyric on the beauty of the moonlit Pentland Hills; to put it another way, the *locus classicus* of the sublime breaks in on the historical and the political, restoring the poet's equanimity and distracting attention from the violence of the middle stanzas. By transforming one impeccably Augustan genre, elegy, into another, nature poetry, Oliphant substitutes an aesthetic equivalent of the

desire for death and forgetting so explicit in “Lament of the Covenanters.” In her contemplative poetic ramblings, the narrator in “The Pentland Hills” deploys the forms of high culture to articulate her own desire for nothingness.

The Empty Nation: Scotland and the Figure of Woman

Oliphant’s poetry emits a remarkably wide range of political resonances. One of her most popular and beautiful poems, “The Lass O’ Gowrie,” announces itself as politically innocent in contrast to the overt political intensity of, for example, “The Banks of the Earn.” Yet the conventional pastoral casting of the poem masks a narrative of social displacement and emotional dislocation that attaches to Scotland’s loss of territorial sovereignty and breaks down the moral coherence of traditional local and national identities. Composed in three octaves, each embedded quatrain consisting of three rhymed octosyllabic verses followed by an irregular refrain that returns to the poem’s beginning (“Gowrie”), the poem places a young woman before a particularized landscape:

‘Twas on a summer’s afternoon,
A wee afore the sun gaed down,
A lassie wi’ a braw new gown
 Came owre the hills to Gowrie.
The rose-bud wash’d in summer’s shower,
Bloom’d fresh within the sunny bower;
But Kitty was the fairest flower
 That e’er was seen in Gowrie.⁴¹²

The first quatrain strongly differentiates the woman’s appearance from the Edenic natural background. Her “braw new gown” marks her difference from nature, indicating on one

⁴¹² C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 8.

hand her objective condition as social and sexual currency and on the other her objectified threat as a seductress. Her arrival in Gowrie, the site of Scotland's most fertile farmland (the "Eden," or Garden of Scotland) and the coronation seat of its ancient kings (the source of patriarchal authority), seems portentous and tracks the woman's dual identification.⁴¹³ Note also that in the first four lines the observer speaks heavily in the vernacular, emphasizing the historically specific social milieu in which the woman appears as the object of desire, even while suggesting that Gowrie simultaneously exists in the dimension of biblical or mythological prehistory.

The second quatrain ramifies this double allusion, emphasizing the woman's virginity amid the mounting sexual desire of the observer, who, in the poetic convention of romance, imagines "Kitty" as a rosebud. Accordingly, the observer's language shifts from the vernacular to a standardized English idiom. The observer's allusion to the "bower" heightens the prelapsarian tension of the scene, recalling the ambiguous introduction of Eve in Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*, in which the innocent and unself-conscious sexual play is undercut by Eve's narcissistic fascination with her own image in the pool. The summer shower that has freshened the rose further suggests the woman's Miltonic self-regarding yet unrealized "vanity," the sin of pride always lurking in a woman's beauty, even as that beauty provokes in the observer the sin of lust while excusing it. Even the name "Kitty" suggests that the woman is trembling on the threshold of a change in her moral, as well as sexual, nature, as the innocent and playful kitten

⁴¹³ Gowrie, or *Gobharaidh* in Gaelic, is the ancient appellation of what is now eastern Perthshire. The "Carse o' Gowrie" is the region extending from Perth eastward to Dundee. The Kings of Scotland were coronated at Scone.

gives way to the devious and selfish cat. It is as if the fall has already happened, as indeed it has, and the poem's refrain—Eden/Gowrie—sounds like the tolling of a funeral bell.

The second octave takes up the prelapsarian setting of the first, but with a creeping sensation of the observer's anxiety:

To see her cousin she cam' there;
An' oh! the scene was passing fair;
For what in Scotland can compare
 Wi' the Carse o' Gowrie?
The sun was setting on the Tay,
The blue hills melting into grey,
The mavis and the blackbird's lay
 Were sweetly heard in Gowrie.⁴¹⁴

The observer feels obliged to disclose in passing that Kitty has come on family business, but his narrative abruptly shifts from this mundane and unpersuasive facticity to a panegyric more suitable to the pastoral frame. Once again, as in Milton, paradise appears never lovelier than in the moment immediately preceding its loss. For the second time in the poem, the observer alludes to the setting sun, as Kitty has arrived in the long twilight of a mid-summer's eve. The image of the "blue hills melting into gray" possibly refers to the Sidlaw Hills from whence Kitty has come, the *Na Sidhbheanntan* of ancient times, with their cairns and supernatural associations with fairies. If Kitty recalls Eve in the first octave, here she might recall Titania, the unhappy goddess/wife in Shakespeare, whose love for a boy has disturbed the settled order of the fairy kingdom. As in the second quatrain in the first octave, the observer continues speaking in a stylized conventional voice, waxing rhapsodic on the beauty of the garden, as if trying to avoid the sense of disruption and estrangement wafted in with Eve/Kitty's appearance. The observer asks

⁴¹⁴ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 8.

uncertainly whether anything in Scotland can compare with the Carse O' Gowrie, as if seeking affirmation in the face of gnawing doubt.

The third octave reveals the observer's insincerity in previous ones, retrospectively clarifying his interest in the "braw new gown" that identifies Kitty as the desired object of his narrative snare:

O lang the lassie I had woo'd,
An' truth and constancy had vow'd,
But cam' nae speed wi' her I lo'ed,
 Until she saw fair Gowrie.
I pointed to my father's ha',
Yon bonnie bield ayont the shaw,
Sae loun' that there nae blast could blaw,
 Wad she no bide in Gowrie.⁴¹⁵

Pastoral and romance are here revealed as mechanisms by which the patriarchy has pre-ordered the way of things in Paradise, whether the Father is figured as the God of Eden or Scotland's immemorial line of monarchs crowned at the ancient seat of royal power. The woman, with her maternal, natural, and demonic associations, has been created solely to fulfill the observer's desire. She has been fashioned from his body (Eve/imagination/fairy queen) for the sole purpose of gratifying his sexual and economic demands. The hard yet brittle casing of formal pastoral language shatters into the vernacular once more, as the observer's "wooing" takes on the cold instrumentality of social circulation and economic exchange. "Truth and constancy," the formal language of love, rapidly gives way to property concerns, as the wooer points to his "father's ha'" securely fortified against the blasts of nature. The Carse O' Gowrie, it seems, was never an Eden at all, just as Eden was not. Eve/Kitty appears in Eden/Gowrie when summoned, the lover's vows

⁴¹⁵ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 8-9.

as illusory as Paradise itself. Only when Kitty sees the property does the lover's suit advance, her destiny always already fulfilled as property. The deal has already been struck, the pre-existing contract solemnized, the transaction concluded. The poetic conventions of romance may now be dispensed with.

And so they are:

Her faither was baith glad and wae;
Her mither she wad naething say;
The bairnies thocht they wad get play,
 If Kitty gaed to Gowrie.
She whiles did smile, she whiles did greet,
The blush and tear were on her cheek---
She naething said, an' hung her head;
 But now she's Leddy Gowrie.⁴¹⁶

Here Kitty is bought and paid for in the crudest possible terms. Her father, delighted to get an unmarried daughter off his hands but reluctant to part with her dowry, her silent mother who knows her daughter's fate only too well, her younger siblings being fattened for the slaughter, all is as it is and always shall be. Kitty submits to the yoke, which has always been in implicit in her existence, and disappears into *couverture*, just as all daughters of Eve. It is noteworthy that her title as "Leddy Gowrie" refers not to the local estate into which she has merged, but to the chief province and seat of authority of the ancient and independent Kingdom of Scotland itself. The poem's refrain, it seems, has always been she.

Though we have read the poem in fairly conventional feminist terms, the poem's politics of place seem no less urgent than those of "The Banks of the Earn." While the heir of Gowrie seems to have assured the continuation of the family property and the

⁴¹⁶ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 9.

national hierarchy it supports, he nevertheless betrays a consciousness of the irremediable loss involved in the eternal transaction in which women are converted from one category or property into another. He knows enough to notice that Leddy Gowrie's "blush and tear" reveal the psychic cost of making the continued existence of nation dependent on the trade in women and their dualistic representation as generative and destructive, undercutting the notion of "Scotland" and its "brave sons" imagined in "The Banks of the Earn" and similar belated, national narratives. Indeed, the Scottish nation, like the feudal patriarchy that erected it, is as anachronistic as pastoral love poetry in the "polite and commercial" society of the eighteenth-century British state. "The Lass O' Gowrie" uncovers a deep-seated discontent, not only with old aesthetic, economic, and social forms and structures, but with the late eighteenth-century North British conception of Scotland. As if Scotland's status in Britain as a junior partner at best and internal colony at worst were not galling enough to poets such as Burns and Oliphant, Oliphant goes much further than Burns to deconstruct the manly, martial representations of Scottish nationhood. Restoring Scotland's ancient independence may be desirable at some level, but it may not make any difference if the social and economic base that produces a figure such as Leddy Gowrie is not itself transformed.

A parodic companion to "The Lass O' Gowrie," "The Laird O' Cockpen" refigures Scotland's anachronistic nationhood in terms of the degentrification of the old rural order.⁴¹⁷ Ironically composed in quatrains of iambic pentameter (with some irregular

⁴¹⁷ Kirsteen McCue dates the composition of this song after 1792, when an anonymous song on a similar subject, "When She Cam ben She Bobbit," appeared in Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*. McCue also notes that Oliphant altered the original, which related the

11-syllable lines), this vernacular poem spoofs a pretentious yet impoverished laird who seeks a suitable bride:

The laird o' Cockpen, he's proud an' he's great,
His mind is ta'en up wi' things o' the State;
He wanted a wife, his braw house to keep,
But favour wi' wooin' was fashious to seek.

Down by the dyke-side a lady did dwell,
At his table head he thought she'd look well,
McClish's ae daughter o' Claverse-ha' Lee,
As penniless lass wi' a lang pedigree.

His wig was weel pouter'd, and as gude as new;
His waistcoat was white, his coat it was blue;
He put on a ring, a sword and cock'd hat,
And wha could refuse the laird wi' a' that?⁴¹⁸

The laird's aptly named property reflects the decline of the Scottish gentry as politically, economically, and demographically significant participants in the Union. Stripped of any real power by the abolition of the Scottish Parliament and diminished during the course of the eighteenth century by the Hanoverian Succession, Jacobite rebellions, and Dundas Despotism, the gentry have become as impotent as they are pompous.⁴¹⁹ "Wanting" a

extra-marital affair of a laird (a friend of Charles II) and a "common collier lassie." As McCue puts it, "Nairne clearly kept an affiliation with this traditional song by using the same melody and by incorporating its first line in her story, though she changed it so that it was the Laird who bowed and not the lady who curtsied: 'An' when she cam ben he bowed fu' law'. While some women were keen to adhere closely to the traditional lyric, Nairne was clearly intent on presenting a more respectable view of the Laird and his wife." K. McCue, "Women and Song," 62. McCue notes further that Nairne and Anne Grant, in contrast of Joanna Baillie, adapted traditional materials for the purpose of "upholding the institution of marriage," though they also demonstrated "women's independence of mind." Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 10.

⁴¹⁹ McGuirk observes: "Nairne ingeniously reverses a Burns song (itself linked to an older bawdy song). In Burns's stanzas for 'When She Cam Ben She Bobbed,' 'Cockpen' steals a kiss from a 'Collier-lassie,' preferring her to the braw 'Lady Jean.' Nairne

wife (indicating both a desire and a lack), the laird nevertheless finds courtship “fashious to seek,” suggesting that sexual capacity follows social influence as his gene pool shallows. The prospective bride, like the laird himself, has “a lang pedigree” but neither land nor dowry; the small comic detail that she lives “[D]own by the dyke-side” not only emphasizes the laird’s vertiginous descent, but the backward state of agricultural production in the neighborhood. Taken together with the lady’s poverty, the kind of dry-stone dyke or enclosure adjacent to the lady’s dwelling may indicate an unimproved farm still practicing run-rig agricultural methods. More generally, though, the dyke connotes a defensive and conservative attitude hostile to innovation that mirrors the laird’s own tightly enclosed and impervious “cockpen.” Accordingly, the third quatrain returns us to the outdated Augustan dress and accoutrements donned by the laird for his wooing, punctuated by the observer’s incredulity that this buffoon could possibly contract a marriage in the old style.

evidently had something to say from Lady Jean’s perspective about unwanted suitors.” She also points out that the last two stanzas were later added to the poem by someone evidently unhappy with the Laird’s utter failure to woo Mistress Jean. Oliphant’s Victorian-era editor, the Rev. Charles Rogers, though aware of third party authorship, included them in his edition. C. McGuirk, “Jacobite History to National Song,” 286, note 66. I, too, give these stanzas here:

And now that the laird his exit had made,
Mistress Jean she reflected on what she had said;
“Oh, for ane I’ll get better, it’s waur I’ll get ten,
I was daft to refuse the Laird o’ Cockpen.”

Next time that the laird and the lady were seen,
They were gaun arm-in-arm to the kirk on the green;
Now she sits in the ha’ like a weel-tappit hen,
But as yet there’s nae chickens appear’d at Cockpen.

The middle three quatrains recall Restoration comedy. The laird sententiously refers to himself in the third person, Mistress Jean coquettes in her “silk gown” and “mutch wi’ red ribbons”:

He took the grey mare, and rade cannily,
An rapp’d at the yet o’ Claverse-ha’ Lee;
“Gae tell Mistress Jean to come speedily ben,
She’s wanted to speak to the laird o’ Cockpen.”

Mistress Jean was makin’ the elder-flower wine.
“An’ what brings the laird at sic a like time?”
She put aff her apron, and on her silk gown,
Her mutch wi’ red ribbons, and gaed awa’ down.

An’ when she cam’ ben he bowed fu’ low,
An’ what was his errand he soon let her know;
Amazed was the laird when the lady said “Na,”
And wi’ a laigh curtsie she turned awa’.⁴²⁰

This farcical scene reverses the positions of the laird and the lady, as Jean rejects the laird’s peremptory proposal in spite of his traditional social ascendancy. The purely transactional nature of the proffered marriage makes the preservation of formal etiquette in the scene all the more ludicrous. It is interesting to note that the laird’s actual offer is implied rather than stated, unlike his command for Jean to “come speedily ben” and Jean’s surprised response. He naturally assumes her acquiescence; her homely occupation (“makin’ the elder-flower wine”) denotes the traditional economy adumbrated in the first three quatrains, while her single luxury—a silk dress and linen cap with red ribbons—marks her as a suitable object and signifier of the laird’s “want.” That Jean foils the speedy dispatch of the laird’s “errand” produces the precise effect that the laird’s lack of desire in the poem’s opening quatrain predicts: his self-mortification and rejection as the

⁴²⁰ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 10-11.

social, political, and economic currency in the “modern” British state that has left him and his ilk behind, the empty casing of an independent national existence bartered away for the promise of a few shekels of imperial gold.

It is left to Jean herself to redeem the laird’s impotence as a representative of the nation, if only to close the circle of the poem and provide a conventional comic dénouement:

Dumfounder’d he was, nae sigh did he gie,
He mounted his mare---he rade cannily;
And aften he thought, as he gaed thro’ the glen,
She’s daft to refuse the laird o’ Cockpen.⁴²¹

The “dumfounder’d” laird rides as cannily away from Jean’s gate as he did towards it, unself-conscious and oblivious to his historical eclipse. Yet Jean cannot achieve autonomy outside of the world that the old laird memorializes, any more than the Leddy Gowrie could have resisted her atavistic Adamic lover. Jean’s practical wisdom regarding the bird in the hand seems to restore the old natural order through marriage, but the lack of issue merely confirms what we knew about the old laird from the beginning. Even comedy, itself the ancient generic expression of the aristocratic privilege, dissolves under the pressure of capitalism and assimilation. Lacking any function in this world, the “laird and the lady” populate the memory of rural feudal social organization, much as Scott’s Laird and Lady Ellangowan preside over a diminished patrimony ultimately redeemed only by the wealthy Anglo-Indian Guy Mannering and his headstrong (and very English) daughter, who has been nurtured on exotic tales of the imperial East. Indeed, even had the laird been able to produce one, an heir would do him no good. In this modern nation what

⁴²¹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 11.

is “wanted” is and is not a cockpen. The British imperial state lacks what can be remembered only in the ritual form of narrative comedy (this poem, Scott’s novel), and it desires only the reproduction of the productive labor that sustains and extends it.

Oliphant’s reimagination of the North British nation as an heiress without an heir continues in “The Heiress.” The song begins a comic vein, as the young speaker seems dumbfounded by her sudden passage from an incipient to a fully realized status as property in a traditional feudal world:

I’ll no be had for naething,
I’ll no be had for naething,
I tell ye, that’s ae thing,
So ye needna follow me.

Oh! the change is most surprising;
Last year I was Betsy Brown;
Now to my hand they’re a’ aspiring,
The fair Eliza I am grown!
But I’ll no, &c.

Oh! the change is most surprising,
Nane o’ them e’er look’d at me;
Now my charms they’re a’ admiring,
For my sake they’re like to dee!
But I’ll no, &c.⁴²²

The opening refrain articulates the speaker’s resistance to the wooers and the tradition they represent. For her “not being had for nothing” establishes an exchange value based on a kind of “affective individuality,” to use Lawrence Stone’s term, that values the co-equality of love over the hierarchy of property. By reversing the polarity of the traditional flow of feudal power, she seizes her own voice in an attempt to overwrite the social and sexual identity that is thrust upon her. This bid for autonomy becomes evident in the first

⁴²² C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 21.

stanza, as she sardonically observes the materialization of this traditional identity in the change from her neutral child-name to the sexually charged “Eliza.” The conventional expressions of love addressed to her by the thronging suitors further allude to the obsolete and morally bankrupt regime of chivalry, which cloaks the brutality of trade in women with a poetics of religious devotion. The comic effect of the sons of the rural gentry attempting to emulate these ancient poetic forms (“Now my charms they’re a’ admiring,/For my sake they’re like to dee!”) not only debases the false currency of chivalry, it accomplishes the reversal the speaker seeks in the refrain. Betsy’s only weapon against the feudal economy of marriage is humor, which, as Bakhtin theorized, destroys the sanctity of traditional genres and subjects them to the “modern” solvent of novelistic polyglossia.⁴²³ As simple a gesture as self-naming—Betsy, not Eliza—breaks through the monologic discourse of masculine power and creates a kind of whispering gallery, in which the echoes of the woman’s “real” name chase the suitors’ increasingly strident assertions of male proprietorship.

If the first two stanzas of the song envision the reassertion of the woman’s “natural” identity from its appropriation in the name of property, the last two confirm the very power and difference property makes:

But there is ane, when I had naething,
A’ his heart he gied to me;
And sair he toiled, to mak a wee thing,
To gie me when he cam frae sea.
But I’ll no, &c.

And if e’er I marry ony,

⁴²³ For Bakhtin’s discussion of this subject, see M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, “Epic and the Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel.”

He will be the lad for me;
For oh, he was baith gude and bonny,
And he thocht the same o' me.
Sae I'll no be had for naething,
I'll no be had for naething,
I tell ye, lads, that's ae thing,
So ye needna follow me.⁴²⁴

Here the social comedy of the first two stanzas abruptly transforms into a simple and beautiful love lyric extolling love as a function of labor, not property. Betsy's propertyless state predicates her lover's gift, but the metonymic substitution of "heart" and "love" is materialized by the lover's "sair" toil "to mak a wee thing,/To gie me when he cam frae sea." Whereas Eliza's suitors claim that they will "dee" if she does not favor them, thus imposing upon her the burden of redeeming them through the property she represents, Betsy's lover invests her with the product of his labor, offering her an emblem of his self-creation in the "wee thing" he works so hard to make. Betsy sees no need to identify the object any more specifically than that; it is merely a material extension of the sailor in any event, an offer of himself in exchange for the "naething" in which Betsy can be fully self-realized. Note the subtle shift into the conditional mode in the first couplet of the final stanza, in which Betsy designates marriage as a volitional act and a fulfillment of *her* desire, independent of the duties of family and property. But in the second couplet of the stanza, Betsy's use of the past tense appears to suggest that the sailor is gone, possibly as a consequence of the very conversion of "Betsy" to "Eliza" that she appears to reject. The simple ejaculation "But oh" poignantly marks the insurmountable barrier between the regimes of property and propertylessness, as Betsy's self-assertion proves

⁴²⁴ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 22.

illusory. The refrain—"I'll no be had for naething"—returns with a vengeance. The double negative cancels out Betsy/Eliza altogether, signifying her absorption into the masculine economy of exchange and the absolute loss of self that it entails. Her last words, "So ye needna follow me," speak the truth: the suitors, indeed, "needna follow" her, for she already belongs to them.

Poems such as "The Heiress" demonstrate that Oliphant's gender politics are dialectically and negatively related to her national politics. Whereas the patriotic poems imagine the Scottish nation as inhabiting a closed "deep" past inaccessible to epic (Burns) or assimilationist (Scott) approaches, the "social manners" poems we are presently discussing emphasize the impermeability of social categories, particularly the manner in which property relations dictate gender identity. While there is some recognition of other possibilities, they lie outside the agency of the poems' speakers, who ultimately must accept the demands of property. Ironically, however, property proves to be a dead end, as the traditional society of aristocratic privilege can no longer reproduce itself, although the social forms continue in force.

This dessication and infertility are on full display in two poems that strongly feature "local" color, "The County Meeting" and "The Ayrshire Lassie." Here the identities and perspectives of these poems' speakers, while contrasting with the initially rebellious and ultimately resigned female figures in "The Lass O' Gowrie," "The Laird O' Cockpen," and "The Heiress," reflect a similar consciousness of a community whose economic and moral structures are no longer sustainable and in terminal decline. Moreover, whereas those poems entertain but refuse the possibility of liberation from the

compulsory social ritual of marriage as a means of preserving property, “The County Meeting” and “The Ayrshire Lassie” reveal that the ritual practices of sociability, though they retain much of their external attractiveness, have become little more than the subject of genre painting, a picturesque remnant of a formerly vital community that now puts its cultural traditions on display for the enjoyment of English tourists.

In “The County Meeting” the speaker, an ebullient and gossipy insider, first welcomes guests to a dance and then, presumably for the benefit of an outside observer who is enjoying the scene, proceeds to comment upon (not without a slightly malicious edge in some cases) the personalities and pécadillos of the most prominent representatives of county society:

There’s the Major, and his sister too,
He in the bottle-green, she in the blue;
(Some years sin’ syne that gown was new,
At our County Meeting.)
They are a worthy, canty pair,
An ‘unco proud o’ their nephew Blair;
O’ sense, or siller, he’s nae great share,
Tho’ he’s the King o’ the Meeting.

An’ there’s our Member, and Provost Whig,
Our Doctor in his yellow wig,
Wi’ his fat wife, wha takes a jig
Aye at our County Meeting.
Miss Betty, too, I see here there,
Wi’ her sonsy face, and bricht red hair,
Dancin’ till she can dance nae mair
At our County Meeting.⁴²⁵

These stanzas breezily introduce the observers to the ruling elites in the neighborhood.

The Major/Sister pair reminds us once again of the barren condition of the local gentry,

⁴²⁵ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 50-51.

who can offer no better representatives than an elderly bachelor and a down-at-the-heel spinster. Moreover, their apparently orphaned nephew appears to have emerged from the shallow end of the gene pool, and his status as “the King o’ the Meeting” not only ironizes the family’s elevated social status but also emphasizes the purely ritualistic aspect of the performance. The poem implies that all county meetings look the same, with the same cast of characters performing the same roles. Whatever meaning was once associated with these events—conducting legal proceedings, organizing the militia, resolving congregational disputes, in other words reaffirming the solidity of feudal authority—has been emptied out and replaced by comic caricature. The narrator’s apparent affection for these figures betrays a certain awkward self-consciousness as well, as the narrator feels she must apologize to the observer for the buffoonery of the characters in the play. Indeed, the descriptions in the following stanza border on the satirical. The “Member” and the “Provost Whig” denote the county’s political representatives, the former a likely product of political patronage and old corruption, the latter a presumed self-dealer and opponent of burgh reform. The “Doctor in his yellow wig” and his “fat wife” exude a comfortable and hedonistic lifestyle, while Betty’s “sonsy face” and “bricht red hair,” when coupled with her tireless energy on the dance floor, indicate a sexual availability that would appear to militate against successful marriage.

The poem goes on to describe the local heiress as “dorty” (haughty), “Lord Bawbee,” another “Major” and his heir (on whose behalf the old Lord is trying to make a match with the ill-humored heiress), the Laird and the Sheriff, and a curious Irishman

named Major O'Neill, in relation to whom the narrator comments behind her hand to the observer that "Impudence comes from Paddy's land,/Say the lads o' our County Meeting." The poem concludes with a predictable burst of Scottish folk-dancing:

Afore we end, strike up the spring,
O' Thulichan and Hieland-fling,
The Hay-makers, and Bumpkin fine!
At our County Meeting.
Gow draws his bow, folk haste away,
While some are glad and some are wae;
A' blithe to meet some ither day,
At our County Meeting.⁴²⁶

Beneath the mirth, however, appears melancholia, as the dancers "haste away,/While some are glad and some are wae." This couplet makes fully explicit the narrator's moral condescension, an attitude adopted in relation to the observer of the dance. The genre painting is complete, a quaint and picturesque view of "traditional" Scottish society has been packaged and presented to an audience confident of its cultural superiority, for which North Briton must be contained and aestheticized for assimilation to the imperial state. For the English observer of "The County Meeting," Scots are indeed "strangers from a far country," as Scott puts it in *The Heart of Midlothian*. Music and dance, the vitality of "folk" culture, the base materials of resurgent European nationalisms of the nineteenth century, are here revealed as the instruments, not of a revival of a national idea, but of the imperial state, which classifies, catalogues, and archives information about its subjects as a means of "knowing" them. Once more we see explicit in Oliphant what perhaps remains implicit in Burns and Scott: a representation of the Scottish nation in art can never be more than a pastiche or simulacrum, but even then that representation

⁴²⁶ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 51.

can only be understood as “national” through the external (English) observer’s aesthetic sensibility. In this sense, Scotland writes itself as an *English* work of art; to speak of a “native” Scottish aesthetic during this period must account for this double remove.

Another version of picturesque localism is found in “The Ayrshire Lassie.” In contrast to “The County Meeting,” however, this mode of aesthetic interpretation of Scotland claims national status for a single county, imagining Ayrshire as more quintessentially “Scottish” than other “bonny places”:

Some brag o’ this, some brag o’ that,
Some brag o’ what they never saw;
But I will brag o’ what I’ve seen,
For Ayrshire it dings ye a’.
Gang ye by land, or by the sea,
Ye’ll heaps o’ bonny places see,
An’ mair than weel can counted be,
For Ayrshire it dings them a’.

Oh, there is mony a bonnie bower
Frae Ardrossan to Arngower,
And mony mair than I can tell,
Where the Clyde’s fair waters swell!
Gang ye by Irvine or by Troon,
Or by the bonnie banks o’ Doon,
By Fairlie, Largs, or sweet Dunoon,
Oh! Ayrshire it dings them a’.

Amang Kelburn’s woody braes
Mony wildflowers sweetly blaw,
An’ there the windin’s burnie strays,
Till owre the lin it tumblin’ fa’.
Oh! when the settin sunbeams glance
O’er the waters wide expanse---
Where Arran hills sae grandly rise,
An’ hide their heads in Scotland’s skies.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁷ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 30.

As the “The County Meeting” subjects a generic local society to the gaze of an outside observer who simultaneously listens to the narration of a knowing insider, here the narrator poses as an authoritative guide prepared to conduct the observer on a poetic tour of Ayrshire’s natural beauty. In order to commence this inspection, however, the narrator feels compelled to shout down rival claims by other guides who might puff their own regions in the same terms. Ayrshire is thus presented first through the lens of a somewhat defensive narrator who must “must brag o’ what I’ve seen,/For Ayrshire it dings ye a’.” Consequently, the next two stanzas take on a tone of justification, as the guide breathlessly whirls the observer through the province, pointing out towns and hamlets, wooded valleys and waterfalls, and the dramatic Arran hills. But the guide moves so quickly through the itinerary that the observer has no real sense of place. One town sounds like another (Ardrossan/Arngower, Troon/Doon/Dunoon, Fairlie/Largs), and the natural features are non-specific and disassociated from any sense of local significance or context. We thus see the same generic quality that attaches to “The County Meeting” creeping into a song that ostensibly celebrates Ayrshire particularism.

In the final two stanzas, the guide turns to a panegyric of Ayrshire folk:

On Ayrshire laddie’s manly brou,
How gracefu’ is the bannet blue;
How weel our lasses set the plaid
That is in Kilmarnock made!
Our weaver lads have lang been fam’d,
Our farmers they are a’ weel kenn’d;
Their butter, cheese, and Ayrshire coo,
Ilk worthy ony ither two!

Our lairds are clever ane an’ a’,
(Tho’ some may think their sense is sma’,)
Our lords and leddies I’ll just say,

Their like ye'll no see ilka day---
But there is *ane* in yon green shaw,
The sweetest flower amang them a',
An' after her a ship I'll a',
'Twill be "The Ayrshire Lassie," O.⁴²⁸

These stanzas describe an Ayrshire "type," a chain of signifiers that taken collectively constitutes the category called "Ayrshire." The signifying chain encompasses lads and lasses, represented in terms of the local textile industry that manufactures their distinctive wear, as well as "weaver lads" and farmers, whose skilled labor produces the goods for which Ayrshire is "known." Unlike in "The County Meeting," where the "Hay-makers and Bumpkin fine" do not appear until the end of the dance, the guide's description of the plebeian sort precedes that of the higher ranks, the "lairds," "lords and leddies." This inversion of the social order perhaps suggests that Ayrshire's particularity stems from a material nativism that is much harder to detect in "The County Meeting." The laboring figures that populate this part of the song appear as extensions of the natural setting and local resources and only exist as integrated components of the products they model. They likewise represent a division of labor that has become so deeply embedded in the county that they cease to have any distinct individuality, appearing only as specular objects for the viewing pleasure of the leisure class on holiday. At the same time, though, the reference to "weel kenn'd" farmers draws attention to the agricultural improvement that, while it occurred throughout Scotland during the latter half of the eighteenth century, was prominent in Ayrshire, especially with respect to cattle breeding and commercial cash crop production. As Bruce Lenman points out, although "Ayrshire was often regarded as

⁴²⁸ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 31.

rather backward, and it is true that the upland parishes of its southern areas were quite unenclosed as late as 1793,” rapid commercialization was achieved in the period after 1760.⁴²⁹ This was largely the result of two major developments: heavy liming of artificial grasslands and the introduction into Ayrshire of a “new type of lease . . . whereby the tenant might not plough more than a third to a quarter of his land in any one year, and no land was to be cultivated for more than three years in succession.”⁴³⁰ Lenman notes that this modern lease arrangement, brought to Ayrshire by a certain Mr. Fairlie, manager of the Eglington estates after 1770, after he observed its beneficial effects in Lothian, promoted crop rotation, encouraged enclosure, and ended the ancient ‘infield-outfield’ system of cultivation. Ayrshire’s natural beauty, it seems, is bound up with agricultural improvements that have significantly altered the traditional life on the land. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that the guide would emphasize Ayrshire’s natural resources and economic “progress.”

The final stanza’s characterization of the higher ranks similarly lacks individual differentiation, but to a more extreme degree. While the lairds are “clever,” the “lords and leddies” are defined only by an ambiguous lack (“Their like ye’ll no see ilka day”), leaving the observer to sort out what the guide might mean. Moreover, the guide is anxious to persuade the observer that Ayrshire lairds are not as devoid of “sense” as the other hawkers would have the observer believe. This anxiety, too, could be read as an expression of the guide’s—and the lairds’—interest in improvement, which is evidenced in the previous stanza. While “cleverness” might also indicate their cunning and

⁴²⁹ B. Lenman, *An Economic History of Scotland*, 138.

⁴³⁰ B. Lenman, *An Economic History of Scotland*, 138.

duplicity—a warning to the observer not to attempt to do business with them—it seems a better reading to link the song’s emphasis on the material resources of the county—agricultural produce, woven textiles, water for power and transportation—at the expense of its outworn feudal social structure, as signified by the formless “lords and leddies.”

Indeed, by the end of the song it has become apparent that the guide seeks to interest the observer in investing capital in Ayrshire; to put it another way, the poem constitutes a prospectus and the observer is a potential buyer. Singling out the “sweetest flower” from the otherwise non-descript group of leddies, the guide announces his intention to name a ship in her honor, not in her own name, but under the signifier “The Ayrshire Lassie.” The ship is the final link in the signifying chain that begins with a panegyric to the landscape and ends with cold, hard business proposal. Ayrshire is simply not what outsiders thought it was: picturesque, quaint, backward, outmoded. Instead, it is economically progressive and rich in resources, labor, and modern know-how. The creaky feudal structure unmasked in “The County Meeting” has virtually disappeared here, where even the lairds have put aside their traditional feudal practices in favor of modern leases and scientific “improvement.” As the economy becomes more aggressively capitalistic, the modes of representation must transform as well. The song enacts this transformation, repackaging Ayrshire as an economic dynamo fittingly signified by a vessel that will carry its products to England and into the stream of imperial commerce. The feminization of the material figure that signifies the modern commercial site called Ayrshire completes the destruction of the old feudal society while retaining a discursive trace of its history and former self-identification. Ayrshire, it turns

out, is not particular or exceptional at all, except insofar as it contributes to the imperial economy. What is needed is not nostalgia for a lost way of life, but cash on the barrelhead. Once again Oliphant's seemingly "Scottish" poetry reveals a profound understanding of the vacancy that used to be "Scotland," a vacancy made even more apparent by its dispensability. Imperial economic identity not only trumps Scottish national self-identification, but it revives the local "folk" as a material sign of the empire's totalitarian conquest. And for Oliphant, the irony is that the "Scots" enveloped within this local-imperial matrix do not miss the "nation," the name of which can no longer be marked—not even on the stern of a ship. Instead, "The Ayrshire Lassie" takes its place in the vast British merchant marine, a sentimental, feminized symbol of vacuity devoid of any dangerous associations with Scottish patriotism.

Oliphant's resetting of the traditional comic air "Cauld Kail in Aberdeen" projects a similar shift from the national song to the imperial localism we see in "The Ayrshire Lassie." It is instructive first to look at the version published by David Herd in 1776:

Cauld kale in Aberdeen,
And castocks in Strabogie;
But yet I fear they'll cook o'er soon,
And never warm the cogie.
The lasses about Bogie gicht,
Their limbs are so clean and tight,
That if they were but girded right,
They'll dance the reel of Bogie.

Wow, ABERDEEN, what did you mean,
Sae young a maid to woo, Sir?
I'm sure it was nae mows to her,
Whate'er it was to you, Sir;
For lasses now are no sae blate,
But they ken auld folks out o'date,
And better playfare can they get,

Than castocks in Strabogie.⁴³¹

Here the comedy involves the ludicrousness of impotent age courting fecund youth, as the song ridicules the sexual fantasies of “auld folks” even while lamenting the forwardness of the “clean and tight” lasses. The imagery of the cold, limp, and overcooked cabbage stalks that will “never warm the cogie” need not be further elaborated; suffice it to say that love is presented as a game for the young and fertile. Oliphant’s revision invokes the same imagery of “cauld kail” and “castocks,” but takes its traditional comic allusion to impotency into the realm of domestic tragedy: a cautionary tale of the dangers of promiscuity, drunkenness, and the illicit trade in spirits, which, as indicated in our earlier reading of “The Banks of the Earn,” signifies Scotland’s humiliating economic subordination to England as a consequence of the Treaty of Union.

There’s cauld kail in Aberdeen,
There’s castocks in Stra’bogie,
And, morn and e’en, they’re blithe and bein,
That haud them frae the cogie.
Now haud ye frae the cogie, lads,
O bide ye frae the cogie,
I’ll tell ye true, ye’ll never rue,
O passin’ by the cogie.⁴³²

While the “cogie” in the traditional song doubly signifies both the vessel in which the “castocks” are cooked and the woman’s womb at the center of male desire, Oliphant’s “cogie” similarly has a double signification. The “blithe and bein” are the lads who have “haud . . . frae the cogie” and abstained from both liquor and womanizing.⁴³³ Moreover,

⁴³¹ D. Herd, *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs*, 205.

⁴³² C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 33.

⁴³³ The appendix to the 1791 edition of Herd’s collection contains this variation of the song:

the healthy sexuality of the “lasses” in the traditional song has now become associated with moral decline, prostitution, and free license, a state of affairs denoting an unhappy change in social and economic conditions:

Young Will was braw and weel put on,
Sae blithe was he and vogie,
And he got bonnie Mary Don,
The flowr of Stra'bogie.
Wha wad hae thought, at wooin' time,
He'd e'er forsaken Mary!
And ta'en him to the tipplin' trade,
Wi' boozin' Rob and Harry?

Sair Mary wrought, sair Mary grat,
She scarce could lift the ladle,
Wi' pithless feet, 'tween ilka greet,

Cauld kail in Aberdeen,
And caustics in Strathbogie,
Ilka lad has got his lass,
Then fie gie me my cogie.
*Then fie gie me my cogie dish,
I canno' want my cogie,
I wadno' gie a well fill'd stoup,
For a' the queans o' Bogie.*

Jonnie Smith has got a wife,
Wha keeps frae him his cogie;
Gin she were mine, upon my life,
I'd dook her in the Bogie.
Then fie, &c.

Then here's to ilka honest life,
Wha'll drink wi' me a cogie,
But as for ilka girnin wife,
We'll dook her in the Bogie.
Then fie, &c.

D. Herd, *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs*, Appendix, 52. As we have seen, Oliphant's version takes up the association of the cogie with drink, but reverses its misogynistic masculine voice, “dooking” Will in the Bogie instead.

She'd rock the borrow'd cradle.
Her weddin' plenishin' was gane,
She never thought to borrow;
Her bonnie face was waxin' wan,
And Will wrought a' the sorrow.⁴³⁴

In contrast to the harmless wooing of the aged Aberdeen in the traditional song, “Young Will” has impregnated “bonnie Mary Don,” left her at the altar, and gotten into the illegal liquor trade with a couple of drunken reprobates. While Will is out smuggling whisky produced by unlicensed stills for consumption in the homes and taverns of Aberdeenshire, the impoverished and starving Mary weeps alone in what was to be her married home, rocking her illegitimate child in “the borrow'd cradle.” Significantly, Oliphant's song refuses to censure Mary for her “fall,” placing all the responsibility for Mary's “sorrow” (and likely her approaching death) on Will's faithlessness. The situation is only saved by accident:

He's reelin's hame ae winter's night,
Some later than the gloamin',
He's ta'en the rig, he's miss'd the brig,
And Bogie's owre him foamin'.
Wi' broken banes, out owre the stanes
He creepit up Stra'bogie,
And a' the nicht he prayed wi' micht,
To keep him frae the cogie.

Now Mary's heart is light again,
She's neither sick nor silly,
For auld or young nae sinfu' tongue
Could e'er entice her Willie.
And aye the sang thro' Bogie rang,
O haud ye frae the cogie;
The weary gill's the sairest ill
On braes o' fair Stra'bogie.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁴ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 33.

⁴³⁵ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 34.

Will's drunken mishap with the cask of spirits he is smuggling in the dark of night costs him "broken banes" but felicitously results in his reformation. He returns to Mary and the baby, saving her from death or, an even worse fate, madness ("She's neither sick nor silly"). Will has become impervious to the temptation of wine, women, and song, a moral example for the community. The song's final couplet, however, refocuses attention on Mary: "The weary gill's the sairest ill/On braes o' fair Stra'bogie." The "clean and tight" lasses of the comic version of the song are one "reel" away from Mary's condition, but the tragic implications of Mary's fate could not be more clearly depicted, despite this song's "all's well that ends well" conclusion. Things in Aberdeen, it seems, are not well at all. There are too many "weary gills," too many "boozin'" lads. The conventional morality with which Oliphant's song seeks to recoup the social damage cannot fully cloak the underlying economic conditions that have loosened the social bonds in the first place. Indeed, the only thing these two versions of the song have in common is the "cauld kail" itself. It is not simply the case that a relatively innocent (if bawdy) comic song has been heavily moralized in its sequel. It is rather, as in *The Ayrshire Lassie*, that the imperial localism suppressing expressions of Scottish national place has the same effect in "Cauld Kail in Aberdeen." Not coincidentally do women bear the marks of this deracination and absorption in both songs, the one literally transformed into a vessel for British imperial commerce and desire and the other conversely into a vessel for "illegitimate" commerce and desire.

Oliphant thus figures the vacant space that the Scottish nation inhabits in both songs as a woman's body, the body onto which the dominant British state inscribes its

economic and cultural designs and then marks the boundaries of legitimate “imperial” and illegitimate “national” practices. We see another variation of this poetics in “The Pleughman,” also a traditional drinking song drawn from Herd’s collection. Whereas this model features the plowman’s sweetheart extolling his personal virtues above all other men (particularly his sexual prowess), Oliphant’s sequel suggests more subversive political possibilities:

There’s high and low, there’s rich and poor,
There’s trades and crafts eneuch, man;
But east and west his trade’s the best,
That kens to guide the pleugh, man.

The, come, weel speed my pleughman lad,
And hey my merry pleughman;
Of a’ the trades that I do ken,
Commend me to the pleughman.⁴³⁶

Burns’s version of the song, first printed in 1788, follows the traditional song much more closely than Oliphant’s, but both add a stanza invoking “east and west”:

I hae been east, I hae been west,
I hae been at Saint Johnston,
The boniest sight that e’er I saw
Was the Ploughman laddie dancing.

* * * * *

Commend me to the Barn yard,
And the Corn-mou, man;
I never gat my Coggie fou
Till I met wi’ the Ploughman.⁴³⁷

Noble and Hogg observe that Burns “somewhat cleaned up” the traditional song, but retained its “happy overtones of horsy, sexual pleasure.”⁴³⁸ Oliphant’s version, however,

⁴³⁶ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 54.

⁴³⁷ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 308.

⁴³⁸ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 308.

dispenses with the bawdy, sexually explicit original and sanctifies the plowman's "trade," imbuing him with universal, religious significance:

His dreams are sweet upon his bed,
His cares are light and few, man;
His mother's blessing's on his head,
That tents her weel, the pleughman.
Then, come, weel speed, &c.

The lark sae sweet, that starts to meet
The morning fresh and new, man;
Blythe tho' she be, as blythe is he
That sings as sweet, the pleughman.
Then, come, weel speed, &c.

All fresh and gay, at dawn of day,
Their labours they renew, man;
Heaven bless the seed and bless the soil,
And heaven bless the pleughman.
Then, come, weel speed, &c.⁴³⁹

Oliphant transfigures the plowman from the sexually voracious rounder of the original and Burns's versions of the ballad to an allegorical Christian everyman for a purpose similar to that of "Cauld Kail in Aberdeen." In that song Mary bore the stigmata of an illicit remnant of a Scottish nationhood crushed under the weight of British imperial economic and political interests. Here, on the other hand, the virtuous plowman bears the "seed" and "soil" of potential national regeneration. His trade is honest, his labor pure, and his conscience clear. He even "tents" his mother, a rather far cry from Burns's man's roll in the hay with his sweetheart. Moreover, recalling that the peasant everyman Piers Plowman became an iconic representative of the abused common estate in Langland's great medieval poem, this plowman's humble origin transcends hierarchic social,

⁴³⁹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 54.

economic, and political structures and evinces an inveterate distrust of money, wealth, and industry. At the same time, the song's celebration of the old moral economy does not appear to signify a nostalgic desire to return to the golden age of feudal chivalry. It rather articulates a fervent desire for a future condition in which a man's self-identification is co-extensive with the direct product of his labor and communitarian concerns predominate over capitalistic ones. Once again, we see in Oliphant a perhaps more far-sighted and sophisticated view of Scotland's ills than Burns offers even in his most republican guise. It is not just that "a man's a man for a' that," but that what makes the man is what he makes. In a world of capitalistic exploitation, Oliphant suggests, political or civil rights do nothing to reverse and remedy the fundamental asymmetry of property relations. Under Oliphant's pen, even a bawdy drinking song becomes politically subversive while presenting itself as conventionally pious.

As we have seen in her imaginative use of traditional balladry to interrogate the political, economic, and gender relations determined in part by the imperial localism instated by the Anglo-Scottish constitutional settlement, Oliphant's rendition of the popular genre of the animal dialogue, so brilliantly executed by Burns in "The Twa Dogs: A Tale," directs attention once more to the precarious nature of Scottish rural life at the close of the eighteenth century. But rather than stage through allegory a stylized and densely allusive debate over the destruction of the traditional moral economy by commercial agricultural practices and the cash-nexus, as Burns does in his poem,⁴⁴⁰ in

⁴⁴⁰ See Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 12-14. They note that Burns refers to both Scottish and English antecedents in his allegory, drawing on Robert Fergusson and English rural poetry from the fifteenth century forward.

“The Two Doos” Oliphant poses the question of poverty as, at least in part, a consequence of bad judgment:

There were twa doos sat in a dookit;
Twa wise-like birds, and round they luiket;
An’ says the ane unto the ither,
What do ye see, my gude brither?

I see some pickles o’ gude strae,
An’ wheat, some fule has thrown away;
For a rainy day they should be boukit,
Sae down they flew frae aff their doukit.

The snaw will come an’ cour the grund,
Nae grains o’ wheat will then be fund;
They pickt a’ up, an’ a’ were boukit,
Then round an’ round, again they luiket.⁴⁴¹

Oliphant’s deployment of the “twa doos” to carry the narrative is striking and broadly suggestive. The birds are “wise-like,” indicating that they have survived periods of famine and shortage, a remarkable achievement given the widespread consumption of dove (and pigeon) meat as a dietary supplement throughout Britain until well into the nineteenth century and beyond. Moreover, as we have seen, the hungry years that recurred in Scotland during the last quarter of the eighteenth century were sufficient in themselves to produce serious social disturbances and acute class antagonism even without regard to external events in America, Ireland, and France and the reformist and radical impulses they helped unleash at home. The dialogue between the birds thus draws attention to their own vulnerability to the ravages of famine and to explosive social forces that want only the trigger of dearth to ignite them. At the same time, doves invoke a Christian iconography of divine love and peace, as well as images of domesticity. But it

⁴⁴¹ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 59.

appears that these latter associations do not neatly converge with the conditions under which the dialogue takes place. Gendered male (“What do you see, my gude brither?”), the birds are engaged in gathering food for the hard winter to come. Their opportunistic scavenging complicates the notion of Christian love, and the panoptic gaze with which they sweep the landscape for the means of subsistence recasts domesticity as a deadly competition for scarce resources. Ideologies of salvation and sacramental love, it seems, cannot stand up to the existential threat of starvation, in which pleasant teleological fictions materialize into “pickles o’ gude strae,/An’ wheat, some fule has thrown away.” Ironically, however, the scraps the birds collect and store remain as vulnerable to appropriation from them as they are by them, as the same scarcity will compel scavengers to consume even the most “wise-like” of doves.

The difference between dove and “fule” seems to be that the former “luiket” through the false ideologies of love and sees the social construct for what it is: a zero-sum game that balances one subject’s pleasure against another’s pain:

O lang he thocht, an’ lang he luiket,
An’ aye his wise-like head, he shook it;
I see, I see, what ne’er should be,
I see what’s seen by mair than me.

Wae’s me, there’s thochtless, lang Tam Grey,
Aye spending what he’s no to pay;
In wedlock, to a taupie, hookit,
He’s taen a doo, but has nae dookit.

