

IMPROVEMENT AND ROMANCE: THE SCOTTISH
HIGHLANDS IN BRITISH WRITING AFTER THE
FORTY-FIVE

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ABSTRACT

The romance of the Scottish Highlands came into existence as a theme within the ideology which governed the region's assimilation into the British Empire: Improvement. The elements of the Improving programme, and of the romance too, were faintly present from the beginning of the eighteenth century, but the form of both was decisively arrived at during the sixty years between the suppression of the Forty-Five and the rise of Sir Walter Scott.

An early, though persistent caricature of the defeated enemy as ridiculous, blinkered and subversive was steadily overtaken by a series of more or less positive images: the society of the region was adopted as an example of an early stage of universal human history; its natural scenery inspired a complex mixture of fear and delight; the superstitions of its inhabitants came to seem a type of the poetic imagination; the warmth and antiquity of its social relations took on a nostalgic glow in an age of industrial and political revolution; its fighting men were made over by degrees from appalling barbarians into imperial heroes. All of these revaluations, however, continued to be compromised by the underlying negativity of the Highland myth, and to legitimate the subordination of the region to the logic of British capitalism and British state power.

At the opening of the nineteenth century, these themes and contradictions are variously exhibited in a range of literary texts: in Wordsworth's Tour poetry of 1803, which subtly links two characteristic Highland motifs - holidays and death; in the prose historical romances which set their scene in the Highlands

and make of them a territory of fantasy and freedom; in Scott's The Lady of the Lake and the contemporary writings which elucidate its status as a national myth; and in the moralistic fiction for which the region furnishes a beguiling imagery of domesticity. The artistic tensions within some of these projects almost have the effect of transforming romance into realism, but not quite.

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Declaration

The thesis which follows was composed by me, and the work it presents is my own.

14 January 1984

Peter Womack

Note on references

Some of the primary works referred to were published anonymously. To simplify reference, I have automatically and silently adopted attributions from the catalogues of the British Library and the National Library of Scotland.

Throughout the footnotes and the bibliography, the place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

INTRODUCTION

We know that the Scottish Highlands are romantic. Bens and glens, the lone shieling in the misty island, purple heather, kilted clansmen, battles long ago, an ancient and beautiful language, claymores and bagpipes and Bonny Prince Charlie - we know all that, and we also know that it's not real. Not that it's pure fantasy: on the contrary, all the things on that rough-and-ready list actually exist, or existed. But the romance is not the things; it is a message which the things carry.

On the other hand, the message and the things are inextricable. Around 1730, an English gentleman, Edward Burt, described the mountains near Inverness: they were, he observed, 'of a dismal gloomy Brown, drawing upon a dirty Purple; and most of all disagreeable, when the Heath is in Bloom.'¹ Here, preserved by chance, is one of the Highland things - heather - devoid of its message. Burt doesn't know what the plant is supposed to mean. We can no longer see the heather he saw, not because we are obliged to like it - that's a secondary and personal question, then and now - but because we cannot name it without at the same time naming a facet of the Highland romance. Botanically, calluna vulgaris is exactly what it was in 1730; culturally, it has been hybridised.

In other words, the Highlands have been made into a myth,² their history and geography taken up and given the order of a

1. Edward Burt, Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland, 2 vols (1754), II, 10.
2. I use this term, throughout, in the sense expounded in Roland Barthes, Mythologies, selected and translated by Annette Lavers, paperback edition (St Albans, 1973).

communication. They are no longer just a place where people and animals and plants live; they are a kind of speech; they have been colonised by the empire of signs. For the historian or geographer of the Highlands, this is drastically inconvenient, since it overlays the data he seeks to establish with accumulations of trash, which have to be laboriously scraped off before he can get started.³ But for the student of significations, the myth is an opportunity because, being of the order of a communication, it possesses a structure. The repetitions and redundancies which order its meaning also encode the history, the contradictions, and the ideological insistences of its making. It tells us more than it knows.

The following study is a narrative of the formative stage of the myth of the Scottish Highlands. 'Narrative' is an optimistic term: the storyline can't in the nature of the case be very clear. I have tried to operate as what Barthes calls a 'mythologist' - that's to say, a reader who treats a myth, not just as the symbol of a concept, and not just as the distortion of a reality, but as both at once. This is like trying to focus simultaneously on the view through the window and the scratches on the pane: the difficulty is felt in the thesis as a perverse ingenuity of construction and an inconsistently ironic tone. I have made it as clear as I can.

3. This is essentially the attitude, for instance, of L.M. Macintyre, 'Sir Walter Scott and the Highlands' (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Glasgow, 1976), and of Leah Leneman, 'The Creation of the Highland Image in Lowland Scotland, 1745-1831' (unpublished undergraduate dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1979). I am grateful to Ms Leneman for making her dissertation available to me at an early stage of my own work.

I have concentrated almost exclusively on writing as a medium of the myth: I've tried to be aware of its parallel manifestations in painting, landscaping, architecture and fashion, but I'm sure I've left much of basic significance unsaid in these areas. Within the sphere of writing, I have drawn on as wide a range as possible, not distinguishing at all consistently between 'literature' and 'non-literature', or between good writing and bad writing. (Both demarcations, in any case, have shifted significantly since the appearance of the texts in question.) I have been interested in connections between political, historical, philosophical and statistical texts on the one hand, and on the other, songs, poems (purportedly ancient and avowedly modern), plays, novels and literary essays. The starting point for making such connections, though it occupies a relatively modest place in the eventual presentation, was a study of travel literature, in the eighteenth century a notably interdisciplinary genre. Even so, the thesis has a strong literary bias, especially in Part Two; for it seems to me that in the attempt to give it poetic or fictional form, the myth appears at its most concentrated, precarious, and interesting.