When we were young it was nae sae;
Nae rummulgumshion folk now hae;
What gude for them can e’er be luiket,
When folk tak doos that hae nae dookit.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴² C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 59.

Succumbing to the siren song of sexual desire thinly disguised as a higher duty, “lang Tam Grey” has taken a wife he cannot afford, and a “taupie” into the bargain. This unflattering characterization of Tam’s “doo” belies the promises of religious and domestic discourses of love and locates masculine desire on a purely physiological or material plane, where it co-exists and frequently conflicts with other compulsory material needs. While the old doves predictably lament the new-fangled ways of the young and their lack of “rummulgumshion,” the fact that they, too, must scrabble to gratify the barest needs of the body suggests that the folly of ignorant youth is a universal experience, more easily repeated as a truism than learned as a “lesson.” The conventional moral of the fable thus lacks conviction, conceding the primacy of the body over the deferral of desire through rational economic and social activity. Moreover, only the needs of the male body are here acknowledged, as food and women appear almost interchangeable objects of physiological impulse. Misogyny goes hand in hand with hunger; the slatternly wife not only neglects herself and her household, but becomes another useless mouth to feed, as do the children that follow. There is little to celebrate in visions of spiritual or domestic peace, especially for the poor and, more specifically, for poor women. In “The Twa Doos” Oliphant diagnoses social ills in terms of the discursive structures of male desire that naturalize their subjection.

A second personification poem makes this point in yet another way. In “The Robin’s Nest,” Oliphant shifts both the narrative perspective and the linguistic medium, though she maintains the regular octosyllabic verse structure. The jaded doves that pass

moral judgment on youth and beauty give way to a maternal speaker who chastises the violent imperatives of masculine desire:

Their nest was in a leafy bush,
Sae soft and warm, sae soft and warm,
And Robins thought their little brood
All safe from harm, all safe from harm.
The morning's feast wi' joy they bought,
To feed their young with tender care;
The plunder'd leafy bush they found---
But nest and nestlings saw nae mair!

The mother cou'dna leave the spot,
But wheeling round, and wheeling round,
The cruel spoiler aim'd a shot,
Cur'd her heart's wound, cur'd her heart's wound.
She will not hear their helpless cry,
Nor see them pine in slavery!
The burning breast she will not bide,
For wrongs of wanton knavery---⁴⁴³

In contrast to “The Twa Doos,” where the narrative resists and spurns images of domesticity, this poem begins by celebrating, indeed sanctifying, the domestic ideal. In place of the spendthrift Tam Gray and his slatternly wife, here the robins responsibly offer their nestlings not only shelter and sustenance, but affection and comfort. Their discovery of the plundered nest shatters the illusion of security of the hearth, as the repetitive chant “all safe from harm, all safe from harm” mimics the form of a prayer. When the desperate mother herself falls victim to the objectless slaughter of innocents, the narrator interprets the mother's death as merciful, as a perverse species of justice in which a mother's loss can only be vindicated by compounding the initial act of “wanton knavery” that deprived her of her children. Moreover, whereas the two doves voice the

⁴⁴³ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 36.

wisdom of experience in the jaded vernacular of long experience, the narrator adopts a substantially more anglicized variant, as if imitating the elevated discursive structures that assist in the production of the illusive ideology of domestic security in the first place.

It is further significant that this formal diction predicates the narrator's introduction of the term "slavery" to describe the fate of the nestlings. Indeed, the incongruous appearance of this analogy has a startling, if not hyperbolic, effect. In what sense can the robin's brood resemble slaves? Does the poem really mean to equate the conventional rural childhood pastime of trapping and shooting all manner of small fauna with the institution of slavery? Apparently so, as the narrator describes both social activities in the same terms ("wanton knavery"), suggesting that the subjection or taking of any innocent natural life stems from the same will to domination that characterizes the worst acts of human trafficking and abuse. The ubiquity of robins in English folklore as birds of mercy (especially in the sixteenth-century Norfolk ballad in which two innocent children are left in the woods to die by their evil uncle and are covered with leaves by robins⁴⁴⁴), as well as their association with the blood of Christ, reinforces the barbarity of the act of plunder, particularly if perpetrated in the name of higher civilization. The poem's concluding stanzas make clear the robin's allegorical significance in the poem, but with a specific national difference:

O! bonny Robin Redbreast,
Ye trust in men, ye trust in men,
But what their hearts are made o',
Ye little ken, ye little ken!
They'll ne'er wi' your wee skin be warmed,

⁴⁴⁴ See, for example, *Babes in the Wood*, which recounts the traditional ballad first published by Thomas Millington in 1595.

Nor wi' your tiny flesh be fed,
But just 'cause you're a living thing,
It's sport wi' them to lay you dead!

Ye Hieland and ye Lowland lads,
As birdies gay, as birdies gay,
O spare them whistling like yoursel's,
And hopping blithe from spray to spray---
Their wings were made to soar aloft,
And skim the air at liberty;
And as you freedom gi'e to them,
May you and yours be ever free!⁴⁴⁵

As in “The Twa Doos,” the poem’s moralizing reveals the springs and traps of predatory masculine behavior that makes slaves (or corpses) out of those who take men at their word. Bearing their Scriptures and tales of chivalry, white men offer liberatory discourses with one hand and chains and shackles with the other. The poem can perhaps be read in late eighteenth-century abolitionist terms alone, but the appeal to “Ye Hieland and ye Lowland lads” transforms its register from a generalized Christian critique to a contemporary political one. As the narrator urges Scottish boys to leave the robins in peace, with the closing benediction “And as you freedom gi'e to them,/May you and yours be ever free,” she confers on the allegorical and figurative “Robin Redbreast” a new association: that of a specifically *Scottish* symbol of peace and “freedom.” Reading this representation back through the more traditional treatment of the figure of the robin in the first two stanzas releases the poem’s liberatory desire, for Scotland’s subjection to English rule mirrors the nestlings’ fate. Just as the English appropriate Scotland’s young men for military, commercial, and colonial manpower, breaking up households and leaving mothers to mourn and die, so do the boys pilfer the robin’s nest. To be “free”

⁴⁴⁵ C. Rogers, *Life and Songs*, 36-37.

requires an ethic of freedom that requires the deliberate and continuous performance of acts that liberate beings from the bonds that enslave them.

Oliphant's commentary on Anglo-Scottish relations within the British imperial state, while eschewing Burns's republicanism and Scottish patriotism, articulates a complex understanding of the adverse effects of Scotland's subordinate status in the Union. Like Burns, Oliphant uses traditional poetic materials, as well as classical genre poetry, to translate the loss of the nation into deeply intimate and personal terms. Moreover, despite her privileged class position, Oliphant inhabits a wide range of voices and bodies in her poetry, and her *oeuvre* proves difficult to characterize in the usual national or class-determined terms that have frequently limited critical reading of Scottish literary texts. Part of the purpose of this study is to begin breaking down these national categories—and along with them the implicit assumption that English literature is somehow universal, while other national literatures within “The Isles” exist only in relation to the Britishness forced upon them by their imperial relations with England. As we have seen, this relationship indeed bears special significance, but it should not preempt the kind of historical or literary analysis that the subject Scottish Literature so amply deserves. It is high time that Carolina Oliphant and her contemporaries be permitted to speak for themselves as poets. They deserve—and richly repay—critical engagement on the same ground as their English counterparts in the late eighteenth-century Republic of Letters.

Chapter 4
**Alternative Radicalisms in the Poetry of Alexander Wilson, John Robertson,
Alexander Tait, and Robert Tannahill**

On April 28, 1788, Alexander Wilson, a weaver and itinerant packman and sometime poet staying in Edinburgh, wrote the following to his friend David Brodie, a schoolmaster in Quarrleton, near Paisley:

Know then, that last week I passed almost a whole night in company with three poets. One was James Kennedy, Ebenezer Picken—who is publishing his works, and the last and most glorious was the immortal author of that well-known ballad, “The Battle of Bannockburn,” “From the Ocean, &c.” Blessed meeting! Never did I spend such a night in all my life. O, I was all fire! O, I was all spirit! I had the honour of being highly complimented by Bannockburn for a poem which I wrote in praise of his sublime song.... I have now a more deep regard for the Muse than ever. I have the opportunity, and my views are more expanded than when I sung on the loom.... That you may long be happy in your noisy mansion to hammer wisdom through the dark walls of the blockheads’ skulls; to teach the young ideas how to shoot; to pour instruction over the opening mind; to be a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to well-doers, is the sincere wish of

Sir,

Your humble Servant,
Alexander Wilson

The unnamed author of “Bannockburn” may have been Gavin Turnbull, though no trace of the poems to which Wilson refers has been found.⁴⁴⁶ But it is nevertheless clear that Wilson’s experience of this heady brew of sociability and revolutionary zeal made an epoch in what had been up to that point a hard-knock existence. Born in Paisley in 1766 to a father who found legitimate work as a weaver (and perhaps more profitable enterprise in illegal smuggling and distilling), Wilson received an education at Paisley

⁴⁴⁶ Clark Hunter, ed. *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson* (Philadelphia, 1983), 121-22, n. 1.

grammar school until shortly after his mother's death, when he was taken out of school and put to work on a farm. He was apprenticed as a weaver to his brother-in-law, William Duncan, in 1779 but did not care for the trade. He continued his education as an autodidact, writing poetry in the style of Milton, Pope, and Goldsmith. He read Burns's Kilmarnock poems, which inspired him to vernacular poetry, and spent several years as a packman, selling small textiles and books of poetry. As Andrew Noble has pointed out, "Like Burns, he combined his vernacular inheritance with early saturation in canonical and contemporary English poetry" and "was equally exposed to the stresses of the fluctuating, industrialising weaving trade."⁴⁴⁷

Wilson's ardent desire to "hammer wisdom through the dark walls of the blockheads' skulls" soon got him into trouble with local authorities back in Paisley. His libel against factory owner William Sharp, "The Shark, or, Lang Mills Detected," was found out when Wilson, in an attempt to extort five guineas for preventing publication of the poem, foolishly wrote Sharp in May of 1792. Sharp filed a criminal complaint, and Wilson was convicted. When he did not pay the fine, the court committed him to Paisley tollbooth for two weeks. His radical views resulted in a second arrest in January of 1794. Rather than stand trial, Wilson sought the freer political climate of America, emigrating to Philadelphia with his nephew that same year. Wilson's American career as a weaver, peddler, schoolteacher, farmer, editor, and ornithologist makes him an important literary and scientific figure in the history of the young Republic. His monumental *American Ornithology* (1808-1814), published by Samuel Bradford with engravings by the Scots

⁴⁴⁷ Noble, "Displaced Persons: Burns and the Renfrew Radicals," 201.

émigré Alexander Lawson (including illustrations of 268 species, no less), was patronized by Thomas Jefferson and Robert Fulton, among other American *literati*, and had a significant influence on John James Audubon. He was elected to the American Philosophical Society just before his death on August 23, 1813.⁴⁴⁸

Wilson's grammar school education and subsequent autodidacticism do not differ markedly from that of Burns, Sillar, or Lapraik, though his working class origins and occupation as a weaver and packman both separate him from his Ayrshire counterparts and sharpen his social and economic critique. Moreover, Wilson's vernacular poetry generally eschews feudal and nationalistic themes, whether couched in the heroic historiography of Scottish independence, the Jacobitic imagery of the Highland Laddie, or the moralism of estates satire. Instead, Wilson's emphasis on social and economic justice, his political commitment, and his deism mark him as a radical and, in some respects, subversive poet (one of Tom Leonard's "radical Renfrew" voices), well beyond even the most ardent expressions of plebeian egalitarianism in Burns.

⁴⁴⁸ See F. Egerton, "Wilson, Alexander, 1766-1813," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004). Wilson inspired the establishment of the Wilson Ornithological Society. Its website reads: "The Wilson Ornithological Society, founded in 1888, is a world-wide organization of nearly 2500 people who share a curiosity about birds. Named in honor of Alexander Wilson, the Father of American Ornithology, the Society publishes a quarterly journal of ornithology, *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology*, and holds annual meetings. Perhaps more than any other biological science, ornithology has been advanced by the contributions of persons in other chosen professions. The Wilson Society recognizes the unique role of the serious amateur in ornithology. Fundamental to its mission, the Society has distinguished itself with a long tradition of promoting a strong working relationship among all who study birds. Each year the Wilson Society awards a number of small grants for ornithological research." See <http://www.wilsonsociety.org/> (accessed May 11, 2012).

Alexander Wilson and the Aesthetics of Libel

As is the case with the Ayrshire poets, Burns's influence on Wilson and other Paisley poets cannot be underestimated. Though poor, Wilson was among the 90 subscribers in Paisley to the initial Edinburgh edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. Encouraged by his friends to emulate Burns, he attempted to raise subscriptions while traveling in the west of Scotland peddling his muslins and ribbons. This effort failed to generate much interest, leading Wilson to seek the patronage of William McDowall, a Member of Parliament for Renfrew and investor in some of the new cotton mills springing up in the west-central Lowlands. McDowall, the proprietor of Castle Semple near Lochwinnoch, agreed to help Wilson obtain subscribers, while John Neilson, a leading Paisley printer, agreed to publish Wilson's volume in early 1790.⁴⁴⁹ To generate interest in the book, Neilson printed several copies of Wilson's satirical poem, "The Hollander, or Light Weight," which cast aspersions on a local silk manufacturer, William Henry:

—Unheard of tortures
Must be reserv'd for such: these herd together;
The common damn'd shun their society,
And look upon themselves as fiends less foul.—Blair.⁴⁵⁰

ATTEND a' ye wha on the loom,
Survey the shuttle jinkin',
Whase purse has aft been sucket toom
While *Willy's* scales war clinkin.

⁴⁴⁹ See Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, 33-36.

⁴⁵⁰ Lines from the Presbyterian clergyman and poet Robert Blair's (1699-1746) magnificent contemplative poem, *The Grave* (1743). William Blake famously illustrated this poem for an 1808 edition.

A' ye that for some luckless hole
Hae pay't, (though right unwilling)
To satisfy his hungry soul,
A saxpence or a shilling
For fine some day.

Shall black Injustice lift its head,
An' cheat us like the devil,
Without a man to stop its speed,
Or crush the growin' evil?
No; Here am I, wi' vengeance big,
Resolv'd to ca'm his clashing;
Nor shall his cheeps, or pouter't wig,
Protect him frae a lashing
Right keen this day.

See! cross his nose he lays the Spec's
An owre the claith he glimmers,
Ilk wee bit trifling faut detects,
And cheeps and dolefu' yaummers.
"Dear man! that wark 'ill never do;
"See that: ye'll no tak telling";
Syne knavish chirts his fingers through
An' libels down a shilling
For holes that day.

Perhaps the fellow's needin' clink,
To ca'm some threatnin' beagle,
Whilk mak's him at sic baseness wink,
An' for some siller wheedle.
In greetan, herse, ungracious croon,
Aul' *Willy* granes, "I hear ye,
"But weel-a-wat our siller's doon,
"We really canna spare ye
"Ae doyt this day."

Health to the brave Hibernian boy,
Who when by *Willy* cheated,
Cock'd up his hat, without annoy,
An' spoke by passion heated:
"Upon my shoul I have a mind,
"Ye old deceiving devil,
"To toss your wig up to the wind,
"And teach you to be shivil

“To me this day.”⁴⁵¹

Here the 24-year-old poet combines a cultural awareness of the high Augustan style of Blair and a vernacular Scots idiom that incorporates the linguistic variety of the Glaswegian working class milieu of which Wilson was a part. The poem, composed in ballad form with eight-line stanzas rhymed *ababcdcd* and with an additional unrhymed dimeter at the end of the octave, draws on a conception of the moral economy familiar to us in plebeian poetry, particularly that of Lapraik and Pagan, but comes packaged with an explosive political charge in a revolutionary context. The poem’s speaker identifies himself with weavers doing piecework for manufacturers such as the unscrupulous “Willy.” Like Wilson and his class, the weaver in the poem finds himself in chronic debt, both to the clothbuyers, who often advanced a discounted sum for work yet to be performed in order to take advantage of the “fellow’s needin’ clink,’/To ca’m some threatenin’s beagle,” and to the pawnbroker, landlord, and merchant from whom he continuously borrows just to “satisfy his hungry soul,/A saxpence or a shilling/For fine some day.” The speaker takes up the weaver’s cause, calling down “vengeance big” on the “black Injustice” Willy perpetrates. This malediction recalls Pagan’s denunciation of the tailor in “Muirkirk Lightweights,” only here the systematic exploitation of the pieceworkers denotes a new economic system impervious to the moral suasion of the third estate. The class antagonism intrinsic to this new economy is exacerbated when the “brave Hibernian boy,” whose work Willy devalues for “Ilk wee bit trifling faut,” refuses to bow to extortion. Imitating the boy’s brogue draws on comic stereotypes of the Irish

⁴⁵¹ Tom Leonard, ed., *Radical Renfrew: poetry from the French Revolution to the First World War* (Edinburgh, 1990), 13-14.

poor, who migrated in large numbers to Glasgow and the industrial heartland of Scotland in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but Wilson also taps into the property-owning class's deep-seated fear of the insurrectionary potential of the unruly Irish peasantry.⁴⁵² The boy's lack of deference to his social and racial superior registers an incendiary tension that burns through the poem's humorous tone.

The poem continues in this vein, retailing other stories of Willy's nefarious dealings and finally provoking the speaker to exclaim:

O sirs! What conscience he contains,
What curse maun he be dreein'!
Whase ev'ry day is mark'd wi' stains
O' cheating and o' leein!
M'K****1, H*b, or throuter O*r,
May swear an' seem to fash us,
But Justice dignifies their door,
An' gen'rously they clash us
The clink each day.

Our Hollander (gude help his saul)
Kens better ways o' working;
For *Jock* an' him has aft a sprawl
Wha'll bring the biggest dark in.
"Weel, *Jock*, what hast thou screwt the day?"
"Deed father I'se no crack o't,
"Nine holes, sax ounce, or thereaway,
"Is a' that I cou'd mak o't,
"This live lang day."

Sic conversation aft taks place,
When darkness bides their logic,

⁴⁵² See Devine, "Industrialisation." By the turn of the nineteenth century in Glasgow, Devine notes, "it was reckoned that around half the [cotton] mill workforce in the city was either Irish-born or of Irish descent. By that time, national population growth in Scotland was starting to accelerate and in the cities the swelling number of migrants was relieving any scarcities that had previously existed in the labor market." "Industrialisation," 51. Wilson would certainly have experienced this migrant workforce first-hand.

Like Milton's Deil, an' Sin, they trace
For some new winning project.
Daft though they be, and unco gloyts,
Yet they can count like scholars,
How farthings multipli'd by doyt,
Grow up to pounds an' dollars,
Some after day.

Forby (to gie the deil his due),
I'll own wi' biggest won'er,
That nane can sell their goods like you,
Or swear them up a hun'er.
Lang hackney'd in the paths o' vice,
Thy conscience nought can scar her;
An' *tens*, an' *twalls*, can in a trice,
Jump up two hun'er far'er
On ony day.

What town can thrive wi' sic a crew,
Within its entrails crawlin'!
Muck worms that maist provoke a spew,
To see or hear them squalin'.
Down on your knees, man, wife and wean,
For ance implore the devil,
To harle to himself his ain,
An' free us frae sic evil,
This vera day.⁴⁵³

Masters who drive a hard bargain might be countenanced, but pious hypocrites like Willy and Jock, who exemplify nothing but the worst characteristics of the Protestant business ethic, are just as lethal to communal life as Lapraik's grasping estate agents or Pagan's unscrupulous merchants. In the event, however, Wilson's libel cut a little too close once more. Like Sharp, Henry sued the poet, who denied that the Willy figure, identified in the poem's title as a "Hollander" and a "Light Weight," made any reference to the silk manufacturer, and even if it did, the poem did not accuse the manufacturer of any specific

⁴⁵³ Leonard, *Radical Renfrew*, 15-16.

act of perjury or other moral turpitude. As might be imagined, Henry was neither persuaded nor amused. Speaking through his counsel in response to Wilson's defense, Henry fumed:

In the Town of Paisley the rage for defaming peoples characters by writing poems & other papers of that kind have for some time past prevailed too much and if a check was not to be put to such practices it is hard to say to what length these scandalous publications might be carried; From the way in which the Defender treats the matter now under Consideration in his Answers your Lord'p will no doubt have some ideas of the liberties which they think themselves entitled to take & when you consider how easily the minds of the working people in a manufacturing town are inflamed & particularly those about the Town of Paisley of which we have already had too many instances, it is not doubted but your Lord'p will agree with the pursuer in thinking that a cheque can not be too soon put to such proceedings.⁴⁵⁴

Now we reach the heart of the matter: Wilson's poetry may inflame the "minds of the working people in a manufacturing town." Whereas Robert Blair's high-minded and abstract denunciation of liars and cheaters in his sermons pass as "polite literature," Wilson's poetic grievance against a specific liar and cheater is actionable in court.⁴⁵⁵ Indeed, Henry's fear that things could get out of hand if Wilson and others like him were not muzzled indicates, if nothing else, a healthy circulation of this type of literature among the weavers and other artisans of Renfrewshire. We can get a good idea of Wilson's audience in the following passage:

Paisley was one of the central sites of Scottish industrialization in the late eighteenth century. It featured pious handloom weavers and other tradesmen laboring in cottages and small workshops, along with workers in rural and

⁴⁵⁴ Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, 421. For the full text of Henry's "Answers for Alex Wilson," dated 15 July 1790, see Hunter, 420-24.

⁴⁵⁵ Pagan's libels, presumably because they were composed by a destitute woman of ill-fame who could not be expected to pay damages and whose imprisonment would likely draw down even greater fulminations on the head of the injured party, were not worth the cost of the lawsuit.

semirural factories driven by waterpower. We can see many of their names in a subscription list appended to the eight-volume duodecimo edition of *The Whole Works of Reverend Robert Millar, A.M.*, which appeared in Paisley in 1789; more than a thousand names appear, most of them identified by their occupations as artisans and tradesmen, including more than 350 weavers from Glasgow, Renfrewshire, and Ayrshire.⁴⁵⁶

There is no further information about the outcome of the lawsuit, though the court apparently never entered a judgment or dismissed the case. Nevertheless, Henry's alarm over the inflammatory potential of poetry on the cadre of literate weavers and artisans in Scotland's industrial belt appears well founded, although the fact that the working people had as strong a preference for the sermons of the remarkable Paisley divine and church historian Robert Millar (1672-1752) as they did for poetic satires against leading industrialists indicates that they were not quite the "swinish multitude" that Henry thought they were.⁴⁵⁷

Wilson's experience of persecution did not prevent him from becoming involved in the Paisley section of The Friends of the People or from continuing to publicize his poetry to potential subscribers. Raising money for the venture by weaving "40 ells (50 yards) of silk gauze at Lochwinnoch," Wilson entered a debate competition in Edinburgh on the question of "Whether have the exertions of Allan Ramsay or Robert Fergusson

⁴⁵⁶ Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book*, 276-77.

⁴⁵⁷ Millar, the son of a Church of Scotland clergyman and educated at the University of Glasgow, authored one of the great works of early eighteenth-century Scottish literature, *The History of the Propagation of Christianity, and Overthrow of Paganism*. His sons John and Henry held parishes in Old Kilpatrick in Dunbartonshire and Neilston (near Paisley), and his daughter Elizabeth married James Hamilton, who succeeded Millar as minister of the Abbey Kirk, Paisley. A third son, Andrew Millar (1705-1768) was, according to Sher, "the greatest bookseller and publisher of the mid-eighteenth century" and at the center of the intellectual renaissance of the Scottish Enlightenment. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, 275-77.

done more honour to Scotch Poetry”⁴⁵⁸ Wilson took Fergusson’s side and finished second by 17 votes to Edinburgher Robert Cumming, who is said to have paid several dozen attendees (out of about 500 well-heeled citizens) to vote for him. This poem, which was published in a new edition of Wilson’s poems published in Edinburgh in 1790, runs for 210 lines of iambic pentameter and is entitled “The Laurel Disputed; Or, The Merits of Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson Contrasted.” In addition to bringing his work to the attention of a segment of Edinburgh polite society already familiar with Burns and stimulating subscriptions to his volume of poems, the poem posits a self-representation of the poet as part of the vernacular revival in eighteenth-century Scottish poetry. The poem begins with the trope of humility we have seen in poets such as Lapraik, Sillar, Little, and Pagan:

Before ye a’ hade done, I’d humbly crave,
 To speak twa words or three amang the lave;
 No for mysel’, but for an honest carl,
 Wha’s seen right mony changes I’ the warl’,
 But is sae blate, down here he durstna come,
 Lest, as he said, his fears might ding him dumb;
 And then he’s frail—sae begg’d me to repeat
 His simple thoughts about this fell debate;
 He gied me this lang scroll; ‘tis e’en right brown;
 I’se let you hear’t as he has’t set down.⁴⁵⁹

In contrast to some of his contemporaries, who claim authorship while propitiating the polite audience for forbearance, Wilson casts himself as a mere translator of the anonymous poet’s verses, establishing a self-reflexive mode in the poem that serves to ironize the staged “debate” and to focus attention, not on the merits of dead poets, but on

⁴⁵⁸ Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, 41.

⁴⁵⁹ Alexander Wilson, “The Laurel Disputed; Or, The Merits of Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson Contrasted” (Edinburgh, 1791), 18.

the figure of a weaver who deigns to speak to the high-and-mighty *literati* of the metropolis:

Trouth I was glad to hear ye war sae kind,
As keep our slee-tongu'd billies in your mind;
An' tho' our Elpsa ca'd me mony a gouk,
To think to speak amang sae mony fouk;
I gat my staff, pat on my bonnet braid,
An' best blue breeks, that war but fern-year made;
A saxpence too, to let me in bedeen,
An' thir auld spectacles to help my een;
Sae I'm come here, in houps ye'll a' agree,
To hear a frank auld kintra man like me.⁴⁶⁰

This theatrical prelude, with its *mélange* of mock humility and deliberate misrepresentation (the young poet on the make passing himself off as a “frank auld kintra man”), seeks both to meet the expectations of Wilson’s polite auditors for a suitably provincial bumpkin and to challenge those expectations by unveiling an aesthetically sophisticated working class figure. Wilson cannot hope to match Edinburgh’s adulation for Burns and his less politically threatening plowman image, hence the double frame of the poem that distances the incipient radicalism associated with his artisanal occupation and local political affiliations.

The bulk of the poem is given over to a disquisition contrasting Ramsay and Fergusson. The speaker lauds Ramsay for restoring Scotland’s pride of place in poetry over Dryden, Pope, and Augustan English poetry and making Edinburgh a literary center once more: “Auld Reekie than, frae blackest, darkest wa’s/To richest rooms resounded his applause.” Ramsay’s classical learning, satiric style, and talent for lyric enable him to speak both to “Learn’d fouk, that lang in colleges an’ schools,/Hae sooket learning to the

⁴⁶⁰ Wilson, “The Laurel Disputed,” 20.

vera hools./An' think that naething charms the heart sae weel's/Lang cracks o' gods,
Greeks, Paradise, and deils," and to the "rustic that can, readin' see/Sweet Peggy skiffin'
ow'r the dewy lee." His death leaves the speaker bereft, fearing "That ne'er in Scotland,
wad a chiel appear./Sae droll, sae hearty, sae confoundet queer./Sae glibly-gabbet, or sae
bauld again."

But then "Up frae Auld Reekie Fergusson begoud./In fell auld phrase that pleases
aye the crowd./To chear their hearts whiles wi' an antrin sang,/'Whilk far an' near round
a' the kintry rang." The speaker's panegyric identifies Fergusson's poetry with a folk
culture of low characters, comic situations, ghost stories and superstitions, and social
realism:

His stories, too, are tell't sae sleek an' baul',
Ilk oily words rins jinking thro' the saul;
What he describes, before your een ye see it,
As plain an' lively as ye see that peat.
It's my opinion, John, that this young fallow,
Excels them a', an' beats auld Allan hallow;
An' shows at twenty-twa, as great a giftie
For painting just, as Allan did at fifty.⁴⁶¹

One cannot but think that the young poet Alexander Wilson draws a self-comparison to
the youthful Robert Fergusson, who "paints" from nature in the real language of the
people:

You, Mr. President, ken weel yoursel',
Better by far than kintra-fouks can tell,
That they wha reach the gleg, auld-farrant art,
In verse to melt, an' soothe, an' mend the heart;
To raise up joy, or rage, or courage keen,
And gar ilk passion sparkle in our een;
Sic chiels (whare'er they hae their ha' or hame),

⁴⁶¹ Wilson, "The Laurel Disputed," 27.

Are true-blue bards, and worthy o' the name.⁴⁶²

This is as fine a statement of aesthetic principle as anything in Burns or elsewhere, as well as a decisive rejection of Augustan classicism. "The gleg, auld-farrant art" of the fifteenth-century bards and makars possesses real emotive power and embodies a people with a distinct language and culture. One wonders what the anglicized Edinburgh audience thought of this manifesto, with its appeals to Scottish patriotism and provincial values from the mouth of a radical weaver poet from the industrial heartland. The poem is a tour-de-force of thematic and cultural allusion, a stage performance, a masterpiece of self-invention, a summons to action:

O let him speak! O let him try t' impart
The joys that than gush'd headlang on his heart,
Whan ilka line, and ilka lang-syne glowr,
Set faes an' friends and Pantheons in a roar!
Did e'er auld Scotland fin' a nobler pride
Through a' her veins, and glowan bosom glide,
Than when her Muses' dear young fav'rite bard,
Wi' her hale strength o' wit and fancy fir'd,
Raise frae the throng, and kin'ling at the sound,
Spread mirth, conviction, truth and rapture round?⁴⁶³

It does not require much imagination to convert this peroration into a political program of national self-realization; the rustic concealed under a veil of self-deprecation and deference at the beginning of the poem shines forth in all the effulgence of youthful enthusiasm for a national cause. In another "debate" poem, "Rab and Ringan," Wilson tells the story of two brothers, Rab, "a gleg, smart cock, with powder'd pash," and Ringan, "a slow, fear'd, bashfu', simple hash." Here we have an Aesop's fable. Rab goes

⁴⁶² Wilson, "The Laurel Disputed," 27.

⁴⁶³ Wilson, "The Laurel Disputed," 29.

off to college in Edinburgh, picks up a little classical learning and falls in with a fast crowd, “Lost a’ his siller wi’ some gambling sparks,/And pawn’d, for punch, his Bible and his sarks;/Till, driven at last to own he had enough,/Gaed hame a’ rags to haud his father’s pleugh.” Ringan, on the other hand, spends his time studying the ways of nature and becomes the parish minister, “Was deep, deep learn’d, but unco blate, ... Sae meikle learning wi’ sae little pride,/Soon gain’d the love o’ a’ the kintra side.” The significance of the poem does not lie in the conventional argument over the virtues and temptations of the active and contemplative life, however. Note the specific types of knowledge the poet privileges:

He kend how mony mile ‘twas to the moon,
How mony rake wad lave the ocean toom;
Where a’ the swallows gaed in time of snaw,
What gars the thunders roar, and tempests blaw;
Where lumps o’ siller grow aneath the grun’,
How a’ this yirth rows around about the sun;
In short, on books sae meikle time he spent,
Ye cou’dna speak o’ aught, but Ringan kent.⁴⁶⁴

Ringan’s virtue derives from his immersion in scientific study, or in eighteenth-century parlance, “natural philosophy.” This aligns him with Scottish Enlightenment intellectual values, in contrast to the “English” classical education and gentlemanly pretensions that lure Rab to ruin. When read together with “The Laurel Disputed,” “Rab and Ringan” may suggest the need for a revived national aesthetic based on *both* pre-Union vernacular (but learned) culture and the uniquely “Scottish” character of modern scientific and intellectual inquisition. Such an approach would be consistent with Wilson’s attempts to

⁴⁶⁴ Leonard, *Radical Renfrew*, 20.

attract a reading audience in religiously moderate and acculturated Edinburgh, as well as in the evangelical, plebeian public of modest means in Renfrewshire.

But Wilson's attempted self-assimilation into the Scottish Enlightenment cultural project of "completing the Union" could not be squared with his increasingly radical politics and working class indignation against the masters. Like many adherents of the Friends of the People, Wilson initially represented himself as a constitutional reformist in the mold of the early French revolutionists.⁴⁶⁵ But domestic events soon pushed Wilson in a more radical and politically dangerous direction. As previously mentioned, in May, 1792, Wilson penned an anonymous letter addressed to the Paisley manufacturer William Sharp threatening to publish a defamatory poem about working conditions at Sharp's mill if Sharp refused to pay five guineas. The poem, entitled "The Shark; or Lang Mills Detected," is given below:

Yes, while I live, no rude or sordid knave
Shall walk the work in credit to his grave.

POPE

Ye weaver blades! ye noble chieils!
Wha fill our land wi' plenty,
And mak our vera barest fiels
To waive wi' ilka dainty;
Defend yoursels, tak sicker heed,
I warn you as a brither;
Or Shark's resolved, wi' hellish greed,
To gorge us a'thegither,
At ance this day.

In Gude's-name will we ne'er get free
O' thieves and persecution!
Will Satan never let abee
To plot our dissolution!

⁴⁶⁵ Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, 46.

Ae scoun'el sinks us to the pit,
Wi' his eternal curses,
Anither granes,—and prays,—and yet
Contrives to toom our purses,
Maist every day.

A higher aim gars Willy think,
And deeper schemes he's brewin';
Ten thousan' fouk at ance to sink
To poverty and ruin!
Hail mighty patriot! Noble soul!
Sae generous, and sae civil,
Sic vast designs deserve the whole
Applauses of the devil
On ony day.

In vain we've toiled wi' head and heart,
And constant deep inspection,
For years on years, to bring this art
So nearly to perfection;
The mair that art and skill deserve,
The greedier Will advances;
And saws and barrels only to serve
To heighten our expenses
And wrath this day.⁴⁶⁶

The following stanzas chronicle the depredations of “Lang Willy Shark,” ranging from the standard social vices of gluttony, drunkenness, and lechery to the more serious offenses against the workers and their families:

Wha cou'd believe a chiel sae trig
Wad cheat us o' a bodle?
Or that sae fair a gowden wig
Contained sae black a noddle?
But Shark beneath a sleekit smile
Conceals his fiercest girning;
And, like his neighbours of the Nile,
Devours wi' little warning
By night or day.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁶ Alexander Wilson, *The poems and literary prose of Alexander Wilson*, ed. Rev. Alexander B. Grosart (Paisley, 1876), 58-59.

All of this might pass for the same fit of pique that incurred the wrath of William Henry two years earlier, but in the incendiary climate of *The Rights of Man* (1791) and heightened fears of working class disaffection in the west country, the following stanzas sound somewhat more ominous:

O happy is that man and blest
Wha in the C-n-l gets him!
Soon may he cram his greedy kist
And dare a soul to touch him.
But should some poor auld wife, by force
O' poortith scrimp her measure,
Her cursed reels at P—y Corse,
Wad bleze wi' meikle pleasure
To them that day.

Whiles, in my sleep, methinks I see
Thee marching through the city,
And Hangman Jock, wi' girnan glee,
Proceeding to his duty.
I see thy dismal phiz and back,
While Jock, his stroke to strengthen,
Brings down his brows at every swack,
“I'll learn you frien' to lengthen,
Your mills the day.”⁴⁶⁸

The poem ends by imploring “thou unconscionable Shark” to repent his wrongs or “Thou'lt mind this reprehension/Some future day.” Hunter notes that some who knew Wilson thought the blackmail attempt so uncharacteristic that someone must have used him to get at Sharp.⁴⁶⁹ Be that as it may, the sheriff (undoubtedly owing to Wilson's previous legal entanglements) promptly arrested the poet, who did not help his case by initially denying the poem was his and then confessing authorship but claiming that

⁴⁶⁷ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 61.

⁴⁶⁸ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 61-62.

⁴⁶⁹ Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, 52

“Willy Shark” could not possibly be construed to refer to “William Sharp.” Wilson found himself in and out of jail for contempt of court and made matters worse by allowing the poem to be published in violation of court order. He was forced to borrow money from friends, including the schoolmaster David Brodie, but he apparently never paid the fine owed to Sharp (though Wilson did burn two copies of his poem on the steps of the Tollbooth in Paisley).⁴⁷⁰ Others came forward to stand security for his good behavior, which did not prevent Wilson from being arrested again in January of 1794, for composing an advertisement for a meeting of the Paisley Friends of Reform. The prosecution against Wilson did not go forward, but Wilson had worn out his welcome in Paisley. Once the poet had earned enough money to pay for a passage to America, he and his nephew, William Duncan, embarked from Belfast on May 23, 1794. Wilson’s Scottish career was over.

Wilson, Robertson, and the Critique of Industrial Capitalism

Wilson’s diatribes in “The Hollander” and “The Shark” have been read in terms Renfrewshire’s industrial setting, and his biographer and editor Clark Hunter calls Wilson “an innovator” of “this kind of protest, although the thought probably never occurred to him.”⁴⁷¹ Whether Wilson may be credited with the deliberate creation of a poetics of industrial protest may be argued either way, but there can be little doubt that Wilson had the broader implications of the new capitalist business structure in mind in these poems. When a single manufacturer can plot “deeper schemes . . . /Ten thousan’ fouk at ance to

⁴⁷⁰ Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, 56.

⁴⁷¹ Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, 48. See also Noble, “Burns and the Renfrew Radicals,” who describes these satires as “bitter, brilliant, seminal poems of the weaving industry on the brink of industrial exploitation.” 202.

sink/To poverty and ruin,” we are in the presence of an organized *system* of oppression far more insidious than anything the old moral economy could generate.

Wilson’s sense that the advent of large-scale industrial capitalism had changed the rules of the game finds full expression in a popular poem composed in 1800 by John Robertson. Robertson (1767-1810), like Wilson, grew up in Paisley and was educated for a profession, but took to the loom when his family fell on hard times in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. In 1803, the impoverished Robertson enlisted in the Fifeshire Militia, serving as a regimental clerk. He killed himself near his barracks in Portsmouth in 1810, at the age of 43.⁴⁷² His poem, “The Toom Meal Pock,” which was set to music, received wide circulation during the economic downturn immediately preceding the Treaty of Amiens (1801):

Preserve us a’! what shall we do,
Thir dark unhallowed times;
We’re surely dreeing penance now,
For some most awfu’ crimes.
Sedition daurna now appear,
In reality or joke,
But ilka cheil maun mourn wi’ me,
O’ hinging toom meal pock,
And sing, Oh waes me!⁴⁷³

The speaker invokes the repression of the 1790s and acknowledges the personal risk involved in putting these sentiments into verse. A parodic or comic poem advocating even the most modest of political reforms could land its author in jail, so with nothing to gain by dissimulation the speaker pulls no punches. His Maxwellian appeal to divine displeasure as a cause of Scotland’s ills would seem to distance the poem’s social and

⁴⁷² Leonard, *Radical Renfrew*, 5.

⁴⁷³ Leonard, *Radical Renfrew*, 5.

economic critique from immediate political conditions, but the “awfu’ crimes” to which the speaker refers remain ambiguous: are they moral crimes of the people or political crimes of the state? Or are the people being compelled to do “penance” for the crimes of a state that tyrannizes over them? It would appear that the only objective, material fact is the “hinging toom meal pock” itself, but who is responsible for its emptiness? Seeking an answer, the speaker, in the manner of many British late eighteenth-century rural poets, then turns to the idealization of the past:

When lasses braw gaed out at e’en
For sport and pastime free,
I seem’d like ane in paradise
The moments quick did flee.
Like Venuses they a’ appeared,
Weel pouter’d were their locks,
‘Twas easy dune, when at their hame,
Wi’ shaking o’ their pocks.
And sing, Oh waes me!

How happy past my former days,
Wi’ merry heartsome glee,
When smiling fortune held the cup,
And peace sat on my knee:
Nae wants had I but were supplied,
My heart wi’ joy did knock.
When in the neuk I smiling saw,
A gaucie weel fill’d pock.
And sing, Oh waes me!⁴⁷⁴

This kind of pastoral dreamworld is familiar to us, but the multiple significations of the term “pock” are particularly striking. Emblematic of starvation in the first stanza, the “toom meal pock” here expansively signifies the female bodies/purses/full meal sacks the speaker remembers and memorializes in the poem. While man may not live by bread

⁴⁷⁴ Leonard, *Radical Renfrew*, 5-6.

alone, the speaker reminds us that without it the social virtues of love and friendship cannot thrive, and even the most radical program for political “reform” is only so much misplaced effort:

Speak no ae word about reform,
Nor petition parliament,
A wiser scheme I'll now propose,
I'm sure ye'll gie consent—
Send up a cheil or twa like me,
As sample o' the flock.
Whase hallow cheeks will be sure proof,
O' a hinging toom meal pock.
And sing, Oh waes me!

And should a sicht sae ghastly like,
Wi' rags, and banes, and skin,
Hae nae impression on yon folk,
But tell ye'll stand ahin!
O what a contrast will ye shaw
To glowring Lunnon folk,
When in St James's ye tak' your stand,
Wi' a hinging toom meal pock.
And sing, Oh waes me!⁴⁷⁵

This is hardly the voice of late eighteenth-century “civil society,” accustomed to speaking in the polished Enlightenment language of improvement and social progress. But it is nevertheless the voice of an emerging “public”—or perhaps more accurately, an “anti-public”—that can no longer be ignored. Invoking the image of gaunt Scottish workers descending on London, the speaker rejects constitutionalism in favor of direct action. In the nostalgic golden age the meal pock synecdochically figures social harmony and the festive banquet in heaven, but in the twin crucibles of war and industrialization, that

⁴⁷⁵ Leonard, *Radical Renfrew*, 6.

figure turns to one of insurrectionary rage. Thomas Carlyle voiced a similar sentiment nearly three decades later:

It is no very good symptom either of nations or individuals, that they deal much in vaticination. Happy men are full of the present, for its bounty suffices them; and wise men also, for its duties engage them. Our grand business undoubtedly is, not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand.⁴⁷⁶

Robertson's speaker, neither happy nor wise, sees only "what lies clearly at hand": a nation, a state, an empire that, despite its immense wealth, can no longer provide even the most basic level of subsistence for its subjects. These subjects, excluded from the public sphere of constitutional government and bourgeois political discourse, must make use of the only texts they understand: starving bodies of "rags, and banes, and skin." The healthy male and female bodies of an imagined "free" feudal past have become the emaciated skeletons of the capitalist present. What they *will* become, though, is the question:

Then rear your hand, and glow'r and stare,
Before yon hills of beef,
Tell them ye are frae Scotland come,
For Scotia's relief;
Tell them ye are the vera best,
Wal'd frae the fattest flock,
Then raise your arms, and oh! display
A hinging toom meal pock.
And sing, Oh waes me!

Tell them ye're wearied o' the chain
That hauds the state thegither,
For Scotland wishes just to tak'
Gude nicht wi' ane anither.
We cannot thole, we canna bide,
This hard unwieldy yoke,

⁴⁷⁶ Thomas Carlyle, "Signs of the Times" (originally published in the *Edinburgh Review* in June, 1829).

For wark and want but ill agree,
Wi' a hinging toom meal pock.
And sing, Oh waes me!⁴⁷⁷

Robertson's speaker has met the enemy, and it is the myth of a unified Britain. Refusing post-Union Britishness as a basis for Scottish identity, he denounces "the chain/That hauds the state thegither" and properly identifies "Britain" as England, with its "hills of beef" and "glowring Lunnon folk." Scotland's impoverishment is inextricably tied to its colonial subordination, its "hard unwieldy yoke," that appropriates the "wark" of the people without supplying their "want." The "hinging toom meal pock" thus takes on another meaning in this chain of signification: the indigenous Scottish nation. Robertson eschews representation of the nation, *à la* Burns, in the epic terms of martial vigor and political independence. Oppressed and exploited, the people can no longer read those figures or translate those texts. Robertson's speaker advocates a new national discourse that recasts Scotland's historic relationship with England as fundamentally economic and dependent. This historical materialism distinguishes Robertson from some of the other poets we have examined, such as Lapraik, Maxwell, and Pagan, who, although they likewise associate Scotland's social and economic ills with the failure of the moral economy, do not explicitly isolate those problems as a direct consequence of internal colonization. For Robertson's speaker, the only way to get England's attention is a revolt, a decisive workers' march on St. James, not to put a Scottish king on the throne, but to blot the term "Britain" out of a tyrannical English text—by force if necessary. When he calls upon Scots to "raise your arms, and oh! display/A hinging toom meal pock," the

⁴⁷⁷ Leonard, *Radical Renfrew*, 6-7.

implication could not be more clear. Moral suasion has no hold on a “polite and commercial people,” any more than it does on the Paisley manufacturers whom Wilson castigates. But whereas Wilson’s faith in “enlightenment” inhibits him from calling for a Scottish working class revolution, Robertson views enlightenment as just another obfuscatory text that papers over real material conditions and the social injustice endemic to colonial status.

Had Wilson remained in Scotland, he may very well have become as disillusioned as Robertson, who took his own life rather than continue to struggle against the machinations of an imperial state at war. We thus see in Wilson and Robertson a shared consciousness that the British state and its economic base present two radically different faces to its own people: one of enlightened political economy and depersonalized standards of social progress, the other of murderous particularity in the classes of persons designated for use and ultimate disposal. This vision scorched both of them to the point that they could not survive as Britons. Burns’s turn toward collecting and composing songs might evince a similar recognition and self-exilic response. Indeed, Wilson and Burns had a vexed relationship. The two poets may have met in Edinburgh in 1791, though Wilson offended Burns in a review of “Tam o’Shanter,” in which Wilson criticized a passage in the poem as having “too much of the brute in it.” Burns responded, “If ever you write again to so irritable a creature as a poet, I beg you will use a gentler epithet than to say there is, ‘too much of the brute’ in anything he says or does.”⁴⁷⁸ As she urged him to do with respect to Janet Little, Burns’s patron Mrs. Dunlop even tried

⁴⁷⁸ Quoted in Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, 42-43.

(apparently unsuccessfully) to encourage Burns to peruse Wilson's volume of poetry.⁴⁷⁹

Perhaps Wilson took his revenge for Burns's neglect in the long narrative poem "Watty and Meg, Or The Wife Reformed," which resembles "Tam":

Mungo fill'd him up a toothfu',
Drank his health and Meg's in ane;
Watty, puffing out a mouthfu',
Pledged him wi' a dreary grane.

"What's the matter, Watty, wi' you?
"Trowth your chafts are fa'ing in!
"Something's wrang—I'm vex'd to see you—
"Gudesake! But ye're desp'rate thin!"

"Ay," quo Watty, "things are alter'd,
"But it's past redemption now;
"Lord! I wish I had been halter'd
"When I marry'd Maggy Howe!"⁴⁸⁰

When the poem was published anonymously, some attributed it to Burns, and it became the best known and most widely circulated of Wilson's Scottish poems. For pure social comedy, "Watty and Meg" can still be enjoyed, though in contrast to imaginative comic brilliance of "Tam," an undercurrent of despair and domestic abuse courses through the poem:

In the thrang of stories telling,
Shaking hauns, and ither cheer;
Swith! A chap comes on the hallan,
"Mungo, is our Watty here?"

Maggy's well-kent tongue and hurry,

⁴⁷⁹ With respect to Little and the tailor-poet Thomas Walker, Valentina Bold observes that "Burns was less than wholly encouraging to those who tried to jump on his bandwagon." We can add Wilson to that list. V. Bold, "Inmate of the Hamlet: Burns as Peasant Poet," *Love and Liberty, Robert Burns: A Bicentenary Celebration*, ed. Kenneth Simpson (East Lington, 1997), 49-50.