I have taken it for granted that the formation of the sign of the Highlands is an event in the history of British ideology. My work is in no way a study of the substantive literature and culture of the Gaidhealtachd, and it ventures on its history only insofar as the intervention, in that history, of British imperialism was the determining condition of the formation. For students of Gaelic literature, the period I have studied is a classic one - the age of Alexander MacDonald, Rob Donn, Duncan

Ban Macintyre, William Ross. The irrelevance of this fact to the process I have described is in itself a devastating irony; but irrelevant it remains.⁴ I have been concerned to understand the myth by its character as speech, rather than by what it fails to mention.

It was formed, then, within the ideology of British imperialism during the second half of the eighteenth century. The formation began, fairly decisively, with the military defeat of the Jacobite clans in 1746, and the myth can be said to have come to full expression in 1810, a moment which is the subject of Chapter 8. I have strayed across both these boundaries - back to the beginning of the century to review , as it were, the prehistory of the myth, and forward over the following decade or so to complete two particular lines of argument which would otherwise have been cut off short by the inevitable arbitrariness of such chronological punctuation marks. I have excluded, however, the 'second career' of Sir Walter Scott: the general impact of the Waverley Novels from 1814, combined with the tartan theatre Scott mounted for the Royal Visit in 1822, seems to me so great as single-handedly to initiate a new phase of the story.⁵ It was a new phase, though,

4. The formation is studied, largely at the level of academic texts, as a Gaelic problem in Malcolm Chapman, The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture (1978).
5. The grounding of the Waverley Novels' Highlands is discussed in James Anderson, Sir Walter Scott and History (Edinburgh, 1981), pp.39-44, 58-61, 94-97. More generally, the historical relationship between Highlands and Lowlands is a necessary theme of all the critics who treat Scott as a great fictional historian of the rise of modern society: the most formidable of these are perhaps Georg Lukács, The Historical Novel, written in 1936-37, translated by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, paperback edition (Harmondsworth, 1969), especially pp.15-100; and F.R. Hart, Scott's Novels: the Plotting of Historical Survival (Charlottesville, Va., 1966).

of something which had already come distinctively into existence; it's the period of that event that I have sought to reconstruct.

During this period - the seventy years alluded to with curious inaccuracy in the subtitle of Waverley⁶ - the dominant theme of imperial discourse, so far as the Highlands were concerned, was Improvement. I have tried to give a sort of cumulative exposition of this charged concept in the course of the thesis, so I shan't attempt a comprehensive definition here. A rich and detailed sense of its economic implications is provided by A.J. Youngson's study, After the Forty-Five.⁷ What is worth pointing out at once, though, is that the primary meaning of the term, etymologically and historically, is the narrowly economic one - the cultivation of an asset in order to profit from it. The ramifications of eighteenth-century usage, in social, aesthetic, moral, juridical and religious applications, are transferences of that basic idea. The growth, within that context, of the vaguer sense which is current now - making better - is thus quite specifically an instance of capitalist ideology: it makes managing a stock so that it increases in value the universal type of beneficent change. The 'Improvement' of the Highlands, then, signified a) that the region was to yield a better return on capital, b) that it was to become, very generally, a better place, and c) that a) and b) were substantially identical.

6. Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since (1814). The novel was begun in 1805 under the projected subtitle 'Tis Fifty Years Since', and the miscalculation was carefully preserved when it was eventually published.
7. A.J. Youngson, After the Forty-Five: The Economic Impact on the Scottish Highlands (Edinburgh, 1973), especially pp.47-100.

This was evidently a project fraught with contradictions both internal and external, and it was out of its contradictions that the myth of the Highlands was generated. I hope that the following chapters show in detail how this happened. In elaborating itself, the code of Improvement produced its obverse, the romance - an ineffectual protest against its suppressions, a compromised escape from its rationality, a refuge for meanings excluded by its synthesis, a fairy story in which its conflicting elements lived happily ever after. The two tendencies can appear antagonistic in particular circumstances, but their structural affinities are such that in the end the antagonism is illusory: thus, the Highlands can be both unimproved and uncorrupted (we might gloss 'underdeveloped' and 'unspoiled') at different levels of a single text. The romance is Improvement's covert complement.

A different if related dialectic emerges if one regards the myth as an episode in the history of English literature. Viewed in this frame, the revaluation of the Highlands appears as a function of nascent Romanticism. The neoclassical canons of reason, perspicuity, and conformity to universal nature generate marked dualisms which at once highlight and exclude the converse forces of feeling, intuition, obscurity, folklore, fantasy.⁸ The reactive championing of these denied powers seizes on various appropriate symbols, of which the Highlands are a rich mine: the wild mountains and torrents mediate a Nature of dynamism rather

8. See W.J. Bate, From Classic to Romantic (Cambridge, Mass., 1946), pp.29-56.

than equilibrium, the oral poetic tradition suggests (erroneously) a species of song in which spontaneous emotion is not affected by rules of art, the reported prevalence of superstitious beliefs offers a Shakespearian release from the orthodoxy of natural causation, and so on. This would be the approach, for instance, suggested by E.D. Snyder's The Celtic Revival in English Literature, 1760-1800⁹ - a work of scholarship rather than either history or literary criticism - or, in a differently specialised sense, J.R. Watson's Picturesque Landscape and English Romantic Poetry,¹⁰ which discusses the Highland visits and connections of Gray, Wordsworth, Keats and Byron, though its real interest is in landscape rather than place. My own version of this literary tale can be abstracted, so to speak, from what I have said about poetry and scenery, especially in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6. But it has seemed more illuminating to deal with it within the decisive problematic of Improvement. I have used 'Romanticism' sparingly as a descriptive term, and as an explanatory term I hope I haven't used it at all.