⁴⁸⁰ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 5.

Darted thro' him like a knife;
Up the door flew—like a Fury
In came Watty's scawling wife.

“Nasty, gude-for-naething being!
“O ye snuffy, drucken sow!
“Bringing wife and weans to ruin,
“Drinking here wi' sic a crew!”

“Devil, nor your legs were broken!
“Sic a life nae flesh endures;
“Toiling like a slave to sloken
“You, ye dyvor, and your 'hores!”

“Rise, ye drucken beast o' Bethel!
“Drink's your night and day's desire;
“Rise, this precious hour! or faith, I'll
“Fling your whiskey i' the fire!”

Watty, heard her tongue unhallow'd,
Pay'd his groat wi' little din;
Left the house, while Maggy fallow'd,
Flytin' a' the road behin'.

Fowk frae every door came lamping;
Maggy curst them ane and a';
Clappet wi' her hands, and stamping,
Lost her bauchles i' the sna'.

Hame, at length she turn'd the gavel,
Wi' a face as white's a clout;
Raging like a very devil,
Kicking stools and chairs about.⁴⁸¹

When Maggy proceeds to berate and threaten the cowed Watty with even greater vociferation, Watty announces his intention to go for a “soger.” While the poem can be read in conventional terms as cautionary tale against overhasty marriage, it nevertheless represents (to a significantly greater extent than in much of Burns's domestic poetry, in

⁴⁸¹ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 6-7.

my view) a deeply disturbed social *milieu*, in which husbands and wives heap one another with physical and psychological abuse, leaving a trail of broken homes and ruined prospects in their wake. As historian Anna Clark has written, artisans in Scottish industrial towns and cities became increasingly associated with domestic violence as downward swings in business cycles pushed them to the margins.⁴⁸² Though the first half of the poem aligns its reader with the hen-pecked Watty, the second shifts the perspective to the terrified Maggy, who is faced with the prospect of abandonment and homelessness with her children:

Then poor Maggy's tears and clamour
Gush afresh, and louder grew;
While the weans, wi' mounfu' yaamour,
Round their sabbing mother flew.

"Thro' the yirth I'll waunner wi' you---
"Stay, O Watty! stay at hame;
"Here upo' my knees I'll gi'e you
"Ony vow ye like to name;"

"See your poor young lamies pleadin',
"Will ye gang and break our heart?
"No a house to put our head in!
"No a friend to take our part!"⁴⁸³

Here the poem reaches an emotional intensity that, although embedded in the conventional social comedy, compares with the harrowing passage in the first stage of

The Pilgrim's Progress:

So I saw in my dream that the man began to run. Now he had not run far from his own door when his wife and children, perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on crying, Life! life! eternal life! Luke

⁴⁸² See A. Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (London, 1995).

⁴⁸³ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 9-10.

14:26. So he looked not behind him, Gen. 19:17, but fled towards the middle of the plain.

The poem locates the couple's salvation in domestic (rather than millenarian) peace, conditioned on Maggy's submission to her husband's authority and Watty's promise to provide house and home. Maggy and Watty consummate their pact accordingly:

Down he threw his staff, victorious;
Aff gaed bonnet, claes, and shoon;
Syne below the blankets, glorious,
Held another Hinnymoon!⁴⁸⁴

Watty's payment of the marriage debt is a nice Burnsian touch, completing the comic restoration of the community and re-establishing the proper gender order. But the poem's internal violence suggests that comedy, while reassuring in an abstract sense, does not represent the true nature of filial or, more broadly, social relations. Milton, one of Wilson's favorite poets, has it right when he portrays the first marriage as drama, a titanic power struggle that leaves the parties emotionally traumatized and severely chastened. Bunyan, too, reunites Christian and Christiana, but only after harrowing their souls. While Watty and Meg are not called upon to renounce anything more than the inconveniences of close proximity, their vows of mutual forbearance are all the more important for recognizing that quotidian relationships are at once the most difficult and most necessary to sustain.

I would thus question Noble's and Hogg's characterization of A. F. Tytler's commentary on "Tam o' Shanter" as "most accurate" in its celebration of Burns's

⁴⁸⁴ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 11.

masterpiece, a Shakespearean *tour de force*, true to nature and powerfully imaginative.⁴⁸⁵

Burns composed the poem for Francis Grose's *Antiquities of Scotland* because Grose wanted a tale of superstition and witchcraft to pair with a romantic drawing of Alloway Kirk.⁴⁸⁶ The resulting product certainly fits the purpose, but Tytler's claim, endorsed by Noble and Hogg, that the poem has "delineated nature with an honour and naivete" is questionable. Kate's abuse of Tam in the poem, colorful and entertaining as it is, has little of the affective quality that animates "Watty and Meg":

O *Tam!* had'st thou but been sae wise,
As taen thy ain wife *Kate's* advice!
She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,
A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
That frae November till October,
Ae market-day thou was nae sober;
That ilka melder, wi' the miller,
Thou sat as lang as thou had siller;
That ev'ry naig was ca'd a shoe on,
The smith and thee gat roaring fou on;
That at the Lord's house, even on Sunday,
Thou drank wi' Kirkton Jean till Monday.
She prophesied that late or soon,
Thou would be found deep drown'd in Doon;
Or catch'd wi' warlocks in the mirk,
By *Alloway's* auld, haunted kirk.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵ Tytler wrote: "Had you never written another syllable, [this poem] would have been sufficient to have transmitted your name down to posterity with high reputation. In the introductory part, where you paint the character of your hero, and exhibit him at the alehouse ingle, with his tipping cronies, you have delineated nature with an honour and naivete, that would do honour to Matthew Prior; but when you describe the unfortunately orgies of the witches' sabbath, and the hellish scenery in which they are exhibited, you display a power of imagination, that Shakespeare himself could not have exceeded." Quoted in Hogg and Noble, *The Canongate Burns*, 270.

⁴⁸⁶ Hogg and Noble, *The Canongate Burns*, 269.

⁴⁸⁷ Hogg and Noble, *The Canongate Burns*, 263.

This is a wonderful and unmatched burlesque, but Wilson's setting of a similar marital condition—a drunken husband and a neglected wife—refrains from emphasizing either Watty's rusticity or the gothic aesthetic that, for the entertainment of polite British audiences, sometimes identifies "Scotland" in the works of Burns, Scott, and Hogg. Wilson's Scotland of "Watty and Meg," rather, is pictured as a home under threat of dissolution, beset by alcoholism, rage, and depression. It is a place where desperate families subsist on the razor's edge of utter destitution, pitiless employers grind and cheat their workers, "improving" landowners disperse whole communities to make way for sheep, and reactionary authorities harass anyone with guts enough to protest. This Scotland is fast becoming deracinated, as voiced by the bereft matron in Wilson's lovely allegorical lament, "The Disconsolate Wren":

"Nae mair I'll thro' the valley flee,
"And gather worms wi' blissfu' glee,
 "To feed my chirping young;
"Nae mair wi' Tam himsel' I'll rove,
"Nor shall e'er joy throughout the grove,
 "Flow frae my wretched tongue;
"But lanely, lanely, aye I'll hap,
 "Mang auld stane-dykes an' braes;
"Till some ane roar down on my tap,
"An end my joyless days."
 So, lowly and slowly,
 Araise the hapless Wren;
 While crying and sighing,
 Remurmur'd through the Glen.⁴⁸⁸

The neologic term "Remurmur'd" preserves only a spectral presence in the empty landscape; the poem's beautiful final couplet leaves a ghostly epitaph for a ruined country. The mother wren's lament for her lost children makes an apt sequel to "Watty

⁴⁸⁸ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 18.

and Meg.” For Scotland, national comedy may be suitably antiquarian and mythogenic in a post-Union, pan-British world, but the appropriate genre for lived Scottish historical experience can only be tragedy. Robert Tannahill, Wilson’s fellow Paisley poet, registers a similar climate of domestic violence in a short dialogic poem “The Moralist”:

‘Barb’rous!’ cried *John* in humanizing mood,
To *Will* who’d shot a blackbird in the wood;
‘The savage Indian pleads necessity,
But thou, barbarian wretch! hast no such plea.’
Hark!—click the ale-house door—his *wife* comes in—
‘Dear, help’s man *John*!—preserve me, what d’ye mean!
‘Sax helpless *bairns*—the deil confound your drouth!
‘Without ae bit tae stop a single mouth.’
‘—Get hame,’ cried *John*, ‘Else, jade! I’ll kick you a—!’
Sure such humanity is all a farce.⁴⁸⁹

John’s “humanizing mood” might come from reading Adam Ferguson’s *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), with its discussion of “rude nations” and their progression from Will’s “barb’rous” cruelty to his own polite cultivation. The sudden entry of John’s wife and the subsequent abuse she suffers reverse the narrative polarity of “Watty and Meg,” foregrounding the poem’s ironic “moral”: that enlightened society is both founded upon and reinforced by the savagery with which men treat women. “Humanity,” the *sine qua non* of Scottish Enlightenment (or, more generally, European) culture, is just as bankrupt a concept as “progress” is in “The Toom Meal Pock.” It would be no revelation to either Wilson or Tannahill that Marxist analysis of the modern relations between capital and labor begins with the patriarchal family’s enslavement and exploitation of women and children. Indeed, just as in Robertson’s poem, the English masters have systematically deprived their Scottish slaves of the means to sustain life (thus defeating

⁴⁸⁹ Robert Tannahill, *The songs and poems* (Edinburgh, 1911), 131.

their own colonial project). Moreover, in Tannahill's and Wilson's poetry, domesticity itself culminates in the death of women by the physical or emotional trauma inflicted by their husbands. The domestic harmony seemingly achieved in "Watty and Meg" is purely aesthetic, just as the polite culture of enlightened Scotland exists only theoretically in the tomes of the *literati*.

Even when Wilson dabbles in a burlesque in the manner of "Tam o' Shanter," as he does in the following passage from "Elegy On An Unfortunate Tailor," the tragic effect of Scotland's "fall" is only barely concealed:

Aft ha'e I heard him tell o' frights,
Sad waefu' souns, and dreary sights,
He's aften got frae warlock wights,
 An' Spunkie's bleeze;
Gau' hame thro' muirs and eerie heights
 O' black fir-trees.

Ae night auld Bessie Baird him keepet,
Thrang cloutin' claes till twall was chappet;
But soon's he got his kyte weel stappet
 Wi' something stout;
An' goose in's nieve, right snugly happet,
 He daunert out.

Maist hame, he met a lang black chiel,
Wi' huggers, stilts, an' pocks o' meal;
Wha drew a durk o' glancin's steel
 To rob an' maul him;
Rab rais't his brod wi' desp'rate wheel
 An' left him sprawlin'.

Tho' aft by fiends and witches chas't,
An' mony a dead man's glowrin' ghaist;
Yet on his knees he ae time fac't
 The Deil himsel':
An' sent him aff in dreadfu' haste,

Roarin' to hell.⁴⁹⁰

Rab the Tailor meets a gruesome death when he stumbles into the river after a drunken orgy and a mill wheel crushes “his guts an’ gear,/Like ony burrel.” The poem makes it evident that, unlike the homosocial play and voyeuristic pleasure-seeking of Tam’s “alehouse ingle,” Rab’s *milieu* is characterized by addictive behavior, alcohol abuse, and hallucinatory episodes. While we are invited to be skeptical of the historicity of Tam’s midnight ride experiences, here Rab’s elegist retails stories of the tailor’s real or imagined encounters with natural and supernatural beings, not only as a moral fable, but as part and parcel of the same sense of social dissolution registered in poems as diverse as “Watty and Meg” and “The Hollander.”

“Rab and Cloutie”: Tait, Burns, and Scotland’s Deals with the Devil

Is it possible that the story of the ill-starred “Rab” in some sense parallels the fate of Rabbie Burns, whom some considered to have sold his soul to the “Deil” in exchange for popular acclaim? As we have seen, Burns certainly cut a wide swath through potential rivals, and giving an imaginary Rab a come-uppance occupies many a rural poet, including Lapraik, Little, and Maxwell. Yet another of these, the tailor Alexander Tait, who lived in Tarbolton and whom Burns apparently slighted, likewise composed several satires on Burns published in a rare volume of poetry and songs printed in Paisley in 1790.⁴⁹¹ The first, “B-rns in His Infancy,” suggests Rab’s infernal parentage:

Now I maun trace his pedigree,
Because he made a sang on me,
And let the world look and see,

⁴⁹⁰ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 53.

⁴⁹¹ There is a copy at the Paisley Central Library.

Just wi' my tongue,
How Rab and Clootie did agree
When he was young.

Now, Rab he's thriving like a plant,
Auld Symie ca's him his young saint,
And learn'd him vastly weel to chant
And mak' fine rhyme;
Tells him, wi' jilts, he'll let him rant
In a wee time.

Now he's come to the age o' ten,
And has begun to chase a hen,
Out, through the kitchen but – and – ben,—
He toddles at her;
The thing grows weary't, as ye'll ken,—
Gi'es her a blatter.

Now he is fifteen years and mair,
There's not his match in anywhere;
Na, not in Clydesdale nor Ayrshire
He beats our Lairds;
His grandfather's gi'en him plenty lear
To play his cards.⁴⁹²

Tait's Faustian Burns presents a hilarious contrast to the *literati's* "heaven-taught pleughman" imaginary. The speaker describes Burns as a womanizer, whoremonger, and profligate, running after the "hens," consorting with harlots, and boozing with the local gentry. His talent for poetry derives not from native ability but from his unnatural dealings, alleging that his "fine rhyme" is part and parcel of his fraudulent personality. Tait's pique at Burns's actual or perceived insult is real enough, but the poem is not merely retaliatory.⁴⁹³ It questions the authenticity of Burns's voice, and thus interrogates

⁴⁹² Alexander Tait, *Poems and Songs* (Paisley, 1790), 149-50.

⁴⁹³ Burns's recent biographer, Robert Crawford, does not identify any particular incident that created bad blood between the poets, but attributes their mutual antipathy to religious differences. According to Crawford, Tait attended the Tarbolton Burgher Church, which

the fundamental grounds of aesthetic composition: is an art object independent of the artist or an extension of the artist? If the artist plays false, does that fraud taint the aesthetic product?

An old question, to be sure, but Tait's deployment of the Faust figure in this context makes for a very different critique than Maxwell's rejection of the impious Burns or Little's of the socially pretentious one. For him Burns's celebrity not only effectively silences other meritorious plebeian poets (as it likewise does for Little and may for Wilson as well), but it establishes an illusory standard of taste for poetry that merely reinforces the *literati's* stranglehold on the production of art. We have seen how Lapraik, Sillar, and Little reject those same critical standards, but Tait's critique also implies that Burns's complicity in the monopolization, or, perhaps more accurately, the syndication, of vernacular poetry possesses malicious intent. For Tait, it is not so much, as it seems to be for Maxwell, that Burns's libertinism translates into godless, immoral poetry, but that Burns has self-consciously adopted a pose *in opposition to* the honest peasant life that he ostensibly celebrates in his art. This sense of betrayal is palpable in another anti-Burns poem, "Burns in Lochly," which begins:

To Lochly you came like a clerk,
And on your back was scarce a sark,
The dogs did at your buttocks bark,
 But now ye're bra',
Ye poucht the rent, ye was sae stark,
 Made payments, sma'.

Man! I'm no speakin' out o' spite,
Else Patie wad upo' me flyte;

had seceded from the more moderate Kirk of Scotland and stoutly rejected its "New Light" theology. Crawford, *The Bard*, 84.

M'Lure ye scarcely left a mite
 To fill his horn,
You and the lawyers gi'ed him a skyte,
 Sold a' his corn.

He sent the drum Tarbolton through,
That no man was to buty frae you,
At the Kirk door he cry'd it too,
 I heard the yell,
This vera thing I write 'tis true,
 Ye'll ken yersel.⁴⁹⁴

This tale accuses Burns of fleecing and then libeling a local farmer, who has kindly taken in the penniless “clerk.” Placing Burns in league with “the lawyers” seems a far more potent insult than any carping about his personal peccadilloes and goes to the heart of Tait’s “problem” with the poet:

McL-re he put you in a farm,
And cost you coals your arse to warm,
And meal and maut—Ye did get barm,
 And then it wrought,
For his destruction and his harm,
 It is my thought.

He likewise did the mailing stock,
And built you barns, the doors did lock,
His ain gun at him ye did cock,
 And never spar'd,
Wi't owre his head came a clean knock,
 Maist kill'd the Laird.

Auld Nick he did himsel disguise,
This is his servant's loudest cries,
McL-re's downfull is B-rns's rise,
 Give ear to me,
Ye Lairds and Gentry, be surpriz'd,
 Sic tricks to see.

McL-re's estate has ta'en the fever,

⁴⁹⁴ A. Tait, *Poems and Songs* (Paisley, 1790), 151.

And heal again it will be never,
The vagabonds they ca' you clever,
 You're sic a sprite,
To rive frae him baith ga' and liver,
 And baith the feet.⁴⁹⁵

The absence of antecedents for the pronouns “he”, “his,” and “you” (a common feature of Tait’s poetry) makes it difficult to follow the narrative, but it is clear enough that Burns is a villain of the blackest description. His fraud on the innocent farmer McLure belies the poet’s hale-fellow-well-met façade, which has similarly deceived the “Lairds and Gentry” around Tarbolton. Whatever facts this slander may allude to, there is no doubt that Tait perceives Burns as a phony, cheat, and liar, which brings into question not only the basis of his celebrity, but also the very nature of his poetry. We have seen other of contemporaries of Burns concentrate their critiques of the poet on various aspects of the poet’s personality and politics, but Tait appears to link Burns’s complicity in criminal activity to his method of representing and publicizing himself. When Tait alleges that Burns “sent the drum Tarbolton through,/That no man was to buy frae you,” and “At the Kirk door he cry’d it too,” he accuses the poet both of libel and of using poetry to carry out and to cover up his criminal schemes. In the second part of the poem, in which he details Burns’s mistreatment of the farmer (including a vicious assault), Tait joins Maxwell in concluding that Scotland’s most celebrated vernacular poet speaks with the forked tongue of Auld Nick, and that his poetic “disguise” constitutes a clear and present danger to the community. Indeed, Tait oddly likens Burns’s literary celebrity to a form of vivisection and, perhaps, cannibalism: “The vagabonds they ca’ you clever,/You’re sic a

⁴⁹⁵ Tait, *Poems and Songs*, 152.

sprite,/To rive frae him baith ga' and liver,/And baith the feet." These verses seem to indicate that rather than producing poetry to promote socially productive values such as piety and honest labor, Burns seeks only to feed his own immoral and criminal desires. His poetry, in other words, becomes an instrument for dissecting and consuming the social body.

Tait composed a third Burns satire that similarly links the poet's sexual adventures with his penchant for the bawdy and licentious in his poetry. Entitled "Burns's Hen, Clock'in in Mauchline," the poem begins:

YE whunstone hearted Mauchline wretches!
Wha wallop aye in deep debauches,
Wi' me ye hae got merry-catches,
 'Tis truth I'm saying,
I have a chicken in my hatches,
 To me she's layin'.

I catch'd her in a green kail yard,
I neither neb nor feathers spar'd,
But a' my strength on her I war'd,
 To mak her clock,
Now she's sa'en till't, he this out rair'd,
 Come help, gude folk!

The wives they up their coats did kilt,
And through the streets so clean did stilt,
Some at the door fell wi' a pelt,
 Maist broke their leg,
To see the Hen, poor wanton jilt!
 Lay her fourth egg.

The wives they sat them down to rest,
And view'd poor Chuckie in her nest,
To see how Robin had her drest,
 For sic a breeze,
She's now a ship amang the rest,

On foamin' seas.⁴⁹⁶

As in “Burns in Lochly,” the speaker denounces Burns from his position as the guardian of the community’s moral condition, very much in keeping with the kind of fundamental democratic Presbyterianism that characterizes Tait’s religious poetry. Just as kirk elders, with the willing assistance of women in the parish, physically examined (often in brutal fashion) and interrogated unwed pregnant women to determine the paternity of their bastard children, here the speaker seizes the unfortunate “hen” and summons the “wives” to witness the birth and shame the bleeding mother. When “Robin” actually appears in the poem, it is to “pray to Cloutie for a breeze,/That to his mind wou’d give great ease./And settle strife,/That she might skip the roarin’ seas,/And save her life.” Here the “egg” hatched by the hen is transformed into Burns’s illegitimate *poetic* offspring, which the poet launches unto the “roarin’ seas” of public scrutiny as evidence of his debauched moral condition. The speaker continues:

But Robin’s prayers had na strength,
McKenzie then he came at length,
And pull’d the ship out by main strength,
 With skill o’ notion,
And then she trimly swims at length
 Upon the ocean.

Now she is sailing in the Downs,
Calls at the ports of finest towns,
To buy bed hangings, and galleons,
 Away she goes;
So trimly as she sails the rounds,
 ‘Mang the Chinose.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁶ Tait, *Poems and Songs*, 153-54.

⁴⁹⁷ Tait, *Poems and Songs*, 154-55.

Here the speaker nastily accuses Henry Mackenzie and the Edinburgh *literati* of what amounts to procurement: they adorn his illicit production with the frippery and finery of literary praise and pass this prostitution off as the genuine “art-icle.” Acidly, the speaker concludes:

McKenzie gets a double dram,
Wi’ a good slice o’ bacon ham;
The wives sit down, drink aff ram tam,
 The soldier’s joy!
Burns is the clever vale de cham,
 Wi’ his hautboy.

The Holy Fair they sit and read,
And wi’ twa pipes blaw anet-seed,
And cracks o’ mony a maiden head,
 O’ Tam and Sue;
Then off they come, as clean’s a bead,
 Adieu, adieu!⁴⁹⁸

One wonders how much professional jealousy imbues these verses, but the image of Mackenzie as Burns’s “hautboy” is almost as risible as the Faustian figure of “Burns in His Infancy.” And as in “Burns in Lochly,” the poet possesses the infernal power to attract better-bred followers and make them accomplices to his crimes against morality and art—up to and including the arbiters of taste (who, uncoincidentally, are also part of the despised *moderati* of the “New Licht” Scottish Kirk). Once more Tait argues that Burns’s personal immorality translates directly into morally culpable literature. Just as salacious and titillating novels (perhaps those of Mackenzie himself?) corrupt polite women, Burns’s poetry has deflowered the “wives” who should form the moral backbone of the community but now occupy themselves with drinking, carousing, and reading

⁴⁹⁸ Tait, *Poems and Songs*, 155-56.

“Tam O’Shanter.” The pious kirk elder is left to throw up his hands and wonder what the world is coming to.

Tait’s equation of poetry with puritan morality, and his fear of the larger social effects of polite culture’s acceptance of Burns’s poetic and personal libertinism, suggests a sinister compact between state authority and aesthetic production, the use of art to advance state interests, and the repression of what he sees as “true” Scottish culture. In this reading, Burns’s Scottish “patriotism” or egalitarian republicanism comes off, not so much as feigned, but as complicit with a cultural arbiter that subverts traditional communalism. Tait locates these values in the Scottish Reformation, with its strict Calvinist religious doctrine and practices that Burns and the *moderati* reject. One locus of Tait’s anxiety involves the government’s proposal to grant Catholics expanded toleration in the mid-1780s. Indeed, about one third of Tait’s volume is dedicated to verses that virulently denounce the Pope, the Catholic prelacy, and the French, as well as British atheists and—as we will see below—New Light Presbyterians. The poem “Toleration” captures something of this hash of sectarian bigotry:

OUR King a toleration grants,
To all his faithful loving saints,
But none that swear and then recants,
 They him disgrace,
He’ll banish them out from their haunts,
 Out from this place.

They’ve gathered a’ the blackguard crew;
His honest subjects to subdue,
But yet I hope he’ll mak them rue,
 An’ down to couch,
That a’ their venom they maun spue
 In the Pope’s pouch.

Mammon he's begun to levy,
Frae priests and gentry, for the navy,
Brave Douglas' horse has ta'en the spavy,
 That makes him curse,
A' the Black Cocks in A-rsh-re cavey,
 For his lost purse.

He in the bank did lay his gold,
Thinking to reap an hundred fold;
The nasty cheats they were sae bold,
 Deceit to breed;
The Pope ye ken they maun uphold,
 What he does need.

Now they brought hame the Pope's address,
Below A---r brig they'll sing the mass,
The're four De'ils there join'd in a clss,
 Ye may them see,
Their speech to you I will express,
 'Tis cheatrie.

Upon their nose wad ye put specs,
Deceit they have sell'd out in pecks,
To make our Scotsmen a' great blacks,
 Here 'tis exprest;
The de'ils they sit, and hatch and clecks,
 Each in his nest.⁴⁹⁹

These are verses worthy of the Gordon Riots in London and anti-popery disturbances in Edinburgh and elsewhere, but the murky stew of loyalism, conspiracy, and betrayal makes it difficult to discern precisely who the enemy is. Toleration is initially seen as a generous gift of the King to “his faithful loving saints,” but it is wasted on the perfidious Romans, who swear loyalty but plot sedition. The “blackguard crew” appears to refer to a supposed cabal in Ayr (“four De'ils there join'd in a class), whose financial misdealings have deceived “our Scotsmen” and filled the Pope's coffers with Scottish gold. The poet

⁴⁹⁹ Tait, *Poems and Songs*, 90-91.

calls on the King, whose naïve faith in his Catholic subjects' allegiance created the problem in the first place, to "mak them rue" by taxing the "priests and gentry, for the navy." This verse evokes the ship money scandal (ironically implicating the pro-Catholic and Scottish Charles I), only here the Protestant defender George III (who nevertheless appears as something of a dupe) will turn the tables by mulcting the disloyal Catholic rump. If all of this were not confusing enough, the poem then shifts from the cryptic and contradictory to the allegorical:

Their nest ye'll see, it fronts the tide,
Where you will see the vessels ride,
In wee egg-shells they'll swim wi' pride,
 In Pacolet's view,
They'll swim clean to the other side,
 The frith out thro'.

The laird and priest went thro' the rooms,
The laird he gae some wicked glooms,
And just between twa empty looms,
 The hen was clockin';
They fasten'd on her wi' their thums,
 And fell a cocking.

The laird at her he fir'd a shot,
The hen was strong enough; she got
The priest, he catch'd her by the throat,
 Then on the grass,
And on her tail a motto wrote,
 That you may guess.

'Twas in a glen, clean out o' sight,
The priest he kend then a' was right,
The laird was standing on the height,
 Mess John did skelp,
An' brought her back wi' strength and might,
 He sought nae help.

'Cause ye hae brought to me this bird,
A kirk ye's get upon my word,
I'll put you in't by dint o' sword,
 Of perfect spite;
Gae serve the De'il or fear the Lord,
 What way he like.

There's few hearers upon your side,
As I'm their Patron and their guide,
Wi' vengeance I will lay their pride,
 To raise my fame;
Then farewell, Scotland, and bra' Clyde,
 O fie for shame!⁵⁰⁰

An historian of Paisley, John Parkhill (d. 1863), wrote that Tait's volume of poems "may be termed the transcendental in nonsensical poetry," and this poem appears to support that analysis.⁵⁰¹ Nevertheless, there may be some method to Tait's Calvinist madness. In the allegory, the "laird and priest" discover a "nest" of French Catholic conspirators, significantly located in what appears to be a weaver's cottage, "between twa empty looms" (perhaps replete with copies of *The Rights of Man*). Like the hen that gives birth to Burns's illicit poetry, this one hatches popish and possibly radical plots, but the pious Presbyterian community around Ayr is about to be betrayed, not only by the friends of Catholicism and of the people, but by its traditional pillars of order and propriety as well. When the priest subdues the hen, the laird promises him a kirk: "I'll put you in't by dint o' sword,/Of perfect spite;/Gae serve the De'il or fear the Lord,/What way you like." The real bogeyman, as it turns out, is aristocratic patronage over the kirk. Religious toleration, while it may give hope to imagined legions of Catholics preparing to rise up and restore

⁵⁰⁰ Tait, *Poems and Songs*, 91-95.

⁵⁰¹ Quoted in R. Brown, *Paisley Poets, with Brief Memoirs of Them and Selections from Their Poetry* (Glasgow, 1889-90), 200.

the prelacy in Britain, actually encourages and preserves the grip of the lairds on the right of presentation. This continuing violation of the Knoxian principles of the Scottish Reformation and their fulfillment in the Solemn League and Covenant appears to ally the Hanoverians with the Stuarts in favor of an Episcopal (and consequently popish) form of church government. Tait's particular brand of radicalism thus differs sharply from that of Burns or Wilson, calling for the restoration of the covenant and parish-level self-determination.

We can now see more clearly how Tait's Burns satires make common cause with his intense devotion to Calvinist doctrine and practice. Burns and his fame mark one of the paths of Scottish national destruction; the legal and cultural reinforcement of aristocratic privilege and Arminianism mark another. In "The Kirk's Alarm," Tait attempts to rally the troops:

ORTHODOX, Orthodox, who believe in John Knox,

Let me sound an alarm to your conscience,
There's a heretic blast been blown i' th' west,
That what is not sense, must be nonsense;
Orthodox,
That what is not sense must be nonsense.

* * *

Calvin's sons, Calvin's sons, seize your spiritual guns,
Ammunition ye never can need;
Your hearts are the stuff, will be powder enough,
And your skull is a store-house of lead, &c.⁵⁰²

Once again, this "heretic blast" is not the expected Catholic avatar, but British pusillanimity, as articulated here in "The Key of Tophet":

I see you do protect my saints,
Wi' black deceit supply their wants,

⁵⁰² Tait, *Poems and Songs*, 170-71.

And keep them frae the godlike haunts,
 To my great joy;
Those cursed Whigs, that roar and rant,
 Wad us destroy.

My priest by no mean maun be blate,
To preach the way that I wad ha'e't,
The New-light jigs to breed debate;
 For ev'ry plea;
I think we'll get it our ain gate,
 Within a wee.⁵⁰³

The “New-light jigs” that pass for contemporary theology in enlightened Scotland, backed by the political power of the “cursed Whigs,” constitute an existential threat to the real Scotland of orthodox saints. In what might be viewed as a fit of hysteria, Tait further associates moderate theology with aristocratic, Quaker, French, and papal attempts to destroy Scotland, as seen in these excerpts from two poems, the first from “French Patrons,” and the second from “A Song”:

The Patron gi'es a clever swing,
Our owre the wall ye'll see him fling,
His singet Chaplain, clatty thing!
 Into the pulpit;
'Tis Pope and Antichrist he'll sing,
 The clatty Owpet!⁵⁰⁴

* * *

Two sorts of rebels you'll see sing,
 The Pope and merry Quaker:
The one against his earthly king,
 Th' other against his Maker.

Again, they're setting up their rump,
 King George maun calm this route,
And clean confound their rotten stump,

⁵⁰³ Tait, *Poems and Songs*, 51.

⁵⁰⁴ Tait, *Poems and Songs*, 39.

From Scotland root them out.

Look, who his oath has broken through,
Church standards with his might,
Then ye'll know whose decision's true,
Or looks like the New-light.⁵⁰⁵

It may be asked how the Anglican King George can be expected to bear the standard for Knoxian “Church standards,” but the speaker’s attack on the lairds, moderates, Catholics, and nonconformists always comes back to the covenant—the single oath that makes a Christian “true.” For Tait, one cannot refuse the oath and call himself “Scottish.” All other forms of Scottish (or British, for that matter) nationalism or patriotism, and certainly any form of cosmopolitanism, are equally illegitimate.

If this is the case, what are we to make of Tait’s apparent loyalism? As we have seen, Tait invokes the king as a bulwark against unorthodoxy, but this may only indicate a weak repetition of the ancient belief that the monarch embodies and thus protects his “people.” Indeed, in the poem “Wallace and the English,” Tait decries Scotland’s lack of a true defender:

Auld Scotland, faith ye'll get a stroke,
For your confounded nasty flock,
The French and Spaniards like a brock,
 They lie in watch.
They'll shoot you like a hare or cock,
 On the dispatch.

Since Wallace he is dead and gone,
To you, Pitt, now I'll make my moan,
And all that's honest round the throne,
 And Prince of Wales,
See that ye grip each Spanish Don,
 And pare his nails.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁵ Tait, *Poems and Songs*, 183-85.

Entrusting Scotland's national fate to a boy prime minister, a womanizing prince, and a cabal of courtiers (this poem appears to have been composed during the "madness" of King George) does not offer much hope, and Tait's essential "Scottishness," like Burns's and Oliphant's at times, seems to be linked with the bygone era of independence. In a similar poem, "The Noble Bruce," the poet seeks to invoke the other iconic Scottish patriot:

No honest man will cast a blot,
On Bruce who was a hardy Scot,
His name let never be forgot,
 Bards loud this raise,
Stir up virtue, let vice rot,
 That gains you praise.

While these poems ostensibly celebrate Wallace's and Bruce's martial glory in their campaigns against the English, they neither demonize South Britons nor identify England as Scotland's "auld enemy." Instead, Tait figures Wallace and Bruce as *moral* crusaders, whose worth is found in their public "virtue." Wallace "clean'd a' Scotland o' the trash,/Each nasty rake or mansworn hash," while Bruce ennobled Scotland through his idealized upstanding character; the English heads, which "Yon sturdy tykes./Like masons down they other hew'd,/to build up dykes," fell because of English "vice," not because of England's entrenchment on some idea of Scottish "freedom." Indeed, Tait does not seem at all interested in reviving Scotland as a national entity, but only as a representation of his brand of orthodox Presbyterian piety. To this extent, feudal (and Catholic) noblemen like Wallace and Bruce can be listed on the Knoxian roll of Scottish heroes and martyrs.

⁵⁰⁶ Tait, *Poems and Songs*, 225.

They stand for a uniquely Scottish faith that Knox later perfected and the Covenanters enforced.

As the poet complains in “The Orthodox’s Lamentation,” it is the loss of true Protestantism that has destroyed the national idea of Scotland far more than English hegemony:

ALAS! the Protestantism,
For every wild polluting schism,
 About her is sae yank,
Deceit is spreading through our land,
And all who have a dirty hand,
 Come on her with a clank,
If magistrates were good Scots blue,
 In council they’re a dizzen,
Who goes the holy standards through,
 They’d clap them into prison;
 Or *boot* them, or shoot them,
 As Romans did lang syne;
 Not crown them, but drown them,
 In Irvine, Ayr, or Tyne.⁵⁰⁷

This surge of ugly militantism makes the image of Wallace and Bruce hewing off thousands of English heads irresistibly attractive to the orthodox Calvinist Tait. Like the ancient Romans, as well as Knox and the Covenanters, the Scottish heroes enforced “the holy standards” by the sword. But there are no crusaders any more, and swords are only used in the defense of Whiggery at home and colonies abroad. Here the schismatics who prostitute themselves to the aristocracy and the sinecured placemen who zealously pursue their commercial interests at the expense of Protestant reform rule all. The community of saints, to which Tait believes he belongs, is all that remains of the heroic Scottish nation.

⁵⁰⁷ Tait, *Poems and Songs*, 55.

Though appalled by Tait's religious bigotry, Wilson might agree with him on one thing: Burns's poetry, however brilliant and imaginative, does not represent the experience of the urban, industrial poor. In his own gesture to Burns, "Ode for the Birthday of Our Immortal Scottish Poet," Wilson reflects a similar ambivalence about the plowman/exciseman/celebrity/poet complex that Burns represents:

Ye sons of bright Phoebus, ye bards of the plough,
Shout aloud! and let gladness sublime every brow;
See the young rosy morning rejoicing returns,
That blest our fair isle with the rare Robin Burns!

Let the pure aquavitæ now inspire ev'ry soul,
Since whisky can waft us at once to the pole;
Let us laugh down the priest and the devil by turns,
And roar out the praise of the rare Robert Burns!⁵⁰⁸

In his Scottish poems Wilson rarely breaks into imitative high British Augustan diction, but he does so here. But why? Perhaps panegyric is best done in classical form, and in this ode Wilson seeks to emulate Burns's success with both English and Scots vernacular poetry. The invocation to poets, and ploughman poets at that, certainly assumes a shared identity, but the second quatrain seems to complicate that claim. Raising the metaphorical glass to the poet's nativity, the poets become drunk and their toasts seditious. The following stanzas praise the author of the anti-clerical satires "The Ordination" and "Holy Fair," as well as his ballad in defense of the virtues of whisky and friendship, "John Barleycorn." They then dubiously invoke:

Ye nymphs of Old Colia [sic], who exult in his art,
And have felt the warm raptures glide home to your heart,
Leave your raw, lifeless clodpoles, your cows and your churns,
And encore the great sportsman, "O rare Robin Burns!"⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 78.

The poem's reader is now wondering what kind of panegyric—and panegyrist—this might be. We know that Coila, Burns's Scottish muse, has "such a *leg!* my bonnie JEAN/could only peer it;/Sae straight, sae taper, tight an' clean/Nane else came near it," but she seems far from the goddess of "The Vision" that crowns Burns with holly. Critics and readers have long been divided on the meaning of "The Vision" for both Burns's art and his aspirations for the Scottish nation,⁵¹⁰ but Wilson's ode, too, appears to register the close and problematic connection between Burns's sexual pursuits and his "genius." Indeed, the image of legions of dairy maids and farm girls who have enjoyed Burns's favors throwing down their implements of husbandry and joining the drinking party can be enjoyed purely for its comic and ironic magnificence. The following quatrain denounces the "dull churchmen" and the Auld Licht religious cant that appalled Burns (and Wilson), while acknowledging his European fame. So far, the panegyric seems to hold up, but its enthusiasm for the radical, libertine Burns frays at the edges.

But then the party gets out of hand:

Rejoice ye Excisemen! resound the huzza!
Nor tremble, by piecemeal in brimstone to gnaw;
Though horrors surround, he's a coward that mourns,
All hell will befriend you for rare Robin Burns.

Hark, hark! what an uproar! every ghost is afoot,
How they brandish their fire-brands 'mid darkness and soot!
See legion on legion tumultuous adjourns,
To swell the loud strain "O rare Robin Burns!"

Ye "heav'n-taught" rhymers, ye bards of the plough,
Shout aloud! and let gladness sublime every brow;

⁵⁰⁹ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 78.

⁵¹⁰ See Hogg and Noble, *The Canongate Burns*, 70-71.

While the young rosy morning rejoicing returns,
That blest our fair isle with the rare Robin Burns.⁵¹¹

Burns and his admirers, it seems, cannot have it both ways. Burns may in fact be a ploughman, but he is likewise a representative of the state, which leagues him with the tax collectors and oppressors of the poor. One may not simply pick and choose one's associations, and the poem views Burns's careful self-representation as a "man of the people" as a cowardly act of deception. Better, the poem suggests, to embrace an authentic identity, invite "ye Excisemen" to "resound the huzza," to brave the "horrors" of hell, than to sell out your people for a small salary and a little social esteem. As hell belches forth its legions—"how they brandish their fire-brands 'mid darkness and soot"—each singing Burns's praises, we recall other brimstone figures in Wilson's poetry, those who live, dig, and die deep in the earth for the glory and profit of their capitalist masters, who in turn fear them as a threatening, insurrectionary mob. But rather than speaking for them, Robin Burns panders to the masters themselves and servants of official culture, the moderate "New Licht" assimilationists in Edinburgh and their fellow travelers in London. No Creech or Constable will publish the poetry of the real "'heav'n-taught' rhymers," the "bards of the plough," or working class poets, who are far more likely to be harassed and persecuted for speaking instead of feted and celebrated.

As we have seen in other plebeian poets' treatment of Burns, Wilson recognizes that Burns's "rare" talent casts a cloak of invisibility over other aspirants. But he is also aware of the danger that a "native" Scottish aesthetic modeled on Burns's vernacular poetry poses to other expressions of Scottish nativity, which for Wilson is primarily

⁵¹¹ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 78-79.

located in the provincial laboring poor. He fears that Burns has broken the mold; there can be no successor, as Wilson's monologic poem "An Expostulatory Address to the Ragged Spectre, Poverty," adumbrates:

If the Muse
Deign at times to bliss my brows,
I lift the pen—prepare for study,
There thou stares, grim, ghastly, duddy;
Shakes thy rags, begins thy grieving,
Terrifies the Muse to heaven;
Then displays my pockets empty,
Belly worse, and all to tempt me.
Humour, rhyming, headlong scampers;
Rotten stockings, soleless trampers,
Nameless torments, crowds of evils
Grin around like real devils.

So disfigur'd with thy scoffing,
Need I wonder why so often
Friends go past, nae answer gi'e me,
Look their watch, and never see me.⁵¹²

Wordsworth's legacy gave him the freedom to compose, and even Burns found an income, meager though it was. With his own head full of poetry—"[H]umour, rhyming, headlong scampers"—Wilson's material poverty "[T]errifies the Muse to heaven" and creates a temporal hell on earth. He loses materiality, vanishing into the background, seeing but unseen, abandoned by his kind. This is Wilson at his most bitter and alienated, not so much at the economic misfortune that has left him starving, shoeless, and unemployed, but at the aesthetic oblivion to which he and his poetry have been consigned. Burns, who refuses his patronage, bears as much responsibility for this as the *literati* who spurned Wilson in Edinburgh.

⁵¹² Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 77.

Masters and Men: English Capital, Scottish Labor

In his “First Epistle to Mr. William Mitchell,” a leader of a local radical faction in Paisley, Wilson returns to the idiom in which he excels his quondam idol. Here his description of the iconic figures of Scottish industrialization, colliers and lead miners, rivals Robertson’s representation of the conditions of the rural laboring poor:

Here mountains raise their heath’ry backs,
Rang’d huge aboon the lift;
In whase dark bowels, for lead tracks
Swarm’d miners howk an’ sift;
High owre my head the sheep in packs
I see them mice-like skift’;
The herd maist like ane’s finger, wauks
Aboon yon fearfu’ clift
Scarce seen this day.⁵¹³

Wilson’s use of common meter is particularly effective in evoking the sublimity of the scene. The *a* rhyme—backs, tracks, packs, wauks—pulses with the masculine energy of the workers, the immense physical effort involved in the enterprise, and almost unnatural, if not diabolical, activity of mining coal and lead. On the other hand, the *b* rhyme—lift, sift, skift’, and clift—indicates the precariousness nature of the mining environment, the threat of sudden death or crippling injury. We have seen much mountain poetry in this study, but not like this. Usually associated with Scottish nativity and independence, and often with nostalgia for the innocent (or Jacobite) past, here the “mountains raise their heath’ry backs,” not as a barrier to English encroachment or hiding place for freedom fighters, but as resources to be exploited and placed into the service of the imperial state. The poem’s speaker alludes to this change, noticing the sheep on the mountainside

⁵¹³ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 93.

walking perilously close to the edge of the cut. This is a striking dual image as well, as the sheep walk could refer to the clearance of land as well as to the shrinking rural character of the Scottish Lowlands in the face of industrialization and urbanization. The description of the miners as a “swarm” ironically recalls the medieval figure of the perfectly ordered society of bees, comparing the miners to drones whose lives are perpetually on forfeit to the absolute authority of the queen/state. Until the turn of the nineteenth century, as we have seen, Scottish miners served their masters as serfs legally bound to the mine, and their dehumanization in the poem reflects their objective economic and social condition.

The next stanza further emphasizes the hellish quality of the miners’ work:

Here mills rin thrang, wi’ whilk in speed
They melt to bars the ore in;
Nine score o’ fathoms shanks down lead,
To let the hammerin’ core in
Whare hun’ers for a bit of bread
Continually are borin’;
Glowre down a pit you’d think, wi’ dread,
That gangs o’ deils war roarin’
Frae hell that way.⁵¹⁴

Wilson ranks among the first British poets to chronicle in poetry an industrial process and its environmental effects. We have seen weaver poetry speak of working the shuttle and the loom, but here Wilson anticipates the condition of England novel by almost half a century. It is somehow difficult to believe that this poem belongs to the same temporal and moral universe as the poetry of James Beattie and Scott, but so it does. Wilson draws on the Miltonic figure of Pandemonium, ironically contrasting the social order of the hive

⁵¹⁴ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 94.

in the previous stanza with that of Satan's hell. In the hive drones serve the queen so that the colony can survive, a tyranny of sorts but a commonwealth nonetheless; in hell the fallen angels serve a tyrant so that God's creation may be destroyed, but even so they at least had a larger purpose. In this poem, the miners dig "for a bit o' bread," not to build a better world for themselves and their posterity. From their perspective, their work is essentially objectless, undertaken solely to sustain their own lives before black lung or lead poisoning brings them to a merciful end.

And it is here that the miners go to die:

Alangst the mountains barren side,
Wi' holes an' caverns digget;
In lanely raws, withouten pride,
Their bits o' huts are bigget;
Nae kecklin' hens about the door,
E'er glad their cheerless Lucky;
They pick the pyles o' leaden ore,
Whilk to poor heedless chucky
Is death that day.⁵¹⁵

The ghost villages of late eighteenth-century English rural poetry may be deserted, but they do not house the toxic waste products of industrial capitalism. The speaker describes the miners' homes as detritus, clustered around the openings of "holes an' caverns" and perched on the heaps of slag where they "pick the pyles o' leaden ore." This is a dead community inhabited by the dead, a zombie society in which death is not a negation of life but a constant state of being.

It should be noted that the three stanzas describing the mine are sandwiched in between light-hearted descriptions of the speaker's experience as a peddler as he wanders

⁵¹⁵ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 94.

through the countryside. In the stanza preceding his coming upon the mine, the speaker waxes lyrically:

Yet wha can, daunerin' up thir braes,
No fin' his heart a' dancin';
While herdies sing wi' huggert taes,
An' wanton lam's are prancin';
Or down the spreadin' vale to gaze,
Whare gltt'rin' burns are glancin';
An' sleepin' lochs, owre whase smooth face
Wild fowl sport the expanse in,
Ilk bonny day.⁵¹⁶

But even the speaker's joy, which the view of the mine interrupts, betrays the complete absence of human life in the natural world. Nature may well be aesthetically pleasing and inspiring to the poet, but its emptiness destabilizes its meaning. In this sense Wilson's poem challenges Romanticist orthodoxy *avant la lettre*. I am thinking here of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" (1798), in which the poet's remembered childhood experiences of nature "interfuse" with his present contemplation of a beautiful scene in which human activity (and suffering) is remote and negated in its distant acknowledgement:

Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁶ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 93.

⁵¹⁷ William Wordsworth, *The Pedlar, Tintern Abbey, The Prelude*, Jonathan Wordsworth, ed. (Cambridge, 1985), 34-35.

Wordsworth's viewer absorbs these signs of human habitation into his own construction of "poetry," in which humanity exists in a minor key that supports and clarifies the true nature of Nature:

To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.

* * *

Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,--both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.⁵¹⁸

Wilson's speaker can scarcely plumb these depths, but even a roving packman-poet realizes that a lead mine and its desolate surroundings are unassimilable to a high romantic rendition of the "still, sad music of humanity." Indeed, for Wilson the mine emblemizes in a tragic mode the fundamental antagonism between humanity and Nature. But this antagonism has a comic mode as well, as the final stanzas of the poem indicate:

As thro' the stream, wi' loutin' back,
Thrang, stanes an' sand I threw out;
A toop, who won'ert at my pack,
Cam down to take a view o't;
A tether-length he back did gae,
An' cam wi' sic a dash,

⁵¹⁸ Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*, 34-35.

That hale-sae hurlan' down the brae,
It blattr't wi' a blush
I' tho burn that day!

Tho' earthquakes, hail, an' thuner's blaze
Had a' at ance surroundet,
I wudna' glowr't wi' sic amaze,
Nor been ha'f sae confoundet!
Wi' waefu' heart, before it sank,
I haul't it out a' clashing;
And now they're bleaching on the bank,
A melancholy washing
To me this day.⁵¹⁹

Whereas the Wordsworthian poet kneels before the shrine of Nature to receive both instruction and salvation, the Wilsonian one is violently ejected from it. Spying the peddler's pack of muslins—a product of industrial capitalism—the ram attacks, bringing down the full force of the natural world (“earthquakes, hail, an' thuner's blaze) on the head of the poet. The pack is flung into the stream, its bearer not far behind. The “melancholy washing” the poet suffers at the behest of a hostile and avenging Nature belies the comic situation and recalls the tragic condition of the miners. One cannot have the world both ways; we are either for it or against it. Wilson's peddler/poet, who views the world from below, learns the hard way that the choice is clear and unequivocal. Wordsworth's creator/poet, whose panoptic gaze takes in the world from above, averts his eyes, still hearing “the still, sad music” but evading responsibility for it. Indeed, with his ruined worldly goods “bleaching on the bank,” all the peddler can do is reflect, not upon nature's benevolence and compensatory grace, but on its bitter implacability.

⁵¹⁹ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 94.

If violated Nature no longer offers consolation for human suffering, it is not likely that any human construct can compensate for that loss. Wilson is perhaps the most strident anti-clerical poet in the Scottish peasant poet tradition, but he does not draw primarily on the tradition of estates satire that we have observed in Lapraik, Pagan, or Maxwell. Wilson, rather, situates his critique of religious institutions and practitioners in the context of modern capitalist society. Indeed, Wilson's major contribution to a poetics of protest arguably lies in this direction. Wilson's poetry discerns the structural relationship between large-scale industrial production and the institutional authority that enables and facilitates it. Clerics, passing smoothly from their former servitude to aristocratic patronage, take their place in the division of labor on the side of capital, doing their masters' bidding as middle managers responsible for inculcating the moral values most needed in an industrial society: sobriety, docility, and regularity. Wilson registers this move in a ballad entitled "Address to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr":

Ye very reverend haly dads,
Wha fill the black gown dously,
And deal divinity in blauds,
Amang the vulgar crously;
And when in Synod ye do sit,
Ye fleech the king and Willy Pitt,
And rouse the Proclamation
Wi' pith this day.

I hae a word or twa to gie,
Ye'll maybe think it's flyting;
Gin ye wad lend your lugs a wee,
Ye'll get it het and piping;
An overture, that ne'er cam' through
Presbyt'ry or Session;
And to your reverences now
It comes without digression
In lumps this day.

Ye wad do weel to feed your flocks,
And read your buiks mair tenty;
Then ye wad better raise your stocks,
And fill your ha's wi' plenty.
Morality and common sense,
And reason ye should doat on;
For then ye're sure of recompense
Frae ladies and your patron
On sic a day.⁵²⁰

This petition is not calculated to persuade the clerics to read it. The speaker classifies them with the enemies of liberty: the British government, aristocracy, and gentry. His exhortation to “do weel to feed your flocks,/And read your buiks mair tenty” sarcastically alludes both to the clerics’ relatively ample means (and given the poverty of so many Scottish congregations, these are very relative, indeed) and their failure to tend to their spiritual “flocks.” The speaker then excoriates their hypocritical sermons on “Morality and common sense,/And reason ...” (one cannot help but think of the anodyne morality, for example, of Blair’s sermons), which please the “ladies and your patron” but offer no tangible benefit to the poor. For the affluent classes, morality and common sense provide a comforting rationale for maintaining their privileges, while teaching the laboring poor to remain in their preordained economic and social positions. In this sense, Wilson, who, as we have seen, can be sympathetic to Enlightenment demystification, deplors the failure of Scottish moral philosophy to develop more humane doctrines that address the inequities intrinsic to modern class structures. Instead, the speaker bitterly opines, it has produced little but whitewash.

⁵²⁰ Wilson, *poetry and literary prose*, 72-73.

The poem continues in this vein, building a more direct political critique on the moral and doctrinal abuses of the clerics:

Sic things are but ill taen thir days,
When Liberty's sae raging;
And in her leel and noble cause
Ten thousands are engaging:
The Kirk should a' your time mortgage,
For weel she pays the cost;
And royalty and patronage
Eternally's your toast,
Baith night and day.

O Patronage! ye cunning baud,
Ye should be sairly thumpit;
Deil blaw ye south, ye cruel jade,
Ye ne'er-do-weel like strumpet.
For under your infamous wing,
The clergy sits sae paughty;
And slyly hums the foolish king,
Wi' cracks that are fell daughty,
For clink this day.⁵²¹

The implication here is that congregations would elect much different pastors, converting the Kirk from a bastion of reactionary loyalism to an organ of social and political revolution. Coming from the deistic Wilson, this familiar rhetoric of Covenanting Puritanism transmutes into a call for the overthrow of Burkean (and British) authoritarianism, which places the preservation of property above all else; the popular energy once associated with puritanical Calvinism still dwells in the people, and the congregation becomes the basic instrument of radical change, as the following stanzas make clear:

The 'Rights of Man' is now weel kenned,
And read by mony a hunder;

⁵²¹ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 74.

For Tammy Paine the buik has penned,
And lent the Courts a launder;
It's like a keeking-glass to see
The craft of Kirk and statesmen;
And wi' a bauld and easy glee,
Guid faith the birky beats them
Aff hand this day.

Though Geordy be deluded now,
And kens na what's a-doing;
Yet aiblins he may find it true
There is a blast a-brewing.
For British boys are in a fiz,
Their heads like bees are humming;
And for their rights and liberties
They're mad upon reforming
The Court this day.

But gin the proclamation should
Be put in execution,
Then brethren ye may chew your cud,
And fear a revolution.
For fegs ye've led the Kirk a dance,
Her tail is now in danger;
For of the liberties in France
Nae Scotsman is a stranger
At hame this day.⁵²²

Here the speaker imagines the conflict pitting Court and Kirk against the people in terms of the “buiks” each propounds: the Synod’s works of theology and moral philosophy on one side, Paine’s *Rights of Man* on the other. Moreover, the speaker recognizes that the very Enlightenment that the moderate *literati* and their state sponsors embrace might also be used against them. This is a populism infused with the virtues of literacy, education, and, as Virginia Woolf put it, “freedom from unreal loyalties.” Wilson’s brand of popular radicalism clearly draws upon the rhetoric of The Friends of the People movement of

⁵²² Wilson, *poetry and literary prose*, 74-75.

which he was part, appealing across national and imperial boundaries to a universal working man, English, French, and Scottish alike. In this respect, the speaker acknowledges that the Anglo-Scottish Union has proved merely another regulatory mechanism for co-optation and control, sapping any vestigial native identity that may threaten the metropolitan rule of property. What is needed, the speaker asserts, is an equally cosmopolitan and unified conception of labor. Ethnic, linguistic, and traditional identities have always been tools of the *ancien régime*, which skillfully manipulates them to divide and conquer, and will not provide the necessary materials for national reconstruction *à la Burns*:

The power of clergy, wylie tykes,
Is unco fast declining;
And courtiers' craft, like snaw aff the dykes,
Melts when the sun is shining;
Auld Monarchy, wi' cruel paw,
Her dying pains is gnawing;
While Democracy, trig and braw,
Is through a' Europe crawling
Fu' crouse this day.

But lest the Muse exaggerate,
Come, here's for a conclusion,
On every true blue Democate
I ken ye'll pray confusion.
But frae your dark and deep designs
Fair Liberty will hide us;
Frae Glasgow and frae Ayr divines
We pray good Lord to guide us
On ilka day.⁵²³

This peroration, stirring as it is, anticipates the counterrevolutionary response that will crush radical democratic movements and drive “true blue” Democrats such as Wilson out

⁵²³ Wilson, *poetry and literary prose*, 76.

of Britain altogether. Though it may be “through a’ Europe crawling/Fu’ crouse this day,” the speaker seems to recognize that the old regime remains dangerous and adaptable to modern conditions. The economic and social forces that produced the revolution in France might be present in Britain, but the “Fair Liberty” the speaker seeks may be no match for the “dark and deep designs” of the churchmen and the government they serve. Indeed, the Muse *does* exaggerate, promising a new millennium but leaving the speaker resignedly to “pray good Lord to guide us.” The revolutionary energy of the poem thus dissipates in the final stanza, implicitly acknowledging the overwhelming force that the interests of property actually wield. The Muse may escape this repression, but the speaker, with his democratic brethren, is left victim to “confusion.”

The poet’s counterrevolutionary premonition in “The Address to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr” is fully realized in “The Tears of Britain,” a 168-line narrative poem that imitates the formal diction of eighteenth-century rural elegy (its headnote quotes Goldsmith’s “The Deserted Village”) to lament the destruction of the hopes for democratic reforms inspired by the French Revolution:

Aloft on the verge of the wide stormy flood,
The genius of Britain disconsolate stood;
Fast heav’d her sad heart, while she gaz’d down beneath,
On armies, and navies, and victims of death;
Her best sons departing beneath ev’ry sail,
And War’s loud’ning shrieks rising fast on the gale;
Joy chear’d not her bosom, Hope soothed her no more,
And thus in deep grief she was heard to deplore.

‘Far fled from my country, where woes never cease,
Far fled are the comforts and presence of Peace!
Slow, mournfully-rising, with tears in her eye,
I saw the sweet goddess ascending on high;
Hope, Commerce, and Wealth, followed sad in her train,

And Pity, that soothes the deep sorrows of Pain;
All fled from the heart-sinking battle's loud roar,
And lost, amid horrors, I saw them no more.⁵²⁴

The allegorical figure of the “genius of Britain” displaces the proletarian anger of Wilson’s vernacular poetry. The formal requirements of Augustan verse suppress insurrectionary impulses and redirect them into satirical and allegorical modes. But why would Wilson invest in this aesthetic distance, when the urgency of Britain’s ills seems to demand his other Muse, the Muse of Protest? Like most of his counterparts, Wilson adeptly utilizes Augustan aesthetic conventions and, in this respect, participates in the broad tradition of eighteenth-century British poets who deploy classical verse forms to express discontent with social, political, and moral conditions in British society. The division of the poem between the poet/reporter’s dream vision and Britannia’s lament has none of the self-reflexive irony or humor of Coila’s visitation to the Burns poet in “The Vision”; Britannia has no specific business with the poet, as Coila does. War’s barbarity excludes irony, satire, or even epic, and the poet should not translate those “horrors” in a way that blunts their true nature. Wilson’s Britishness in this poem thus befits the tragic consequences of war for all Britons. Literary nationalisms simply do not seem appropriate to the occasion, especially when all are either dying or fleeing:

‘What eye without tears can the ruin survey,
That wise o’er my country fast urges its way!
The huge domes of industry, rear’d in such haste,
Unfinish’d and useless, lie dreary and waste;
Sore harass’d, and work with despondence and care,
The poor Manufacturer yields to despair;
Discharges the workman, in mis’ry to wail,
And sinks ‘mid the comfortless glooms of a jail.

⁵²⁴ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 213.

'Down yonder rough beach, where the vessels attend,
I see the sad emigrants slowly descend;
Compell'd by the weight of oppression and woe,
Their kindred, and native, and friends to forego.
In these drooping crowds that depart every day,
I see the true strength of the State glide away;
While countries, that hail the glad strangers to shore,
Shall flourish when Britain's proud pomp is no more.

'Her towns are unpeopl'd, her commerce decay'd,
And shut up are all her resources of trade:
The starving mechanic, bereav'd of each hope,
Steals pensively home from his desolate shop;
Surveys with an anguish words ne'er can express,
The pale sighing partner of all his distress;
While round them, imploring, their little ones meet,
And crave from their mama a morsel to eat.⁵²⁵

Rural depopulation by enclosure, commercialization, and emigration is a commonplace in British poetry from the mid-eighteenth century, even before the American and French wars added their toll in impressed seamen, dragooned foot-soldiers, and militia conscripts. But Wilson's critique is more comprehensive in that it envisions the world as a zero-sum game, in which Britain's loss is the corresponding gain of "countries, that hail the glad strangers to shore." Nor is commercial or industrial capitalism *per se* to blame, not this time. In marked contrast to Wilson's vernacular poetry, state capitalism, when dedicated to the arts of peace, might also operate to the benefit of the "poor Manufacturer" and "his workmen," the "sad emigrants" and "starving mechanic." The question remains whether modern British capitalism itself, with its growing dependence upon territorial empire (especially in the east), naval hegemony, and exclusive foreign markets, is at all compatible with peaceful enterprise. Britannia's anguished lament

⁵²⁵ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 214.

predicts that Britain's capitalistic dependence on extracting surplus labor from the workers will eventually result in a proletarian revolution:

'These woes, horrid War! thou unmerciful fiend!
These woes are the shades that thy footsteps attend.
Arous'd by the call of Ambition and Pride,
Thou wakes, and the earth with destruction is dy'd.
The red blazing city enlight'ning the air,
The shrieks of distraction, the groans of despair,
Remorseless as hell thou behold'st with delight,
While Pity, far distant, turns pale at the sight.

'Shall then such a monster, a fiend so accurs'd,
By Britons be welcom'd, embosom'd, and nurs'd?
Shall they, on whose prudence and mercy we rest,
Be deaf to the cries of a nation distress?
Yes!--scorn'd for a while my poor children may mourn,
Contemn'd and neglected, depress'd and forlorn;
Till bursting the bands of oppression they soar
Aloft from the dust, to be trampled no more.⁵²⁶

Whose Ambition? Whose Pride? The "gentlemanly capitalists" who started the war and profit by it? The bankers and stock jobbers who speculate on war? The bondholders and coupon clippers without whose investment in the national debt the British state could not wage war to begin with? Referring to this poem, Noble is right when he points out that "[T]he Scots were neither politically nor linguistically alien from their radical English compatriots, and cross-border fertilisation among radical writers was constant throughout the period," but I would add that Wilson's brand of radicalism is just as deeply informed by his Scottish Enlightenment *milieu* and self-education in canonical British poets as it is from his artisanal roots.⁵²⁷ While the appeal to the allegorized "Pride and Ambition," which calls forth War and banishes "Hope, Commerce, and Wealth" appears

⁵²⁶ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 215-16.

⁵²⁷ Noble, "Displaced Persons," 206.

conventional, the poem implies that they may actually be two sides of the same coin. That “Hope” is serially attached to the other figures does not mean that it is a synonym of them, but recognizes that Smithean political economy and moral philosophy cannot truly be reconciled. Capitalism, in other words, is incompatible with “sympathy.” Rather, it thrives on precisely the economic and military competitiveness that Britannia deplors:

High o’er Valenciennes, engulfed amid flame,
(The glory of Gallia, of despots the shame)
The wide-waving flag of Germania may flow,
And Tyranny shout o’er the horrors below;
But Liberty, radiant, immortal, looks down
On millions of heroes whose hearts are her own;
Who, sworn her defenders, will stand to their trust,
When towns yet unconquer’d are sunk in the dust.

‘When rights are insulted, and justice deni’d,
When his country is threaten’d, his courage defied;
When tyrants denounce, and each vassal prepares,
‘Tis then that the soul of the Briton appears:
Appears in the stern resolution reveal’d,
To rescue his country or sink in the field;
Indignant he burns the proud foe to pursue,
And conquest or death are the objects in view.⁵²⁸

Britannia views the war as another bloody episode in *European* history, in which for centuries dynastic states have fought one another for prestige and plunder but have joined forces to suppress “Liberty” whenever and wherever it threatened to usurp aristocratic and clerical privileges. There is very little sense here of attachment to local, historical, or cultural nationalisms; indeed, Britannia here signifies Liberty, which is defined not in property but in *class* terms. As we have seen in Wilson’s labor poetry, the world of industry and commerce collects feudal, ethnic, linguistic, and historical identities into two

⁵²⁸ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 216.

great aggregations: masters and hands. In this world Britannia sides unambiguously with the hands, as in English rural poetry it identifies with yeomen farmers and the “bold peasantry, their country’s pride,/When once destroyed, can never be supplied.” Even Burns in his most “radical” idiom does not quite approach this understanding of the real functional significance of the revolution. The *Rights of Man* provides a vocabulary for a poetics of equality (at least for the universal male), but it does not perceive the structural economic transformations that incarcerate the laboring classes in the workhouse of “free labor.” The cruelest irony of this process, as Britannia acknowledges in the poem, is that the rhetoric of Liberty has been co-opted for use by the propertied classes as the fundamental characteristic of “Britishness,” the idea that “free-born Britons” will not brook the “foreign” Tyranny with which property interests are complicit. In the final octaves Britannia asks, “Was Britain insulted, was justice refus’d,/Her honour, her quiet, or interest abus’d?”:

‘These shouts that I hear from yon wide western plains,
Where distant Hibernia lies panting in chains;
Those pale bleeding corpses, thick strew’d o’er the ground,
Those law-sanctioned heroes triumphing around;
These speak in the voice of the loud-roaring flood,
And write this stern lesson in letters of blood:
Oppression may prosecute, Force bend the knee,
But free is the nation that wills to be free.’⁵²⁹

For Wilson (as for William Blake), as events proved, America is that nation, at least in its Jeffersonian imaginary. In this respect, Robert Tannahill’s beautiful eulogy for the exiled Wilson expresses the departure from Scotland of its last “free” poetic voice:

O DEATH! it’s no thy deed I mourn,

⁵²⁹ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 217.

Tho aft my heart strings thou has torn,
Tis worth an merit left forlorn
 Life's ills tae dree,
Gars now the pearly, brakish burn
 Gush frae my ee.

Is there wha feel the meltin glow
O sympathy for ithers woe?
Come, let our tears thegither flow;
 O join my mane!
For Wilson, worthiest of us a,
 For ay is gane.

He bravely strave gainst Fortune's stream
While Hope held forth ae distant gleam,
Till dasht and dasht, time after time,
 On Life's rough sea,
He weep'd his thankless native clime,
 And sail'd away.

The patriot bauld, the social brither,
In him war sweetly join'd thegither;
He knaves reprov'd, without a swither,
 In keenest satire;
And taught what mankind owe each ither
 As sons of Nature.

If thou hast heard his wee bit wren
Wail forth its sorrows through the glen,
Tell how his warm, descriptive pen
 Has thrill'd thy saul;
His sensibility sae keen,—
 He felt for all.

Since now he's gane, an Burns is deid,
Ah! wha will tune the Scottish reed?
Her thistle, dowie, hings its heid,—
 Her harp's unstrung,—
While mountain, river, loch, an mead,
 Remain unsung.

Farewell, thou much neglected Bard!
These lines will speak my warm regard,
While strangers on a foreign sward

Thy worth hold dear.
Still some kind heart thy name shall guard
Unsullied here.⁵³⁰

Even taking into account the eulogistic hyperbole, I am inclined to agree with Tannahill that Wilson belongs in the company of Burns as one of the pre-eminent vernacular Scottish poets of the period, although Wilson himself, as we have seen, does not always take Burns's line on "Scottishness" or the function of poetry. Moreover, Wilson's subsequent American career as a poet *and* scientist might make him a better example of a "lad o' pairts" than just about any of his contemporaries. His relative obscurity as a Scottish poet (as opposed to an American ornithologist) undoubtedly owed much to his politics and subsequent exile. Burns died, perhaps, before he could do anything irrevocably foolish, and cultural authorities anxious to claim his "genius" for British uses largely, if not quite completely, sanitized his political reputation, while treating his moral failings as a species of local color to be expected of Scottish rustics. Wilson, however, remains unassimilable to this particular model of the poet of the people. To a greater extent than any of the Scottish poets we have discussed, Wilson was a poet specifically of the working class, though he in some respects sympathized with Burn's New Light moderatism, republicanism, and progressivism. At the same time, Wilson should not be made a martyr to the radical cause, as Muir and Palmer have been. He left Scotland under threat of prosecution for seditious libel, to be sure, but his itinerant habits, wide-ranging intellectual interests, sense of humor, and chronic poverty make comparisons to provincial poets such as Lapraik, Sillar, Little, Maxwell, or Pagan provisional at best.

⁵³⁰ R. Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (Paisley, 1874), 78-80.

Wilson must also be considered as an important contributor to the Scottish Enlightenment and its diffusion in the United States. It is one of the loveliest of historical coincidences that John Witherspoon baptized the infant Wilson at Paisley Kirk in 1766. There was something very powerful indeed in that water.

But leave it to Wilson to ironize his own self-representation and refuse to take himself too seriously. In this wonderful comic poem, “To the Famishing Bard. From a Brother Skeleton,” Wilson emerges simply as a struggling young artist looking for his next meal:

Aloft to high Parnassus’ hill,
I heard thy pray’r ascending swift;
And are the Nine propitious still
To grant thy wish, and send the gift?
Has kind Apollo made a shift,
To roll down from his kitchen high
A sirloin huge—a smoking lift,---
To feed thy keen devouring eye!
* * *
If thou must eat, ferocious bard,
Elsewhere importune for a dinner;
Long thou may pray here, nor be heard,
And praying makes thee but the thinner.
Do like the lank, lean, ghostly sinner,
That here presumes to give advice;
Ne’er court the Muse for meat—to win her,
E’en starve, and glory in the price.
* * *
More consolation I might pour,
But, hark! the tempest, how it blows!
Th’inconstant blast, with thundr’ing roar
O’er the chimney-tops more furious grows.
The wintry drop, prone from my nose,
Hangs glist’ring in the candle’s beam;
And Want and Sleep’s uniting throes,
Here force me to forsake my theme.⁵³¹

⁵³¹ Wilson, *poems and literary prose*, 225-27.

Robert Tannahill in North Briton: Bought and Sold for English Gold

Robert Tannahill, the eulogist of the exiled Wilson (who may have fancied himself as Burns's and Wilson's literary heir), was born in 1774 in Paisley. Another of Radical Renfrew's well educated weaver poets, Tannahill was raised at the loom as an apprentice to his father, a silk gauze weaver, from the age of 12. After two years working as a weaver in Lancashire, he returned to Paisley to tend his dying father in late 1801 or early 1802. There he lived with his mother until his death by suicide in 1810. Early biographers portray the sensitive and isolated Tannahill as living in desperate poverty, but subsequent versions of his life, most notably that given by David Semple in 1876, depict a more comfortable and sociable Tannahill, who had money in a savings bank, served as the first secretary of the Paisley Burns Club, and was courted by admirers and fellow poets, including the Ettrick Shepherd.⁵³²

In collaboration with weaver and composer Robert Archibald Smith, as well as musicians James Barr of Kilbarchan and John Ross of Aberdeen, Tannahill enjoyed notable success as a songwriter and compiler. Donaldson's biography emphasizes the usual eighteenth-century influences: Thomson, Shenstone, and especially Burns. Tannahill likewise "'mended' folk-songs," but his original songs, such as 'Jessie, the flower o' Dunblane', 'Oh, are ye sleeping, Maggie', 'Thou bonnie wood o' Craiglea', and 'Gloomy winter's now awa'' secured his posthumous reputation. According to

⁵³² R. Tannahill, *The Poems and Songs and Correspondence of Robert Tannahill, with Life and Notes*, ed. David Semple (Paisley, 1876), lxxxiii-lxxxiv; see also W. Donaldson, "Tannahill, Robert (1774-1810)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

Donaldson, Tannahill's "stress on the naivety of his work was misleading," and his real audience consisted of "the burgeoning new early nineteenth-century drawing-room market, whose demand for popular art-songs, arranged for one or more voices with accompaniment for the piano and other instruments, was beginning to become commercially significant."⁵³³

Tannahill's shrewd appraisal of the commercial possibilities of antiquarian collecting and songwriting tapped by Burns, Scott, and Hogg promised a means of earning a living wage from his art that was not available to other weaver poets.⁵³⁴ Tannahill apparently began submitting his songs and verse to periodical publications in London as early as 1800, when "Jessie, the flower o' Dunblane" first appeared.⁵³⁵ He published several songs in Glasgow in 1805, including some of his Burns poetry, and in the *Paisley Repository*, edited by the bookseller John Miller. Tannahill's dramatic poem in two acts, "The Soldier's Return," appeared first in this publication, together with "The Recruiting Drum" and "The Old Beggar." Donaldson and other biographers concur that Tannahill's songs quickly became popular because "[H]is lyrics were easily committed to memory, particularly by the gentler sex," and in "every company where singing delighted the ear, in the cottage, in the hall, at concerts, and in theaters they were heard."⁵³⁶ His first and only volume of poetry was published by subscription in 1807; Tannahill proposed an expanded second edition to Constable, who turned it down. He continued to send both

⁵³³ Donaldson, "Tannahill, Robert."

⁵³⁴ Hogg visited Paisley and met Tannahill just before his death in the spring of 1810. See Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1876), lxxx.

⁵³⁵ A copy is located in the National Library of Scotland, catalogued under Evans, printer, Long-Lane, London; Shelfmark: L.C.1269 (118).

⁵³⁶ Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1876), lxxii.

new and revised songs to various periodicals, including the *Scots Magazine*, until the year of his death.

Is there a “radical” Tannahill to be found here, or simply an aspiring bourgeois producer of aesthetic goods for commercial sale? There is no record of Tannahill engaging in any political commitments or controversies of the kind that ended in Wilson’s exile, nor do we find much in the way of imitation of Burns’s republicanism. But Tannahill’s active participation in the establishment of the Burns cult in the years immediately following the Bard’s death, rather than signifying a bourgeois appropriation of Burns, may suggest a more radical version of the poet than has always been thought. Consider, for example, the following song, composed in honor of Burns to the accompaniment of the Air, “Britons, who for freedom bled”:

HAIL, ye glorious sons of song,
Who wrote to humanize the soul!
To you our high strains belong,
Your names shall crown our friendly bowl:
But chiefly, BURNS, above the rest,
We dedicate this night to thee;
Engrav’d in every Scotsman’s breast,
Thy name, thy worth, shall ever be!

Fathers of our country’s weal,
Sternly virtuous, bold and free!
Ye taught your sons to fight, yet feel
The dictates of humanity:
But chiefly, BURNS, &etc.

Haughty Gallia threats our coast,
We hear her vaunts with disregard,
Secure in valour, still we boast
“The Patriot, and the Patriot-bard.”
But chiefly, BURNS, &etc.

Yes, Caledonians! to our country true,

Which Danes nor Romans could subdue,
Firmly resolv'd our native rights to guard,
Let's toast "The Patriot, and the Patriot-bard."⁵³⁷

This is a fine drinking song, indeed, and its surficial ambiguity assures that no revelers will offend loyalist sensibilities. But as an ostensible tribute to the "Patriot, and the Patriot-bard," the song complicates Burns's relation to those flattering epithets. Composed as a proper Augustan ode, the song refuses the Burnsean vernacular and standard habbie versification, in effect "royalizing" the panegyric to the ploughman. While there may also be a Thomsonian gesture to a "Scottish" tradition, the song carries virtually no trace of nativity. Burns appears as the "chief" of "ye glorious sons of song," but the singer omits the usual mention of Ramsay and Fergusson, leaving it unclear precisely who the other honored Scottish poets might be (except perhaps the present poet?). Similarly, the panegyrist refers to the "Fathers of our country's weal,/Sternly virtuous, bold and free," presumably implying the roll call of Scottish heroes from the days of Bruce and Wallace. But rather than invoke the specific patriotic tradition of the Wars of Independence, the poet "others" the Danes and the Romans, hardly stirring stuff, it would seem, for "Caledonians ... true." Does this archaism imply a tacit recognition that Caledonia really is a northern province of Anglo-Saxon Britain, whose enemies are the enemies of England, not the Anglo-Norman conquerors who strove to subject an independent Scotland to feudal vassalage? Indeed, while the refrain insists that "Engrav'd in every Scotsman's breast,/Thy name, thy worth, shall ever be," one cannot help wonder how that inscription actually reads. Burns's patriotic appeal, whether in republican or

⁵³⁷ R. Tannahill, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Tannahill, with Life, and Notes* (1874), 109-112.

Jacobite form, is unambiguously anti-English. As we have seen, the composer suppresses this Anglophobia in the form, content, and even the tune of the song. The question is whether we are to read this act of violence to Burns's poetic legacy as an ironic revision dictated by political expediency or a deliberate misprision of Burns for the purpose of sanitizing his genius for use by the imperial state.

Tannahill's popular comedy, "The Soldier's Return," may help us answer this question. Set to music by the distinguished Aberdonian musician John Ross, the following tribute to the Cameron Highlanders, veterans of several major engagements during the French war, divides the first and second scenes of the first act:

Our bonnie Scots lads in their green tartan plaids,
Their blue belted bonnets, an feathers saw braw,
Rankt up on the green, war fair tae be seen,
But my bonnie young laddie was fairest o' a';
His cheeks were as red as the sweet heather bell,
Or the red western clud looking doun on the snaw,
His lang yellow hair owre his braid shoulders fell,
An the een o' the lasses were fixed on him a'.

My heart sank wi' wae on the wearifu' day,
When torn frae my bosom they march'd him awa',
He bade me fareweel, he cried "O be leel,"
An' his red cheeks were wet wi' the tears that did fa',
Ah! Harry, my love, tho' thou ne'er shoudst return,
Till life's latest hour I thy absence will mourn,
An' memory shall fade, like the leaf on the tree,
E'er my heart spare ae thocht on anither but thee.⁵³⁸

The song draws deeply on Jacobite typology, but (in a manner similar to the anglicization of Burns in the previous ode) appears to redirect the insurrectionary energy of Scottish patriotism to endorse royalist political and imperial aims. In the surrounding comedy, the

⁵³⁸ Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return; A Scottish Interlude in Two Acts; With Other Poems and Songs, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Paisley, 1807), 14-15.

heroine Jeanie, betrothed to the local laird's servant who has followed his master to fight the French in Egypt (the somewhat incongruously named "Hielan Harry"), has been promised in marriage to an aging but wealthy bachelor, the buffoonish Muirlan Willie. Harry returns from battle, having saved the life of his laird, setting up a generational confrontation between the love-lorn Jeanie and her mother:

Jean. Mither, ae simple question let me speir,—
Is Muirlan fat or fair wi' a' his geir?
Auld croichlin wicht, tae hide the ails o' age,
He capers like a monkey on a stage;
An' cracks, an' sings, an' giggles sae licht an' kittle,
Wi's auld beard slavered wi' tobacco spittle.—

Mir. Peace, wardless slut—O, whan will youth be wise!
Ye'll slicht your *carefu'* mither's gude advice:
I've brocht you up, an' made ye what ye are;
An' that's your *thanks* for a' my toil an' care:
Muirlan comes doon this nicht, sae drap your stodgin,
For ye must gie consent or change your lodgin'.⁵³⁹

The comedy displaces the blocking paternal authority from Jeanie's father, Gaffer (the laird's tenant), who thinks his daughter's marriage with Muirlan a perversion of nature, to the scheming and covetous mother figure, Mirren. Muirlan, on the other hand, is feminized, portrayed as an addle-pated, gossipy old crone. In this respect, the Mirren-Muirlan pair stands for a traditional communal organization that consolidates wealth through the exchange of women. But this community has no positive valence in the comedy, which paradoxically aligns feudal hierarchy (laird/tenant/servant) with the proposition that, as Jeanie holds, "Love shoud be free." But what liberates "Love" is not

⁵³⁹ Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return*, 13-14.

the law of nature or an ideology of affective individualism and companionate marriage, but Harry's devotion to the British state, symbolized in the play by his rescue of the laird:

Then, as our rowers strove with lengthen'd sweep,
Back from the stern I tumbl'd in the deep,
And sure had perish'd, for each pressing wave
Seem'd emulous to be a soldier's grave;
Had not this gallant youth, at danger's shrine,
Off'ring his life a sacrifice for mine,
Leap'd from the boat and beat his billowy way,
To where I belch'd and struggl'd in the sea;
With god-like arm sustain'd life's sinking hope,
Till the succeeding rowers pick'd us up.⁵⁴⁰

"Hielan" Harry, who reveals that he is an orphan, turns down the grateful laird's offer to "raise his fortune," instead asking the laird to sponsor his marriage to Jeanie:

Then, as in warmth I prais'd his good behaviour,
He modestly besought me this one *favour*,
That, if surviving when the war was o'er,
And safe return'd to Scotia once more,
I'd ask your will for him to wed your daughter;
A manly, virtuous heart he home hath brought her.⁵⁴¹

The laird complies and soothes Mirren's ruffled feathers by giving her a gold ring, prompting her to exclaim, "It's goud, it's goud! O yes, sir—I agree./Gaffer, it's goud! Yes, "LUVE *shou'd aye be free!*"

This poem writes a complex recipe for Anglo-Scottish or North British identity. The Jacobite figure of the "Bonnie Hielan Laddie" is first assimilated to an anglicized Lowland social organization, where his native martial qualities can be used to protect the state his kinfolk once attempted to overthrow. Jeanie's erotic attraction to him, as in Jacobite romance, is closely identified with this martial *habitus*, as indicated in the

⁵⁴⁰ Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return*, 31.

⁵⁴¹ Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return*, 31-32.

marching song that frames the comic treatment of Jeanie's love dilemma, but Harry nonetheless indicates his acculturation by speaking in perfect, high-minded Augustan heroic couplets, a representative example of which runs, "Great is his soul! soft be his bed or rest,/Whose *only wish* is to make others blest." Mirren's and Muirland's greed and lack of interest in the supposed French threat to Britain's national survival, on the other hand, appears to bolster the same English Scotophobia that the brave Highland regiments put to shame on foreign battlefields. In this regard, Hielan Harry performs the dual functions of defending the empire (he is sent to fight in Egypt, hardly the place to defend the homeland) and restoring Scotia's damaged reputation for manliness and virtue, which has been degraded by clowns such as Muirlan and conspiratorial women such as Mirren (whose loyalty must be bought with English gold in a kind of re-enactment of the Act of Union). The laird legitimizes this new Scottish meritocracy, effectively adopting and gentrifying the orphaned soldier, who loses his original Highland nativity and becomes fully incorporated into a deracinated British identity:

Harry. While I was yet a boy, my parents died,
And left me poor and friendless, wandr'ing wide,
Your goodness found me, neath your fost'ring care
I learn'd those precepts which I'll still revere,
And now, to Heav'n, for length of life I pray,
With filial love your goodness to repay.⁵⁴²

The British state, in its "goodness," supposedly "found" the barbaric and benighted Scots, brought them the benefits of enlightened and polite culture and language, and gave them opportunities through war and imperial adventure to justify the subordinate status so generously and paternalistically conferred upon them in 1707. As Gaffer opines at the

⁵⁴² Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return*, 35-36.

end of the play, “Virtue ever is its own reward,” as long as “virtue” is understood as respectful submission to a Scotsman’s betters.

But the apparently anodyne acceptance of an assimilated Britishness featured in “The Soldier’s Return” does not necessarily imply a strictly loyalist aesthetic. Virtue may be its own reward, but it must be remembered that in Tannahill’s comedy virtue comes packaged with English cash and the promise of imperial opportunities. This shadowed aspect of British loyalism reveals itself in Tannahill’s song, “Loudon’s Bonnie Woods and Braes.” Semple describes the immediate context of the song, a great volunteer review held near Paisley in the fall of 1804:

The whole of the Volunteers in the County of Renfrew, mustering nearly 5000 strong, were reviewed by the gallant Commander, General the Earl of Moira, on Thursday, the 4th day of October, 1804, in the large field on the north-west side of the Barnsford Bridge, near Walkinshaw, two miles from town. This review was among the earliest, if not the very first of Volunteer Reviews in Scotland, and occurred on a splendid day for the occasion. Business was suspended, and it became a joyous and grand holiday to all classes of the community. The brilliant appearance of so many thousands of Volunteers in their military uniforms,—the beauty and fashion of the surrounding country,—and the vast assemblage of citizens in holiday attire,—was a sight worth seeing. The review was a complete success; and from the cheerful smiles and merry laughs, it was evident that every confidence and reliance was placed in our Scots Volunteer lads that they would defend their households to the death. In the afternoon, an elegant entertainment was given in the Town Hall to his Excellency and suite, and a number of noblemen and gentlemen belonging to the County, officers of Corps, &c., &c. In the evening, his Lordship and suite returned to Glasgow.⁵⁴³

Though Tannahill’s song was actually written as a tribute to Moira when called to active service in 1807, Semple’s Victorian era account of the solid loyalism of “all classes of the community” seems a far cry from Wilson’s reading of Paisley as riven by class

⁵⁴³ R. Tannahill, *The Poems and Songs and Correspondence of Robert Tannahill, with Life and Notes* (1876), 247.

antagonism. While the threat of French invasion and the rush to arms of the local volunteers (which included two of Tannahill's brothers) appear to have a leveling and unifying effect, Semple's interpretation nevertheless reflects the same historical amnesia that tends to reproduce narratives of Scottish inflammability during the period. The review Semple describes undoubtedly has a bread and circuses flavor about it, but Tannahill's rendition of this species of loyalism takes on a much more ambivalent and darkened perspective in the song itself:

Loudon's bonnie woods and braes,
I maun lea' them a', lassie;
Wha can thole whan Britain's faes,
Wou'd gi'e Britons law, lassie?
Wha wou'd shun the fiel o' danger?
Wha frae Fame wou'd live a stranger?
Now whan Freedom bids avenge her,
Wha wou'd shun her ca', lassie?
Loudon's bonnie woods and braes
Hae seen our happy bridal days,
And gentle hope shall soothe thy waes,
Whan I am far awa', lassie.⁵⁴⁴

One pauses over the lyricism of these lovely verses, which refuse excessive sentimentality while registering an authentic attachment to place and home. Indeed, this balancing of desire and reticence, of longing and stoic acceptance, in Tannahill's poetics of loss raises his songs to the level of Burns and Oliphant. The Jacobite theme, however, is here placed in the service of British patriotism, as the speaker's "exile" to military service seems necessary to preserve "Britons law" and "Freedom." But when the speaker directs a series of queries to his wife—"Wha can thole whan Britain's faes./ Wha wou'd shun the fiel o' danger./ Wha frae Fame wou'd live a stranger./ Wha wou'd shun her

⁵⁴⁴ Tannahill, *Poems and Songs of Robert Tannahill* (1874), 163-64.

ca” —they appear more calculated to convince the soldier *himself* to follow the flag than to assuage her grief at their parting. Indeed, appeals to honor, manliness, and “fame” have remained essentially unchanged since *The Iliad*; young men compelled to leave home to fight their masters’ wars must be given some reason beyond the explicit or implied threat of coercion. But what reasons could ever be sufficient for his forsaken partner?

Hark! the swellin’ bugle sings,
Yieldin’ joy tae thee, laddie;
But the dolefu’ bugle brings
Waefu’ thochts tae me, laddie.
Lanely I may climb the mountain,
Lanely stray beside the fountain,
Still the weary moments countin’,
Far frae love and thee, laddie.
O’er the gory fiels o’ war,
Whan Vengeance drives her crimson car,
Thou’lt may be fa’, frae me afar,
And nane to close they e’e, laddie.⁵⁴⁵

Just as Oliphant refigures loss in the Jacobite song as largely a woman’s tragedy, Tannahill registers the contradiction inherent in a culture of masculine honor, which exalts women (and to a lesser extent children) as possessions in need of constant “protection” while requiring their protectors to desert them whenever the “swellin’ bugle sings.” The soldier’s wife clearly recognizes this contradiction: to her, the “dolefu’ bugle brings/Waefu’ thochts.” Again, her proleptic lament betrays no sentimentality, only a grim acknowledgment that his potential death on the battlefield announces her own. After all, is this not the inexorable logic of a society in which a married woman is covered by her husband’s body and subsumed into his legal personality? In this aspect, Tannahill’s poem gives voice to the wife’s residual, aural presence. Her husband does not see her as

⁵⁴⁵ Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1874), 164.

much as he hears the echo of her dirge from within the totalizing discourses of duty and country which he has so deeply internalized:

Oh, resume thy wonted smile!
Oh, suppress thy fears, lassie!
Glorious honour crouns the toil,
That the soldier shares, lassie.
Heaven will shield thy faithfu' lover,
Till the vengefu' strife is over,
Then we'll meet, nae mair to sever
Till the day we dee, lassie:
Midst our bonnie woods and braes,
We'll spend our peacefu', happy days,
As blythe's yon lightsome lamb that plays
On Loudon's flowery lea, lassie.⁵⁴⁶

His adoption of the imperative form of address cancels its consolatory intention and displaces it onto a different plane of existence. Prepared for self-immolation by a lifetime of acculturation to the patriotic cult of “Glorious honour,” the soldier plays out his prescribed role as both a warrior and a preserver of the hearth. This self-suppression, if it may be said that the soldier retains or ever possessed even a shred of individual agency, is an automatic response. His lover must be dutifully proud of his sacrifice and encourage him to fulfill it, and this is precisely how he imagines her with her “wonted smile.” Loudon’s “bonnie woods and braes,” as it turns out, functions in the same way as Oliphant’s “Land o’ the Leal,” an idyllic afterlife in which the soldier and his lover will “spend our peacefu', happy days,/As blythe's yon lightsome lamb that plays.” When the soldier claims the protection of Heaven, he does not mean that Providence will return him whole in this life, but only in the next. The beauty of Tannahill’s poem is that these conventional pieties refuse the consolation they appear to promise. Just as his wife, who

⁵⁴⁶ Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1874), 165.

exists in the poem only as a production of the masculine economy of war and death, the soldier's presence is solely aural, as he repetitively chants the liturgy of violence that produces and reproduces him from one generation to the next, down through the ages. Tannahill's popularity with Victorian readers undoubtedly owes much to his ostensible loyalism and deference to social rank, while his compatriot Wilson's working man radicalism makes him unsuitable for the polite drawing room, but I would suggest that poems such as "Loudon's Bonnie Woods and Braes" deeply problematize these long-settled assumptions and reveal much closer affinities between these weaver poets than once thought.

The story of all wars is that the men who fight them do not come back, as seen in a fitting sequel to "Loudon's Bonnie Woods and Braes" entitled "The Soldier's Funeral." In this song, set to the air "Holden's Dead March," Tannahill abandons the vernacular common metre in favor of stately Augustan rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter:

Now let the procession move solemn and slow,
While the soft mournful music accords with our wo,
While Friendship's warm tears o'er his ashes are shed,
And soul-melting Memory weeps for the dead.
Kind, good-hearted fellow as ever was known!
So kind and so good every heart was his own;
Now, alas! low in death are his virtues all o'er;
How painful the thought, we will see him no more!

In camp or in quarters he still was the same,
Each countenance brighten'd wherever he came;
When the wars of his country compell'd him to roam,
He cheerful would say, all the world was his home.
And when the fierce conflict of armies began,
He fought like a lion, yet felt as a man;
For when British bravery had vanquish'd the foe,
He'd weep o'er the dead by his valour laid low.

Yet time-fretted mansions! ye mouldering piles!
Loud echo his praise through your long vaulted aisles;
If haply his shade nightly glide through your gloom,
O tell him our hearts lie with him in the tomb.
And say, though he's gone, long his worth shall remain,
Remember'd, belov'd, by the whole of the men:--
Whoe'er acts like him, with a warm feeling heart,
Friendship's tears drop applause at the close of his part.⁵⁴⁷

No proper patriotic sentiment appears out of place—manliness, heroism, Christian fellow-feeling define the true Briton willing to spend all in “the wars of his country.” Unlike in the previous poem, however, there is no figure of the lover left behind, her grief softened by pride in the hero's brave sacrifice. But then again, why should it? As we saw in “Loudon's Bonnie Woods and Braes,” the war narrative genders everything as masculine, right down to the warrior constructing a feminine alter ego that vindicates and redeems killing other warriors in a national cause. Tannahill here recognizes that a soldier does not live for his country, but *always* dies for it. The beautiful verses enact the military march to which they are sung, playing out the ceaseless suicidal loop of masculine aggression and self-destruction. At the end of the song we see that the soldier's funeral is indeed the last act of a play, a tragedy, in which “Whoe'er acts like him, with a warm feeling heart,/Friendship's tears drop applause at the close of his part.”

Read as a dramatic text, the patriotic discourse the dirge publicly endorses falls to pieces under the pressure of its structural contradictions. In the second octave, the soldier's generous spirit animates the patriotism that “compell'd” him to join his country's war, but at the same time “He cheerful would say, all the world was his home.”

⁵⁴⁷ Robert Tannahill, *The Works of Robert Tannahill*, ed. Philip A. Ramsey (London, 1838), 82.

This cosmopolitan self-representation starkly opposes the insular patriotic nationalism that compels him to fight, placing the soldier in the paradoxical position of destroying his home in order to save it. At a logical impasse that he can neither reconcile nor evade, the soldier can only fight “like a lion” and feel “as a man.” Personal moral responsibility for killing his brothers (the “world is his home,” after all) is neatly cleaved from the physical act of murder, which is refigured as “valour,” while the soldier’s individual agency is collectivized in the trope of “British bravery.” To “feel like a man,” then, means the ability to mourn, and even to love, the fellow humans the soldier has been programmed to slaughter. To “act like a man,” however, which the song ultimately urges the friends whose “tears drop applause at the close of his part” to do, means simply to butcher other men until one’s part in the tragedy is played out.

When the poet initiates the lament in the first octave by personifying “Friendship” and “Memory” (in contrast to localizing grief and consolation as he does in “Loudon’s Bonnie Woods and Braes”), he emphasizes the abstraction of moral agency from the murderous “acts of valor” for which the soldier is praised. Institutionalized practices of bereavement—funeral processions, lugubrious music, pious sentiment, hyperbolic eulogy—safely contain the horror and revulsion that would result if one’s subjectivity somehow escaped the control of the state. All are equally kind, good, and virtuous in death, just as they are in combat; moral states, it seems, are purely retrospective rather than aspirational or motivational. The song reveals that in the patriotic national state, whether defined as “British,” “English,” “Scottish,” or otherwise, a continuous identity is only possible in performance, in acting out a predetermined part in which one is both

actor and spectator. Both are deeply structured, collectivized, and automatic; doing and not doing have the same result. Tannahill's song thus anticipates the Nietzschean demotic principle that collapses the cause-and-effect sequence. Dead bodies are just that.

As is the case with Tannahill's contemporaries, social rituals provide copious material for late eighteenth-century Scottish poetry: courtship, marriage, fairs, war, celebrations, funerals. One of Tannahill's most popular songs, "The Kebbuckston Wedding," describes a rumbustious rustic wedding, with considerable local color, comic characterizations, and a touch of bemused condescension, causing Ramsay to lament that the "humour and spirit of this production are so appropriate, that it is to be regretted the author did not write more in the same vein."⁵⁴⁸ Perhaps Tannahill thought he got it right the first time and did not feel the need for another go, but Ramsay's sentiments fully explain the nineteenth-century reception of Tannahill and his all-but complete disappearance from the scene in the twentieth. Rather than give this ballad the extended reading it certainly deserves, however, I would like to concentrate on selected stanzas that, in my view, further demonstrate Tannahill's demythologizing aesthetic, as we have identified in the previous two poems.

"The Kebbuckston Wedding" begins in much the same way as "The Laird O' Cockpen":

AULD Watty of Kebbuckston brae,
With lear and reading of books auld-farren,---
What think ye? the body came owre the day,
And tauld us he's gaun to be married to Mirren;
 We a' got bidding,
 To gang to the wedding,

⁵⁴⁸ R. Tannahill, *Works*, 74.

Baith Johnny and Sandy, and Nelly and Nannie;
 And Tam o' the Knowes,
 He swears and he vows,
At the dancing he'll face to the bride with his grannie.