In identifying my object of enquiry as a British myth, I'm conscious of cutting across another possible line of approach to the romanticisation of the Highlands - the one represented by Murray Grigor's exhibition and subsequent television film 'Scotch Myths', and the colourful response these evoked in Scottish periodicals.¹¹ This powerful mode of attack, whose

9. E.D. Snyder, The Celtic Revival in English Literature, 1760-1800 (Cambridge, Mass., 1923).

10. J.R. Watson, Picturesque Landscape and English Romantic Poetry (1970).

11. 'Scotch Myths', exhibition, St Andrews and Edinburgh, 1981; film, written and directed by Murray Grigor for Channel Four, 1983. For reaction, see for example Lindsay Paterson, 'Scotch Myths' and Andrew Noble, 'MacChismo in Retrospect', Journal of Scottish Politics, 2 (1981), 67-81; and Colin The Signs: "Scotch Myths" as Cultural 7 (1981-82) 21-25.

theoretical mentor is Tom Nairn,¹² situates the myth above all within the matter of Scotland: 'ben-and-glen romanticism', 'the tartan monster', and 'granny's hieland hame', are tackled with humour and rage as deformations of Scottish identity, pathological cultural responses to the determinate absence of a political nation. On this view, the vital term in the formation of the Highland myth is not so much Improvement as Anglicisation. I haven't sought to avoid this interpretation: there are certainly points in the development of the myth where a displaced Scottish nationalism was demonstrably a shaping influence on it. And I suspect that my analysis as a whole draws on Nairn's problematisation of Britain too deeply for detailed acknowledgment. But I don't think the question of Scottishness is in any sense the ultimate determinant, and my handling of the issues doesn't privilege it. In discussing texts, for example, I haven't routinely taken into account the geographical origins of their authors. Highlanders (Macpherson, Adam Ferguson), Lowlanders (Blair, Scott), English (Johnson, Wordsworth) and hard cases (Smollett, Jane Porter) all come into the picture, and while their place in it is obviously affected by their personal histories in the context of nation, region, class and sex, these determinations are always too complex to be reducible to national tags, and often marginal to my interest in the writings anyway.

That is, in the end, the mythic speech itself - the dream life of a social order, with its pathos, absurdity and brutality, its

12. Tom Nairn, The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism (1977), pp.110-14, 148-69.

good intentions and bad faith. The Highlands exhibit in conveniently circumscribed form a structure which is characteristic of British imperial culture: the neutralisation of an adversary code by a repressive literarisation which renders it glamorous, useless and mournful. (This, for example, was how the commercial and anti-militaristic ideology of Victorian England accommodated its perpetual overseas wars.¹³ A similar pattern governs the early twentieth-century romance of India.¹⁴ Analogously, again, the present 'post-industrial' crisis of work seems to be generating a retrospective romance of the industrial working class.¹⁵) It's a process of some refinement: the marginalised signification is not erased, or even absorbed exactly, but seduced, adopted by the central culture as a sort of wild pet;¹⁶ and finally its very

13. 'The British Experience of War', lecture given by Geoffrey Best at the Scottish Universities Summer School, July 1980.
14. The founding mythographer is clearly Kipling; the continuing vigour of the myth is indicated by the success of Richard Attenborough's film Gandhi (1982), significantly and controversially a British project.
15. For a serious version, see Jeremy Seabrook, What Went Wrong? Working People and the Ideals of the Labour Movement (1978). At about the same time, the 'Strikes' chain of restaurants, adorned with documentary images of Limehouse and Jarrow, offered a degraded rendering of the same myth.
16. The phrase is T.S. Eliot's: see Selected Essays, third enlarged edition (1951), p.317. Eliot is glancing at the forms of the cultural incorporation of William Blake: the romanticisation of potentially subversive writers such as Blake, or Milton or Shelley, is an interesting variant of the structure.

distinctiveness becomes the finest, most hauntingly authentic expression of imperial unity. At the end of 1982, for example, ITN's review of the year¹⁷ had as its penultimate image the brassy euphoria of the return of the Canberra from the South Atlantic: the Empire triumphant. But after that, behind the credits, it had a lone piper at Goose Green, playing a lament against the evening sky. The mythic appropriateness is striking - a rocky but precious homeland; nostalgia; British sovereignty; death. The melancholy imagery, derived from a society obliterated by the Empire in its prime, is still on hand to ratify the adventures of its decadence, resolving their violence and incoherence into a vague patriotic reverie.

In a preface to his Mythologies, Barthes proposed the slogan: no semiology which is not in the last analysis semioclasme.¹⁸ I hope I have met that demand.

17. 'The Making of 1982', broadcast on ITV, 29 December 1982.

18. Barthes, Mythologies, p.9.

PART ONE : THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SIGN

CHAPTER ONE

THE UNCOUTH SAVAGE

That spirit of industry which begins to take place among them, together with a more free and liberal education will soon, it is to be hoped, polish their manners, take off the rust of barbarity, sloth and ignorance, and convert the uncouth savage into an industrious and useful member of society.¹

1 Integration

In the middle of the eighteenth century the Highlands of Scotland were the target of an unusually systematic government offensive, whose aim was to efface their historical distinctiveness. The wreck, at Culloden, of the clans' military prestige was to inaugurate a programme that would close off a recurrently dangerous French second front by making the Highlands as much as possible like the rest of Britain. The razing of difference was the legislative theme: in 1746 the Disarming Act laid down the same penalties for wearing Highland dress as it did for carrying weapons; in 1747 came the Heritable Jurisdictions Act, dedicated to 'rendering the Union more complete' by 'an active communication of the generous, free, and noble plan of the law of England, in the room of those servile tenures and barbarous customs, which in Scotland deform the system of government'; and in 1752 the Annexing Act, creating significant swathes of Crown land in various parts of the Highlands, had in view a persuasive example of enlightened estate management which would promote rational self-interest in place of what the House of Lords agreed in calling an 'enthusiastical clannish

1. Monthly Review, 11 (1754), 343.

spirit'.² Education was to be centralised too: the Disarming Act tried to license Highland schools in such a way as to exclude Catholics and non-juring Episcopalians, and to place children everywhere under the influence of the established Kirk, which would at this period instruct them in English. The whole enterprise is neatly summarised by the brief of the Commissioners appointed under the 1752 Act: revenues from the annexed estates were to be devoted

to the purposes of civilising the Inhabitants upon the said Estates, and other Parts of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, the promoting amongst them the Protestant Religion, good Government, Industry and Manufactures, and the Principles of Duty and Loyalty to his Majesty, his Heirs and Successors, and to no other Use or Purpose whatever.³

In thus moving unselfconsciously from principles to manufactures and back to principles again, the legislators testify to the profound unity of the concept they're bringing to bear on the problem. Religion, state power, and economic development merge: the clause encodes the assumptions that are built into model Highland towns such as Inveraray or Ullapool, where the church, the jail and the fishquay are incorporated in a single architectural design.⁴ Thomas Pennant, the pioneering tourist, displays the same coherence in his compliment to the Scottish clergy as he found them in 1769 - not the 'furious, illiterate and enthusiastic teachers of old times', but men of learning whose 'discourse is

2. William Cobbett, The Parliamentary History of England, 36 vols (1806-20), XIV (1813), 50.

3. 25 Geo. II C.41, clause 14.