A' the lads had trystet their joes,
 Slee Willy came up and ca'd on Nellie;
Although she was hecht to Geordy Bowse,
 She's gi'en him the gunk and she's gone wi' Willie.
 Wee collier Johnny
 Has yocket his pony,
And's aff to the town for a lading of nappy
 Wi' fouth of good meat
 To serve us to eat;
Sae wi' fuddling and feasting we'll a' be fu' happy.⁵⁴⁹

The poem's emphasis on a wedding as a carnivalesque release, with plenty of fuddling, feasting, and trysting, follows a well-worn groove, but we must first pause on the pretext: Auld Watty's determination to wed Mirren appears based entirely on his "lear and reading of books auld-farren." This suggests that Watty's sudden desire has been engendered in part by a Quixotic obsession with tales of chivalry. The poet thus premises the nuptial rituals on an act of "bad" reading, a misprision of romance that promises nothing but trouble for the infatuated pedant. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, chivalric romance deals in adultery, not marriage, but Watty appears to have missed the essential point. His compulsive reading of romance, with its attendant titillation and exquisite restraint on the consummation of sexual desire, works him into an understandable passion, but rather than dissipating it in dalliance, as do the "lads" that "trystet their joes" (who appear, despite their lack of "lear," to have a much better understanding of romance than Watty does), he confuses pleasure (sex) with business (marriage). That everyone

⁵⁴⁹ R. Tannahill, *Works*, 72-73.

else in and around Kebbuckston recognizes Watty's error gives the poem its comic piquancy, as they are far more interested in a temporary escape from the heavy moral strictures imposed by the kirk, which have ironically converted the sacrament of marriage into something resembling the pre-Reformation feast day that the reformed kirk sought to suppress.

This Cameronian hint is humorously taken up in a later stanza, which reads:

Lowrie has cast Gibbie Cameron's gun,
That his old gutcher bore when he follow'd Prince Charlie:
The barrel was rustet as black as the grun,
But he's ta'en't to the smiddy and's fettl'd it rarely.
With wallets of pouter
His musket he'll shouter,
And ride at our head, to the bride's a' parading;
At ilka farm town
He'll fire them three roun',
Till the haill kintra ring with the Kebbuckston wedding.⁵⁵⁰

Scotland's confused history of religious and political violence erupts into the poem, its Covenanter and Jacobite effusions of blood converging in the ancient musket that will see service once more. Gibbie Cameron's gun materializes Auld Watty's predilection for romance, representing a heroic past of ideological fervor and hopeless causes. The motley "parade" Lowrie leads with the gun indeed mimics that of the Covenanting and Jacobite bands that preceded it, deftly overwriting the wedding with ominous narratives of historical and cultural blind alleys. The ritual practice of firing "three roun'" to rouse the countryside likewise suggests the mustering of the militia to meet a perceived (or misperceived) emergency. Scott's comic treatment of the false alarm in *The Antiquary* comes to mind, as Lowrie's shots in the air could mean anything from the threatened

⁵⁵⁰ R. Tannahill, *Works*, 72-73.

French invasion to a rat-killing, but here they signify nothing more than an invitation to a big drunk staged at Watty's considerable expense. Seen from this perspective, the interpretive ambiguity of Lowrie's alarming signal to gather at the Kebbuckston Wedding intensifies the comic sense of calamity in the entire enterprise, which begins with Watty's misreading of romance and proceeds to empty out the political and religious ideologies of Scotland's turbulent past and present. Historical "isms"—Feudalism, Reformation, Revolution, Anglo-Scottish Union, and, finally, Anglo-French imperialism—come and go, but their artifacts, such as Watty's "auld-farren" books and Gibbie's gun, continue to command anachronistic social responses, whether they are wars or weddings. Watty's belated attempt to enact the chivalric narratives he loves is in this sense not very different from the Cameronians' effort to revive the Covenanting faith or Prince Charlie's to restore the Stuart monarchy. As Tannahill reveals, how and in whose interests these narratives are plotted ultimately determine their social and cultural effects. It does not take much twisting to make comic figures out of religious zealots or royal pretenders, rendering their pretensions ludicrous and absurd. Moreover, traditional history itself, with its earnest and solemn preoccupation with "great men and events," makes the same plot choices that the poet does in a ribald song such as this. For Tannahill, a rural wedding may be as bad an omen for social peace as the descent of Napoleon, or it might equally be an occasion for a riotous blowout. There is simply no absolute standard of value in any plotted narrative:

Then gi'e me your hand, my trusty good frien',
And gi'e me your word, my worthy auld kimmer,
Ye'll baith come owre on Friday bedeen,
And join us in ranting and tooming the timmer:

With fouth of good liquor,
Will haud at the bicker,
And lang may the mailing of Kebbuckston flourish!
For Watty's so free,
Between you and me,
I'se warrant he's bidden the half of the parish.⁵⁵¹

It is telling that the poem only mentions Watty in the first verse and the third to the last, and Mirren never appears in the poem at all. Weddings are not for the people who have them, but for the “half of the parish” fortunate enough to be “bidden.” What the uninvited half thinks goes unrecorded, but one suspects one of them would write a much different narrative than the bluff, companionable fellow who on Watty's behalf invites both his “trusty good frien” and the “worthy auld kimmer” to the party. The Kebbuckston Wedding marks a significant historical event in the life of the parish, but what significance and which parish? To one part it means the joy of carnival excess and comic freedom; to the other it offers the bitter cup of exclusion and a tragic missed opportunity for fleeting enjoyment in the midst of daily travails. The poet puts the story in the mouth of the former, but Watty's folly reverberates throughout the entire community. If Tannahill had written this side of the story, perhaps Ramsay and other nineteenth-century lovers of rustic quaintness would not have been so anxious to see “more in the same vein.”

As we have seen in our examination of Carolina Oliphant's work, even in its most conventional and ostensibly “safe” forms, Tannahill's poetry sustains a deep and probing engagement with the political. This is certainly true of his best known lyric, “Jessie, the flow'r of Dunblane”:

⁵⁵¹ R. Tannahill, *Works*, 74.

The sun has gane doun o'er the lofty Benlomond,
And left the red clouds to preside o'er the scene,
While lanely I stray in the calm simmer gloamin'
To muse on sweet Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane.
How sweet is the brier wi' its saft faulding blossom,
And sweet is the birk, wi' its mantle o' green;
Yet sweeter and fairer, and dear to this bosom,
Is lovely young Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane.

She's modest as ony, and blythe as she's bonnie;
For guileless simplicity marks her its ain;
And far be the villain, divested o' feeling,
Wha'd blight in its bloom the sweet flow'r o' Dunblane.
Sing on, thou sweet mavis, thy hymn to the e'ening,
Thou'rt dear to the echoes of Calderwood glen;
Sae dear to this bosom, sae artless and winning,
Is charming young Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane.

How lost were my days 'till I met wi' my Jessie,
The sports o' the city seem'd foolish and vain,
I ne'er saw a nymph I would ca' my dear lassie,
'Till charm'd with sweet Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane.
Though mine were the station o' loftiest grandeur,
Amidst its profusion I'd languish in pain;
And reckon as naething the height o' its splendour,
If wanting sweet Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane.⁵⁵²

Ramsay effused that “no Scottish song has enjoyed among all classes greater popularity.

For this it is indebted at once to the beauty of the words and the appropriateness of the music composed for them by the poet's friend [Archibald Smith].”⁵⁵³ This oft-imitated love lyric delighted its morally proper nineteenth-century performers, auditors, and readers, but despite its “appropriateness” a violent male fantasy perturbs the song's placid surface of melancholic chastity. To begin with, the speaker's perspective places the

⁵⁵² R. Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1874), 171-73. Victorian critics lauded the first two stanzas of the song, while regretting the later addition of the “inferior” third stanza. See Semple, 208, and Ramsay, 4-5.

⁵⁵³ R. Tannahill, *Works*, 4.

setting sun between his field of vision and Ben Lomond, casting a lurid “red” hue to “preside o’er the scene.” His peripatetic musing plays out in this light, which reflects both his intense sexual desire and his objectification of nature as a feminine vessel awaiting penetration by the male (“How sweet is the brier, wi’ its saft faulding blossom”). As in Wordsworth, the wandering poet uses the tranquility of the “calm simmer gloamin’” to conjure up this passion, to recreate, partly through excited memory and partly by the action of the natural scene on the poet’s faculties, the pleasurable emotional and physical desire he experiences when in close proximity to “the flow’r o’ Dunblane.” As the first stanza draws to a close, the poet has invested his lover with an exaggerated sensuousness; she is “sweeter and fairer” than nature and “dear to this bosom.” At the same time, however, the poetic act of investing her with these supercharged feminine attributes *of* nature forcefully removes her *from* nature. The poet must appropriate Jessie to himself fully to enjoy her, just as men must conquer nature to achieve dominion over it. Jessie’s body is a thing to be possessed and plundered, to be sure, but in a larger sense her enthrallment in the poet’s mind as an exclusive subject of poetry subjugates her to his desire far more thoroughly than the mere satisfaction of physical lust. In poetry he can place her in a permanent state of chaste readiness, as she opens up to receive his first approach in an infinitely repeatable moment of exquisite consummation. This, it seems, is what Victorian admirers of the song thought of as love.

The poet makes his possessory interest more explicit in the second stanza. Listing Jessie’s generic qualities—modest, blithe, bonny—tells us nothing, nor does his insistence that “guileless simplicity marks her its ain.” On the contrary, these

commonplaces conceal Jessie behind a veil of conventional figures as effectively as if she was physically covered and secluded. The poet's motive for this defensiveness becomes clear in the next couplet, in which he condemns the "villain, divested of feeling,/Wha'd blight in its bloom the sweet flow'r o' Dunblane." Gesturing in the direction of the chivalric tradition, the poet's anxiety over the preservation of Jessie's maidenhood does not simply reflect a male desire for exclusive sexual prerogative. It also indicates that the production of desire through poetic representation of this prerogative carries with it a perverse, almost sadistic pleasure in imagining Jessie's "deflow'ring." In that ephemeral instant of gratification, the poet-lover dominates Jessie in two ways: sadistically, as a subjugated object, and masochistically, as an object subjugated by another, the "villain, divested of feeling." Indeed, it might be argued that the poet splits into ego and alter ego, the former the possessor of an "effeminate" poetic sensibility or "feeling," the latter the male animal that takes. As if startled and chagrined by this self-recognition, the poet shuts down his fantasy, apostrophizing the mavis to sanctify his aesthetic and sexual prurience in "thy hymn to the e'ening." The final couplet of this stanza repeats the first, safely veiling Jessie for his future enjoyment.

The third stanza, apparently added some time after composition of the first two, is self-exculpatory. Guiltily retreating from the self-image of the voluptuary, the poet attempts to pass himself off as something of a prodigal who has come home to claim his birthright. He defines moral values in conventional terms of urban cosmopolitan rot and virtuous rusticity, but this somehow rings hollow. Though the poet "ne'er saw a nymph I would ca' my dear lassie,/Till charm'd with sweet Jessie," he implies not only that

eyeballing nymphs is all he has ever done, but that composing love poetry is little more than an onanistic exercise. Indeed, this impulse toward self-gratification is part and parcel of the same economy of sadistic and masochistic male pleasure that we see in the second stanza. In his determined quest for a “nymph I would ca’ my dear lassie,” he acknowledges that poetry provides a medium for coding the complex relationship between the imaginative and carnal selves inhabiting the same body, as well as for the cultural effects that such self-representation entails, particularly with respect to masculinizing gender identities and relations. It seems fitting that for years after this song was published, Tannahill’s admirers sought fruitlessly for the “real” Jessie, the flow’r of Dunblane. That they did so speaks volumes for the double action Tannahill’s song initiates: it projects male desire in the form of a female body, but simultaneously reveals that the true object of desire is the poet himself. Searching for Jessie, it seems, is the self-reflexive act of “love” that characterizes the psychic economy Tannahill—and the men of his culture—inhabit.

Tannahill further explores this self-reflexivity of the aesthetic act in “The Parnassiad, A Visionary View,” a meditation on the depressing difficulty of achieving poetic fame. As we have seen particularly in Wilson, Little, Sillar, and Lapraik, the obscure labor of the poet is entirely at the mercy of standards of taste over which the poet has no control. The signal success of Burns, however, only makes matters worse, as it establishes a transformative “new normal” that eclipses even the deftest skill at imitating and—it is to be hoped—reanimating classical genre poetry. Tannahill’s use of the

Parnassus trope (like Sillar's) both acknowledges this problem and recognizes his own supersession by the new poetics of "Nature" that Burns and others have forged:

COME, Fancy, thou hast ever been,
In life's low vale, my ready friend
 To cheer the clouded hour;
Tho unfledg'd with scholastic law,
Some visionary picture draw
 With all thy magic pow'r.
Now to the intellectual eye
 The glowing prospects rise.
Parnassus' lofty summits high,
 Far tow'ring mid the skies,
 Where vernal, eternally,
 Rich leafy laurels grow,
 With bloomy bays, thro endless days,
 To crown the Poet's brow.⁵⁵⁴

This is one of Tannahill's most ambitious poems in terms of its metric construction. Composed in fourteen-line stanzas (sonnet form), each stanza begins with a pair of tercets, rhymed *aabccd*, the first two verses of which are iambic tetrameters and the third of which is iambic trimeter. These are followed by pair of quatrains composed in common meter, rhymed *efef* and *ghgh*. It is likely that Tannahill had Burns's vernacular version of the Spencerian or Shenstonian invocative mode in mind (as well as the direct influence of Shenstone and other Augustan poets, as the poem itself indicates), though he does not attempt either Burns's Standard Habbie form or broad Scots diction (though, as we will see below, he does drop into the vernacular when describing his inadequacy as a poet). This complexity of form demonstrates the poet's ambivalence and self-doubt about his craft and his motives for pursuing it. Which model should a poet follow? The "great" poets in the classical tradition—Homer, Virgil, Dante, Milton—were all successful

⁵⁵⁴ R. Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1876), 75-76.

imitators and, arguably, innovators. When Burns joined the company, he did it by leavening classical forms with his “genius,” his fidelity to Nature. As we have noted elsewhere, many of Burns’s contemporaries for various reasons resent this “genius,” but Tannahill appears to locate his disappointment in a failure of the poet’s “Fancy,” whom he invites to “cheer the clouded hour;/Tho unfledg’d with scholastic law,/Some visionary picture draw/With all thy magic pow’r.” Tannahill’s muse is thus an externalized version of himself, as opposed to the loftier visitants of the epic poets or even Burns’s vision of Dame Scotia. Indeed, it might be argued that Tannahill crosses over into the romantic trope of the self-made poet, as exemplified, for instance, in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*.

But as the poet discovers, invoking the self as inspiration imports the very inadequacies the poet seeks to remedy through the invocation itself. Fancy, it seems, is “unfled’g with scholastic law,” a familiar self-deprecatory move in much of the plebeian poetry we have sampled, but tinged with the recognition that perhaps the poet cannot dispense with “scholastic law” and still hope to scale “Parnassus’ lofty summits high.” Imitation matters, and although poets may spurn older forms and subjects as outworn and anachronistic (Milton’s rejection of classical and Renaissance epic subject matter and the constraints of artificial verse forms come to mind), they must nevertheless master them in order to transcend them. Here the poet appears to feel this deficiency keenly; his Fancy comes uninstructed, bereft of one of the basic requirements of poetry’s “magic pow’r.” Having called for this problematic imagination, the poet’s “intellectual eye” fantasizes about producing a “great poem,” despite being already aware of the incompatibility of his

desire and his talent. This incompatibility cannot be long repressed, and when it emerges into the poet's active consciousness he proves unable to cope with the psychic strain:

Sure, bold is he who dares to climb
Yon awful jutting rock sublime,
 Who dares Pegasus sit;
For should brain ballast prove too light,
He'll spurn him his airy height
 Down to Oblivion's pit,
There to disgrace for ever doom'd
 To mourn his sick'ning woes,
And weep, that ever he presum'd
 Above the vale of Prose.
 Then, O beware! with prudent care,
 Nor leave behind thy peace of mind,
 To gain sounding name.⁵⁵⁵

This vision is obviously not the kind of inspiration the poet seeks when he summons his muse; indeed, the poem announces itself as a kind of anti-epic, a demonstration of poetry composed without inspiration of any kind, whether supernatural or self-generated. Burns sought this inspiration in a national idea, a political commitment that helped him to reconcile his desire and talent in an integrated aesthetic production. Declining this muse, and the limitations it imports (Burns the plebeian radical), Tannahill looks to the ancients and his more recent British avatars to establish a suitable national and aesthetic position from which this integration can occur. The poem implicitly asks the question: what kind of poetry might Burns have written had he lived into the Napoleonic years that Tannahill experienced? Could a poem like "The Vision," with its appeal to a specifically *national*

⁵⁵⁵ R. Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1876), 76.

muse, have been produced in reactionary, royalist Scotland increasingly being called upon to defend the British state from external enemies?⁵⁵⁶

Perhaps Tannahill might have used this opportunity to recast Burns's "vision" as Britannia. But he firmly resists the allegorical mode that such a national appeal would entail; his "fancy" cannot build such a framework. His choice rather appears to lie between some kind of fidelity to the self and a misappropriation of Burns's avatar (not to mention that of the British poets who went before him). At the same time, that fidelity leads to an "Oblivion" of obscurity and "disgrace." The "vale of Prose" of the second stanza coincides with "life's low vale" in the first, a place of seemingly dishonorable refuge for the ruined poet but also one in which "peace of mind" is still possible. To write poetry, in this sense, is "madness," mandating the poet's willing desertion of this same "peace of mind." Prose is the medium of sanity, sociability, and common sense. It is also the language of religion, philosophy, and enlightenment:

Behold!—yon ready rhyming carl,
With flatt'ry fir'd, attracts the warl'
 By canker'd, pers'nal satire;
He takes th' unthinking crowds acclaim
For sterling proofs of lasting fame,
 And deals his inky spatter.
Now, see! he on Pegasus flies
 With bluff, important straddle!
He bears him midway up the skies,--
 See! see! he's off the saddle!
 He headlong tumbles, growls and grumbles,
 Down the dark abyss;

⁵⁵⁶ Marilyn Butler and others have answered this question in the negative. Although most agree that Burns privately sympathized with the reform cause in private, he generally devoted his energies in the 1790s to "Scottish song, with its potentially much wider, more open popular market." M. Butler, "Burns and Politics," *Love and Liberty, Robert Burns: A Bicentenary Celebration*, ed. Kenneth Simpson (East Linton, 1997) 88-89.

The noisy core, that prais'd before,
Now join the gen'ral hiss.⁵⁵⁷

As we have seen elsewhere, the fickle taste of the “noisy core, that prais'd before” can likewise condemn a poet too fixated on celebrity. This is a conventional enough lament, but how does it interact with the lack of “brain ballast” that hurls the poet down the “abyss” in the second stanza? It seems significant that this is the first instance in the poem in which the poet reverts to a vernacular strain to describe the “rhyming carl,/With flatt'ry fir'd, attracts the warl'/By canker'd, pers'nal satire.” One thinks of Wilson, Pagan, or Tait firing off poetic broadsides at real or perceived personal enemies, but Tannahill is also referring to Swiftean satire, with its sharp political elbows and partisan side-taking. These verses may also take a bit of a side-swipe at Burns, who could grind personal axes with the best of them, but such satire should not be confused with “poetry.” Tannahill’s idea of poetry, though constructed in terms of negative opposition, is taking a discernible shape. As we see in the first and second stanzas, a poet must be learned and capable of reproducing and manipulating classical genres and verse forms. Developing this skill requires “scholastic” and assiduous study, not a task for the intellectual lightweight. In the third stanza, the poet eschews the “canker'd, pers'nal satire,” the petty subject matter of individual grievance that characterizes much of eighteenth-century poetry.

A further solecism against poetry is committed in the fourth stanza:

Now, see another vent'rer rise
Deep fraught with fulsome eulogies
To win his patron's favor,—

⁵⁵⁷ R. Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1876), 77.

One of those adulating things
 That, dangling in the train of kings,
 Give guilt a splendid cover.
 He mounts, well prefac'd by "my Lord,"
 Inflicts the spur's sharp wound;
 Pegasus spurns the great man's word,
 And won't move from the ground.
 Now, mark his face flush'd with disgrace,
 Thro future life to grieve on;
 His wishes cross'd, his hopes all lost,
 He sinks into oblivion.⁵⁵⁸

Disappointment in securing patronage is thematic in much of the poetry we are reading, but here the poet seems to assert that anything written in the service of patronage is necessarily false. This view of the matter would disqualify a considerable amount of canonical poetry from the laurels. Nevertheless, the argument is consistent with the poet's conception of the "true" self as the only legitimate source of poetic inspiration. A poet who prostitutes himself or herself to the whims of patronage is at least as deserving of oblivion as one who writes in an effort to propitiate popular or critical taste or demonstrates no competence in using the poetic materials of the past.

While the third stanza anathematizes the alienation of the poet's intellectual and aesthetic integrity, the fourth excoriates poetasters who attempt to utilize genres unconnected with the poet's lived experience:

Yon city scribbler thinks to scale
 The cliffs of fame with Pastoral,
 In worth thinks none e'er richer,
 Yet never climb'd the upland steep,
 Nor e'er beheld a flock of sheep,
 Save those driv'n by the butcher;
 Nor ever mark'd the gurgling stream,
 Except the common sew'r

⁵⁵⁸ R. Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1876).

On rainy days, when dirt and slime
Pour'd turbid past his door.
Choice epithets in store he gets
From Virgil, Shenstone, Pope,
With tailor art tacks part to part,
And makes his Past'ral up.⁵⁵⁹

This particularly pungent denunciation, to which the poet delightfully draws attention by consecutive enjambments in the first quatrain (between “common sew’r” and “On rainy days” and “dirt and slime” and “Pour’d turbid”), applies to any number of Tannahill’s predecessors and contemporaries, but just how do we distinguish between “imitation,” which the poet appears to accord an appropriate place in his aesthetic, and, for lack of a better term, literary plagiarisms (the “tailor art”)? If the “choice epithets in store he gets/From Virgil, Shenstone, Pope” deserve condemnation, what about the ones Virgil, Shenstone, and Pope themselves borrow from their masters? And if poetry must remain free of direct influence, on one hand, and represent the poet’s authentic experience on the other, upon what foundation does the poet build? The apparent resolution lies in “Nature”:

But see, rich clad in native worth,
Yon Bard of Nature ventures forth,
In simple modest tale;
Applauding millions catch the song,
The raptur’d rocks the notes prolong,
And hand them to the gale.
Pegasus kneels—he takes his seat—
Now, see! aloft he towers
To place him, ‘bove the reach of fate,
In Fame’s ambrosial bowers:
To be enroll’d with bards of old
In ever honour’d station,—
The gods, well pleas’d, see mortals rais’d

⁵⁵⁹ R. Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1876), 77-78.

Worthy of their creation!⁵⁶⁰

This Burnsian apotheosis suggests that only the poet who closes the circuit between the “tale,” the “Applauding millions,” and Nature itself can “be enroll’d with bards of old.” The arbiters of taste—the pedantic *literati*, fashionable society, partisan or patronage interests, in fact the whole basis of Augustan British culture—have destroyed poetry, leaving its revival to a humble farmer from Ayrshire. This triumphalist version of Burns’s aesthetic importance, however, sits uncomfortably beside Burns’s co-optation by the very cultural authorities Tannahill rejects. Indeed, Burns’s popularity with the “people” might never have occurred without their sanction and the publicity they offered to the penurious poet. In “The Parnassiad,” the poet is faced with a Hobson’s choice: publicity is necessary to access the literary market, but at the same time producing suitable material for the market requires the poet to satisfy the taste-makers, thus alienating the poet from his “nat’ral” self and falsifying poetry.

The poet’s only exit from the paradox is to give up the game:

Now, mark what crowds of hackney scribblers,
Imitators, rhyming dabblers,
 Follow in the rear!
Pegasus spurns us one by one,
Yet, still fame-struck, we follow on,
 And tempt our fate severe:
In many a dogg’rel Epitaph,
 And short-lined, mournful Ditty,
Our “Ahs!—Alases!” raise the laugh,
 Revert the tide of pity,
 Yet still we write in Nature’s spite,
 Our last piece aye the best;
Arraigning still, complaining still,
 The world for want of taste!

⁵⁶⁰ R. Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1876), 78-79.

Observe yon poor deluded man,
 With threadbare coat and visage wan
 Ambitious of a name;
 The nat'ral claims of meat and cleeding,
 He reckons these not worth the heeding,
 But, presses on for fame!
 The public voice, touchstone of worth,
 Anonymous he cries;
 But draw the critic's vengeance forth,—
 His fancied glory dies.
 Neglected now, dejected now,
 He gives his spleen full scope;
 In solitude he chews his cud—
 A downright Misanthrope.⁵⁶¹

The speaker strikes a Voltairean pose, urging aspiring poets to tend to their own gardens lest they lose their humanity. But is this renunciation merely a conceit, itself a hackneyed imitation of the trope of the misunderstood artist? To put the question another way, is Tannahill rehearsing the very process the poem appears to abhor, and if so, what does this mean for the idea of poetry? If we read “The Parnassiad” as a challenge to prevailing aesthetic principles and official standards of taste, the poem takes on heavy political freight. It is not simply the conventional diatribe of a disappointed poetaster against critical “vengeance,” but a radical manifesto for freeing poetry from the hidebound conservatism of the cultural hegemon that regulates poetic production. Moreover, the poem does not, in my judgment, advocate this freedom solely as a means of releasing the *poet* from the stranglehold of criticism, but of liberating the “public voice” from the disciplinary constraints of official culture. This begs the question of what constitutes a “public,” but the poem suggests an answer in terms of the “Applauding millions” whose

⁵⁶¹ R. Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1876), 79-80.

sanction, “passed” on to Nature, elevates the poet to Parnassus’ heights. In Shelley’s terms, in this apotheosis the poet realizes his true function as a legislator for the people, whose voice the established order has so long silenced. The real problem with the “crowds of hackney scribblers,/Imitators, rhyming dabblers” is not their ambition but their lack of commitment to the radicalization of poetry itself. While the romantic tropes of the “People” and “Nature” make convenient placeholders for the purpose of opposing the contentless and artificial art demanded by the ruling classes, they speak more directly to the reconception of the poet (as Wordsworth and Coleridge theorized) as a “man speaking to men.” This perspective brings the ostensibly loyal workman Tannahill much closer to the radical weaver Wilson than we might recognize simply by comparing their respective *oeuvres*. Wilson may have employed republican and reformist codes in the early 1790s, when the possibility of a “constitutional revolution” may still have been imaginable, but we should not judge Tannahill’s apparent political quiescence in those terms. The right turn to “Nature” performed by early nineteenth-century Romantic poets appalled by Napoleon’s megalomania, such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, finds something of its Scottish parallel in the “Anonymous . . . cries” of an obscure weaver from Paisley:

Then, brother Rhymsters, O beware!
Nor tempt unscar’d the specious snare
 Which Self-Love often weaves;
Nor dote with a fond father’s pains,
Upon the offspring of your brains,
 For fancy oft deceives.
To lighten life, a wee bit sang
 Is sure a sweet illusion!
But ne’er provoke the critic’s stang
 By premature intrusion.

Lock up your piece, let fondness cease,
Till mem'ry fail to bear it,
With critic lore then read it o'er,
Yourself may judge its merit.⁵⁶²

Just as Protestantism revolutionized Christianity by giving the “people” direct access to scripture, thus re-conceiving personal literacy as both a religious duty and an economic necessity, poets must lead a Reformation of their own medium to meet the demands of a “nat’ral” life, thus re-conceiving poetry as a language suitable to the modern conditions of commercial capitalism. This reconception may be achieved only by “locking up” the phony imitations or formulaic doggerel “Till mem’ry fail to bear it.” While preserving the universal structure and language of poetry, exemplified by the classical models the poet must study and internalize, the poet must avoid “premature intrusion” by rushing products to market before either they—or the market itself—are ready. “To lighten life, a wee bit sang/Is sure a sweet Illusion” seems perhaps too modest and homiletic a statement of purpose, at least in the context of contemporary defenses of poesy familiar to readers of English Romanticism. But in its understatement lies its power. It is well to recall once more that most English romantic poets spoke from positions of high cultural authority rather than from the industrial underside of late eighteenth-century Britain. Absent those considerable advantages, plebeian poets used similar materials for similar purposes; for them, a “wee bit sang” may be a “sweet Illusion,” but the important fact remains that art *is* an illusion. As such, art cannot be invested with human hopes, fears, ambitions, and aspirations, but only with facsimiles thereof rendered by the artist in

⁵⁶² R. Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1876), 80.

relation to the natural world, whether that world is a placid hilltop in England or a noisy, grimy industrial town in Scotland.

While MacPherson's and Scott's poetry, for example, are rightfully considered an integral part of the larger tradition of European romanticism, Wilson, Tannahill, and their contemporaries, despite not enjoying much in the way of commercial success, should be considered as important contributors to this tradition as well. Each of them deserves his or her own study using the same methods of literary, linguistic, and historical analysis as have been so amply and deservedly accorded to canonical poets. For each of them who actually made it into print, allowing us the pleasure and excitement of discovery and evaluation, many more did not leave permanent traces of their unique presences. Wilson and Tannahill, Robertson and Tait, Pagan and Burns, do not speak from a "class" position that determines their meaning, but from individual sites within a highly structured society in transition from one organized by rank, function, and degree to one determined largely by one's relation to capital and labor. Each is "British" in the common fund of language, form, and tradition that they draw upon to speak for themselves and their society. Each is local, national, and even cosmopolitan in their comprehensive, though often divergent, interests in their communities and in the wider world. I have from time to time labeled many of them for convenience as "weaver" or "plebeian" poets, but none is insular or parochial, though the intensities they register in their poetry constantly shift from inside to outside and back again, indeed erasing the boundary between "inside" and "outside" and establishing the proper role of poetry as encompassing the human and natural worlds

as a single field of experience and expression. If this is not what it means to be a poet, I am not sure what is.

To be a “Scottish” poet at the end of the eighteenth century, in other words, was to be “just” a poet, however each of these figures conceived of his or her vocation. To claim them for “Scotland” is to acknowledge that Scotland, regardless of its political status, has always had a large part to play in European, British, Anglophone, and transnational culture. Tannahill, like Shakespeare, Donne, Burns, and so many of the “great” poets who went before and came after him, sees it this way:

THIS warl’s a Tap-room owre an owre,
Whar ilk ane tak’s his caper,
Some taste the sweet, some drink the sour,
As waiter Fate sees proper;
Let mankind live, ae social core,
An drap a selfish quar’ling,
An whan the Landlord ca’s his score,
May ilk ane’s clink be sterling.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶³ R. Tannahill, *Poems and Songs* (1876), 171.

Chapter 5 A Scottish Revolution in Verse

A friend of Alexander Wilson (who borrowed money from him), James Kennedy made a tenuous living by weaving gauze and muslin in Edinburgh.⁵⁶⁴ In the wake of the notorious sedition trials, he published a broadside against the government entitled *Treason!!!, or, Not Treason!!! Alias the Weaver's Budget* (1795). Published under his own name, with the added epithet describing himself as a “Scotch Exile,” the title page contains the following inscription:

Price *One Shilling*:
To the Labouring Poor, *Sixpence*.
Those who cannot afford, in these hard times, to part
with a *Sixpence for food to the mind*, may
have it from the Author *gratis*.⁵⁶⁵

Kennedy thus announces his offensive against a corrupt, warmongering government dedicated to the slaughter of its young men abroad and the starvation of laborers, women, and children at home. For him, poetry is a blunt instrument to be used for the purpose of bludgeoning the conscience of the ruling elites. But it is also the instrument of the political exile; indeed, Kennedy places himself in the rather elevated company of the stateless who refused to go quietly into the Cimmerian darkness—Socrates, Cicero, Boethius, Dante, Bunyan, Milton:

GEORGE GUELPH the Third, to you I call!
Slight not Advice in season:
Remember CHARLIE STUART'S Fall—

⁵⁶⁴ A. Noble, “Burns and the Renfrew Radicals,” 212.

⁵⁶⁵ James Kennedy, *Treason!!! Or, NOT TREASON!!! Alias The Weaver's Budget* (London, 1795).

Kings *can* commit High Treason!⁵⁶⁶

As can poets, but Kennedy does not seem deterred. He was involved in the Watt and Downie conspiracy in Edinburgh, was arrested, and spent ten weeks in jail.⁵⁶⁷ Upon his return to London, he published yet another seditious text, *The Pitiful Complaint of a Hen-Pecked Prodigal: dedicated to the Daughter of the Duke Bobadil*, a satire on the Prince Regent. We then lose sight of him; John Barrell thinks he may have fled to Canada to avoid prosecution (and the very great possibility of transportation) for explicitly “imagining,” if not threatening to cause, “the king’s death.”⁵⁶⁸ We are in the presence of political revolutionism *par excellence*, adumbrated by poets such as Robertson and Wilson, circumlocuted by Burns, and directly advocated—as well as contested—in the poetry to which we now turn.

James Kennedy and the Poetics of Exile: Making Britain Scottish

In this discussion, I am not as interested in the political arguments these poems make, though they are interesting enough, as I am in how and to what extent the “Scottishness” of radical or royalist poets of the period contributes to such positions. For example, what does it mean for Kennedy to represent himself as a “Scotch exile” as opposed simply to a friend of liberty?

Kennedy’s pamphlet opens with an address to “The Reader”:

Chas’d from my calling to this hackney’d trade,
By persecution a poor Poet made—
Yet favour court not, scribble not for fame;

⁵⁶⁶ Kennedy, *Treason*.

⁵⁶⁷ A. Noble, “Burns and the Renfrew Radicals,” 214.

⁵⁶⁸ This phrase refers to John Barrell’s fascinating study of the expansion of the English law of treason during the 1790s, *Imagining the King’s Death*.

To blast Oppressors is my only aim.
With pain I started from a private life;
In sorrow left my Children and my Wife!
But though fair Freedom's foes have turned me out,
At every resting-place I'll wheel about,
And charge the Villains! —⁵⁶⁹

No aspiration to scale the heights of Parnassus here: poetry is the last resort of a persecuted man, his only remaining weapon against his “Oppressors” and “fair Freedom's foes.” Unlike his friend Wilson, who shared the same political commitments, Kennedy articulates no aesthetic *raison d'être* for poetry distinct from its function as revolutionary discourse. Poetry, he argues, is the form of language best suited to the condition of exile; “made by Persecution,” the poet lives not in an ecstatic state of mystical converse with Nature, but in “pain” and “sorrow,” bereft of intimate relationships and the pleasures of a sociable life. The ultimate causes of human suffering are not personal and emotional, not the vicissitudes of fortune, but deliberately political and remediable by direct political action. Kennedy's Paineite view stems from the very Enlightenment thinking that has made common cause with the British state that “chas'd” him “from his calling,” destroying his ability to support a family in an honest trade simply by virtue of his republicanism. Politics makes exiles, and exiles respond by making poetry.

But what change can poetry effect, sourced as it is in the most politically impotent, the dispossessed and the stateless? The first poem in Kennedy's pamphlet, “The Exile's Reveries, Dedicated to the Scourge of Scotland, Harry Dundas” (1794), announces an explicitly Jacobin and insurrectionary call to arms:

⁵⁶⁹ Kennedy, *Treason*.

“Do we toil while others reap?
“Do we starve while others feast?
“Are we sold and shorn like sheep?
“By the Despot and the Priest?

“Are we born for them alone?
“If by Right Divine they rule,
“Yonder *idiot* on a Throne,
“Reigns by Right Divine a *fool*.

“Masters of the *puppet show*,
“Long they’ve made us dance at will;
“Should we down the curtain throw,
“Farewell to their magic skill.⁵⁷⁰

While this may be standard fare for radical verse of the period, Kennedy prefaces his rising revolutionary zeal and anger with a reflection on the exile’s eternal condition as a “marked man”:

Sweet the birds around me sing,
Fair the flow’rs around me blow;
Conscience wears no guilty sting—
Why, then, droop the child of woe?

Here no rotten-hearted Spy,
Spider like, the snare extends,
Though on grassy couch I lie,
I am guarded by my friends.⁵⁷¹

Then, as now, the state’s spies were notoriously effective at identifying political agitators and promoters of sedition. The actual physical banishment of the subject was only the most extreme form of exile; for thousands of reformists at home, the unceasing surveillance of the “dangerous” subject isolated them just as effectively as transportation to Botany Bay. In the poem, the exile feels the temptation to succumb to the peace and

⁵⁷⁰ Kennedy, *Treason*, 4.

⁵⁷¹ Kennedy, *Treason*, 4.

solitude that Nature offers him, imagining himself secure from discovery by Dundas's agents. What prevents Nature from exercising its narcotic effect is the "child of woe," the consciousness of exile from which the poet can never find relief, even in the relative safety of Nature. In contrast, Wordsworth's marvelous freedom to wander and "become" a poet of Nature in the first book of *The Prelude* owes everything to his privileged political position, which produces the benefits of economic and social security. His rejected Jacobinism is a broken fragment of himself, the cause and consequence of an emotional breakdown vaguely attributed to his shock and dismay at the Reign of Terror and the imperial pretensions of Napoleon. Wordsworth figures his passage from revolutionism to quiescence as healing, a wholesome return to his "right mind." His exile was a temporary insanity, not a self-identity, as it is for Kennedy, who enjoys none of Wordsworth's advantages. Wordsworth's "Nature" approaches the Divine, the Objective Universal existing over and above the machinations of human societies, whereas for Kennedy it is simply a production of "culture," controlled and regulated by the ruling elites for the purpose of depriving the great majority of human subjects of a fair share of the fruits of their toil. Thus, even when beguiled by the natural beauty and repose of his "grassy couch," the exile recognizes that accepting the illusion as real gives "the Despot and the Priest" the final victory. Any art, any aesthetic principle, produced under their hegemony is necessarily false and oppressive, and it must be resisted:

"Have the jugglers nerves more strong?

"Are their numbers more than our's?

"Nay, they could not triumph long,

"If depriv'd of borrow'd pow'rs.

"Should the *Sans-Cullottes* come here,

“We may gain, but cannot lose;
“Freedom’s friends we do not fear,
“Tyrants only are our foes.”

* * *

Gallia starts to mental view;
(Ah! her laurels reek with blood)
Trampling on a reptile crew,
Blasters of the public good.

Truth and Reason, rob’d in charms,
Cheering like the morn, advance;
Freedom’s trumpet sounds to arms!
Slav’ry shrinks abash’d from France.⁵⁷²

These are fighting words, indeed, inviting the Jacobins to duplicate their slaughter of priests and aristocrats in England’s green and pleasant land. The poet laments the fates of Palmer and Muir (“injur’d Scotia’s shining gem”), Margarot and Skirving, and other transported patriots, victims of judicial murder:

Britons, blush! the tale is true;
Britons, from your stupor, rise!
Are not fetters forg’d for you,
By the shameful sacrifice?⁵⁷³

Turning from the martyred Friends of the People to his own domestic sacrifice, the poet once more laments his forced separation from wife and children:

CITIZEN! Dear hapless Child!
Soon, alas! thou’rt forc’d to roam:
Now thy Father is exil’d,
Thou art left without a home.

Fond, I hop’d, my efforts joined
To thy Mother’s virtuous care,
Would have stor’d thy rising mind

⁵⁷² Kennedy, *Treason*, 5.

⁵⁷³ Kennedy, *Treason*, 7.

With ideas as free as air,

Mitres, crowns, and titled things
Early taught thee to despise;
Noblest fame true merit brings,
The *good* are *great*, the *just* are *wise*.⁵⁷⁴

Revolution is thus figured as a family piéta, a domestic tragedy. What is sacrificed is not so much the poet's injured political sensibilities, as compelling as they are, but his "efforts joined/To thy Mother's virtuous care." The enjambment powerfully marks the magnitude of the loss; it severs the line through the word "joined" just as the repressive state decapitates the domestic unit "joined" in marriage and parenthood. Moreover, the revolutionary poet must choose between submission to that state, requiring him to surrender "ideas as free as air," and the maintenance of those ideas at the debilitating expense of the very domesticity that state ideology idealizes. This verse additionally lays bare the illusory nature of the Lockean state as a consensual body that its citizens "join" in order to foster the liberties of "free-born" Britons. It thus makes a mockery of the theoretical right of citizens to withdraw their consent when confronted by tyranny. So just as the poet must sacrifice the domestic security and affection of the family in order to assert his privileges as a "citizen" (ironically the name of his son), he must go into exile in order fully to realize his identity as a citizen of the state that has placed a price on his head.

The Popean format of the poem, recalling *The Essay on Man*, demonstrates just how deeply even plebeian citizens have internalized the British state's language of liberty. But Kennedy does not stop with simply using this language against his

⁵⁷⁴ Kennedy, *Treason*, 8.

oppressors. In the final quatrains of the poem, he proposes a new basis for reconstituting the liberty of the subject from the broken fetters forged by Locke and the Revolution

Settlement:

Must I no more remain your prop?
No more your kind embraces meet?
Hark! SCOTIA calls, "These ravings drop!"
"Gain Freedom, or a winding sheet!"

"My Sons, beneath Corruption's yoke,
"Enfeebled and degraded, groan:
"ROUSE! Fav'rites ROUSE! The SPELL IS BROKE!
"THE PROUD OPPRESSOR'S POW'R IS GONE!"⁵⁷⁵

This ecstatic vision imagines Scotia's intervention to restore liberty to the cowed and tyrannized Britons of the previous quatrains. When Scotland rouses the poet from his own "stupour" and sentimental attachment to his family, it is not to reclaim her ancient independence but to redeem the meaning and value of Britishness itself. The poet's move is somewhat ironic, given Scotia's lived history of repressive and autocratic feudal and kirk government; rather his selective revision of this history emphasizes Scotland's collective experience of repression by its more powerful and imperious neighbor. Here the poet defines "Scottishness" in terms of "Freedom," "Britain" in terms of oppression, emptying out any ethnic or "national" content from these terms and recasting them as markers of a purely political identity. As any republican the world over can become "French" by virtue of his adherence to the revolution, anyone can be Scottish, and hence British, if imbued with the same revolutionary ethos of citizenship. In this sense, the poet's son "Citizen" embodies the central ideological argument of the poem: what we call

⁵⁷⁵ Kennedy, *Treason*, 8.

things matters. The signs we use to indicate national allegiance, while not entirely arbitrary because of, if nothing else, their historical usage, are nevertheless plastic and malleable. Kennedy's propagandistic sensibility in the poem predicts one of the Foucaultian premises of "modernity"—that political power depends on the command of definitions as much as on a monopoly of violence.

Much of Kennedy's other poetry in this volume deploys a satiric mode, sometimes descending to near scurrility. His critique of Burke, "the most sublime apostate from the cause of liberty," strikes a common pose in the radical poetry of the period. In a song titled "Swinish Gruntings," the poet calls on the porcine multitude to rise up against their "drivers":

WHO would not join the cause,
The cause of Reformation,
Oppression has o'erspread our Herd,
We groan beneath taxation.
From Tyrant *Boar* to Butcher *Pig*,
Each *Driver* is our servant;
Though late with savage rage they've grown,
Our persecutors fervent.

What! shall a base, deceitful crew,
Supported by our labours,
Gainsay our wills—wage wicked war,
With our good Apeish neighbours?
Forbid it, Heaven! forbid it, Earth!
Ye Grunters brave, forbid it!
Nor let your haughty rulers tell,
With your consent they did it.⁵⁷⁶

While formulaic and unremarkable in terms of its critique of political and economic repression at home and unpopular war abroad, the poem reveals a tension in much radical

⁵⁷⁶ Kennedy, *Treason*, 9-10.

poetry between reformation and retribution. Here we see the “constitutional” phase of British reformism of the 1780s, of which Burke was a part and which stood for varying degrees of democratization and the elimination of “Old Corruption,” giving way to the more radical, Jacobin rhetoric of the people as vengeful Nemesis:

To view our dear-bought rights o’erstep’d,
By crazy Capernonians,
Our Patriots banish’d, dragg’d in chains,
Alarms us Grumbletonians.
But rank unjust oppressive deeds,
And fiery persecution,
Shall only hasten the day
Of downright retribution.

*Come Rouse, ye slumb’ring Grunters, Rouse!
Shake off inglorious slav’ry!
Like Swine! assert your native rights,
Make Drivers dread your brav’ry.*⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁷ Kennedy, *Treason*, 11. A footnote to the poem defines “Capernonians” as “Old crazy cruel creatures, who, by way of distinction upon particular cases, wear the hair and skins of other animals.” Kennedy here refers to the notorious Lord Braxfield, who presided over the sedition trials of Thomas Muir and others. Readers are directed to “apply to the Lord Justice Clerk of the Scotch Court of Judiciary” to find the meaning of “Grumbletonians.” Kennedy’s usage of the term was repeated in a contemporary chapbook satire entitled *An epistle from C.J.K. Weaveronian, to L.J.C. Capernonian; being an echo to his lordship’s ever memorable speech, on opening the Joost-Ass-Court in the city of St. Mungo, September, 1796* ... (London, 1796). Francis Grose’s *The 1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* defines “Grumbletonian” as a “discontented person; one who is always railing at the times or ministry.” A more explicit (and scatological) satire of Braxfield can be found in Kennedy’s “A Caracature (sic) Likeness of the L. J. Capernonian”:

Prisoner: My Lord, did you lately dine with Rough-head,
The sworn foe to Swine?

L.J. Capernonian: Suppose I did, seditious sinner! What us’t to
Thee whar I tak’ dinner?

Prisoner: Did you propose, in consultation
To add the Lash to Transportation?

Kennedy's rhyme of the now-forgotten terms "Capernonians" and "Grumbletonians" jars the aesthetic sensibility, but to contemporary readers it signifies the prevailing reactionary stance of the Scottish judiciary toward The Friends of the People, particularly its savage and unjudicial treatment of the radicalized working class in the Scotland's central industrial belt. Once again we see Kennedy dealing with British politics in a Scottish context. Scotland has become the site of contestation between "native rights" and "fiery persecution," the political space that fully reveals the ruling elites' naked exploitation of the "slumb'ring Grunters." The poem's characterization of the people as "slaves" contradicts Thomson's proud assertion that "Britons never will be slaves" and compares the condition of the workers to the coerced African laborers toiling on West

Did not a charming female say,
Ye durst not thus the Tyrant play?
Did you reply—you durst, you would:
"Twould do the Swinish Rabble good,
To drown their murmurs in their blood?"

The Justice, frying mad with anger,
Exclaim'd, "I canna thole nae langer!"
Then rearing up his bum unholy,
Discharg'd a thund'ring stinking volley!
The steam in curling volumes rose—
Miss Pult'ney blushing, held her nose;

The wag'ish Duchess, with a roar
Of laughter, cry'd, "Encore! Encore!"
The Justice, filthy, ill-bred brute,
Besmear'd, encor'd the vile salute:
Then whisper'd low to Johny Grame,
"John, John! Wi' a' yer pith run hame,
"An' fetch me cleen breeks an' a sark
"For troth, John, I've o'ershot the mark!"

Qtd. in A. Noble, "Burns and the Renfrew Radicals," 215-16.

Indian plantations, a common figure for radical weaver poetry of the period. But whereas the previous poem locates hopes for the renewal of British liberty in Scotland, this one specifically identifies the oppressors as Scottish, rather than referring to the monarch and his Scottish henchmen, such as Henry Dundas.