4. 'Estate Architecture in the Highlands', Lecture given by Nicholas Allen to the Scottish Georgian Society, November 1978.

not less improving than the table they entertain the stranger at is decent and hospitable'.⁵ Here the single image of dinner-table conversation represents advances in learning, piety, etiquette and material affluence: it's hard to imagine a more economical expression of the complex of values comprising 'Improvement'.

The policy whose elements interlocked so smoothly was of course more than an emergency response to the Highland army's months of success in 1745-46. Just as the rising itself was not a new thing, but a greatly intensified repetition of 1689 and 1715, so the state's reaction was to work up attitudes and recipes which had been formulated already. Already, for example, the integration of the Highlands had acquired a public hero in General Wade, Commander-in-Chief, North Britain, from 1725 to 1740. The roads with which his name is still linked had quite narrowly strategic origins: they were the necessary precondition of the three permanent garrisons he proposed to set up in the Great Glen. But their construction proved capable of more generous interpretation.

5. Thomas Pennant, A Tour in Scotland MDCCLXIX, second edition (1772), p.143. Thomas Pennant (1726-98), Flintshire landowner, zoologist and traveller, made two journeys through Scotland, in 1769 and 1772, and his accounts of them were published in Chester in 1771 and 1774 respectively. In their grander second editions, published in London, they were standard travellers' companions for the rest of the century, and on his second visit Pennant's services to the reputation of Scotland were rewarded with the freedom of Edinburgh. I have used the London editions: A Tour in Scotland MDCCLXIX, second edition (1772), referred to as 'Pennant, 1769'; and A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides: MDCCLXXII, second edition, 2 vols (1776), referred to as 'Pennant, 1772'.

And see, where bursting from a Gothic night
 Half her brave race emerges into light;
 By ~~THEE~~ to better being waked, they hail
 Their social life, and court the peopled vale;
 By ~~THEE~~ her genius raised, with glad surprise
 Sees cultured groves, and cheerful villas rise.
 Pleased she beholds the golden harvests nod,
 And the bold arch controul the swelling flood;
 E'er wastes the traffic-crowded causeway stretch,
 And spreading hedges fence the grateful beach.^o

To read this with the eye of a legislator is to note how well its diction, with its consciously value-laden epithets and light momentary personifications, is adapted to articulate the unified idea of improvement. The groves and harvests 'rise' and 'nod', half transmuted into the enlightened and cheerful people whose new-found industriousness they represent. The 'bold arch' depicts lightly - the lightness is part of the point - the new dominance of central organisation over the unruly 'swelling' of the northern hordes. New building; new agriculture; new social relations - material and moral improvements are written in the same words. A parallel union appears, in more conceited style, in verses by Robertson of Struan. Wade's bridge over the Tay at Aberfeldy addresses the passenger on the occasion of its opening in 1735.

The North and South rejoice to see me stand,
 Uniting, in my Function, Hand in Hand,
 Commerce and Concord, Life of ev'ry Land.
 But - who could force rough Nature thus to ply,
 Becalm the Torrents and make Rocks to fly?

6. Scottish Descriptive Poems, edited by John Leyden (Edinburgh, 1803), p.153. For other tributes, see J.B. Salmond, Wade in Scotland, second edition, enlarged (1938), pp.218-19.

What Art, what Temper, and what manly Toil
 Could smooth the rudest Sons of BRITAIN'S Isle?⁷

Neatly, the art and toil seem to be smoothing geological obstacles until the completion of the couplet reveals the 'rough Nature' to be that of the inhabitants as well.

The sunny coherence of this vision of social change is associated with its surprising lack of political tension. Commerce and cultivation spread across the Tay by the mere removal of obstacles: resistance to this assimilation is not condemned - it is not even imagined. (Struan was an intransigent old Jacobite who, in another poem, looked forward to the rampant Lion 'Undoing every shameful link' of his chain: probably he was writing insincerely; the point is the fluent availability of the imagery.) The best-known tribute to Wade, apparently composed by his second and successor on the road programme, Governor Caulfeild, and quoted by traveller after traveller, is the couplet,

If you'd seen these roads before they were made,
 You'd lift up your hands, and bless General Wade.

The Irishism which constituted the epigram's attraction speaks the absence, for the project of improvement, of whatever may have been there before. The unimproved routes are an inconceivable zero, a logical impossibility into which the 'bull' falls.

The '45 was beyond a joke, of course, and the flurry of officially inspired inquiries and accounts which followed its

7. Alexander Robertson, *The History and Martial Achievements of the Robertsons of Strwan* (Edinburgh, 1735), second part, p. 17.

suppression, although they pursue the same theme of uncontradictory and inevitable progress, do so with renewed political edge. It was now, after all, a matter of framing government policy in order to engineer ulterior changes in the structure and values of a society - a considerable originality in eighteenth-century administration. The 'Gothic night' had to be delineated; there had to be a consensual view of what the Highlands were actually like. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, the sharp need to abolish Highland differences produced a sharply focussed picture of them. Its elements were mostly not new, even to statesmen in London, but newly clear and consequential; and so it provides a useful point of departure for this investigation.⁸

8. The profile which follows is abstracted from the following:
- Duncan Forbes, 'Some Thoughts Concerning the State of the Highlands of Scotland', written in 1746, Culloden Papers (1815), pp.297-301.
- Andrew Fletcher, 'Proposals for Civilising the Highlands' written in 1747, Albermarle Papers, edited by C.S. Terry, 2 vols (Aberdeen, 1902), II, 480-91.
- 'Extracts from a MS in the possession of the Gartmore Family', written in 1747, Edward Burt, Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland, fifth edition, edited by R.Jamieson, 2 vols (1818), II, 338-70.
- A Second Letter to a Noble Lord, Containing a Plan for effectually uniting and sincerely attaching the Highlanders to the British Constitution (1748).
- The Highlands of Scotland in 1750, edited by Andrew Lang (1898).
- Speeches by Hardwicke and Newcastle in support of the Annexing Act, Parliamentary History, XIV, 1249ff.

The people of the Highlands, according to this depiction, are liable to be led into Jacobite adventures for three reasons: because they are, both by sentiment and in practice, the slaves of their Chiefs; because the primitive economic condition of the country makes them poor and idle (that is to say, it gives them both motive and leisure to prey upon their wealthier neighbours); and because the differences between them and other British people, seen in their manners, their religion, their language and their dress, combine to make them feel like foreigners who owe no allegiance to the British Constitution. These three factors tend to reinforce one another: the multiplicity of petty princes leads to a general lawlessness inimical to the creation of agrarian or industrial wealth; the clansmen's poverty seals their dependence on the chiefs; the poor communications attendant on the poverty and insecurity keep the greater part of the region remote and preserve its peculiarities. Minuter connections can also be traced: for example, the Highlanders' houses are often mere hovels, which they are not afraid of losing in the course of an insurrection; again, the Highland dress, to which the people are enthusiastically attached, is much better adapted to sport and fighting than to working, so that their prejudice on this point prolongs the material conditions which are its ultimate cause. The picture, in short, shows a system of greater and lesser vicious circles, in which disorder, idleness, ignorance and remoteness all feed on each other, and Popery and the Stuarts on all.

Even bating its hostility, this account is not the innocent

fruit of observation. Its guiding lines mirror those of eighteenth-century constitutionalism: that liberty and property are the joint and mutual guarantors of law, as law secures property, which in turn confers the necessary independence to defend liberty, thus creating a constituency with the interest and the power to uphold the rule of law.⁹ The vicious circle is this benign circle reversed: the state of the Highland appears as an idealised and inverted image of the Constitution. Just as in Caulfeild's epigram, the region seems to lack precisely what British society seems to offer it.

That is - to resume the summary - the gradual dissolution of Highland foreignness by the combined introduction of legal authority and market forces. The military power of the chiefs is to be broken by a network of garrisons which, besides their immediate purpose, are to become centres for the encouragement of fishing on the coast, linen manufactures inland, and, everywhere, the exchange of agricultural surplus. The obstacles to producing the latter are to be removed by the institution of long leases which will give tenants a motive for increased productivity and an interest opposed to that of the lairds. Since it's understood that the people's clannishness isn't altogether due to the agrarian conditions, it's to be attacked directly by increasing the number of schools, making attendance compulsory, and reducing the size

9. See H.T. Dickinson, Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain (1977).

of parishes. As the centres of power, industry and exchange mature into towns, they will afford other conveniences - making possible a Highland Circuit to regularise the administration of justice, attracting Lowland traders or craftsmen whose habits of industry will set a good example, and ensuring that no spot is far enough from the homes of people with good reason to be friends of Government for treasonable conspiracies to hatch undetected. In this way, the chief's power-base will vanish, and the people, tasting the fruits (or sweets) of industry (or liberty), will labour to augment 'the Importance and Value, not of the Patriarchal Family of the Chief, but of the real and natural Family of the Man'.¹⁰ Finally, the superior reality and naturalness of a commercial society will become obvious to the landowners themselves, who will 'chuse rather to have their rental increased by a rich and laborious people, than to be followed into a rebellion by a number of idle and desperate beggars'.¹¹

The circumstances and function of these early accounts tend to mean, therefore, that all the distinctive features of Highland society appear as deficiencies. A minor anomaly in the negative tale suggests how this works. 'The Camerons', we learn, 'are a Lazy Silent Sly and Enterprising People'¹² - how can they be lazy

10. A Second Letter to a Noble Lord, p.24.

11. Parliamentary History, XIV, 1254.

12. The Highlands of Scotland in 1750, p.32.

and enterprising? Forbes of Culloden implies an answer when he notes a secondary advantage of disarming the Highlanders, namely that 'thereby that diversion which is the greatest incentive to their idleness, i.e. hunting, is cut off'¹³; the anonymous author of the Gartmore MS, meanwhile, offers a gloss on 'enterprise' in explaining how inter-clan 'jealousies, feuds, depredations and thefts ... affect the common sort, and in so far open their understandings, and sharpen their judgments'.¹⁴ The definition of idleness, agreed by all to be a Highland characteristic, is a covertly restricted one: these observers expect the poor to engage in lower-class pursuits (manual labour), and when they find them engaged in upper-class ones (hunting and diplomacy), they don't recognise the activity, but see it as a form of doing nothing.

The categories of Improvement regularly precipitate such images of the Highlands as the negation of good sense and progress. The region enters the national ideological system as a minus value; the play of curiosity and sympathy does not easily alter this fundamental determination.

13. Culloden Papers, p.301.

14. Burt, Letters (1818), II, 340.

2 Eccentricity

1706:

They are all gentlemen, will take affront from no man, and insolent to the last degree. But certainly the absurdity is ridiculous to see a man in his mountain habit, armed with a broadsword, target, pistol, at his girdle a dagger, and staff, walking down the High Street... as if he were a lord, and withal driving a cow! bless us - are these the gentlemen! said I. 15

1730s:

They say a Spanish Ship being stranded upon the Coast of Barra ... one of the Members proposed, "If she was laden with Wine and Brandy, she should be confiscated as an illicit Trader upon the Coast; but if she was freighted with other Merchandize, they should plunder her as a Wreck."