Thomas Muir, Henry Dundas, and the Scottish Revolution(s)

Both eighteenth-century defenders of the union and some modern historians have identified Scotland's retention of its legal system (as well as its educational and religious institutions) under the 1707 treaty as a more or less significant marker of Scotland's unique national history and the distinctiveness of Scottish identity within Great Britain.⁵⁷⁸ Though formally incorporated into the British state, Scotland was governed primarily by an indigenous elite whose privileges were backed by effective state control over the institutions that actually came into contact with the people: the courts and the church. Indeed, for much of the eighteenth century a pair of political managers—Archibald Campbell, Earl of Islay, and 3d Duke of Argyll (the so-called “king” of Scotland famously portrayed by Scott in *The Heart of Midlothian*) and Henry Dundas, later Viscount Melville (whose rise to Lord Advocate in 1775 marked the beginning of almost

⁵⁷⁸ Historians differ with respect to the extent of this significance. Smout argues that the “parts of the treaty guaranteeing the separate existence of the Church of Scotland and the Scottish law courts. . . ., though not immune from erosion, remain obvious sources of the surviving distinctions between the two halves of the same island, and rallying points for national consciousness today.” Smout, *The History of the Scottish People*, 200. Devine discusses Scotland's institutional uniqueness in terms of the provenance of the Scottish Enlightenment, which he locates not in the relatively liberal eighteenth century, but in the intellectual ferment of the seventeenth century. See *The Scottish Nation*, ch. 4. Colin Kidd, however, contends that historians overrate the preservation of Scots law and kirk as an assertion of Scottish identity. C. Kidd, “Eighteenth-Century Scotland and the Three Unions,” *Anglo-Scottish Relations from 1603 to 1900*, ed. T. C. Smout (Oxford, 2005), 176-81.

three decades of virtually uncontested domination of Scottish politics)—ruled Scotland on behalf of the Hanoverian monarchs.⁵⁷⁹ To keep Scotland quiescent (in stark contrast to the robust parliamentary independence and concomitant political turbulence of Ireland), Argyll and Dundas dispensed patronage, controlled the tiny electorate (about 4,000 in a country of 1.5 million), appointed the judiciary, and influenced the presentation of clergy to local congregations.⁵⁸⁰ Indeed, James Buchan has described Scotland in the 1790s as “one great big pocket-borough” controlled by the Dundas “interest.”⁵⁸¹ Given the overwhelming preponderance of ministerial power over both the instruments of government and access to jobs and economic opportunities in the empire, it is hardly surprising that the landed, professional, and commercial classes for the most part lined up solidly behind the British state in the decade of crisis.⁵⁸²

As we have seen, however, historians have also documented a substantial and fairly persistent rash of popular disaffection with that state: periodic meal mobs; anti-militia riots (leading in one instance to the 1797 Tranent massacre in which English dragoons cut down a dozen men and boys); combinations against oppressive employment conditions in mines and factories; agrarian violence provoked by enclosure, land clearances, and the construction of sheep walks; immigration; and political protest, such as

⁵⁷⁹ On these two eighteenth-century “kings of Scotland,” see, for example, T. Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 22-3 and 197-99. For a broad discussion of the importance of the “semi-independent” Scottish government to economic development, see C. Whatley, *Scottish Society 1707-1830*, 99-116.

⁵⁸⁰ On patronage, see W. Ferguson, *Scotland: 1689 to the present* (Edinburgh, 1968), 236-42.

⁵⁸¹ J. Buchan, *Capital of the Mind: how Edinburgh changed the world* (London, 2003), 338.

⁵⁸² T. Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 212-19.

the spectacular king's birthday riot in Edinburgh in 1792, which lasted for three days and featured an attack on Dundas's house. When viewed in the same context as more persistent and permanent features of eighteenth-century popular resistance to British rule, such as excise fraud, smuggling, refusal of kirk congregations to accept their landlords' choice of clergy, anti-Catholic agitation, and periodic demands for reform of corrupt royal burgh government, Scots, at least in terms of the middling sort and working poor, might appear well nigh ungovernable.⁵⁸³ Indeed, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century one might characterize Scotland as an incipient police state, as repeated challenges to social and political stability forced Dundas and the government to overhaul law enforcement and utilize the military to repress riots and maintain order in the town and countryside. "Over a decade, government policy had been a mixture of careful calculation, heavy-handed repression and occasional foolish miscalculation," David Brown writes of the 1790s. "Overall it had managed to keep social order by a difficult balancing act, while developing an infrastructure to police social order."⁵⁸⁴ Even had the French Revolution not occurred (or had taken a different trajectory), late eighteenth-century Scotland still seethed with sufficient dissension to compel the government to resort to increasingly formal and potentially draconian military and judicial means of law enforcement.

⁵⁸³ William Ferguson characterizes these and other indications of popular radicalism as an outgrowth of a larger "hidden struggle" over the British constitution in the last quarter of the eighteenth-century. *Scotland: 1689 to the Present*, ch. 8. Thomas Johnston likewise emphasizes the seriousness of the middle and working class challenge to the Scottish *ancien régime*. See T. Johnston, *A History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, ch. 9.

⁵⁸⁴ D. J. Brown, "The government response to Scottish radicalism: 1792-1802," 117.

The government's hammer fell hardest on Thomas Muir and some of his compatriots in the Scottish Friends of the People. The extraordinary level of public interest in Muir's arrest and trial for sedition not only crystallized pro-government anxieties but gave the Scottish government an opportunity to make an effective display of its panoply of powers, designed to keep its own people under surveillance and subject to sudden, potentially arbitrary imprisonment and punishment. Muir's trial took place on August 30, 1793, before Scotland's criminal court, the high court of justiciary.⁵⁸⁵ Lord Advocate Robert Dundas, Henry Dundas's nephew, appeared for the prosecution. Five judges heard the case, presided over by Robert Macqueen, Lord Braxfield (to whom James Kennedy has so graphically introduced us). Braxfield's conduct of the trial has passed into some Whig histories of eighteenth-century Scotland as a scandalous travesty of justice, though these accounts can be exaggerated. According to Henry Meikle, the great early twentieth-century historian of the period, "most of the injustice was due to the panic pervading all classes, including the bench."⁵⁸⁶ Henry Cockburn's partisan assessment was more blunt: "This is one of the cases the memory whereof never perisheth, history cannot let its injustice alone."⁵⁸⁷ A contemporary observer of the trial, James Kennedy put it this way:

For me—unceasing war I'll wage
With fell Oppression's furies:
Come, let us cram the *Iron Cage*
With cruel *Scottish Juries*;
And put in a *state of requisition*

⁵⁸⁵ Meikle bases much of his narrative of Muir's trial on Cockburn's *An Examination of the Trials for Sedition in Scotland*. See *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 131-36.

⁵⁸⁶ H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 131.

⁵⁸⁷ Qtd. in H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 131.

The wicked COURT OF INQUISITION
Injustice, there, with savage paw,
Stamps HARRY'S mandates SOV'REIGN LAW.⁵⁸⁸

Braxfield's biographer, Michael Fry, blames young Whig advocates, primarily Cockburn (who dubbed Braxfield "the Jeffreys of Scotland"), for smearing Braxfield's reputation by "always partisan and unfair slurs on tories," a narrative repeated over and over again in much nineteenth- and twentieth-century Scottish historiography. Fry claims that Braxfield, though "[C]onservative in his politics, stern in his judgments, and severe in his sentences," was no better or no worse than his colleagues on the bench and in the bar; he was highly intelligent, fond of conviviality, and immensely successful in his profession.⁵⁸⁹

But Braxfield's sociability must have provided cold comfort to Muir and other Scots radicals who fell under his heavy hand in the 1790s. Muir's sedition trial was the first major cause to come before Braxfield in the superheated political climate of revolution and reaction in the early 1790s. The indictment consisted of three charges: that Muir made seditious speeches designed to disaffect the lower classes; that he circulated Paine's *Rights of Man* and other seditious works; and that he read the "Address of the United Irishmen" at the first General Convention of the Friends of the People. Anxious for a conviction, Lord Advocate Dundas appears to have left no stone unturned, suborning a key witness, a maidservant to the Muir family, to deliver damning and

⁵⁸⁸ Kennedy, *Treason*, 28.

⁵⁸⁹ See M. Fry, "Macqueen, Robert, Lord Braxfield (1722–1799)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) William Ferguson provides a measured analysis of the trial, noting that Cockburn "exaggerated the misconduct of Braxfield" and "minimised the foolhardiness of the panel, Thomas Muir." *Scotland: 1689 to the Present*, 256.

fabricated evidence of Muir's supposed radical and insurrectionary activities.⁵⁹⁰ Although himself a relatively accomplished lawyer, Muir made the classic mistake of appearing *pro se*; he believed he could defend himself better than anyone else, rejecting an offer of representation from the great Whig advocate Henry Erskine (who had briefly served as Lord Advocate under the ill-fated Fox-North coalition a decade before).⁵⁹¹

In addition to the Lord Advocate's willingness to adduce false evidence, the very structure of Scottish criminal procedure told against Muir as well. Unlike the English criminal law system, Scottish judges selected the jury from a list of 45 qualified jurymen submitted by the sheriff of each of the three Lothians. The justiciary clerk culled this list to 45 and submitted it to the lord justice clerk, who on the day of the trial hand picked a jury of 15.⁵⁹² The unfortunate accused could only hope for the best, since he could not challenge the judge's selection. In the event, Braxfield picked 15 members of the loyal Goldsmith's Hall Association, of which Muir himself had once been a member. Troubled by his reformist zeal, the Association had expelled Muir and further offered a reward of five guineas to anyone giving evidence that any bookseller in Scotland was selling or distributing Paine's pamphlet to the "working people."⁵⁹³ In these respects, the trial may justifiably be considered more of a *posse comitatus* than a judicial proceeding,

⁵⁹⁰ H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 133.

⁵⁹¹ W. Ferguson, *Scotland: 1689 to the Present*, 256.

⁵⁹² H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 132.

⁵⁹³ H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 133.

although, as previously indicated, Muir did little to take advantage of any residual scruples some of the judges and jurymen may have had as to legal form.⁵⁹⁴

Muir's real crime appears to have been his association with both the French revolutionaries and the Irish reformers.⁵⁹⁵ The prosecution pointed to Muir's trips to France and Dublin as evidence of his seditious intent, although Muir himself made no secret of his activities and returned openly to Scotland to face trial. Moreover, even the government spy who copied down Muir's defense of the United Irishmen at the Edinburgh convention could not cite any specific incitement to rebellion, but only an exhortation to join with the Irish to pursue constitutional reforms (only later in the 1790s did the United Irishmen shed its reformist principles for more radical action). In fact, Muir moved a resolution, adopted by the convention, that "each society of the Friends of the People . . . expunge from the roll of its members, the name or names of any individual or individuals who may have acted illegally, tumultuously, or in any way to the disturbance of the public peace."⁵⁹⁶ Muir also subscribed to a declaration by John Millar that the convention "give to the executive government an effectual support in counteracting the efforts of sedition, and in suppressing, in their beginnings, all tumults and riots on whatever pretence they may be excited. . . . With these sentiments, and to this intent, we are RESOLVED AND DO DECLARE that we will stand by the

⁵⁹⁴ As Ferguson points out, Muir failed to "challenge the relevancy of the indictment at the proper stage." *Scotland: 1689 to the Present*, 256.

⁵⁹⁵ On Muir's visit to Dublin to meet William Drennan and Hamilton Rowan, leaders of the United Irishmen, see E. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution*, 100-01.

⁵⁹⁶ H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 254.

Constitution with our lives and fortunes.”⁵⁹⁷ In his address to the jury, the Lord Advocate, presumably to compensate for the considerable weight of the evidence against the state’s case, resorted primarily to innuendo and *ad hominem* attacks on the accused. Muir was a “demon of mischief,” a “pest of Scotland” whose “diabolical conduct” was aimed at raising rebellion among the rabble and overthrowing the constitution.⁵⁹⁸

Muir’s three-hour address in his own defense, though it kept the jury from its dinner and lasted until 2 a.m., has passed into the history of Scottish reform politics. In it Muir systematically rebutted the prosecution’s case and pleaded for toleration of reasoned constitutional dissent over radical political change. “What has been my crime?” he queried the exhausted jurymen. “Not lending a relation a copy of Mr. Paine’s works; not the giving away to another a few copies of an innocent and constitutional publication; but for having dared to be, according to the measure of my feeble abilities, a strenuous and active advocate for an equal representation of the people in the House of the People.”⁵⁹⁹

Muir’s appeal fell on the deaf ears of both the patrician judges and the loyal burghers with whom they had packed the jury. “In Lord Braxfield’s summing-up,” William Ferguson observes, “no attempt was made to separate political opinions from judicial duties: he instructed the jury to take into account the prevalence of disorders and

⁵⁹⁷ H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 267.

⁵⁹⁸ H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 133-34.

⁵⁹⁹ H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 134.

the real risk of anarchy.”⁶⁰⁰ Braxfield’s jury charge has likewise passed into the same history as Muir’s address, but as the oppressive voice of “Landlordism”⁶⁰¹:

I leave it for you to judge whether it was perfectly innocent or not in Mr. Muir, at such a time, to go about among ignorant country people, and among the lower classes of people, making them leave off their work, and inducing them to believe that a reform was absolutely necessary to preserve their safety and their liberty, which, had it not been for him, they would never have suspected to have been in danger . . . A government in every country should be just like a corporation; and, in this country, it is made up of the landed interest, which alone has a right to be represented. As for the rabble, who have nothing but personal property, what hold has the nation on them? What security for the payment of their taxes? They may pack up all their property on their backs, and leave the country in the twinkling of an eye. But landed property cannot be removed.⁶⁰²

It is difficult to imagine a more candid statement of the lived reality of the British Constitution for James Kennedy and other laboring Scots living in poverty and subsisting in the abject servitude of the factory, mine, and rackrented farm. Perhaps the lucky ones could put their property on their backs and immigrate to North America, but for most this escape still lay in the future. As a statement of constitutional interpretation, however, Braxfield’s rhetoric accurately, if rather insensitively, summarizes the concept of virtual representation, in which each member of Parliament, whose qualification for office rests on ownership of land, represents both the locality which returned him and the “nation.” While seemingly irrelevant to the specific criminal charge against Muir, Braxfield’s recital of this doctrine materializes Kennedy’s and other working class poets’ characterization of the Scottish “nation” neither as the mystical and aestheticized Scotia of the historical past nor an emergent co-partner in the British imperial enterprise, but

⁶⁰⁰ W. Ferguson, *Scotland: 1689 to the Present*, 257.

⁶⁰¹ Johnston’s description in his *A History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, 221.

⁶⁰² T. Johnston, *A History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, 221.

simply as a “corporate” oppressor. Braxfield’s equation—nation = land = political agency—not only has the virtue of constitutional and conceptual integrity, but of demystifying the relationship between state and subject: one is either in or out. In this respect, it makes the same assumption as Kennedy’s radical critique and produces the same result: Scotland has no “national” existence, whether politically or culturally determined. For both Braxfield and Kennedy, the term “nation” is a merely an interchangeable signifier for class; in this sense, neither Scotland nor England can be said to exist within a meaningful discursive framework. The most that can be represented, it seems, is “Britain,” which, by virtue of its territorial constitution (as amended by the 1707 Treaty of Union), is the only legal entity that can recognize—and enforce—subjectivity. In either case, it makes no sense to speak of particular “Scottish” or “English” national identities, and the term “British” applies so exclusively to the landed class that, as Braxfield suggests, the nation is little more than a corporation operated solely on behalf and for the benefit of its paid-in shareholders.

Consequently, Muir’s argument that the British constitution contemplates “an equal representation of the people in the House of the People”—in other words, that the “nation” is politically embodied in both the propertied and laboring classes—might be interpreted as an attempt to enlarge Braxfield’s and Kennedy’s narrowly exclusive construction of the nation. But by offering an interpretation of the British constitution that has little if any historical or legal warrant, Muir appears to commit the very seditious act that he denies. In the eyes of Dundas, Braxfield, and the British government, Muir was a traitor to his class, a gentleman who rejected his British subjectivity in favor of a

“foreign” one. Moreover, by accepting the immense benefits of this exclusive subjectivity—a university education, entry into the legal profession, standing as an officer of the court he later defied—Muir not only waived any possible “right” of withdrawal, but, in aggravation of the crime, abused a trust. I do not mean here to defend Braxfield’s inappropriate conduct in the trials of Muir and others, but to suggest that Braxfield’s understanding of the laws of sedition, as articulated in his instruction to the jury, is not particularly controversial in terms of eighteenth-century constitutional theory. From this perspective, Muir’s failure to convince the court of his “constitutionalist” innocence should come as no surprise. As we have seen, Muir might have been better off attacking the form of the indictment and procedural flaws in the presentation of the prosecution’s case, but as soon as he based his defense on constitutional principles, he may have sealed the court’s judgment against him.

Muir’s conviction and sentencing to fourteen years transportation to Botany Bay stunned Scottish, English, and Irish reformers and even the jury, which had petitioned the judges for leniency (at least one juror was threatened with assassination for voting for a guilty verdict).⁶⁰³ In France, reports of the trial hardened the increasing hostility toward England, and Muir and his fellow convicts were hailed as martyrs for the cause of liberty.⁶⁰⁴ Americans almost universally rejected the verdict, and in 1796 President George Washington had a ship outfitted to procure Muir’s escape from the penal

⁶⁰³ T. Johnston, *A History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, 221. On the Foxite Whigs raising the issue in Parliament, see W. Ferguson, *Scotland: 1689 to the Present*, 258; and H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 135.

⁶⁰⁴ H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 135.

colony.⁶⁰⁵ Indeed, part of the outrage in Scotland was not the verdict itself, but the punishment of transportation, which arguably was not recognized under Scots law (the usual penalty was banishment from Scotland).⁶⁰⁶ Transportation had been used on Scots offenders during the days of Cromwell and following the 1715 and 1745 Jacobite rebellions, so it was identified not with the tradition of Scots law but with English oppression.⁶⁰⁷ Spurred by Whig criticism, including that of Sheridan and Lord Grey, in London, the Home Secretary conveniently referred questions of the legality of the punishment to Braxfield, who stated that the punishment fit the crime, and that any demonstration of leniency would prejudice the upcoming sedition trials of other radicals. The sentences were then aired in Parliament on four different occasions, forcing the government to reject reconsideration and prompting Fox's famous lament: "God help the people who have such judges!"⁶⁰⁸

Muir's political activities were hardly isolated, but their cumulative impact on political and social stability remains unclear. By the end of 1792, as Devine points out, "local societies of the Friends of the People had been founded in all towns south of Aberdeen and in numerous small villages in the central belt," while "a series of spontaneous riots that erupted in several towns along the east coast" frightened the authorities even more than moderate constitutional reform societies.⁶⁰⁹ As we have seen, government reprisals discouraged all but a small handful of the upper middle-class Whig

⁶⁰⁵ T. Johnston, *A History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, 221-22. On Muir's remarkable escape from Botany Bay, see T. Devine, *Scotland's Empire*, 278.

⁶⁰⁶ H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 136.

⁶⁰⁷ T. Devine, *Scotland's Empire*, 272.

⁶⁰⁸ H. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 136.

⁶⁰⁹ T. Devine, *Scotland's Empire*, 275.

reformers from attending the convention in Edinburgh in January, 1793 (Colonel MacLeod, Colonel Dalrymple, and Lord Daer were notable exceptions). Further sedition trials involving other “radicals” ended the same way as Muir’s: Thomas Fyshe Palmer, a Unitarian minister from England and pastor at Dundee, received seven years transportation; two London radicals, Joseph Gerrald and Maurice Margarot (who later turned double agent) got fourteen years; and William Skirving, the Scottish secretary of the National Convention of the Friends of the People, also received fourteen years (for a time James Kennedy served as Skirving’s assistant).⁶¹⁰ Muir, Palmer, Skirving, and Margarot shipped out to Botany Bay in February 1794, along with 83 other convicts.⁶¹¹ Thus the birth of the legend of the “Scottish martyrs.”⁶¹²

⁶¹⁰ T. Devine, *Scotland’s Empire*, 277.

⁶¹¹ Devine’s discussion of the almost universal Scottish “hostility to the Australian colonies” prior to 1820 no doubt contributed to the sense of shock resulting from Muir’s sentence. T. Devine, *Scotland’s Empire*, 279-81.

⁶¹² T. Devine, *Scotland’s Empire*, 279-81. Muir was treated well in Botany Bay, as were Skirving and Palmer, and was able to purchase land, which he named Huntershill after his mother’s estate in Scotland. He wrote a poem, *The Telegraph: A Consolatory Epistle*, to his friend the reformer and advocate Henry Erskine, that concludes:

The best and noble privilege in Hell,
For souls like ours, is Nobly to rebel,
To raise the standard of revolt and try
The happy fruits of lov’d Democracy. (T. Devine, *Scotland’s Empire*, 277)

Muir’s escape from captivity created a minor sensation. In 1796 Muir smuggled himself aboard the ship famously sent by Washington, an American fur-trading vessel bound for Alaska. At Nootka Sound, Muir transferred to a Spanish gunboat, which took him to California. He crossed Mexico to Vera Cruz, took passage aboard a Spanish ship, which, after touching in Havana, was attacked off Cadiz by a Royal Navy squadron. In the fracas Muir was shot in the face, losing an eye and a good bit of cheekbone, and left for dead. He survived and was imprisoned in Spain as an Englishman. When he was recognized, the Spanish freed him and the French brought him to Paris, where he was toasted as a hero of the revolution. He died in 1799 at Chantilly and was buried in an unknown grave.

On his way to captivity in Australia, Muir composed a dignified and moving Latin

ode:

O Scotia! O longum felix longumque superba
Ante alias patria, Heroum sanctissima tellus
Dives opum fecunda viris, latetissima campis
Uteribus!
Aerumnas memorare tuas summamque malorum
Quis queat, et dictis, nostros aequare Dolores
Et turpes ignominias et Barbara iussa?

Nos patriae fines et dulcia linquimus arva.

Cras ingens iterabimus aequor.

Robert Crawford translates the poem as follows:

O Scotland! proud, long blessed above all others,
My sacred country, rich, broad-meadowed, strong,
Who could spell out your many grievances
And wounds, then find the words to match our own
Hurts *in extremis* under barbarous laws,
As now, sailing still further from the frontiers
Of our own land with all its lovely farms
I take up Horace—

Cras igens . . .

Tomorrow

We put out once again on the great deep.⁶¹³

The strophe praises the exiled poet's sacral homeland, while the antistrophe laments Scotia's subjection to an oppressor the poet finds no need (or perhaps has no stomach) to name. The poet figures Scotia in terms of pastoral and thus of peace and moral virtue, whereas the foreign Albion comes as a savage conqueror seeking to impose "barbarous laws." Scotia's "wounds", it seems, cannot be directly narrated. When the poet asks "Quis queat, et dictis, nostros aequare Dolores," he conflates his "own/Hurts" with those

⁶¹³ R. Crawford, *Scotland's Books*, 368.

of the nation, indicating that exile registers the generalized condition of occupied Scotland and that English juridical oppression effectively banishes all patriotic Scots from the *patria* by excluding Scotia even from signification. In the beautiful epode the poet literally turns his face from the homeland to the “great deep” of severance from the nurturing nation. Muir’s use of the formal language of the ancient Scottish universities (his own, Glasgow, dates to 1451) marks his genteel education and class, in contradistinction to the plebeian James Kennedy, but like Kennedy, Muir eschews the formal Latinate English of the Augustan poets and truckling *literati*. Muir’s Latin belongs as much to a republican vision of Scotland as to republican Rome. And, as we shall likewise see in the Latin poetry of Alexander Geddes, Muir’s use of Latin orientates Scottish radicalism toward France, Europe, and the humanistic tradition, rather than in the direction of insular, hegemonic English political culture. Muir’s contribution to a history of Scottish radicalism inheres not only in his defiant performance before what many thought to be a kangaroo court, but in his powerful sense of Scotland’s participation in a larger Republic of Letters that resists English exceptionalism and false allegiance to the English “cult of commerce.”⁶¹⁴ At the same time, Muir’s desire to recover from history a lost Scottish nation with membership in Latinate Europe sharply contradicts Kennedy’s and other working class poets’ rejection of “Scotland” as a category that accommodates the laboring poor.

Rather than cowing Scottish radicals, Muir’s exile boomeranged on the government. As Thomas Johnston put it in his great history of the Scottish working class,

⁶¹⁴ The felicitous phrase is Linda Colley’s in *Britons*, 62.

“Yet scarcely had the Government got the ablest of the middle class reformers transported or hanged and their sympathizers cowed and silent, than the agitation broke out in a stratum lower down and in a more dangerous and virulent form.”⁶¹⁵ More recently, Elaine McFarland observes that “Muir’s fate confirmed radicals in their fears over the unconstitutional intentions of the government, and actually gave new life to the Friends of the People societies,” though this resurgence proved short-lived as the government took additional measures to stamp them out.⁶¹⁶ A mid-decade famine reduced tens of thousands of Scots to starvation levels, which, coupled with widespread popular resistance to the Militia Ballot Act, unsettled wide areas of the country. In Dundee, for example, a weaver named George Mealmaker, was tried and transported for administering illegal oaths (he was a member of the United Scotsmen, an offshoot of the disbanded Friends of the People) and distributing seditious literature. His conviction was assured in advance by the fact that the jury consisted solely of wealthy property owners whose homes the United Scotsmen had determined to torch.⁶¹⁷ Mealmaker’s experience was repeated dozens of times, as the government moved swiftly and with increasing police, military, and judicial proscription (Scotland’s Habeas Corpus law had been suspended in 1797) to suppress this second stage of incipient revolutionism.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁵ T. Johnston, *A History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, 229.

⁶¹⁶ E. McFarland, *Ireland the Scotland in the Age of Revolution*, 105.

⁶¹⁷ T. Johnston, *A History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, 233.

⁶¹⁸ There is a great deal of scholarly disagreement with respect to the extent of Scottish plebeian revolutionism in the mid- to late 1790s. Devine argues that despite the organization of the United Scotsmen, whose numbers swelled with the influx of weavers, peddlers, and laborers from Ireland, “the pattern in Scotland seemed to be one of rock-solid political stability after the dramatic events of 1792-4.” T. Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 209. John Stevenson points out that the wheat famine of 1795-6 produced few

There was no general insurrection in Scotland during the 1790s. But, arguably, a revolution—or perhaps, multiple revolutions—did occur. On the one hand, this period witnessed the unprecedented development of methods used by the state to repress political and social disorder, dissent, and concerted action on behalf of the dispossessed classes of a starkly divided society. On the other, during the second half of the eighteenth century, Scotland experienced a remarkable economic transformation. Tom Devine dates the “take-off” of the Scottish economy, fueled by complementary agricultural and industrial development, from about 1760.⁶¹⁹ Rural Scots who had been legally bound to their landlords for centuries increasingly found themselves at the mercy of the market, which treated them as units of labor (though paternalistic intervention to calm rising food prices continued to persist as well). While a small professional middle class expanded in the second half of the century, its “enlightened” attitudes and intellectual triumphs seemed distant to the mass of Scots, who lived at or below subsistence levels in wretched rural hovels or growing urban slums. The French Revolution had sparked something of an “awakening,” as William Law Mathieson noted a century ago, but one might argue that many Scots “awoke” not into an enlightened society, but into the nightmarish realities of force in a capitalist and imperialistic state. It comes as no surprise that

food riots in Scotland, where the oat crop did not fail, though frequent price riots occurred in Scotland in 1799-1801 and remained a feature of Scottish unrest until the mid-nineteenth century. J. Stevenson, “Scotland and the French Revolution,” 259. Elaine McFarland, however, argues that though the number of active members of the United Scotsmen remained relatively small, their contacts with Irish and European radicals gave the Scottish establishment good reason for serious concern. E. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution*, x. See also T. Clarke and T. Dickson, “The Making of a Class Society,” 168-77.

⁶¹⁹ See especially T. Devine, “Industrialisation” and “The Transformation of Agriculture: Cultivation and Clearance.”

Kennedy, Muir, and their fellow radicals found little appeal in the progressive narrative of the *literati* when it came to vindicating the rights of free-born Scotsmen.

The Scottish Internationale

As we have seen, for Kennedy tyranny is a native British product, as is resistance to it. The English “other” has no particular negative valence, identifying Kennedy, like Alexander Wilson, as a self-consciously working class poet. This incipient Marxian quality of Kennedy’s class analysis of the nation, while characteristic of the radical literature in support of The Friends of the People movement generally, nevertheless reverses the unidirectional energy of much late eighteenth-century poetry that asserts Scottish national difference from England and uses iconic historical features such as the Wars of Independence and Jacobite risings to reclaim a peculiar collective identity. As indicated in Kennedy’s poetry, this type of special pleading plays into the hands of Dundas and his goons in the Scottish judiciary because it elides the exploitation of labor as the cause of state-sponsored oppression. As long as Scotland’s grievances, however they are defined, can be “nationalized” in this fashion, the existing class structure might be discomfited, but it can hardly be fundamentally threatened. The bigwigs are still big, whether they wear the tartan or not, and ennobling a wage laborer with the honor of “Scottishness” merely reinforces his or her historic subjection to exploitation.

When the narrative turns personal, however, Kennedy’s verses transcend the standard political line. Consider these verses from a poem entitled *Dedicated to the Majesty of the People*:

Alike despise the *Pittite* race
Who deem REFORMING *Treason*;

And crafty *Foxites* out of place,
Who call, '*Tis not the season.*

HAIL! Sovereign People! Parent Pow'r!
From due allegiance swerving!
See! those you've nurs'd, your strength devour,
And riot while you're starving!
These are the Traitors would o'erturn you
Would *yet alive* cut and burn you
Your bowels, reeking red with blood,
Dash in your face, "for public good!"

I grieve to see you sore attack'd
By reptile hordes rapacious,
Whose dark designs are firmly back'd
By parricides audacious.
But will your Majesty permit
The legions of th' infernal *Pitt*,
And curs'd Dund-Cuddy's brutal train,
To blast the glories of your reign?⁶²⁰

* * *

George GUELPH the Third, to you I call!
Slight not advice in season;
Remember CHARLEY STUART's Fall—
King's *can* commit High Treason!
And, trust me, GEORGE, a sim'lar fate
Will on a sim'lar conduct wait;
Bold British hearts you can't retain
By muzzles, or oppression's chain.⁶²¹

* * *

Thank Heaven! delusion's pow'r's decline;
King-Priest-craft, Superstition,
In melancholy mania pine,
Fast sinking to perdition:
Their vot'ries now with dire dismay,
Set all their legions in array —
Go, Friends of Man! at Freedom's call

⁶²⁰ Kennedy, *Treason*, 17.

⁶²¹ Kennedy, *Treason*, 19.

With *Reason arm'd*, attack them all!⁶²²

* * *

Must I no more remain your prop?
No more your kind embrace meet?
Hark SCOTIA calls, "These ravings drop!
Gain Freedom, or a winding sheet!" . . .

Kind Reader, let me wisper by the way—
To do too much at one time is imprudent;
(This trick of Lawyers charms the novice student)
'Tis fools make speed when gaining by delay.
Let's imitate sly Justice EYRE;
For mutual benefit, retire:
The Muse, refresh'd from twistings and distortions,
May, like the *Court*, produce some great ABORTIONS!⁶²³

Noble calls this the "finest poem in the collection *Treason, or Not Treason!* . . . The poem, too, seethes not with only Burns's contempt for the imposed German royalty but for the equally degenerate aristocracy of the Hanoverian state and its tribe of placemen and informers."⁶²⁴ But noting John Barrell's "praise of the poem's ambiguity," Noble queries the apparent irony of the poem's final octave, in which the speaker abruptly turns from his clarion call—"Hark SCOTIA calls, "These ravings drop!/Gain Freedom, or a winding sheet!"—to "wisper" in the reader's ear.⁶²⁵ He suggests (somewhat cryptically) that Kennedy might have believed that his own radical republican vision for Scotland was a pipe dream, an imaginary already negated by the reality of British state power.⁶²⁶ I would suggest, rather, that "Scotia's" call for Kennedy to his "ravings drop" registers the

⁶²² Kennedy, *Treason*, 26.

⁶²³ Kennedy, *Treason*, 28.

⁶²⁴ A. Noble, "Burns and the Renfrew Radicals," 220, 222.

⁶²⁵ A. Noble, "Burns and the Renfrew Radicals," 223.

⁶²⁶ A. Noble, "Burns and the Renfrew Radicals," 224.

fundamental incompatibility of working class revolution with national reformation. In the revolutionary state Kennedy projects, the mythical nation would melt into thin air, revealing Scotia, Albion, Britannia, Gallica, or any other national personification as the “King-Priest-craft, Superstition” they are. In fact, the true call in the poem is “Go, Friends of Man! at Freedom’s call/With *Reason arm’d*, attack them all!” Once “Reason” enters the fray, the myth of the “nation” must go the same way as the oppressive mystifications of king and church. When Scotia calls, however, she urges the poet to take up arms against the edifice of national ideology, a futile gesture that can only result in a “winding sheet” because “Freedom” itself is a product of that same ideology. Scotia thus lures the working class poet away from the only revolution that can liberate him: the working class revolution that dissolves national difference. In this sense, maybe Noble is right: “Harry Dundas, thinly disguised by various coats of ideological paint, has remained in constant charge—perhaps never more so than at the present moment.”⁶²⁷

Historians have still to settle definitively the question of whether the Scots, like the Irish, might have organized a rebellion in the 1790s.⁶²⁸ Scottish historiography tends

⁶²⁷ A. Noble, “Burns and the Renfrew Radicals,” 224.

⁶²⁸ J.E. Cookson, for example, argues that “there was an enormous gap between the threat of revolution as imagined by the government and ruling groups and the innocuousness of physical force protest in the actual event. Violent disorder, for the most part, remained localized, limited in its aims, and easily subdued.” J. E. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation 1793-1815* (Oxford, 1997), 182. On the other hand, Roger Wells concludes from essentially the same evidence that the threat of revolution “must be taken very seriously indeed.” R. Wells, *Insurrection: The British Experience 1795-1803* (Gloucester, 1983), xiv. In his history of the British army during the period, J.W. Fortescue notes that “the home army . . . was not designed primarily for defence against foreign enemies, but simply and solely for the purpose of domestic police,” indicating a relatively high level of anxiety that, even if exaggerated, was nevertheless real. J.W. Fortescue, *The British Army 1783-1802* (London, 1905), 20.

to view this question in terms of the considerable residual strength of the ruling classes, but it is worth examining it from the perspective of Kennedy and other radical poets. Advocates of a more aggressive interpretation of the revolutionary potential of Scottish dissent point to a relatively large volume of (mainly) ephemera espousing the people's cause, the evident apprehension of the authorities of any hint of working class aggregation, the overbearing loyalist reaction (of which the sedition trials are only one facet), and periodic rioting throughout the decade as evidence of widespread disaffection that, given the right combination of circumstances, could have been organized into an armed uprising. Those who believe the Scots were essentially quiescent have a strong case as well. They cite the overwhelming preponderance of loyalist literature at the state and local levels, the small and poorly organized radical cells so easily infiltrated and broken up, the absence of a single purpose or organizing principle for the rioting and scattered violence that did occur, and the general enthusiasm for which Scots appeared to identify with the British state, especially under the Napoleonic threat. Both views appear plausible, and it also seems reasonable to construct a synthesis of these positions that acknowledges the co-existence of radical and reactionary Scotlands that, at least for brief moments in time during the period, might have hung in the balance.

When analyzed in this fashion, a weaver poet such as Kennedy may be read in very different ways. For historians interested in recovering a truly radicalized element in late eighteenth-century Scottish history, he and his compatriots are important representatives of the political and social views held by a significant proportion of the working poor. For those persuaded by the non-flammability thesis, Kennedy is something

of a Jacobinical crackpot, the voice of a tiny minority of partially educated malcontents confined to the artisanal class in Scotland's industrial belt. Given Kennedy's and other Scottish weaver poets' obscurity for more than two centuries, Smout's argument has generally prevailed and has only recently been revisited by historians such as Elaine McFarland and Bob Harris, as well as by literary critics such as Andrew Noble. Indeed, extending this reappraisal is one of the primary objectives of the present study. Additionally, in my view, the measures we use to evaluate this question should likewise be open to revision. Heaping up evidence on either side takes us a considerable distance, but it does not quite get us to a full understanding, if that is even possible, of the meaning of the French Revolution and its immediate consequences to Scots who were caught up in it. Henry Cockburn's oft-quoted line, composed well after the fact, that every Scot lived and breathed the revolution is certainly hyperbolic, but if we consider his assertion in light of the experiences of individual Scots who did have a stake in the revolution upon which they were willing to base public political commitments, then it becomes much more specific and informative. By any reckoning James Kennedy the poet did not pose a clear and present danger to the British crown, government, armed forces, or constitution, but when he refused to keep his opinions to himself, the full weight of those powers descended upon him. No matter that most of what he actually said about the king, his ministers, and a corrupt Parliament were well within the traditions of political speech that so characterized eighteenth-century British factional politics:

Fates! bless the Monarch who maintains
The duties of his station;
With mercy, love, and justice, reigns,
The Father of the Nation:

And shudders at the thought of war,
And heals the wounds of civil jar,
And spurns the venal from his Throne,
And makes the injur'd cause his own!

Fates! blast the King whom War delights,
Who hugs vile venal creatures,
Who deems th' asserters of their rights,
Seditious, wicked Traitors—
His subjects starves to pamper minions,
And persecutes for just opinions!
That King no more deserves a Crown;
Hurl—hurl the sanguine Tyrant down!⁶²⁹

Kennedy's language is not so very different than that used by Renaissance courtier and anti-clerical poets, who regularly implored the monarch of the day to rid his court of corrupt sycophants and redeem the suffering of the people at the hands of dishonest and rapacious priests, lawyers, and merchants, though the suggestion to "*Hurl—hurl* the sanguine Tyrant down" gives the poem its more contemporary Lockean charge. Times change, however, and what is acceptable political criticism in one age may be proscribed in another. But in this case, Kennedy's class makes the critical difference. When working people with growing economic clout take poetry—and other modes of non-violent resistance—into their own hands, examples must be made. It speaks volumes that the British state saw fit to deploy extreme judicial violence against those who sought to use the tools of literacy and education rather than arms to challenge the basis of its authority. In this sense, Cockburn was right. Many of those who could speak had an opinion about the Revolution. For the most part, only the properly credentialed *literati*, those in Cockburn's social and political class, possessed this privilege, and as long as the

⁶²⁹ Kennedy, *Treason*, 22.

conversation recognized the appropriate limitations of polite speech and decorum, a wide range of opinions might be voiced without incurring the displeasure of the state. Outside this circle of privilege, state violence to repress political speech had no effective constraints in Scotland (though, as discussed above, English juries proved an impediment to the state). The truly heroic efforts of a few *literati* figures such as Thomas Erskine, who sacrificed their public position and professional practices to defend hapless defendants in sedition trials, simply prove the rule.

Yes, “Swinish herd! I’m one of you!
A plain well-meaning Weaver,
Of knowledge small, of talents few;
Believe me, no deceiver—
No public scourge, no idle drone,
Who feeds on labours, not his own:
The petty Tyrants of the North,
To do them *Justice*, dragged me forth.

By them traduc’d, by them belied
Unjustly charg’d with Treason,
Had I not fled, I might have died,
Or languish’d, starv’d in prison.
By lawless violence oppress’d,
Where shall the injur’d be redress’d—
When Pow’rs base minions, fir’d with fury,
Are stern Accusers, Judge and Jury?

What can be done in such a case?
Mean inter’st says, “Knock under;
“Kneel—kiss the breech of knaves in place
“Their crimes praise loud as thunder,”
No—crouch I won’t; I can’t endure
To see oppressors ride secure:
Tho’ quite unequal to the task,
I’ll strive to tear the villain’s mask.

I lay no claim to sapient lore,
My teacher was my Mother;
Plain Scotch I learn’d in days of yore,

And language ken no other.
Stern Critics, carp not tho' you see.
The rules of art are o'erstepped by me;
If you'll eclipse me as a Weaver,
I'll own you *tolerably* clever.⁶³⁰

Citing these verses, Noble compares Kennedy to the American poet Joel Barlow, “in his confrontational style and his desire for violent political solutions.”⁶³¹ But I am not so sure. Though Kennedy’s overheated rhetoric in the poem purports to represent the poet’s personal experience, the poet nevertheless distances himself from the violence he suggests. While he proclaims that he will “strive to tear the villain’s mask,” the poem as a whole decries the “lawless violence” that forced the poet to flee. His legitimacy rests, as we have seen, on the argument that he faces persecution simply by virtue of enjoying the constitutional liberty of a free-born Briton—Britons never will be slaves. To advocate actual physical violence, as opposed to the rhetorical violence of metaphorical figures (“hurl the sanguine Tyrant down”; “tear the villain’s mask”), would cost the poet everything. The choice of poetry matters; for the same reason that Burns sometimes cloaked his republican views in verse, Kennedy uses poetry to refuse the violence to which he has been subjected. One wonders what Burns, who likewise shrunk from “violent political solutions,” might have written if he had been arrested, imprisoned, and exiled for composing the explicitly Paineite “A Man’s a Man for a’ that.” As for Kennedy, I would surmise that the poet would have prevailed over the *sansculotte*.

⁶³⁰ Kennedy, *Treason*, 23-24.

⁶³¹ A. Noble, “Burns and the Renfrew Radicals,” 217.

The Empire Writes Back: Radical Loyalisms in William Robb and Hamilton Paul

Poets such as Wilson and Kennedy did not go unanswered by offended loyalists, who used the medium of poetry in support of the government. Whether solicited or spontaneous, these effusions indicate a genuine anxiety over the subversive effect of radical poetry. The Reverend William Robb, an Episcopal clergyman of St. Andrews, composed a typical example of this type of verse. Published in 1793 in Edinburgh and London, the poem, entitled “The Patriotic Wolves: A Fable,” is prefaced by this advertisement:

This poem was written in the beginning of December last, at that period, when the *agents of France*, and those *sedition societies*, falsely styling themselves “*The Friends of the People*,” threatened the subversion of our happy constitution; and had so far proceeded in the dissemination of their pernicious principles, that it was found necessary to summon the Parliament, in order to provide for the safety of the country. Their publication was delayed till the author had consulted his literary friends; and, encouraged by their approbation, he now submits his performance to the candour of the Public.⁶³²

Robb’s case is a particularly interesting one. Responding to the widespread Episcopalian clerical and lay support of the 1715 rising, Parliament imposed severe sanctions on Episcopal worship in 1719. In the wake of the ’45 the government went further, ordering troops either to burn Episcopal churches or force their congregations to demolish them, and barring those who attended services from holding office, voting, or attending colleges and universities. Though with the accession of George III the penal laws were relaxed and finally repealed in 1792, the number of Episcopal priests in all of Scotland had dwindled from 600 in 1689 to a mere 40, including one William Robb. Moreover,

⁶³² William Robb, “The Patriotic Wolves: a fable. By a Scotch Episcopal Clergyman.” 2d ed. (Edinburgh, 1793), 2.

whereas an estimated two-thirds of Scots identified with Anglicanism at the Revolution, only about five percent still did so in the last decade of the eighteenth century.⁶³³

According to a recent parish history, Robb's incumbency at St. Andrews commenced in 1791, though there was no fixed place of Episcopal worship in the town until the 1820s. Robb ministered to his flock (which could not have been very extensive) in rooms hired for the purpose, and one anecdote has him pausing during his sermon to slake his thirst with a bottle of ale.⁶³⁴ Little else is known about Robb, but one wonders how his own experience of state repression colors the single writing he left behind. Using the timely death of Charles Edward Stuart and the alarming events in France to good effect, the few remaining Scottish Episcopal clergy, led by the Bishop of Aberdeen, John Skinner, swore an oath to pray for the Hanoverian king and successfully petitioned Parliament for relief from the penal laws. Their expressions of loyalty may thus be read as a *quid pro quo* in the church's bargain with the British state, proof and justification of the church's political reliability. This is not to suggest that Robb and his fellow clergy did not sincerely hold their loyalist views, only that having fought long and hard to liberate their religious practices from the shackles of the state by taking oaths of fidelity, they were not about to let a rabble of Francophile Scots and Irish render such state recognition nugatory.

⁶³³ The website [scotland.anglican.org](http://www.scotland.anglican.org) contains a wonderful short history of the Scottish Episcopal Church. See <http://www.scotland.anglican.org> (accessed August 28, 2012).

⁶³⁴ John Thompson, *St. Andrew's, St. Andrews: An Episcopal Congregation 1689 to 1993—Some Historical Notes* (Driffield, 1994). I am also indebted to a blog by one of Robb's ancestors for alerting me to Thompson's volume. See <http://mprobb.wordpress.com/2009/06/27/rev-william-robb-in-st-andrews/> (accessed August 28, 2012).

Robb's motives, conscious and unconscious, seem equally mixed as those on the radical side. On the one hand, for both Robb and Kennedy "liberty," while it may mean different things to different people, is a birthright, and judicial (to say nothing of extrajudicial) attempts to deprive the subject of his liberty are both unconstitutional and unconscionable to the minds of true Britons. On the other hand, while Robb predictably appeals in the advertisement to the fears of the propertied elites, he remains centrally concerned with his self-representation as a "poet," just as his radical counterparts do. He admits to delaying publication of the poem (it was composed in December and not published until February) until he "had consulted his literary friends," indicating an anxiety over reception that undercuts his righteous indignation with the *soi-disant* seditious "agents of France." A bad poem might make him a laughing stock, further fueling the fires of Jacobinism and discrediting a church itself emerging from a century of repression. Just as embarrassingly, such a production may go utterly unnoticed, leaving a priest of slender means to bear the chagrin of his meager parish. Like the other poets we have seen whose studied self-effacement prefaces their works, Robb implicitly recognizes that while writing poetry is no heroic act, publishing it is, regardless of any aesthetic or political value it may have in the historical moment.

Turning to Robb's 300-line poem, it begins with the familiar iambic tetrameter panegyric:

Hail, happy isle! *Britannia*, hail!
The pride and glory of the main!
No foreign foe dares thee assail,
But may expect to wear thy chain.

Fair land of *Liberty* and peace!

Where *Science* lifts her laurel'd head;
Whose wealth and commerce still increase;
Whose fields supply thy poor with bread.

Long may thy monarch wear the crown!
His foes be to destruction hurl'd!
Long may'st thou flourish in renown,
The dread and envy of the world.

But shall thy own ungrateful sons
Abuse their Sov'reign's gentle sway;
And, headed by a race of *Huns*,
Conspire their country to betray?

Say, must the land be drench'd in blood,
Their broken fortunes to repair?
Or, like the viper's pois'nous brood,
Shall they their mother's vitals tear?

To what can all this frenzy tend?
Must ev'ry real the rabble own?
Must *Britons* to this monster bend?
And even *Justice* quit her throne?⁶³⁵

The remainder of the poem is an extended allegory composed in rhymed tetrameter couplets and comparing The Friends of the People to wolves fed up with the “shepherds, who the flocks attend/And from their ravages defend.” Convening a Jacobinical assembly, the ringleader presses his plan:

In sheep's attire completely clad,
Straight join the flock; excite the bad,
And those who burn with vain ambition,
To riot, tumult, with suspicion fill
Of plots; and play our game with skill:
Make them against their guides conspire
With us to set their huts on fire;
Assert their right to life and health,
And institute a Commonwealth;
Yet, still to *Common Sense* appeal;

⁶³⁵ Robb, “Patriotic Wolves,” 5-6.