Upon this, one of the Council, more cautious than the rest, objected that the King of Spain might resent such Treatment of his Subjects; but the other replied, We have nothing to do with that, McNeal and the King of Spain will adjust that Matter between themselves.¹⁶

1770s:

There are many ladies here, who would rather prefer marrying a Chieftain, and live secluded from the world on six hundred a year, than join themselves to a Lowlander, whose progenitors were born a few hundred years later, with treble that sum. I don't think the gentlemen are such dupes to this foible.¹⁷

1828:

A Highland Laird ordered one of his people to be hanged; he was shy of mounting the Ladder: his wife called, "Hoot Mon, make haste or ye'll anger the Laird."¹⁸

These four specimens point to a constituent of the Highland image which seems to remain stable, transmitted through a half-buried

15. Daniel Defoe, letter to Harley, quoted in R.N.Salaman, The History and Social Influence of the Potato (Cambridge, 1949), p.353.
16. Burt, Letters (1754), II, 281-82.
17. Mary Anne Hanway, A Journey to the Highlands of Scotland (1776), p.131.
18. Mrs Hughes of Uffington, Letters and Recollections of Sir Walter Scott, edited by H.G. Hutchinson (n.d.), p.331.

culture of jokes and snap judgments, regardless of insights or idealisations produced elsewhere: the Highlander as a sort of clown. What's interesting then is that the joke, in all four instances, turns on just those traits which the programme of Improvement had identified as dangerous - the Highlander's unthinking attachment to his clan and chief, and his consequent contempt for liberty and property. The ideology of integration projects a single British society, and so the values of a Highlander, detached from the real social relations they mediated, come out as his 'foibles'. Seen as an individual, he is eccentric; and he is seen as an individual because it's his collective existence - the clan - which is taken as a threat and suppressed.

This form of diminution is seen, very directly motivated, in Joseph Mitchell's The Highland Fair; or the Union of the Clans, a comic ballad-opera staged at Drury Lane, in 1731 in what was, as far as I know, the region's theatrical debut.

The piece takes its cue from another well-known Highland achievement of Marshal Wade's: the establishment of the Independent Companies (later to become the Black Watch), and their policing role in the southern and eastern glens between 1725 and 1739. The light-weight plot concerns the efforts of an Independent Company Captain to bring about the ceremonial reconciliation of two clans who are hereditary enemies. One or two of the obstacles retarding the eventual union are tinged with local colour - one of the clans can't be prevented from stealing the other's cattle, and one of the chiefs is malignly influenced by a Roman Catholic confessor.

But on the whole the story eschews social realism and concentrates on the amorous complications which threaten the marriages involved in the settlement. The picture of the Highlands is therefore a faint one for most of the show: one of the lovers is foppish, another a man of sense; the Captain himself is a pleasant libertine; the intrigues are resolved with the aid of a sardonic but good-hearted widow - the setting is an exotic touch within a secure world of Restoration comic types.

Placed by this familiar dramatic context, the distinctive Highland characteristics are a kind of affectation, follies to be laughed out of countenance from the standpoint of 'sense'. The Highland Chief's insistence on the antiquity of his family and the absolute submission of his vassals appears as a monomania like the ones in Molière. The Captain, in an expository scene, wonders at the rival leaders' pretensions, and adds:

But to expect Homage, and insist on Punctilio's of
Honour and Ceremony, among Equals too, is a peculiar
Instance of their Romantic Pride and Grandeur.¹⁹

'Romantic' here has no shadow of its emerging positive sense, I think: it merely promises the audience an exhibition of behaviour laughably at odds with reality. The Highland juvenile lead replies,

Commerce and Correspondence with the Lowlanders, (to which
this Union will contribute) will, by Degrees, refine our
Notions, Customs, and Manners. -

And the Captain caps the exchange:

And our Independent Companies will assist, in making you,
at least, tame and peaceable Subjects.

19. Joseph Mitchell, The Highland Fair; or, the Union of the Clans (1731), p.4.

This is mere official policy turned into dialogue, and it's typical of both that the aboriginal 'notions and customs' should attain so little imaginative coherence. The assured formulas of the State combine with those of the genre to render Highland manners marginal and removable. Even the Chief's supposed claims to independent sovereignty (juridically the most formidable objection to them from the point of view of the British Crown) can be sweetly assimilated into the Beggar's Opera joke of using diplomatic language to speak of domestic business: 'There's as much Difficulty in bringing about the happy Union of our Clans, as in settling the Peace of Europe'.²⁰ The conventionally smoothing and reconciling rhythms of the marital comedy ending depoliticise the conflicts; and it's assumed, of Highlanders as of other misguided comic protagonists, that 'If their Eyes were once Open'd and their Prejudices removed they would See and Act as others do'.²¹

In one coup de théâtre, though, The Highland Fair does hint at codes outside its own comic and improving one. The actual chiefs of the two clans don't appear in the negotiations, which are conducted by their 'vassals'. The principals are therefore constantly spoken of but not seen until the very end, when they enter, suitably costumed and attended, with bagpiper and 'Bard', and wordlessly perform the pre-arranged ceremony of reconciliation.

20. Mitchell, The Highland Fair, p.39.

21. Lang, The Highlands of Scotland in 1750, p.145.

The details are some of them ludicrous, such as the solemn offer and acceptance of a pinch of snuff, and the Bard is told to 'rehearse the genealogy of their Families' but given no lines, which probably means he is to improvise bizarre Gaelic-sounding names; so the climax is broadly farcical. Still, the surprising silence of the chiefs themselves has the force of an explanation withheld, a curious gap at the centre of a scene which therefore amounts to rather more than local colouring of an old formula. The verbal and musical loquacity of the progressive party in the play has left the ancient heritors without a voice, and their mute, ridiculous presence offers to be picturesque and pathetic too.

Whatever unarticulated cultural possibilities may be held in that rather effective suspension, its immediate motive was probably to avoid the problem of an appropriate Highland idiom. All Mitchell's characters speak standard English; there are no 'stage Highlanders' analogous to the Irishmen and Frenchmen for whom the eighteenth-century theatre had confident artificial dialects. The Highland equivalent of these farcical jargons seems to appear only in Smollett's patriotic comedy The Reprisal (1757), when a very briefly introduced piper declares to his master,

her nain sell wad na pudge the length of her tae, without
your honour's order.²²

The ideological point is obvious at once: the audience is to

22. Tobias Smollett, Miscellaneous Works, edited by R. Andrews, third edition, 6 vols (Edinburgh, 1806), III, 460.

recognise the garbled English as being of a piece with the unenglish servility of the sentiment; it's the speech of an obstinate 'vassal'.

This curious literary Highlandese, for which 'her nain sell' is the crude call-sign as 'bigard' is for stage French, seems to descend from derisive Lowland and Scots balladry of the early Jacobite period.²³ The earliest example I've seen is in William Cleland's satire on the Highland Host of 1678, but the style of use there ('If any ask her of her thrift, Forsooth her nain sell lives by thift',²⁴ for example) expects a quick recognition, as if the formula were already well known. As far as I know, it is used only by Scottish writers, and its whimsical inaccuracy as a notation ('I doubt', an irritated Celticist remarked in 1889, 'if one Highlander in a hundred would know what "her nain sell" meant',²⁵) probably reflects hostility rather than ignorance. Yet its eighteenth-century uses are on the whole farcical rather than vituperative: the Highlander who speaks like that is not so much a monster as a child. The master of this fantasy is Dougal Graham, the Glasgow bellman and literary pedlar, who wrote a handful of stylish ballads in which 'her nain sell' gives his views on the changing condition of the Highlands.²⁶ The best-

23. See W. Donaldson, 'Bonny Highland Laddie: the Making of a Myth', Scottish Literary Journal, 3 (2) (1976), 30-50.

24. William Cleland, A Collection of Several Poems and Verses (1697), p.13.

25. C.C. Grant, 'Highland-English as Found in Books', Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, 15 (1888-89), 172-88.

26. Collected Writings of Dougal Graham, edited by G.MacGregor, 2 vols (Glasgow, 1883), I, 257-73.

known of these is 'The Turnimspike': dating from the 1760s, it protests vehemently but impotently about invaders who 'mak a lang road on the crund' and then charge people to go on it. Its opening portrait recalls Defoe's 'gentleman', but doesn't have the same hard appraisal:

First when her to the Lowlands came,
 Nain sell was driving cows, man:
 There was nae laws about hims narse,
 About the breeks or trouse, man.

Nain sell did wear the philapeg,
 The plaid prik't on her shouder;
 The gude claymore hung pe her pelt,
 The pistol sharg'd wi' powder.

The softening is of course partly a sociological matter: all these imposing accoutrements are now illegal, and Graham deftly catches the new vulnerability: the speaker tamely pays his toll, and vows never to come near the Turnimspike again, 'Unless it pe to purn her', a threat which is evidently no more than cheeky.

The character, drawing on old Lowland prejudice but also on new historical observations, isn't a simple one. The 'shentleman', with his vanity, his wholly unfounded self-confidence, his ingenuous bloodthirstiness and timidity, and his spectacular grammatical incompetence, has something of the elusiveness of a folk-tale fool. Sometimes, as in the popular 'John Highlandman's Remarks on the City of Glasgow', the language is so fantastically at odds with ordinary modern life that the poem reads like a series of riddles. All these qualities can be illustrated with the payoff of 'Tugal McTagger', the story of a Lochaber lad's career in Glasgow retailing:

She'll got a big shop, an' she'll turn'd a big dealer;
 She was caution hersel', for they'll no sought no bailer,
 But Tugal McTagger hersel' mak's a failure -
 They'll call her a bankrump, a trade she'll not know.

'the win's on Glendoo' authenticate Tugal as a free spirit who is above all the legal palaver. The reductive and the romantic are views through the same frame.

3 Lawlessness

Somebody observing that the Scotch Highlanders, in the year 1745, had made surprising efforts, considering their numerous wants and disadvantages: 'Yes, Sir, (said he) their wants were numerous; but you have not mentioned the greatest of them all, - the want of law.'²⁷

This comment of Johnson's, made in 1770, expresses a combination of judgments of the Highlands. It alludes to the tactical proposition that the clans are formidable only in agility and impetuosity, and can gain only temporary advantages over disciplined troops; this was a well-established commonplace, which had been enforced by Defoe, for instance, in a pamphlet published during the '15.²⁸ But by implicitly linking military indiscipline to that other level of the Jacobite army's lawlessness - the fact of its being in rebellion - Johnson suggests how the category defines the whole relationship of the Highlands to the British state. In every sense, the stereotypical Highlander is without law. The author of the Gartmore MS speaks in 1747 for all the commentators and administrators for whom the pro-Jacobite Highlands, with their separatist loyalties and poor communications, are essentially a problem of police:

27. James Boswell, Life of Johnson, edited by R.W. Chapman and corrected by J.D. Fleeman (1970), p.443.

28. Daniel Defoe, A View of the Scots Rebellion (1715), pp.19, 23.

Here the laws have never been executed, nor the authority of the magistrate ever established. Here the officer of the law neither dare nor can execute his duty, and several places are above thirty miles from lawfull persons. - In short, here is no order, no authority, no government.²⁹