And, under the pretence of zeal
For freedom and the public good,
Deluge their fertile fields with blood.
The swains remove, assume the sway,
The sheep are then an easy prey.⁶³⁶

The sheep revolt and declare a Republic: “Their *ipse dixit* is the law;/And ev’ry wolf is a *Marat*.” Only after a bloody massacre do the surviving sheep repent and recall the swain and his “faithful dogs,” who end the reign of terror and restore the proper hierarchy. As we have seen, James Maxwell deploys a similar allegorical medium both in praise and denunciation of the events in France, demonstrating the easy fungibility of the aesthetic setting of “revolution.” Though Robb never switches sides, his treatment of Jacobinism here evinces a similar ambivalence. Revolutionists, even if they are wolves in sheep’s clothing, nevertheless make a persuasive case that appeals to a shared set of values (“right to life and health”; “Common Sense”; “freedom and the public good”), making it very difficult to distinguish the true patriot from the odious rebel. Only the particularly astute can penetrate the haze of abstraction and aspiration that characterizes political speech, and Robb himself seems uncomfortable with the fine shades of difference between a “Commonwealth” and a “Republic.” In the British experience, these terms emit both positive and negative pulses, whether one associates them with the Romans, medieval feudalism, or Cromwellian autocracy.

While there is nothing particularly remarkable about Robb as a poet, how closely the language of his loyalist panegyric mirrors that of Kennedy’s radical complaint repays close examination. Both poets begin from the premise that a paternalistic, benign

⁶³⁶ Robb, “Patriotic Wolves,” 8-9.

monarch holds the people's "liberty" in sacred trust and must discharge the primary duty of his office—the dispensation of justice—with a fair and impartial hand. Both assume that Britain is indeed a "blest isle with matchless beauty crown'd/And manly hearts to guard the fair," elected by God as the holy seat of chivalric honor. Both consider Britain's rising affluence, commercial hegemony, and martial prowess as proof of the superiority of its political institutions, the rule of law, and its moral righteousness. Both speak of "patriotism" as a duty, as well as a sentiment, owed to the state. And both couch the nature of the threats to domestic peace and national existence in strikingly similar rhetoric, although the objects of obloquy are different. For Kennedy and the radicals, "corrupt" and "venal" place-seekers subvert the monarch and lead him by the nose into destructive foreign wars and repressive and arbitrary justice at home. For Robb and the loyalists, a small group of seditionists and foreign agents stir up the "rabble" (whether swinish or simply ignorant), distracting them with talk of "the rights of man" while seeking their own personal enrichment at the expense of hard-working, deferential Britons. In both cases, the remedy for Britain's ills is found in rooting out these domestic parasites and their foreign fellow travelers (whether Austrian or French) and "reforming" the British state on the constitutional basis secured by the Glorious Revolution. Rhetorically speaking, with just a few substitutions Kennedy's "Swinish Gruntings" and Robb's "The Patriotic Wolves" would be virtually indistinguishable.

It is far too reductive to divide the world of late eighteenth-century Scottish political poetry into radical weavers and conservative clergyman. Hamilton Paul (1773-1854), a Presbyterian clergyman, printer, and poet, presents a third striking example of a

sophisticated and complex critique of the modern British state emergent in the artisanal and middling ranks of Scottish society. The son of an Ayrshire coal grieve (a mine overseer), Paul attended the parish school in Dailly and the University of Glasgow. While at university, Paul befriended the better-known Glaswegian poet Thomas Campbell (1777-1844) (whom he bested in a prize poem competition). After leaving Glasgow, he worked as a private tutor and later became a partner in an Ayr printing concern and editor of the *Ayr Advertiser* (which is still in publication⁶³⁷). He received his license to preach in 1800 and spent the remainder of his life as a minister in several parishes, publishing verses along the way on subjects ranging from the virtues of the students at a Glaswegian girls' academy to the benefits of vaccination. Paul also wrote his parish's contribution to the *New Statistical Account of Scotland* (1845) and served as editor for an 1819 edition of Burns's poetry.⁶³⁸ Maurice Lindsay includes an entry for Paul, calling him "a broadminded member of the 'New Licht' clergy" and an ardent defender of Burns's religious attitudes as expressed in his poetry.⁶³⁹

While still an Ayrshire printer and editor in the 1790s, Paul penned a lengthy political poem entitled "The Wail of Scotia, In Which the Former and Present States of Scotland are Contrasted," printed in Glasgow under the pseudonym Philopatris. Composed in heroic couplets of iambic pentameter, the poem introduces a deeply distraught Dame Scotia:

Her cares excited by her people's woes

⁶³⁷ See <http://www.ayradvertiser.com/news/> (accessed October 24, 2012).

⁶³⁸ J. R. MacDonald, 'Paul, Hamilton (1773–1854)', rev. Douglas Brown, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶³⁹ Maurice Lindsay, *The Burns Encyclopedia*, 281.

The guardian power of Caledonia rose;
 A fix'd dejection in her face appears;
 Her face, all bloated by descending tears;
 Her tresses wav'd dishevelled on the blast
 From northern wastes which wildly howling past;
 Her limbs invested with a snowy shroud
 Which shone at distance like a fleecy cloud.
 Wide o'er the fields she throws her mournful gaze,
 And all the scene so dearly lov'd surveys,
 Sees hills, and dales, and ample cities, rise,
 And thus, while gush the sorrows from her eyes.⁶⁴⁰

Far from the regenerative figure of Burns's saucy, seductive, and tartan-wrapped Coila, Scotia, with her "bloated" features and "dishevelled" appearance, suggests a history of violence and victimization rather than one of alluring beauty, heroic struggle, and future ascendancy. Although she "all the scene so dearly lov'd surveys,/Sees hills, and dales, and ample cities, rise," this external image of pastoral tranquility and bustling commerce (which we would expect in poetry extolling the Hanoverian state) evokes not pride in British civilization but despair of Scotland's true condition:

Ah, hapless land dear object of my care!
 For which the winter's ruffian blasts I dare;
 For which lamenting from my cave arose,
 For which I waste with unremitting woes,
 What horrid scenes? since nature's forming hand
 Profusely scatter'd verdure o'er thy land,
 What horrid scenes of carnage have I view'd!
 What ruthless hands with kindred blood imbru'd!
 When Scots and Picts with mutual fury rag'd,
 And war for ages unrelenting wag'd;
 When love of conquest drew the Roman bands
 To scatter devastation o'er the lands;
 I saw my gallant sons indignant rise,
 I saw the flash of fury in their eyes,
 I saw them issue dauntless to the field,

⁶⁴⁰ Hamilton Paul, "The Wail of Scotia, In Which the Former and Present States of Scotland are Contrasted" (Glasgow, 1794).

The Claymore handle, and the Target wield.
Bid martial music rouse the vindictive fire,
And when o'erpowered to their hills retire.⁶⁴¹

Scotia, it seems, has been long absent from the land, dreaming of a banquet while dining on ashes. Whereas Coila reveals to the rustic poet the vision of “a *Race*/To ev’ry nobler virtue bred./And polish’d grace,” endemic civil war greets the “guardian Power of Caledonia,” drawn from her cave by “her people’s woes.” This spirit appears powerless either to safeguard the nation or to endow the poet with creative genius sufficient to redeem it. Moreover, Coila’s revelation of “a martial Race, pourtray’d/In colours strong” becomes a scene of “dauntless” yet futile “fury,” in which the “gallant sons” of Scotia “Bid martial music rouse the vindictive fire./And when o’erpowered to their hills retire.” Though they wield the fierce weaponry of the Highlanders, the claymore and target, they inevitably suffer defeat at the hands of superior foes. Even when temporarily free of foreign conquerors, the same sons turn on each other “with ruthless hands with kindred blood imbru’d.” Invasion, it appears, merely interrupts a permanent state of internecine warfare:

But when compell’d to guard her native coasts
Ambitious Rome far hence recall’d her hosts,
Intestine discord, than external foes
More fatal far, throughout the nation rose.
‘Gainst Chieftan, Chieftan rais’d his vassal train,
And kinsmen, heap’d on kinsmen strew’d the plain,
When haughty tribes were fir’d by mutual harms,
And castles totter’d by alternate arms,⁶⁴²

⁶⁴¹ Paul, “The Wail of Scotia.”

⁶⁴² Paul, “The Wail of Scotia.”

While the poem briefly (16 lines out of nearly 300) celebrates the heroics of Wallace, who “freed his country from the Despot’s chain,” and Bruce, who “By prowess won and wore the Scottish crown,” the Scottish Wars of Independence seem little more than a footnote to a bloody history of civil conflict. Highland and Lowland depredations remain undifferentiated in the poem, just as “foreigners,” whether Roman, English, or French, appear as generalized, serial trespassers and plunderers. Indeed, the poem dwells longest on the passion of “Ill starr’d Maria, fortune harass’d Queen,” both in terms of her supposed weakness for bad men (“her spotted fame”) and her fate at the hands of the “unpitying” and “unfeeling” Elizabeth. In this respect the poem figures a close identity between an allegorical Scotia and her historical counterpart. It thus appears to concentrate betrayed Scottish national loyalty primarily on Mary’s sacrifice, a kind of failure of chivalry:

O fatal hate! O cursed pride of Kings!
What now avail thy matchless charms of face?
Thy mien majestic, thy commanding grace?
What tho’s for thee enamour’d Princes strove?
And Europe’s Kings contended for thy love?⁶⁴³

If the poem relegates Wallace, Bruce, and Scotland’s ancient independence to the margins, Knox and the Reformation do not even rate the barest mention. Another alternative basis of a national Scottish historical legacy—Presbyterianism—finds no place in the narrative, leaving an exhausted, deracinated Scotia meekly to accept the Union of the Crowns as a relatively peaceful, if anticlimactic, intermission:

But when of mutual depredations tir’d,
Nor longer by alternate hate inspir’d,

⁶⁴³ Paul, “The Wail of Scotia.”

The sister kingdoms reason's call obey,
And yield submission to one Monarch's sway,
What glorious days rose imag'd to my view!
How pleas'd I bade embattled hosts adieu!⁶⁴⁴

Scotia is strangely passive here: "reason" joins the "sister kingdoms" without consulting the Scottish nation herself. Though the poem suggests some kind of equality between the kingdoms under a single monarch, this equality is figured as negative, a joint submission to a convenient disposition of the crown by parties too worn out to care; Jacobitism, it seems, carries no emotional, historical, or ancestral investment on either side. Perhaps for this reason Scotia entirely neglects to acknowledge the third rail of Scottish nationalism, the Jacobite cause. Instead, Anglo-Scottish Union and the Hanoverian succession bring an intermission, which Scotia appears to characterize as a return of "Augustus' golden days":

Meanwhile the Bard with heaven instructed tongue
In lofty numbers Albion's glories sung,
Sung how her Navies ride the subject main,
And rival nations dare her power in vain,
From east to west her vessels plough the tide,
While Indian treasures pour on every side,
The song of gladness fills her peaceful vales,
Here gardens spread, and edifices rise,
"And all the land in gay confusion lies",⁶⁴⁵

Scotia seems to take particular pride in "Albion's glories," but only as a Scottish Bard sings them. Even while mimicking Part IV of Thomson's *Liberty* (1735-36), a Whig *apologia* that envisions post-revolutionary Britain as the ultimate repository of Augustan virtue, political liberty, and imperial power, Scotia nevertheless rejects the Bard's

⁶⁴⁴ Paul, "The Wail of Scotia."

⁶⁴⁵ Paul, "The Wail of Scotia."

panegyric as merely a “blissful vision.” Recalled from her frozen cave by the “commutual groan” arising from the Hanoverian state’s factional politics, Scotia laments the opulence, waste, and false values of aristocratic privilege, imperial aggression, and official corruption under the Georges and their ministers:

How chang’d the aspect of my favour’d care,
Since first the charge solicitous I bare!
I’ve joyful witness’d (these were blissful times!)
My sons recoiling from their slightest crimes,
Then robberies, rapes, and murders were unknown,
And love and peace made all the lands their own;
My nobles scorn’d illicit joys to share,
My dames resorted to the house of prayer;
But now the great deem piety a whim,
The devotee’s enthusiastic dream,
Now with his name the festive circle rings
Who most maids to shame and ruin brings;
Now riding awful in his bloody car
War’s rous’d up Demon spreads destruction far,
Now commerce stagnates, and now grandeur falls,
Now woeful wailings echo round my walls.⁶⁴⁶

Scotia imagines Scotland’s golden age as a time of “love and peace” in which chivalric and religious virtue held sway, though Scotia’s memory, as with all such utopian nostalgia, cannot situate this imagined community within her historical narrative. Indeed, though Scotia claims to have “witness’d . . . blissful times” since accepting her “charge solicitous,” her utopianism seems curiously extra-national; paradise, it seems, precludes the necessity of a national muse. Scotia and Albion can issue only from the very internecine warfare that forges the “nation” to begin with; once called forth, the national spirit can only mourn her own death. National poetry must suffer the same fate, as it

⁶⁴⁶ Paul, “The Wail of Scotia.”

simply reinscribes the same pattern throughout “history,” announcing its repetitious immolation with a shattering martial fanfare:

See! hapless crowds to foreign regions roam
By want's stern edict banish'd from their home,
To western shores beyond the Atlantic main
They speed their course, ne'er to return again;
And carry hence to that more favour'd land
My greatest wealth the artist's skilful hand,
See! others bend beneath oppression's load,
*And bow submissive to the will of God!*⁶⁴⁷

Mass emigration, figured in much late eighteenth-century British poetry and public discourse as a sign of national decline, appears so here, but with a difference. Whereas English rural poets commonly lament the loss of the stout yeoman and sturdy peasant, Scotia identifies artisanal labor as the nation's “greatest wealth.” This variation draws attention not only to the plight of the landless poor, driven from croft and cottage by agricultural “improvement,” but also to the independent skilled worker displaced by the steam engine and power loom. While hardly Alexander Wilson's blunt critique of industrial capitalism, as personified in the factory owners themselves, Paul's Scotia nevertheless connects “War's rous'd up Demon,” commercial stagnation, and declining national “grandeur” with the baleful social effects of an economic system undergoing rapid commercialization. Moreover, Scotia's lament casts a backward light over her apparent praise of “Albion's glories,” which rest on the fatally flawed foundation of “Indian treasures.” Scotia makes no explicit mention of her native sons' investment in East Indian and American trade, perhaps in illicit opium or slave-produced tobacco, or the undoubted financial and employment benefits of the colonial system, but leaves little

⁶⁴⁷ Paul, “The Wail of Scotia.”

doubt that the ill-gotten riches of a few have driven the previously virtuous poor over the edge:

Now midnight thieves whom famine's rage impels
Invest the dome where careless plenty dwells;
With engines cautiously attempt the door,
And entering rob the coffer of its store;
Or aim the poniard at the father's breast
Who boldly dares their plundering speed arrest;
Or should the mother rouse them with her cries,
She with her screaming babes surrounded, dies.⁶⁴⁸

This horrific vision of social collapse reverses the positions of the predators and their prey, much as the mid-nineteenth-century “condition of England” novel activates middle-class anxiety over increasingly desperate, starving hordes of factory hands or the ante-bellum polemics of the American South stoke white fear of slave revolts. But in this rendition of a traumatic national history, Scotia interprets “famine’s rage” as yet a further repetition of time out of mind, “When Scots and Picts with mutual fury rag’d./And war for ages unrelenting wag’d.” Here “Scots and Picts” are simply refigured as rich and poor, the propertied and the dispossessed, engaged in fruitless economic warfare that spares no one. Indeed, even the sacred domestic hearth bears the taint of property, as both father and mother, deprived of even a modicum of biblically mandated deference, are slain with their offspring on the altar of domesticity. Indeed, the image conjures a Burkean vision of the mob besieging Versailles and ripping the royal family from their beds in an orgy of bestial violence, a metaphorical turnabout that recasts the possessory class as helpless beasts of the field:

So from the Alps a hideous grisly train

⁶⁴⁸ Paul, “The Wail of Scotia.”

Which hunger's rage, and hope of prey constrain,
When deepening snows invest the mountain's height,
Descending wolves the peopled plains affright;
The flocks and herds one common ruin share;
Nor youth nor age these prowling monster's spare.⁶⁴⁹

Faced with a catastrophic failure of deference and the specter of mob violence, Scotia can produce only a mechanical gesture to the decidedly undemocratic reassertion of a divine right monarch's prerogative and responsibility to deliver justice to the downtrodden:

O Sire of Britain! lend a gracious ear!
The groans of thousands of thy subjects hear,
To thee the favour'd of the skies, belong
Of right the keeping, the redress of wrong;
'Tis thine to bid affliction's murmurs cease,
To quell the robbers of the public peace.⁶⁵⁰

Scotia's shift to the imperative mood merely emphasizes the impotency of her demand. If her prior narrative has shown anything, it is that the "Sire of Britain" no longer represents, much less acts on behalf of, the nation in any meaningful sense, even if she possessed the power to command him to do so. Scotia's inability to frame a pertinent response to social disintegration underscores the widening gap between hierarchical, natural law conceptions of a liberal order and the emerging "rights of man" discourse of individualized political and moral agency. Within this gap, the identification of Scotland's—or Britain's—"wrong" or "affliction" remains so distressingly vague as to compel Scotia to clap her hands to her ears, bidding the "murmurs cease" and "the robbers of the public peace" punished. One might argue that Scotia's resort to a reactive disciplinary mode concurs with the British government's actual reaction to all forms of

⁶⁴⁹ Paul, "The Wail of Scotia."

⁶⁵⁰ Paul, "The Wail of Scotia."

“sedition,” but an alternative reading contradicts this view. Rather than calling for the restoration of “peace” by force of executive and judicial murder (as in the cases of the Scottish Martyrs, for example), Scotia reminds us that the social inequality inherent to existing property relations compels such extremism in defense of social order. Having already invoked “famine’s rage” in terms not of natural causes but of an inequitable distribution of resources, Scotia cannot simply turn round and advocate the kind of authoritarian repression used to “quell” meal riots and other popular expressions of malcontent. Her subsequent inability to suppress the potentially radical implications of this admission may explain the incoherence of the following verses:

And you my sons what frenzy can impel
Against your country’s welfare to rebel?
That land alone can lasting bliss obtain
Where freedom and subordination reign,
Where rulers govern by impartial sway,
And subjects unreluctantly obey,
And sacrifice, revereful of the laws,
Their private interest to the public cause.⁶⁵¹

Whose “land” and whose “rulers”? Scotia speaks of her sons as rebellious children, but precisely what (or whom) do they rebel against? The lament bewails schism in civil society, to be sure, but it is far from clear what Scotia urges her sons to do about it. If Albion has become as corrupt and misguided as Scotia says she has, then knuckling under to the British state seems but poor and inconsistent counsel. On the other hand, if civil conflict itself (as opposed to “freedom” and independence) defines Scottish historical experience, as the poem certainly suggests in its perfunctory gesture toward the Wars of Independence and its heroes, then the “country’s welfare” would not seem to

⁶⁵¹ Paul, “The Wail of Scotia.”

depend on Scotland's assimilation into the British state in any event. In other words, Scotia's true complaint is that Scotland *never happened*, either in history or art. Indeed, merely to invoke the national idea of "Scotland" necessarily entails the very internecine violence Scotia deplors. Thus her sons' "frenzy" links inextricably to this signifier as its signified and explains Scotia's rhetorical flight into the arms of the Hanoverian oligarchs whom she has previously denounced. Scotia desperately needs Albion because Albion must herself bring Scotland into being; absent that imperial act of signification, Scotland cannot recognize itself. In other words, Scots must be British before they can become Scots; such is the "sacrifice, reverent of laws" that Scotia's sons must ultimately make.

This occlusion of any historical entity called "Scotland" and reliance on "Britain" as a master signifier that gives meaning to its national components becomes clear in the poem's final couplets:

Let Britain's senate to their country's weal,
From spotless motives dedicate their zeal,
With ready ear attend the nation's cry,
And all th' attempts of factious rage defy.
So when the din of battle rends the skies,
My sons by love of freedom fir'd shall rise;
In marshall'd thousands shall avert the blow,
And pour destructive thunder on the foe;
Then shall the sons of Gaul retract their boasts,
Their vaunts confining to their native coasts,
Again these Courts shall ring with glad acclaim,
And King and Country be one common name;
The arts shall shine, the sciences shall smile;
And peace and plenty bless this favour'd isle."

This said; the Goddess vanish'd from the view,
Her robe of mist wide waving as she flew,
With rapid speed descended to the wave,

And sighing sought her solitary cave.⁶⁵²

In this peroration, Scotia exhorts Britain to harness the martial ardor of her Scottish sons, previously misdirected to fruitless family feuding and to misalliances with France. Now that Scotland's "national" identity has finally been fixed in its subordinate relation to the British superstate, old corruption, self-interest, and internal dissent will cease in the face of Gallic republicanism, the true enemy, and British cosmopolitanism, the true nation to whom the subject owes undivided fealty. Scotia, on the other hand, vanishes once and for all, a figment of the historical imaginations of Scots patriots since the Declaration of Arbroath.

“Voices from the Dark”: Alexander Geddes and the Invention of British Poetry

Kennedy, Robb, and Paul, while describing Scotland's woes in strikingly similar terms, thus come to very different conclusions about the nature of Scottish nationalism and of the nature of the revolutionary threat to the British state. Whereas Kennedy and Robb seem particularly bent on clearly identifying self and other, however, Paul deconstructs the binary altogether. True, the turn toward Gaul at the end of the poem suggests a reinstantiation centered on some conception of Britishness, but the effect of the poem as a whole undermines an assumption of the primacy of either an individual or collective self-identification as a "Briton." Once again, determining with any precision the meaning of that immensely evocative signifier "Scotland" and fixing such meaning at a given historical place and time simply eludes us. As Cairns Craig poses the question, "Where are we in history? Ask first whose history, what are its limits. Take your eyes

⁶⁵² Paul, "The Wail of Scotia."

away from the stage: listen for the voices from the dark, listen to the mingling of the voices in and out of history.”⁶⁵³

But which voices do we hear and which do we not? One suspects that many readers of the periodical, pamphlet, and poetry wars of the 1790s agreed with the assessment of *The Edinburgh Gazetteer*, in the first issue of which the editors denounced opposing political factions:

Two political parties are understood to exist in the British Government; that of the Ministry, and that of the Opposition. Wise men have long distrusted both of them, and the kingdom at large seems at last disposed to regard them with jealousy, as in a great measure, consisting of men who are little interested in the national welfare, and who contend only about the possession and disposal of the spoils of the people. They have repeatedly exhibited the indecent picture of the leaders of a great empire, courting popularity as the means of obtaining power, but depending on a flagitious corruption of its security . . .⁶⁵⁴

Or in a similar vein later in the decade, this anonymous contribution to the *Scots Chronicle*:

Honour, virtue, truth, decaying;
Princes from their spouses straying;
Statesman with big airy visions;
Taxes, loans, and requisitions.

Bribing, threat’ning, flattering, jeering,
Rioting, electioneering,
Warm addresses, fair professions,
Coalitions, and secessions.

Peace from Britain still retiring;
Public credit fast expiring;
Ruin o’er our heads suspended;
Prudence curb’d, and waste extended.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵³ Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in English and Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh, 1996), 255.

⁶⁵⁴ *The Edinburgh Gazetteer*, November 16, 1792.

⁶⁵⁵ *Scots Chronicle*, January 13, 1797.

This is a critique to which Kennedy, Muir, Robb, and Paul might all accede. To the extent a crisis actually existed in late eighteenth-century Scotland and Britain that threatened the existence of the state, intelligent critics—the weaver, the lawyer, the Anglican priest, the Presbyterian, the editors of *The Edinburgh Gazetteer*—seem all to have perceived it as civil and political in nature. While they might invoke the Jacobin bogeyman, either as a potential liberator (for Kennedy and less clearly for Muir) or an usurper (for Robb and Paul), poets and observers seem more interested in Jacobinism as a trope for emphasizing the apparent breakdown of constitutional government in Britain itself, no matter to whom the blame for the crisis might be assigned. The Augustan mode in which so much of this critique is delivered makes this debate, in my view, a characteristically eighteenth-century one. Events in France, as engrossing of public attention as they are, are part of a British political drama playing out in the domestic, Habermasian public sphere, centered largely in the cities and larger towns where much of the unrest and intermittent violence actually occurred. What is different about the late eighteenth-century drama is the eruption of working class poets such as Wilson and Kennedy into that sphere as representatives of a new “public” that has learned to speak using an idiom historically available only to the elites. Once the working man or woman can compose in the same aesthetic form and language as Pope, Gray, or Shenstone (much less Virgil or Horace), it is clear that poetry and politics can never be the same again. That Romantic poets were already in the process of breaking down these older aesthetic molds in the age of revolution might owe something to the plebeian poets in Scotland (and England) who contributed, usually under exigent circumstances, to poetry’s democratization.

If we have learned anything, it is the difficulty, if not impossibility, of synthesizing a definitive “Scottish” national poetics under late eighteenth-century conditions of external warfare and domestic turmoil. Retrospective attempts to identify Burns with “Scottishness” do not fare well when confronted by the sheer linguistic and formal variety of poetry produced by Scots during this period. Moreover, the class and gender inflections these poets bring to bear on identity questions would seem to scotch such a project from its inception. I would, nevertheless, like to suggest one more possibility for identifying a distinctive Scottish contribution to the making of British poetry. I would further suggest that such distinctiveness can be located in a particularly Scottish episteme, exemplified most clearly in the poetry of the Roman Catholic clergyman, biblical scholar, and political radical Alexander Geddes.

Alexander Geddes was born on September 4, 1737 in Rathven, Aberdeenshire. His father farmed land belonging to the Gordon estates, allowing the young Geddes to receive instruction from, among others, Catholic priests who served the Gordon family and later at seminary in Glenlivet (the site of one of the world’s best-known distillers of Highland whiskey). At the age of 21, Geddes matriculated at the Scots College in Paris, where he studied rhetoric, Greek, and Latin. He later studied Hebrew at the Sorbonne. Refusing a teaching appointment in Paris, Geddes took up the ministry, first in Dundee and then as chaplain to the Catholic family of John Stewart, 6th earl of Traquair, and brother of the committed Jacobite, Charles Stewart, whom he succeeded. In 1769 Geddes became parish priest in Auchinhalrig. In 1779 he published a financially successful English translation of selected Horatian satires (lauded by Johnson) and was befriended

by James Beattie. Geddes' decision to accept an invitation to attend an Episcopalian service resulted in his forced resignation from his parish in 1781.⁶⁵⁶

Geddes moved to London, where, under the patronage of Lord Petre, he pamphleteered on behalf of Catholic emancipation and published his *Idea of a new English Catholic edition of the holy Bible for the use of the Roman Catholics of Great Britain* (1782) and *Prospectus of a New Translation of the Holy Bible* (1786). Though Geddes abandoned his plan for a new Catholic bible, he undertook an historical examination of the Old Testament with the support of Robert Lowth, the Anglican Bishop of London. Geddes' interest in German biblical criticism landed him in hot water with Catholic authorities, but earned him the admiration of radicals such as Joseph Priestly.⁶⁵⁷ Geddes may also have helped persuade his publisher, Joseph Johnston, to publish *Rights of Man*, while contributing to the growing body of periodical literature and political satire championing the French Revolution.⁶⁵⁸ He composed a lengthy Latin poem (with a corresponding English translation), "Carmen sæculare pro Gallica gente tyrannidi aristocraticæ erepta" (1790), to help reassure French revolutionists of British support for their cause, and two years later added the satirical prose narrative *An Apology for Slavery*

⁶⁵⁶ G. Carruthers, "Geddes, Alexander (1737–1802)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

⁶⁵⁷ According to Jerome McGann, "Geddes was the chief conduit in England for the ideas which were being pursued and elaborated by the new German scholars of the Bible." 309. Geddes' biblical criticism, which argues that the "received biblical texts were corrupt because they all derived from unreliable base texts" and could only be purified by a new, unadulterated translation of the original Hebrew texts, i.e., the Samaritan Pentateuch." J. McGann, "The Idea of an Indeterminate Text: Blake's Bible of Hell and Dr. Alexander Geddes," *Studies in Romanticism* 25 (1986), 310-11.

⁶⁵⁸ G. Carruthers, "Alexander Geddes and the Burns 'Lost Poems' Controversy," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 31 (1999), 83.

(1792). Also in that year, his publication of an exegesis entitled *The holy Bible, or, The books accounted sacred by Jews and Christians; otherwise called the books of the old and new covenants* resulted in his suspension from holy orders. At the same time, Geddes became acquainted with leading radical voices in Scotland and joined the Society for Constitutional Reform. His contributions to the pamphlet and newspaper wars of the 1790s include essays on British policy towards France and a significant amount of anonymously published radical poetry (some of which Patrick Scott Hogg and others have attributed to Burns). His connection with David Downie, a member of the Scottish Friends of the People who was convicted of high treason along with Robert Watt in Edinburgh in 1794, raised questions about the loyalty of Geddes and other Catholics to Britain, prompting Geddes to write to Henry Dundas attesting his allegiance to the sovereign.⁶⁵⁹ Geddes nevertheless continued to publish pro-revolution poetry and associate with noted radicals such as Johnstone, as well as English poets William Blake and S. T. Coleridge.⁶⁶⁰ Geddes died in London on February 26, 1802.

As Gerard Carruthers notes, Geddes composed a significant amount of politically radical poetry, much of which appeared anonymously in the *Morning Chronicle*, edited

⁶⁵⁹ G. Carruthers, "Geddes, Alexander."

⁶⁶⁰ McGann argues that "Blake's *Urizen* follows Geddes' idea, which he shared with the leading contemporary German scholars, that Genesis represents an edited collection of mythological narratives which have their basis in the cultural history of the ancient Hebrews. . . . His discussion of the 'Mosaic divinity'—the figure Blake will name, recollecting Geddes, *Urizen*—is particularly apposite in relation to Blake's various accounts of this being." J. McGann, "The Idea of an Indeterminate Text," 318. In McGann's reading, Geddes and his treatment of scriptural texts as "mythologues" constitute a major influence on the development of English Romanticism and nineteenth-century poetry and fiction. J. McGann, "The Idea of an Indeterminate Text," 324.

by Geddes' friend and "fellow Aberdeenshire man" James Perry.⁶⁶¹ Carruthers claims that several poems attributed to Burns by Patrick Scott Hogg actually belong to Geddes, including "Exhortatory Ode to the Prince of Wales on Entering his 34th Year" (1795), "The Ewe Bughts" (1794), "The Cob Web—A Song" (1795), "Address to Justice," "Ode Inscribed to Certain Jurymen" (1794), and "Ode for the Birthday of C. J. Fox."⁶⁶² Based on the quality Geddes' poetry and his broad influence on British biblical scholarship, Carruthers argues that "Geddes is the second most significant Scottish poet of the 1790s," an "unjustly little-known figure . . . important in Scottish, British, and, indeed, European history and letters."⁶⁶³ For purposes of this study, however, I am primarily interested in Geddes' use of Latin as a medium for celebrating radical revolutionism in France and urging similar progressive political change in Britain.

For Robert Crawford, Geddes' "Carmen Sæculare, pro Gallica gente tyrannidi aristocraticæ erepta" "sounds the last trump for Scottish Latinity," a venerable tradition in Scottish letters commencing with the first Christian mission and, for all practical purposes, terminating at the end of the eighteenth-century.⁶⁶⁴ Crawford regrets Latin's "considerable government-backed repression in the Scottish state-school system" as a potentially irretrievable loss to the study and appreciation of Scottish history, literature, and culture.⁶⁶⁵ But even by the late eighteenth century, the death of Latin as a language of Scottish poetry had already become apparent. While "Carmen Sæculare" remarkably

⁶⁶¹ G. Carruthers, "Alexander Geddes and the 'Burns Lost Poems' Controversy," 84.

⁶⁶² G. Carruthers, "Alexander Geddes and the 'Burns Lost Poems' Controversy," 81-82.

⁶⁶³ G. Carruthers, "Alexander Geddes and the Burns 'Lost Poems' Controversy," 82.

⁶⁶⁴ R. Crawford, *Scotland's Books*, 367.

⁶⁶⁵ R. Crawford, *Scotland's Books*, 369.

“was read to the assembly of deputies in Paris at a time of particular nervousness among the revolutionaries so as to reassure its members that international intellectual support held firm” (indicating that at least some of the elected representatives of Gaul could still conduct business in the *lingua franca* of medieval Europe), publisher Joseph Johnston provided an English translation for the poem’s British audience.⁶⁶⁶ The poem thus addresses multiple communities of readers: French revolutionaries, British democrats and friends of reform, and, presumably, members of a classically educated English elite that can recognize a hendecasyllabic verse when they see one. But just as the poem revives an ancient language associated with Roman *libertas*, its translation from Horatian Sapphic into stately iambic pentameter resurrects the eighteenth-century neoclassical poetry celebrating the “modern” form of British liberty that emerged from the Union, successful wars against absolutist France, and the Hanoverian succession. Geddes thus strikes a puzzling and specifically imperial pose in a poem that urges the leveling of aristocratic power and privilege.

Given Geddes’s adept use of the Scots vernacular to articulate radical political aspirations in other settings, how might we read the scholarly and ostensibly belated form of “Carmen Sæculare” to encourage revolutionary change? In this case, Bakhtin’s concept of *polyglossia* may offer a means of understanding how the formal presentation of this poem directs its politics. Michael Holquist has synthesized the sense in which Bakhtin employs this term, defining *polyglossia* as the “simultaneous presence of two or more national languages interacting within a single cultural system (Bakhtin’s two

⁶⁶⁶ G. Carruthers, “Alexander Geddes and the Burns ‘Lost Poems’ Controversy,” 83.

historical models are ancient Rome and the Renaissance).⁶⁶⁷ Bakhtin discusses this concept, as well as the related one of *heteroglossia*, specifically in the context of the “rise” of the modern European novel at the expense of the classical genres, epic, lyric, and tragedy⁶⁶⁸:

This latecomer [the novel] reflects, in its stylistic structure, the struggle between two tendencies in the languages of European peoples: one a centralizing (unifying) tendency, the other a decentralizing tendency (that is, one that stratifies languages). The novel senses itself on the border between the completed, dominant literary language and the extraliterary languages that know heteroglossia; the novel either serves to further the centralizing tendencies of a new literary language in the process of taking shape (with its grammatical, stylistic and ideological norms), or—on the contrary—the novel fights for the renovation of an antiquated literary language, in the interests of those strata of national language that have remained (to a greater or lesser degree) outside the centralizing and unifying influence of the artistic and ideological norm established by the dominant literary language. The literary-artistic consciousness of the modern novel, sensing itself on the border between two languages, one literary, the other extraliterary, each of which now knows heteroglossia, also senses itself on the border of time: it is extraordinarily sensitive to time in language, it senses time’s shifts, the aging and renewing of language, the past and the future—and all in language.⁶⁶⁹

Bakhtin further clarifies that the creation of distinct “national languages,” such as English and French, are “inseparable from social and ideological struggle, from processes of evolution and of the renewal of society and the folk.”⁶⁷⁰ Here Bakhtin’s language seems more Hegelian than a classical Marxist could stomach, but the dialectic historical process that repetitively breaks down and recreates “national” languages would seem to imply the

⁶⁶⁷ M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 431.

⁶⁶⁸ According to Bakhtin, *heteroglossia* refers to “the problem of internal differentiation, the stratification characteristic of any national language. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 67. A “national language,” according to Holquist, means the “traditional linguistic unities (English, Russian, French, etc.) with their coherent grammatical and semantic systems.” M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 430.

⁶⁶⁹ M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 67.

⁶⁷⁰ M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 67-68.

presence of immense revolutionary—as well as evolutionary—energy. Indeed, Bakhtin invests literary discourse (particularly the novel) with extreme political significance in this respect. Thinking about the nation in terms of the linguistic code that describes it has the material (historical) effect of establishing a nation that is both thought and spoken. In this sense, the violent struggle that history records as “revolution” is an effect of a national language in the process of becoming “national.” That the nation never fulfills everything thought or spoken about it marks not only its continuous incipience, but its continuous susceptibility to new formations initiated by the dialectical process that Bakhtin describes. The very thing the nation requires must needs cast it away and set up new idols to kill.

Bakhtin’s formulation of *polyglossia* flows usefully into Benedict Anderson’s well-known conception of modern nation-states as “imagined communities” made possible primarily by the fungibility of literature in an age of print-capitalism. This age began with the massive expansion of the book trade in early modern Europe, which first exhausted the relatively small market for Latin texts before turning to vast new markets in vernacular languages.⁶⁷¹ Anderson emphasizes the importance of the Reformation in this historical process, in that it conjoined Protestantism and print-capitalism to establish a new “popular” literature with enormous political and religious influence. This literature helped bring into being a mass readership of “merchants and women, who typically knew

⁶⁷¹ See B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), ch. 3.

little or no Latin—and simultaneously mobilize them for politico-religious purposes.”⁶⁷² At the same time, even Catholic *imperia* such as the Bourbons and Hapsburgs, ruling over polyglot provinces with dramatic linguistic diversity, found it necessary for imperial administration to produce and disseminate print vernaculars, which in Anderson’s view pre-dated the distinctly “national” languages that emerge at the end of the eighteenth century.⁶⁷³ Altogether, Anderson argues, these developments overwhelmed Latin as a linguistic medium for elite control of European state, church, and society, while at the same time limited the potentially infinite diversity of local idiolects to a relatively small number of languages that began to look “national” in character.⁶⁷⁴

Geddes’s strange poem thus flies directly in the face of both the triumph of national languages over monologic Latin and the assumption that the modern state, as it appeared in the late eighteenth-century, would inevitably capture and replace popular allegiance to other forms of self- and collective identification. Rather than reading the poem as “the last trump” of ancient Scottish Latinity—a belated and perhaps nostalgic gesture toward pre-Union Scottish intellectual traditions—we might read it as a rejection of national language, together with its construction of the imaginary nation and its “history,” in favor of the universal language of a “single cultural system” in which national languages exist for use in everyday life but do not canonize the nation as the

⁶⁷² B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), 40-42.

⁶⁷³ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), 41.

⁶⁷⁴ Anderson uses the interesting term “esotericization” to describe the marginalization of Latin in early modern Europe. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), 42.

bearer of a unique and “better” culture. This reading, too, might indulge in nostalgia, but Geddes’s face in the poem seems firmly set toward a future defined by *libertas*, as opposed to one culturally dominated by English “liberty” or French “liberté.” To achieve this future, wars and revolutions seem inevitable, aided no doubt by the command and control of the national languages that enable them. For Geddes, however, if these conflicts result only in the creation of “nations” divided by their respective languages, they have signally failed to liberate anyone.

As previously discussed, “Carmen Sæculare” announces itself as a Horatian ode, prefaced by Cicero’s famous dictum, *Jucundio rem faciet Libertatem Servitutis Recordatio*.⁶⁷⁵ The poem carries a dedication to the National Constituent Assembly of France, assembled in Paris (called by the full Latin name *Lutetia Parisiorum*). We will discuss the poem in sections, followed by Geddes’s simultaneous translation for English readers. The poem begins with a bardic invocation:

⁶⁷⁵ Which may be translated: “Liberty is made even more precious by the recollection of servitude.” Geddes’s contemporary biographer, John Mason Good, takes a dim view of the poem: “animated with the sacred fury of the moment, which seems to have borne down every breast before it, [Geddes] flies to his muse, to give vent to the rapturous feelings that agitated him. The muse, however, in direct contradiction to what might have been expected, does not appear to have been propitious. There is a tameness and insipidity pervading the entire ode—an occasional inattention to prosody and grammar which renders it equally unworthy of its subject and the poet: no prominent event is seized possession of; no sentiment auspiciously conveyed.” J. Good, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Reverend Alexander Geddes, LL. D.* (London, 1803), 265. Good (1764-1827) is an interesting figure in his own right. Son of a Congregationalist minister, he studied medicine and practiced surgery in Suffolk and London; authored a history of medicine; acquired a number of foreign languages, including Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Persian, Russian, Sanskrit, and Chinese; and wrote and translated Latin poetry. Good met Geddes in 1792 and undertook his biography upon Geddes’s death. See G. T. Bettany, ‘Good, John Mason (1764–1827)’, rev. Patrick Wallis, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

DA, puer, plectrum citius sonorum;
Sapphicum jamjam libet excitare
Carmen—afflatu subito moveri
Sentio pectus.

Galliam, lætus, cano liberatam:
Heu nimis longum rigidis revinctam
Funibus, longum et nimis haud serendo
Pondere pressam.

Canto Saturni repetita regna
Lenis et justi, populique patris:
Et Themis terries cano restitutam, et
Aurea sæcla.

[BRING, boy, bring quickly the resounding lyre;
Let me refit each long-neglected string;
I feel my bosom glow with sudden fire;
The Sapphic Muse invites—and I must sing.

Joyful I sing: for Freedom prompts the lay;
Freedom by Gallia's struggling sons obtain'd:
Too long, alas! oppress'd by lawless sway;
Too long in rigid fetters fast enchain'd!

I sing Saturnian times return'd: I sing
Once more to Themis earthly temples rear'd,
Under a gentle, just, parental King,
Not dreaded by his people, but rever'd.]⁶⁷⁶

While in keeping with Latin lyric conventions, the bard's invocation of the "Sapphic Muse" nevertheless marks a point of departure from contemporary lament or panegyric by Burns and others, which invokes "national" muses such as Scotia, Coila, or Britannia. Moreover, while the bard deploys the feminine trope of the nation—Gallia—he appeals not to her, but to Plato's "Tenth Muse," a progenitor of lyric poetry itself. The poem's

⁶⁷⁶ Alexander Geddes, "Carmen Sæculare, pro Gallica gente tyrannidi aristocraticæ erepta" (London, 1790), 1.

address to “Freedom” mimics a lover’s address to a beloved; “*afflatus subito moveri/Sentio pectus*” bespeaks the lover’s passionate longing, the pleasurable pain of the heart’s desire. The “long-neglected” ancient lyre of the Roman poet likewise contrasts with the bardic harp of MacPherson’s Ossian or Beattie’s minstrel, as well as the traditional musical settings of songs by Burns, Oliphant, or Tannahill. Whereas nativist Scottish or British national poetry readily identifies “Freedom” with, for example, the Wars of Scottish Independence, distinct Scottish cultural and egalitarian values, or (in loyalist poetics) the British constitutional tradition, here “Freedom” compels the bard to take up an antique art to “resound” not only the victorious “Gallia’s struggling sons,” but the aesthetic form in which “Freedom” must be expressed: “*Galliam, laetus, cano liberatum.*” To sing of *Libertas* requires, in this sense, an ahistorical language disassociated from national histories and the narratives that produce them. Geddes’s poem exemplifies the operation of *polyglossia*, in that it seeks to set up a unified discursive system through which the interaction of national languages may be synthesized to produce “free” thought, that is, thought free of the “rigid fetters” forged by national languages themselves. For Bakhtin, as we have seen, the modern novel performs this synthesis, dissolving linear—or “historical”—time in the process. Consequently, narratives that use national languages to tell “folk” or national histories, whether those of Scotia, Gallia, or Britannia, attempt to invoke a sense of synchronicity, of the “timelessness” embodied in the concept of the folk or nation, in an idiom that remains obstinately historical and incipient. The phoenix-like nation, always rising from its own ashes as it were, resists universalization even as it celebrates universal values.

Revolutions, from which the modern nation-state might in some sense be said to emerge, do not move history forward, but simply back upon itself. Rather than singing the revolution as a reinscription of Gallic national history in this fashion, however, the bard explicitly invokes the Golden Age under the reign of Themis, upholder of the ancient patriarchal order. This appeal jars a bit, especially when contrasted with Burnsian egalitarianism or Wilsonian dignity of labor. Waiving knowledge of Geddes's political commitments, one might reasonably read the poem as an implicit loyalist paean to benign Hanoverian rule. Yet such a reading overlooks the premised "Saturnian times," which require no external symbols or trappings of power to remind subjects of their subjection; indeed, subjectivity ceases as either signifier or signified. Each lives an objective life in which desire and realization perfectly and spontaneously coincide in each act, and act and thoughts are one. In this sense, then, each "man" is "King," and as "the people" inhere fully in each "man," there is nothing left to rule. Universal "man" remains as the only object of reverence because he embodies God.

Geddes thus proposes a poetics of universalism with the potential to transcend the operation of *polyglossia* within a "single cultural system" The next three quatrains revert to *denunciatio*:

Ecce prostratum truculentum, acerbum,
 Horridum monstrum, stygiis in antris
 Tristius quo non — Procerum potentum
 Sæva potestas!

Gentis humanæ sator atque rector,
 Hoc tuum donum! — Tibi sing bonorum
 Omnium verè dator ac origo,
 Gloria Lausque!

Audiant omnes timeantque reges;
Totius terræ timeant tyranny;
Palleat quicumque imitatur illos,
 Nomine quovis!

[See Pow'r Aristocratic breathless lie!
 (With whom no monster, ever sprung from hell,
In dire, atrocious cruelty could vie;)
 At Justice' feet, by Heav'n's command, he fell.

Yes, Father of mankind! thine is the deed!
 Our grateful voice of thanks to Thee we raise:
To Thee, the giver of each precious meed,
 Be honour, glory, and eternal praise.

Let Sov'reigns hear, and tremble!—May the sound
 Reach ev'ry tyrant's ear, from pole to pole:
Kings, emp'rors, princes, prelates, popes confound;
 And fill with terror each despotic soul.]⁶⁷⁷

The bard appears to have taken us unawares into radical territory; Saturnian “gentleness” has become Jovian—or perhaps Jehovah—retribution. Indeed, it seems unclear to which “Father” the bard now refers, as paternal images multiply and contradict each other. Is it the jealous Hebrew God of Genesis, who in his righteous wrath pitches demonic aristocracy into hell, or the Christian counterpart, whose grace and love redeem those who raise the “grateful voice of thanks”? If we read the bard to invoke the Hebrew God, who liberates his chosen people from the thrall of tyrants, must we likewise accept that God's “national” exclusivity? Or can we assume the transcendence of a God available to both Jew and Gentile on equal terms? I would suggest that the poem offers antithetical “gods/fathers” (Saturn/Jove; Jehovah/God; kings/popes) in the same way that it does antithetical theories of “history.” As in the first three quatrains, where the bard

⁶⁷⁷ Geddes, “Carmen Sæculare, pro Gallica gente tyrannidi aristocraticæ erepta,” 2-3.

scepter with no crime distain'd," wears a "crown innocuous, lawfully obtain'd," exempting him from the "dire, atrocious cruelty" ordinarily associated with dynastic rule. One suspects that this exemption, however, has more to do with Louis's resistance to absolute monarchy and unwillingness to concentrate power in his hands than it does his saintly character. A king who leaves his subjects alone might well seem innocuous, indeed. Henry, whom the bard cannot bring himself to praise as either "innocuous" or entirely "distain'd," merits mention simply as sire of the House of Bourbon, whose historic purpose, according to the bard, is to put kings out of business altogether. When the bard attributes to these figures "holy rapture" to "find on France bestow'd/Another monarch, like themselves," the "likeness" inheres in the current incumbent's historical importance as the last in a trinity of French kings instrumental in the downfall of the "Pow'r Aristocratic." Thus the bard's ostensible gesture towards an acceptable form of benign (constitutional?) monarchy melts into thin air, leaving us on solid—if radical—republican ground.

Indeed, one may ask whether the poet's preservation of the "happy Louis" as a puppet king masks the true extent of the poem's radicalism, particularly in view of Geddes's brush with the government over the firmness of his (and other Catholics') loyalty. The following stanzas suggest that nobility can be reconciled with liberty if sanctified by a holy purpose:

Gaudeant cives periisse totam,
Diram et audacem dominationem;
Gaudeant ferrugineas catenas
Fulmine fractas.

Gaudeat clerus, jubiletque* sese,

Liberum cura et mediocritate
Divitem, sacris modo rite posse
Dedere rebus.

Gaudeant ipsi, generosa pubes
Nata praeclaris atavis, et exhinc
Creditent solam meritis parari
Nobilitatem.

*Venia sit mihi, amice lector, primam syllabum Tð *jubilo*, contra Siliii auctoritatem, corripuisse.⁶⁷⁹

[Frenchmen, rejoice! The heavy galling yoke
Of daring domination is no more:
Your adamantine chains at length are broke,
And your Egyptian servitude is o'er.

Rejoice, ye Ministers of the Most High!
That, freed from all those cares which Mammon brings
And bless'd with golden mediocrity,
Ye can devote your lives to holy things.

Rejoice, ev'n Ye, who boast a noble birth;
(Vain, idle, foolish boast in Wisdom's eye)
And henceforth learn to know, that nought on earth,
But worth and virtue, makes Nobility.]⁶⁸⁰

When compared to the explicit revolutionism of the *denunciatio*, these quatrains appear conventionally anodyne. The bard anchors himself to safe allegorical ground in the comparison of French bondage to that of the ancient Hebrews. His appeal to ministers of religion to forsake the comforts of their ecclesiastical establishments and to embrace vows of poverty would not overly trouble the conscience of a voluptuary, whether Catholic or Protestant. And “ev'n Ye, who boast of noble birth,” may seek redemption from their inherited taint by devotion to “worth and virtue,” as if they could recreate

⁶⁷⁹ Geddes's note.

⁶⁸⁰ Geddes, “Carmen Sæculare, pro Gallica gente tyrannidi aristocraticæ erepta,” 6-7.

themselves as medieval crusaders or figures of chivalric romance. This stuff hardly breathes fire, but the conservative turn evident in these quatrains in the poem gives way to white heat in the following ones:

Gaudeatque ævo senior subactus:
Debiles palmas, oculosque siccos
Tendat in cœlum, pietate magna
 Numen adorans.

Gaudeat fortis juvenis, lubensque
Velle, testetur patrias ad aras,
Se prius quam servitium subrire,
 Perdere vitam.

Gaudeat ludens gremio parentis
Parvulus lactans, simul ac referre
Polleat balbas pietate tinctas
 Lingu loquelas.

[Ye hoary Sires, though bow'd beneath the load
 Of circling years, yet raise your feeble hands
And sapless eyes to Heav'n! — and heav'n's great God
 Adore, as grateful piety demands:

Whilst your more vig'rous sons, in youthful age,
 Exulting, at the patriot altar swear
Eternal war with tyranny to wage;
 And sooner *death*, than *servitude*, to bear.

Let babes and tender sucklings, ev'n, rejoice,
 As playful on their mothers' laps they lie;
And, mimicking their pious parents' voice,
 Lisp the sweet syllables of LI-BER-TY.]⁶⁸¹

The bard no longer seems anxious to propitiate moderate or conservative opinion, but to declare the Rights of Man. Returning to the theme with which the song commences, this revolutionary appeal invokes “heav'n's great God” as the author of Liberty, suppressing

⁶⁸¹ Geddes, “Carmen Sæculare, pro Gallica gente tyrannidi aristocraticæ erepta,” 8-9.

national muses and recasting the “patriot altar” as domestic and universal. In this sense, the bard implies that servitude entails the same kind of obedience to “unreal” loyalties that Carolina Oliphant deplors in her laments. National identities, while apparently celebrated in the previous three quatrains (“Frenchmen, rejoice!”), are now denounced as false illusions that can be manipulated to benefit the aristocratic oppressors: the prelacy and nobility (often the same caste). The bard here proclaims a different form of patriarchy than either feudal or absolutist varieties, a patriarchy founded on filial duty and the sacrament of marriage. This markedly gendered “natural” Liberty figures the community as a kind of Rousseauian entity in which patriarchal rule is tempered by piety and domestic affection, rendering “national” government as unnecessary as it is repressive.

The celebration of domesticity continues in the following three quatrains:

Gaudeat mater genuisse prolem
Jam sui juris, vigilemque matris
Sedulū, et fulcrim tremulæ senectæ;
 Ut decet annos.

Gaudeat virgo licitum marito
Libero tandem, decore ac honore,
Par pari pignus dare nuptiale, et
 Jungere dextram.

Nee satis, solos julilasse Gallos:
Canticum, audenter, repentant Iberi;
Consonent Belgi, Batavi, Allemanni,
 Helvetiique.

[Mothers, rejoice; that in your sons ye view
 A race of freemen, citizens, compeers;
The faithful guardians of their sires and you:
 The props and comfort of your drooping years.

Rejoice, ye virgins; that each lover free,
 May freely choose the partner of his bed;
And that, with equal freedom, ye may be
 To Hymen's shrine, with due decorum, led.

Nor is't enough, that France alone rejoice:
 Let Spaniards boldly echo back the sound;
Let priest-rid Flemings hear the sacred voice;
 Germans, Italians—all nations round!]⁶⁸²

The bard appropriates the Burkean appeal to chivalry for republican uses, identifying women as primary beneficiaries of a “race of freemen, citizens, compeers/The faithful guardians of their sires and you.” His suggestion of the matrilineal origin of this “race” emphasizes its difference from the *ancien régime's* reliance on church and crown patriarchy to oppress its subjects. The aristocratic tradition of arranged marriage (and perhaps the popular myth of *droit du seigneur*) figures in this critique as both sexually exploitive and destructive of the marriage institution itself. In the absence of “free choice” in marriage, women become prostitutes, sex becomes rape, and marriage becomes unholy, prefiguring Blake's overtly radical lines:

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse⁶⁸³

Just as it reverses Burke's paeon to aristocratic traditions as “beautiful,” the poem thus identifies radical republicanism with Christian virtue, refuting Burke's denunciation of the revolutionaries as placing their faith in deistic (or even atheistic) and materialist discourses of “moral” philosophy. Though the poem purports to address the French

⁶⁸² Geddes, “Carmen Sæculare, pro Gallica gente tyrannidi aristocraticæ erepta,” 9-10.

⁶⁸³ William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, Copy B, Object 36, “London” (1789, 1794); <http://blakearchive.org> (accessed March 27, 2014).

Assembly, it speaks directly to English fears that, if not put down by the concerted effort of European aristocracies, the revolution will continue to spread. But whereas Burke and the apologists raise the specter of a godless rabble bursting into the bedrooms of people of property and burning their family bibles, the bard figures the revolution as the restoration of Christ's law: faith, hope, and charity. Aristocratic rule has co-opted the Christian religion and placed it in the service of an illegitimate and criminal syndicate. No wonder, then, that the bard calls on other subjected European peoples to overthrow their own nobles and prelates, no doubt stoking loyalist paranoia (so striking in Robb's poem) of Jacobinical wolves at the door.

Indeed, as the bard turns his gaze from France and Europe to the Isles, he issues a challenge and an implied warning:

Albion! sed te potiore plausu
Liberos Fallos decet æmulari;
Æmlans Gallos, tibi gratularis
Terra Britanna!

Inclyti Heroes Runimedis agri*,
Qualis, O, vobis stupor atque sensus?
En! magis clarum Runimedis agro
Cernitis agrum!

Mira! nunc Lutetia puriore
Gaudet unda, quam Trinobantium urbs; et
Thamesis quam, liberiore crusu
Sequana sertur.

[But, Britons! ye should raise the loudest note,
For Freedom granted to a sister state:
While ye, with France, this day to joy devote,
Britons! yourselves ye do but gratulate.

Immortal heroes of that famous field,
Where was achiev'd the great, the glorious DEED!

What was your wonder, when ye, late, beheld
A *Field* more famous, ev'n than *Runimede*?

'Tis strange, 'tis passing strange! and, yet, 'tis plain,
 Parisians quaff a purer draught than *We*!
And once sluggish, slow and soilly *Seine*,
 Than *Thames* itself, flows freer to the sea!]⁶⁸⁴

*Campus, quo Angliæ Barones *Magnam*, quam dicunt *Chartam*, Joanni Regi extoserunt.⁶⁸⁵

British liberty, embodied in the Great Charter and immemorial Blackstonian custom, comes down to little more than a vestige of long-forgotten feudal conflicts, a pathetic historical footnote. While one might read these lines naively, the bard's palpable sense of shame and humiliation (the Parisians, of all people, have perfected human freedom) undercuts the Hanoverian constitutionalist narrative. In this rendition of "Whig" history, the torch has already passed to republican France, leaving the moldering carcass of British exceptionalism to poison the lifeline to its maritime empire. The bard's association of the failed Charter with the Thames likewise suggests Blake's dystopian "London":

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.⁶⁸⁶

For Blake, the synecdochic "charter" overdetermines English history as a continuous narrative of the aristocracy's enslavement and exploitation of the people ("every face") for its own interests, both at the imperial center ("each charter'd street") and the periphery ("where the charter'd Thames does flow"). Geddes's bard, however, appears to

⁶⁸⁴ Geddes, "Carmen Sæculare, pro Gallica gente tyrannidi aristocraticæ erepta," 10-11.

⁶⁸⁵ Geddes's note.

⁶⁸⁶ Blake, "London."

memorialize the “charter” in terms of the “Immortal heroes of that famous field,” the barons who forced King John to restore their feudal privileges and now look on in “wonder” as the French discard the last vestiges of them. But the bard’s comparison of *Magna Carta* to the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789), for which all Britons “should raise the loudest note, For Freedom granted to a sister state,” indirectly emphasizes the dystopian condition of contemporary Britain that Blake explicitly invokes. Instead of rejoicing in the spread of liberty to a “sister state,” the aristocratic “Britons” (and their Burkean fellow travelers), who by virtue of their own revolutions subjected the monarch to Parliamentary sovereignty, now plan a counter-revolution to return the absolutist Bourbons to power. The bard thus ironizes the British claim to have invented the liberty of the subject, when in fact the “Immortal heroes” of Runnymede were concerned merely with securing their own power vis-à-vis the monarch. This historical obfuscation has muddied the semiotic waters; only a Paineite revolution can purify the British nation and free it from its “charter’d” past.

Geddes’s bard, it seems, preserves the categories of “Britain” in order to expose the hypocrisy of claims to constitutional and political legitimacy based on a contract to which the vast majority of “Britons” are not and never have been parties. Republicanism, on the other hand, derives legitimacy from the inclusiveness of the political process that produces it. Thus Britain, to the extent it refers to a constitutionally constructed entity, does not exist and cannot command the loyalty or patriotism of most of its subjects. Does the Bard nevertheless recognize that “Britons” may exist without the fiction of “Britain”? The answer may lie in the poem’s Latinity itself, which posits “Britannia” as part of a

unitary Roman culture that contains and reconciles national difference. Viewed in this context, the bard's invitation to "all nations round"—encompassing Iberi, Belgi, Batavi, Allemanni, and Helvetiique—can be read as proposing the "re-romanization" of Europe in the republican mode. According to Geddes's bard in *Carmen Sæculare*, the French Revolution marks a return to the true history of Europe as a single culture, an awakening from a dark millennium of schism, confessional violence, and nativist aberration.

Geddes's use of Latin as a Scottish language contrasts that of Thomas Muir in the evocative farewell to his homeland. Though as a matter of history most of Scotia remained beyond the limits the Roman rule, Geddes's Latinity speaks for a Scottish ecclesiastical, juridical, and court tradition that participated in a pan-European discursive and cultural community largely defined by its Roman antecedents. In learned men such as Duns Scotus, George Buchanan, and Hector Boece, this Scotland can justifiably claim an immense contribution to the collective intellectual project of "Europe" as part of a Britannic identity that privileges its Roman origins over, for example, the fictional indigeneity of Tudor mythology or later Stuart Celticisms. When Geddes's bard appeals to "Britons," he means the people whom Rome constituted. When Muir apostrophizes Scotia, rather, he means the people whom the Romans called *Scoti*, the Gaels who descended from union of the Irish Gathelas and the Graeco-Egyptian Scota, pharaoh's daughter. As Murray Pittock puts it, "the Scottish crown's descent from Irish kings, though less emphasized as the Middle Ages progressed, was an important indicator of difference from England and Wales, and indeed betokened a continuing consciousness of

cultural alliance with Ireland: the Scottish kingdom was born of Irish immigration.”⁶⁸⁷

One reading of Muir’s poem revives this emphasis on a Hiberno-Scottish origin (particularly given Muir’s close relations with members of the Irish Friends of the People), as opposed to the Anglo-Welsh Arthurian mythology.⁶⁸⁸ For Muir, Latin enables a discourse of Scottish patriotism quite distinct from Fenian epic (Macpherson) or vernacular egalitarianism (Burns). For Geddes, Latin enables a discourse of Britannic patriotism similarly distinct from Anglo-Scottish neo-classicism in the Thompsonian mode (Robb and Paul).

Geddes’s genius for national poetry, however, is not limited to the Latin esotericism of European savants. Consider the following poems, each of which offers an alternative discourse for identifying radical alterity within the imperial British state. As previously noted, these poems, the vernacular “The Ewe Bughts” and the anglicized “The Cob Web,” had always been attributed to Burns until a little more than a decade ago, when Gerard Carruthers adduced evidence of Geddes’s authorship.⁶⁸⁹ If Carruthers is correct that the two lost poems are indeed Geddes’s, then, taken together with “Carmen Sæculare,” they reveal an astonishing range of idiolects that, I will argue, embody the project of Scottish poetry in the revolutionary moment of the 1790s.

⁶⁸⁷ M. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester, 1999), 15.

⁶⁸⁸ M. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester, 1999), 14-16.

⁶⁸⁹ See G. Carruthers, “Alexander Geddes and the Burns ‘Lost Poems’ Controversy.” Noble and Hogg, while attributing the poem to Burns, note that “the song is based on an old song named “Will Ye Go to the Ewe Bughts, Marion” and its tune of the same name, which melody Burns had already set to “Will Ye Go to the Indies, My Mary.” This new version is significantly adapted from Allan Ramsay’s earlier “Ewe Bughts, Marion.” Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 492.

“The Ewe Bughts” was published in *The Morning Chronicle*, on July 10, 1794.

The poem announces itself as pastoral:

‘Will you go to the Ewe-bughts, Marian,
‘And wear in the sheep wi’ me?
‘The mavis sings sweetly, my Marian,
‘But not sae sweetly as thee’.
These aft were the words of my Sandy,
As we met in the how of the glen,
But nae mair shall I meet wi’ my Sandy,
For Sandy to Flanders is gane.⁶⁹⁰

This somewhat irregular variant of common meter, which includes lines of iambic pentameter as well as anapestic trimeter, heptameter, and octameter, resists easy scansion, drawing attention to the lover’s broken and forlorn plaint. In the first octave, the rhymed lines repeat the same term, the names of the lovers, as if they were carved indelibly in stone. This poem reinforces the union of the lovers by putting Sandy’s words into Marian’s mouth, so that the voices of the lovers blend into a single “sweet” song, shared and amplified by that of the ubiquitous song thrush. The repetitive use of the possessive pronoun “my” produces the effect of a low cry, sounding the lover’s loss. The near rhyme of Sandy/Flanders in the last line of the octave may forebode Sandy’s death in battle, his lonely burial in the foreign dust. The separation of the lovers materializes in the imperfect rhyme “glen/gane,” signifying the violence with which Sandy has been wrenched from the land and his lover’s embrace.

In the second octave, the lover projects her sorrow outward, directly addressing unspecified observers:

⁶⁹⁰ Alexander Geddes(?), “The Ewe Bughts,” ptd. in Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 491.

How can the trumpets loud clarion
Thus take a' the shepherds afar?
Oh, could na' the Ewe-bughts and Marian
Please mair than the horrors of war?
But, oh, tis the fault o' them a', Sirs,
In search of gowd and of fame,
The lads daily wander awa', Sirs,
And leave their poor lasses at hame.⁶⁹¹

Here the lover rehearses the immemorial masculine allurements of war: excitement and change, plunder and celebrity. She makes no mention of patriotic fervor or duty, indicating the fictionality of abstract appeals of this sort, possibly even those offered by the gentlemanly “Sirs” whom she addresses. The lover’s question—“Oh, could na’ the Ewe-bughts and Marian/Please mair than the horrors of war?”—appears unanswerable. In terms of pastoral, it is unanswerable, but not so in epic, which celebrates young men who leave home “In search of gowd and of fame.” The lover thus touches on the relationship between gender and genre; whereas pastoral poetry traditionally features rustic lovers (“Ewe-bughts and Marian”) engaged in a stylized discourse about love, epic concentrates on “the trumpets loud clarion” and the “horrors of war.” But both discourses remain ineluctably masculine, in that love and war become interchangeably masculine fields of conquest. That shepherd “lads wander awa’/And leave their poor lasses at hame” only makes sense in this unitary masculine economy, which the lover recognizes when she blames “them a’” for her abandonment.

The functional equivalence of masculine poetic discourses has real and catastrophic material effects. The pastoral lyric of the first octave and the epic lines of the second give way to the lover’s clear-eyed social critique in the third:

⁶⁹¹ Geddes, “The Ewe Bughts,” in Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 491.

Not a plough in the land has been ganging,
The owsen hae stood in the sta',
Nae flails in our barns hae been banging,
For mair than this towmond or twa.
Ilka Laird in the Highlands is rueing,
That he drove his poor tenants away,
For naething is seen here but ruin,
As the haughs are a' lying in lay.⁶⁹²

We see a sharpening of the lover's vernacular, as if cutting through the more formal genres rehearsed above. She tasks the observers to view the economic "ruin" they have caused and alludes to the clearances (that, ironically, have freed up pasturage for the sheep Sandy tends), connecting war and "improvement" as twin aspects of the same masculine desire for self-aggrandizement. Here the lover seems to speak in her own voice, maintaining aesthetic form but filling the container with the materiality of lived domestic struggle. In this real world, ruin means starvation and death for the women and children left to shift for themselves. No pastoral or epic poetry can recuperate this condition—nothing comes from "naething."

The increasing bitterness of the lover's animus for masculine desire and the aesthetic forms that cloak it in glory bursts forth in the final octave:

There's gowd in the garters of Sandy,
And silk in his blue-bonnet lug,
And I'm not a kaerd nor a randy,
Nor a lass without blanket or rug;
Then why should he fight sae for riches,
Or seeks for a sodger's degree,
Or fling by his kilt for the breeches,
And leave the dear Ewe-Bughts to me?⁶⁹³

⁶⁹² Geddes, "The Ewe Bughts," in Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 491.

⁶⁹³ Geddes, "The Ewe Bughts," in Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 492.

Finally, the lover directs her anger at Sandy himself and, through him, at the masculine economy. The mournful love song of the first stanza, with its gesture toward the conventional sentimentality of love and loss, transforms into self-assertion and a different vision for sustaining the community. For the first time in the poem the lover refers to herself, defining herself against “low” types, a “kaerd” (wool-carder) or a “randy” (one who is coarse or rude, frequently associated with beggars).⁶⁹⁴ Marian implies that by rejecting her and seeking a “sodger’s degree,” Sandy proves little more than a fool, seduced by aesthetically beautiful but barren discourses of male desire. In their discussion of the poem as one of Burns’s lost poems, Noble and Hogg observe:

Like Burns’s treatment of *Logan Braes*, the new lyric has been transformed into a war-broken love song. The simple language and style is enhanced by the evocative use of the feminine voice; a characteristic trait of Burns’s lyrics. Ramsay’s version is written in the male voice. No poet of the eighteenth-century possessed Burns’s skill in employing the female voice in song.⁶⁹⁵

While I would argue that Carolina Oliphant is at least one other eighteenth-century poet who could match Burns in this respect, Hogg and Noble appear to miss the reversal of the poem’s “feminine voice” from the “war-broken love song” of the first half to the assertive, self-aware critic of the follies of men in the second half. This reversal would seem to undercut their argument that the poem represents a “new radical text” in opposition to war.⁶⁹⁶ If we read the poem as I propose, Marian’s rejection of her lover suggests the possibility of an alternative world in which women “wear in the sheep” without a male auxiliary too stupid to know when he has it so good. From this

⁶⁹⁴ Noble and Hogg translate “kaerd” as “gypsy.” Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 492.

⁶⁹⁵ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 492.

⁶⁹⁶ Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 493.

perspective, the poem does not oppose war except insofar as war reflects the same masculine predilection for violent competition, whether in love or war. This is not to say that the poem does not articulate more contemporary war-weariness, but that the poem views war and masculine aggression from the perspective of those who have to pay the heaviest price for it (as I have argued that Oliphant's poetry does). And while I will leave the attribution of the poem to the scholars who know the most about it, I do think that if Geddes adapted it, he created a "new radical text" that diagnoses British war-mongering as in part a product of the aesthetic forms in which men celebrate (and perhaps prove to one another) their own masculinity.⁶⁹⁷

Another of the lost poems, "The Cob Web—A Song," appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* on August 22, 1795. In attributing the poem to Burns, Noble and Hogg argue that nowhere does Geddes "display the Burnsian skill of ironic assent to what he is actually attacking so evident here."⁶⁹⁸ Geddes's familiarity with Horatian satire, his marvelous nine-canto mock-epic "The Battle of Bangor, or the Church's Triumph," and his pungent "An Apology for Slavery; or, Six Cogent Arguments Against the Immediate Abolition of the Slave-Trade" (1792) might argue the case against Burns's clear

⁶⁹⁷ Carruthers bases his claim for Geddes's authorship of "The Ewe Bughts" on a number of circumstantial factors: Geddes's frequent contributions to the *Morning Chronicle*, his consistent critique of Pitt's war policy, his long association with the Gordons of Aberdeenshire, and his composition and revision of other Scots songs, such as "Lewie Gordon." As Carruthers adds, "If I were to push my case, I might even point to the song's lament for 'Sandy,' the soldier abroad on duty in Flanders, and suggest a playful piece of self-reference." G. Carruthers, "Alexander Geddes and the Burns 'Lost Poems' Controversy," 84.

⁶⁹⁸ Hogg and Noble, *The Canongate Burns*, 528.

superiority with respect to ironic assent, as the following brief passage from the *Apology* indicates:

With what face, after this, can the Sticklers for the abolition of Slavery introduce *Religion*, even in her present Christian garb, pleading with tears of liberty to a set of unchristened savages, to whom the name of CHRIST is only known through the blasphemies of their *Christian* task-masters? SHE, who makes no sort of scruple to enslave, persecute, and torture her own baptized children! – Mr. Wilberforce and his associates may be able to point out a few individual clergymen of every denomination, who have openly declared themselves the enemies of slavery; but their voice can never be called that of Religion, which speaks only by *established churches*. Until, then, the Church of England and the Kirk of Scotland (the Church of Rome is here out of the question) have clearly delivered their oracles *ex cathedra*; and thundered anathemas against the Slave-trade; we must consider the genuine voice of *Religion*, such as she is in these latter days, as on our side of the question.⁶⁹⁹

And as we have seen in our analysis of “Carmen Sæculare,” there is nothing particularly unique about Burns’s thematization of “the notion of a degenerate England betraying her libertarian heritage in order to destroy France” or “his capacity for integrating on-going political events into his poetry.”⁷⁰⁰ Consider also Geddes’s parodic treatment of the great Scottish Whig trial advocate Henry Erskine’s argument to the jury in defense of a libel action brought by Lord Lonsdale against Peter Pindar. Erskine (unsuccessfully) contended that Pindar’s suggestion of Lonsdale as a fit model for a painting of Satan “made no malicious insinuation, for he did not recommend his lordship to be painted with horns.”⁷⁰¹ In the poem, entitled “Court of Uncommon Pleas,” Geddes imagines an aggrieved Satan seeking damages from Lonsdale for injury to the devil’s reputation:

The libel, my lords! ye, by this time, must see

⁶⁹⁹ Geddes, *An Apology for the Slavery*, 18-19.

⁷⁰⁰ Hogg and Noble, *The Canongate Burns*, 528.

⁷⁰¹ *The Albany Law Journal*, June 11, 1870. This account of the trial is contained in a sketch of Lord Chief Justice Kenyon at 447.

To be *scandal. magnat.* in the highest degree:
Yet, such is my client's good heart, he declines
To insist upon *pillory, prison, or fines*:
And all that he asks is, that never again
A dealer in paint may his character stain;
That never again, or on canvas or board
His head be depictur'd, like that of a LORD.
This, my lords! he expects from the laws of the land:
The court can't refuse him so just a demand.

I know, it has been by a *barrister* said,
That my client hardly dare call *law* to his aid.
Why, forsooth? — For this reason — “His hands are not
clean.”
Has ever the petulant barrister seen
The hands of my client? I'll wager a crown,
That *his* hands are as clean as the barrister's *own*.⁷⁰²

The avowed Foxite Geddes seems just as adept as Burns at parody, and he does it equally well in three Scottish literary languages: Latin, Scots, and English. Be that as it may, what difference does it make if we read “The Ewe Bughts” or “The Cob Web” as Geddes's poems rather than Burns's? For Carruthers, “Geddes is the second most significant Scottish poet of the 1790s,” and finding additional poems that can be properly attributed to him strengthens this claim.⁷⁰³ For my purposes, however, the authorship question pertains to the very different conceptions of “Britishness” and “Scottishness” that I see in Geddes and Burns. My reading of “The Ewe Bughts” agrees with Hogg and Noble's assertion of the song's radicalism, but not with their assessment of what makes the poem “radical.” By the same token, my “Geddesian” reading of “The Cob Web” finds no fault with Hogg and Noble's anti-Pittite interpretation, but argues that the poem finds

⁷⁰² J. Good, *Life and Writings of the Reverend Alexander Geddes*, 297-98.

⁷⁰³ G. Carruthers, “Alexander Geddes and the Burns ‘Lost Poems’ Controversy,” 82.

common ground with Geddes's European orientation and rejection of narrower nationalisms, whether French, English, or Scottish.⁷⁰⁴

The poem begins much as "Carmen Sæculare" ends. The speaker, who identifies himself as "A. Briton,"⁷⁰⁵ apostrophizes Britons for their traditional love of liberty:

The sweets of a blessing
Are had by possessing,
Hail! Britons! the cause is your own;
You are wonderful great,
You have Princes and State,
And the wisest and best on a Throne!

What a contrast is France,
Where is now the gay dance,
They are no way so happy as we;
We have flourishing Trade,
Plenty, beer, meat, and bread!
While madly they starve to be free!

It was once so for us,
Indeed it was thus,
Like them we once swore to maintain,
The blessing that God,
Sent to cheer man's abode,
And preserve free from blemish or stain.⁷⁰⁶

The first stanza features three strong rhymes: blessing/possessing; great/State; and own/Throne. These rhymes, in my view, suggest the intimate connection in loyalist

⁷⁰⁴ Carruthers also urges us to read the poem side-by-side with Geddes's "Trial By Jury," a very close analogue in form and diction. "Alexander Geddes and the Burns 'Lost Poems' Controversy," 84.

⁷⁰⁵ With respect to the pseudonym "A. Briton," Carruthers notes that Geddes used similar pseudonyms elsewhere, including "A Patriot" and "A True Briton" in the months leading up to publication of the poem. "Alexander Geddes and the Burns 'Lost Poems' Controversy," 85. Noble and Hogg dismiss this claim, arguing that "A. Briton" points to Burns because he had recently used it to identify an essay addressed to the editor of *The Morning Chronicle*. See Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 526.

⁷⁰⁶ Geddes, "The Cob Web: A Song," ptd. in Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 524-25.

polemics between God-granted British exceptionalism (blessing), property (own and possess), and the institutional Church-State, unified in the person of the monarch. The speaker contrasts France, but not in the absolutist and Popish terms we might expect to see in loyalist texts. Instead, the speaker emphasizes Britain's "flourishing Trade,/Plenty, beer, meat, and bread," shifting the poem's focus from the ancient constitutional establishment of liberty (on display in "Carmen Sæculare") to a specifically eighteenth-century discourse of "improvement" and commercial affluence.⁷⁰⁷ This allusion reflects Enlightenment apologetics that link Britain's apparent economic success to its politico-legal institutions, complete with the Lockean equation between liberty, property, and "happiness." But the use of the term "happy" is almost certainly ironized in terms of the judicious Hooker's definition of "happiness" as a life of virtue.⁷⁰⁸ The problem for the unlucky, starving, and "unfree" French seems to inhere in their lack of security of property, though in their starvation "to be free" they seem to reject Locke's happiness for Hooker's.

In the third stanza, the speaker abandons the ironized discourse of exceptionalism of the first two, lamenting in chastened tones a lost past of real British freedom: "It was once so for us,/Indeed it was thus." This couplet, so beautiful in its simplicity, reverses the speaker's perspective, casting the French struggles in universalist terms. As it was with us, so it shall be with you—national signifiers dissolve in the essential unity of God and man. We are all the same in Him, seeking "The blessing that God,/Sent to cheer

⁷⁰⁷ Noble and Hogg point out the irony of the speaker's allusion to "plenty," given the widespread food shortages in Scotland during the mid-1790s. Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 527.

⁷⁰⁸ R. Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Cambridge, 1989), Book 1, ch. 10.

man's abode,/And preserve free from blemish or stain." Having re-established the common basis of human desire in terms of humble domestic virtue, the speaker returns to the historical moment:

Thus, they might suppose,
To be led by the nose,
Was not for a People, like them;
That we being free,
Should with freemen agree,
Nor those who sought freedom condemn.

But there they was wrong,
We have alter'd our song,
Resolv'd to have nothing to do –
With a good, full of evil,
Devis'd by the Devil,
That freedom for which the French rue.

Yet, lest it be thought,
We lov'd self to a fault,
We offer'd Court blessings to treat them;
Ah! could you expect
This they would reject,
And force us, unwilling, to beat them.⁷⁰⁹

Again, as in "Carmen Sæculare," the speaker questions why Britons cannot see themselves in their French compatriots. The repetition of "free," "freemen," and "freedom" in the fourth stanza once more reveals the speaker's disinterest in national signifiers. Instead, he refers to both "they" and "we" as "freemen," a common "People." In the following stanza, however, national prejudice wedges itself back into the poem. In Britain the "freedom for which the French rue" signifies "a good, full of evil,/Devis'd by the Devil." This appalling hypocrisy seems to shock the speaker, and he completes the

⁷⁰⁹ Geddes, "The Cob Web: A Song," ptd. in Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 525.

metonymic association of the Devil, the British government, and the gravest of sins, fraud (“We offer’d Court blessings to treat them”). When the French naturally reject this Faustian offer, the British use that rejection as a pretext for a “just” and “holy” war (“And force us, unwilling, to beat them”). The bitterness of the speaker’s denunciation of *la perfide Albion* continues in the following stanzas:

First a King, good as may be,
We made of a Baby,
Then demanded they’d fawn on the Child!
But, so wicked were they,
That they would not obey,
But beat us! for being so wild.

We brib’d to divide them,
Tried all arts to chide ‘em,
To starve them, made a great fuss;
When, some Demon of Hell,
Inverting the spell,
Turn’d the picture of Famine on us!⁷¹⁰

The speaker refers to Pitt’s unsuccessful strategy to invest British and royalist hopes in the Dauphin and the First Coalition’s military reverses. When these measures fail, Pitt’s tactics turn to subversion and economic blockade, alluding to the great naval battle of June 1, 1794, when the Royal Navy failed to stop a convoy of ships bringing grain to France. The speaker ironically observes that rather than starving French women and children, the government has managed only to starve its own people—especially Scots, who in the 1790s experienced several years of food shortages, high grain prices, and rampant price inflation. As one concerned magistrate observed:

⁷¹⁰ Geddes, “The Cob Web: A Song,” ptd. in Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 525-26.

The Farmers in this Country are very much more disposed to sell their Grain by the lump for shipping, than in small quantities for the consumpt of certain classes of People at home; because though the price may be the same, they thereby avoid the trouble attending the sale of small quantities in the public market, when, on the other hand, they sell and deliver in large quantities, and receive their payment in one sum.⁷¹¹

This passage recalls Isobel Pagan's denunciation of grain engrossers and other middlemen, invoking the moral economy to defend the "People at home." Indeed, in a song published in the *The Edinburgh Herald* on May 15, 1793 (entitled "A Song On The Times") a poet identified as T. Mc---B put the harsh economic conditions in these terms:

On paper muny a' men dout,
An' trade is in disorder,
Thro' a' the kintra, roun' about,
Frae John Groat's, to the border.

Upo' the Bankers there's a run,
Sare they fin' credit alter;
Now ilka ane taks out his loan;
Demands come, helter, selter.

The merchants a', baith great an' sma',
Fin' trust an' siller failen',
An' jealous thoughts amang them a'
Are ilka way prevailin'.

I've liv'd near Fife, maist a' my life,
But ne'er saw things sae fashes;
Now ilka Lad, and Man and Wife,
Cry out,--how scant the Cash is.⁷¹²

Even if farmers had the grain, it appears that no one has the "siller" to buy it. The speaker in "The Cob Web" concludes by reinforcing the pervasive impression that Britain is caught in downward social spiral:

⁷¹¹ NAS, Melville Castle Muniments, GD 51/5/226/1, David Staig, Dumfries, to Robert Dundas, 27 Dec. 1795, qtd. in Harris, "Scotland in the 1790s," 9.

⁷¹² *The Edinburgh Herald*, May 15, 1793.

So great is the blessing
We got by redressing
Each nation's faults but our own;
To destroy them, their Trade,
We, their country invade,
While our own is cut up to the bone.

But courage my Friends
We may yet gain our ends,
Perhaps in a circle they'll meet:
When, nine out of ten
They've kill'd of our men,
And the rest are left something to eat.⁷¹³

It is interesting to compare these bitterly satiric concluding stanzas with those of the vernacular poet in “A Song On The Times”:

What signifies a' our distress,
Compar'd to Frenchmens curses?
Be thankfu', Sirs, ye live in peace,
Tho' ye hae but light purses.

May blessins on our King fa' down,
An ilka thing that's dainty;
Lang lang may he enjoy his Crown,
His people, peace an' plenty.⁷¹⁴

Against the backdrop of events in Scotland during 1792 and 1793—the King's Birthday Riots in Edinburgh (June, 1792), the Tree of Liberty protests throughout Scotland (November/December, 1792), the “Year of the Sheep” in the Highlands (1792), the conventions of the Scottish Friends of the People (December, 1792; April, 1793; October, 1793), and the infamous sedition trials of Muir and Palmer (August/September, 1793)—the poet's contrast between the “Frenchmens curses” and British “peace,” followed by his

⁷¹³ Geddes, “The Cob Web: A Song,” ptd. in Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, 526.

⁷¹⁴ *The Edinburgh Herald*, May 15, 1793.

benediction on behalf of an intermittently deranged King, registers a breathtaking ironic naivety. The speaker in “The Cob Web,” writing a little later in a similar context of military and domestic disasters, does not even try to play the straight man. The Scottish poets’ choice of the Scots vernacular or English (or for Geddes and Muir, Scots-Latin) to articulate the same national anxieties reveals the full extent to which Scottish poets both constitute and transcend “British” poetry during this period. Whereas the national language, English, rules and constrains articulations of both loyalist and radical poetics south of the Tweed, no such limitations apply to North Briton.

Whatever one concludes about Geddes’s authorship of “The Ewe Bughts” and “The Cob Web,” his beautiful Jacobite lyric “Lewie Gordon” quite equals similar compositions of Burns and Oliphant. It also demonstrates Geddes’s poetic range as perhaps more comprehensively “Scottish” than any of the poets we have read in this study.

O send Lewie Gordon hame,
And the lad I daurna name!
Though his back be at the wa’,
Here’s to him that’s far awa’.
 Ohone! my Highlandman;
 Oh! my bonnie Highlandman!
 Weel wad I my true love ken
 Amang ten thousand Highlandmen.

Oh! to see his tartan trews,
Bonnet blue, and laigh-heeled shoes,
Philabeg abune his knee!—
That’s the lad that I’ll gang wi’.
 Ohone! my Highlandman.

Princely youth of whom I sing,
Thou wert born to be a king!
On thy breast a regal star

Shines on loyal hearts afar.
Ohone! my Highlandman.

Oh! to see the wished-for one
Seated on a kingly throne!
All our griefs would disappear,
We should hail a joyful year,
Ohone! my Highlandman.⁷¹⁵

Geddes's lyric reflects all of the features of the Jacobite song with which we are familiar: the speaker's mingled sexual and emotional desire for the conflated figure of her beloved and Prince Charlie; the sartorial typology of the Highlandman; the lover's consciousness of the permanence of the Highlandman's exile; the millenarian association of Charlie's coming with the onset of a new age. Geddes's version of the song, however, operates on two discursive levels: the first two stanzas use the Scots vernacular to voice the lover's lament for her Highland laddie, while the last two address the "wished-for one" in limpid English (though the refrain returns to the vernacular). This discursive shift produces profoundly different effects, as the sexualized love lyric celebrating "the lad I daurna name" pulls apart from the transcendent desire for spiritual unity, embodied by the "wished-for one/Seated on a kingly throne." Geddes's use of Jacobite lyric seems quite distinct from that of Burns, who, as William Donaldson argues, deploys the Jacobite lyric in pursuit of "the preservation and renewal of the *Kulturstaat*," the Scottish "nation, defined as a sense of collective identity based on a common cultural tradition."⁷¹⁶ As we have seen in his Latin, English, and vernacular poetry, Geddes's interest lies not in the recovery of the imaginative artifacts of an endangered Scottish *Volk*, but in the

⁷¹⁵ Robert Chambers, ed., *The Songs of Scotland*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1829), 186-87.

⁷¹⁶ Donaldson borrows this term from Herder. W. Donaldson, *The Jacobite Song*, 87-88.

disassociation of Scottishness from any and all forms of historic, religious, or cultural exceptionalism (or, one might say, parochialism). His vision spurns “Britain” as well, whose assimilationist narrative, so insistently promoted by the learned *literati* (which might be said to include Geddes⁷¹⁷), remains far too constricted for Geddes’s expansive conception of Scottish identity as both ahistorical and deracinated in nature. In Geddes’s Jacobite lyric, the eponymous figure of Lewie Gordon, the “Highlandman,” refers not just to a feudal remnant of the Scottish past, but to an eternal and republican Scotland with which any humane soul may self-identify. To this extent, Geddes’s Jacobitism retains political purchase, even while it cuts “Scottishness” loose from both its ancestral and Ossianic tethers. For Geddes, to identify as Scottish simply means that one embraces a forgiving Christian God and rejects tyranny in any form. Though this category remains explicitly European and Latin, as we have seen, it is nevertheless theocentric and refuses national inflections.

Bakhtin, as has been noted, gives pride of place to the revolutionary potential of the novel, which “fights for the renovation of an antiquated literary language, in the interests of those strata of national language that have remained (to a greater or lesser degree) outside the centralizing and unifying influence of the artistic and ideological norm established by the dominant literary language.”⁷¹⁸ My argument in this study is that

⁷¹⁷ Carruthers suggests just this: “A short sketch of his life and the recent powerful re-awakening of interest Geddes gives a sense of the fact that, in spite of his subsequent relative anonymity, Geddes is one of the major intellects to emerge from eighteenth-century Scotland, and this is to place him among no small rank in the milieu of the Scottish Enlightenment.” G. Carruthers, “Alexander Geddes and Burns ‘Lost Poems’ Controversy,” 82.

⁷¹⁸ M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 67.

Scottish poetry in the age of revolution does precisely the same thing: it reclaims for the Scottish nation not a single past, dominated and overwritten by the unitary national language of an elite ruling class, but a past that conceptualizes the Scottish nation in terms of local self-identification, linguistic multiplicity, cultural and religious difference, and transnational political and cultural affiliations. This fluid conception of the nation can accommodate a British identity, but it neither depends upon it nor would be very much disturbed if it vanished altogether. In the poetry of this period we see Scots imagining themselves as many things in many times through the medium of many languages, so much so that “Scotland” resists all efforts to encompass its geopolitical limits. Whether male or female, loyalist or radical, urban or rural, elite or plebeian, *literati* or autodidacts, these poets adamantly refuse “the central and unifying influence of the artistic and ideological norm established by the dominant literary language,” though they are glad to avail themselves of the dominant language when it benefits them to do so. They refuse to imagine a single nation, British or otherwise, preferring an open, polyvocal field, on which they can stage new national formations and fight new revolutions. In this sense, “Scotland” is a revolutionary category, always subject to creative destruction and reformation. And if past efforts to reduce Scotland to a specific category are any indication, whether Scots vote yea or nay with respect to formal statehood will make little difference to what it means to be “Scottish.”

Epilogue **Back to the Future**

In September, 2014, Scots will decide whether to dissolve the political union that created Great Britain. The Scottish National Party states the case for “the new Scotland” in this way:

Independence is about making Scotland more successful. At its most basic, it is the ability to take our own decisions, in the same way as other countries do. Scotland is a society and a nation. No one cares more about Scotland's success than the people who live here and that, ultimately, is why independence is the best choice for our future.

With independence we can work together to make Scotland a more ambitious and dynamic country. We can create an environment where our existing and new industries grow more strongly. We would have the economic levers to create new jobs and take full advantage of our second, green energy windfall. And instead of many young people having to leave Scotland to fulfill their ambitions, they would be able to stay and take advantage of the increased opportunities here. We will have the powers to address the priorities of people in Scotland, from pensions to childcare. Scotland could do even more to lead the world in areas like renewable energy and tackling climate change, and play our part in creating a more peaceful and stable world. Independence will allow us to make Scotland a better place to live.

And independence will mean a strong, new relationship between Scotland and the rest of the UK. It will create a partnership of equals - a social union to replace the current political union. Independence means Scotland will always get the governments we elect, and the Queen will be our Head of State, the pound will be our currency and you will still be watching your favourite programmes on TV. As members of the EU there will be open borders, shared rights, free trade and extensive cooperation.

The big difference will be that Scotland's future will be in our own hands. Instead of only deciding some issues here in Scotland, independence will allow us to take decisions on all the major issues. That is the reality of independence in this interdependent world.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁹ Scottish National Party, <http://www.snp.org/referendum/the-new-scotland> (accessed June 19, 2013).

This statement characterizes Scotland in several different and perhaps contradictory terms: a “society,” a “nation,” a “country.” It touts “success” as the ultimate objective of an independent Scotland, defined in terms of political autonomy, economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, and social justice. It declares Scotland’s right to an independent foreign policy, full membership in the European Union, and a “partnership of equals” in the United Kingdom. It argues for the desirability of national self-determination, the ability “to take our own decisions, in the same way other countries do.” And it reassures Scots that, in addition to these benefits, the Queen will remain their sovereign, their cash will still spend, and they will still enjoy English television programming (polling data no doubt indicates that these items top lists of voter concerns).

Even if voters approve the referendum and subsequent negotiations with the English government (itself now promoting a strikingly parallel EU in-out referendum in 2015) produce a final devolution of sovereign authority to a new Scottish nation-state, this juridical resolution will only partially clarify the essential ambiguity of the SNP’s appeal for independence. What, after all, is the difference between a society, nation, or country and a formal nation-state? Do these terms indicate a single identity or multiple ones? The SNP’s formulation of this question emphasizes sovereign control over the economy, tax base, and natural resources as the most salient features of a “nation-state,” but these aspects hardly approach what it means to be a society, nation, or country. Although elsewhere the SNP alludes to the general desirability of freedom from the UK’s defense priorities and expenditures, moreover, that benefit is couched in terms of keeping Scottish tax dollars at home to fund domestic programs such as education and health care.

In order to aspire to a “better” society, the SNP asserts, Scots must withdraw from Great Britain.

One might well ask, however, to what extent the SNP’s stated objectives could be achieved within the framework of the Union. The “partnership of equals” or “social union” that the SNP calls for does not, on its face at least, necessitate secession from Britain. Assuming for a moment that the kind of autonomy that the SNP advocates may not come about by further negotiated devolution, the question remains: what is the precise nature and extent of the value of independence? What kind of emotional response does that question provoke, and why is it so important to some but not others? Regardless of which side of the question one takes, it does not take long before personal insults make themselves heard above the political clamor and name-calling supersedes argument. “Independence” is as much a challenge and a threat as it is a policy.

The nature of this threat, however, is far from clear. "There are many things I want this coalition Government to do," David Cameron has remarked, “but what could matter more than saving our United Kingdom?”⁷²⁰ What could matter more, indeed. The UK must be “saved,” though from what or from whom remains implicit: the bogeyman, as he has been in the past, is a Scot (and Alex Salmond in particular). The Prime Minister does not attempt to argue that any of the historical conditions that made the Union politically expedient in 1707 pertain today. Rather, his appeal that Britons are “Better Together” (as the name of the organized pro-Union campaign has it) rests largely on the

⁷²⁰ Auslan Cramb, “David Cameron: I'll resist Scottish independence with 'everything we've got',” *The Telegraph*, October 10, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/conservative/9599671/David-Cameron-III-resist-Scottish-independence-with-everything-weve-got.html> (accessed June 21, 2013).

perceived business, economic, and cultural advantages of the composite state, as well as the greater weight that the UK might swing in European and international affairs as opposed to a fragmentation of smaller states with potentially divergent perspectives.

Regardless of the political appeals with which they will be inundated between now and September, Scottish voters will make the ultimate choice of independence or union based upon a balance of perceptions of individual, local, and national interests. Their experiences of “Scotland” are likely to be personal and little influenced by the war of words between the SNP leadership and the British government, much less by theoretical constructs of what it means to be “Scottish.” Indeed, the referendum may not tell us anything much about Scottishness at all, other than that a majority of Scots who vote in the election feel that Britishness and Scottishness may get along perfectly well together in the same household. The devil one knows tends to win elections, and Great Britain is the incumbent in the race.

But efforts to persuade voters of their “true” interests will intensify in the months ahead, whether those voters want them or not. Those of us outside of Scotland who are interested in the plebiscite in terms of its historical importance, however, cannot but be impressed by the persistence of the national question north *and* south of the Tweed. It is likely that this question will persist beyond the referendum, regardless of the outcome, and that future histories of Scotland and Britain will conduct similar analyses of the terms of national articulation in the period 1999-2014 as I have undertaken here for the revolutionary decades of the late eighteenth century. Marx famously said that ideology has no history. The same might be said for Scotland.

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The National Library of Scotland (NLS) possesses significant holdings of eighteenth-century newspapers, journals, and periodicals. I researched these holdings for the period 1781-1801 for the purpose of situating Scottish "public" poetry within the larger context of domestic and international news, political and editorial opinion, and reports of local events, such as political meetings, judicial proceedings, and letters to the editor (among other items). Reading across the columns of these publications yields a rich and polyvocal experience of shared experiences of Scots during the revolutionary period. Lyric poetry played a significant role in shaping reader perceptions of events in France and on the continent, as well as in London and around Scotland. While the editorial positions of these publications differed, they show an equivalent intensity of public engagement with the revolution and its potential impact on both the British state and Scotland itself. This intensity registers powerfully in the poetic performances of contributors to these publications, and where possible I have tried to refer to the immediate historical moments in which the poetry actively participated. Archival materials of this type, however, are uneven in coverage and, in some cases, can be difficult to work with because of their condition. Nevertheless, these publications indicate the kind of information and knowledge available to the poets featured in this study. They also show just how well informed Scots actually were about their own historical condition.

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