Well before the '45, this formidable 'want' had concentrated itself in the figure of the blackmailer, that is, the cattle thief or cattle thieves' patron who, like MacDonald of Barrisdale, instituted a protection racket on the boundary of Highland and Lowland. This 'heavy and shamefull tax', which is a main theme of complaint in the Gartmore MS, was noticed by Burt and by Wade himself in the 1720s,³⁰ and around the same time one of the black-mailers, Rob Roy Macgregor, then still alive, was launched upon national notoriety by a pamphlet, published in London, entitled The Highland Rogue.³¹ The point about this emphasis is that the levying of regular protection money was not simply a crime but also a system: as another post-1740 analyst sarcastically put it, a 'famous Company had the Honour to Methodize Theft into a Regular Trade'.³² The regularity meant that they didn't steal anything other than cattle, which they (like Homer's Achilles) regarded as legitimate prey; that their trade was looked on as honourable, anyone unlucky enough to be hanged for it being revered rather than disgraced; and that they scrupulously kept the undertakings

29. Burt, Letters (1818), II, 344.

30. Burt, Letters (1754), II, 228; for Wade, see Burt, Letters (1818), II, 272-73.

31. E.B., The Highland Rogue (1723).

32. Lang, The Highlands of Scotland in 1750, p.82.

which they gave in return for their money - indeed, the problem as the Gartmore writer saw it was that their protection was so much more cost-effective than that of the state that even respectable and well-disposed proprietors were drawn into the arrangement. Blackmail, in short, was black in the precise figurative sense that it implied, not just illegality, but an alternative legality - a territorial jurisdiction and a right to tax. In this it resembled, at least from a metropolitan point of view, the old sovereignty of the heads of the clans: the black-mailing brigand is a criminalised image of the chief.

It's an image, then, which works rather ambivalently. The Highland Rogue (1723), although it portrays Rob Roy as a wild man, an enormous person covered with red hair, nevertheless implies that he was forced into outlawry by 'the Duke of -', and features anecdotes in which he pays (and steals back) a poor man's rent arrears, or bamboozles a captured clergyman with the mock-Calvinist self-defence that he was predestined to be a cattle-rustler. The latter tale is doubly interesting in that it looks back to the spoof sermons and practical jokes of renaissance picaresque, but also forward to the philosophic lawlessness of Wordsworth's Rob Roy, who is to argue in 1805 that law is the source of moral confusion and 'bitterness of soul'.³³ The conditions are clearly present for the conversion of at least Macgregor into a Robin Hood - Pennant, whose account is quite hostile, comparing

33. 'Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1803', in William Wordsworth, Poetical Works, 5 vols (Oxford, 1940-49), III, edited by E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire (1946), 73-96, number XI, 'Rob Roy's Grave'.

him with Fielding's Jonathan Wild, still concedes that Rob Roy was 'a true friend to the widow and orphan';³⁴ and Robin Hood is explicitly evoked by William Gilpin among many others.³⁵ Bannisdale too, with his silver sword-blade inscribed in Latin and his gentleman's manners, has the style if not the philanthropy for the role. The political problem of lawlessness inverted easily into the popular image of freedom - the more rapidly because, against many expectations, the problem was completely solved (if we exclude excise and game laws, both special cases) within a dozen years of Culloden.³⁶

This reversal is especially conspicuous in Lowland popular song, where long-standing prejudice against the Highlander as a thieving vagabond turns readily into rogue-romance. Which, for instance, is 'The Highland Balou', collected and probably shaped by Burns? -

Hee-balou, my sweet, wee Donald,
 Picture o' the great Clanronald;
 Brawlie kens our wanton Chief
 Wha got my wee Highland thief...³⁷

34. Pennant, 1772, I, 403.
35. William Gilpin, Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776 on Several Parts of Great Britain: Particularly the High-lands of Scotland, second edition, 2 vols (1789), I, 211-13.
36. T.C. Smout, A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830, paperback edition (1972), pp.321-23.
37. The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns, edited by J. Kinsley, 3 vols (Oxford, 1968), No. 580.

The implications are consciously libellous: the Highland 'character' is certainly being denigrated. But the outlaw tenderness which the lyric also carries is part of the romance. Similarly, in the 'Highland Laddie' vein of balladry traced by W. Donaldson, the girl who goes off with Donald is choosing a freely wandering life instead of respectability with her 'Lawland Kin and Dady'.³⁸ The aims of Improvement are directly refused:

I'll sell my rock, my reel, my tow,
My gude gray mare and hacket cow,
To buy my love a tartan plaid,
Because he is a roving blade.

The social recklessness is vitally, in the songs, a sexual dynamism: Liza Baillie, in a much-hymned seduction, elopes with Duncan Grahame -

But she's cast aff her bonny shoon,
Made of the Spanish leather,
And she's put on her Highland brogues
To skip amang the heather -

and the invariable features of costume - dirk, pistol, enveloping plaid - shade readily into innuendo.³⁹ (Donaldson's collection prompts the speculation that the great plaid, which was not among the forms of Highland dress popularised by the army, owes its fame to the frequency with which the heroines of eighteenth-century broadsides are 'row'd' in it. It confers freedom in an amorous context as in a military one, by enabling the 'ranting, roving laddie' to bed down anywhere. It's relevant, of course, that it

38. Donaldson, 'Bonny Highland Laddie'.

39. 'My Love was born in Aberdeen' and 'Liza Baillie', in Love, Labour and Liberty: the Eighteenth Century Scottish Lyric, edited by Thomas Crawford (1976), p.129.

was illegal from 1746 to 1782.) The two analogous themes, banditry and sexual licence, combine literally in the string of songs about girls who, like Bonny Babby Livingstone, were abducted to the Highlands more or less by force; the most popular of these in the latter part of the century seems to have been the one featuring Robin Oig, Rob Roy's son.⁴⁰ This libertine tradition arguably reaches its peak in the song of the 'raucle Carlin' in Burns's Love and Liberty cantata, where 'John Highlandman', now in the 1780s a half militarised figure, is the carrier of a rowdy vagabond energy much more radically anarchic than Wordsworth's Glengyle philosophe.⁴¹

In these notations, admiring or deploring, of outrageous Highland liberty, there was an obvious conflict with the idea, equally powerful and equally the product of the state's efforts to suppress Highland particularism, that Highlanders were all slaves. It was not a formal inconsistency: the official view, that the chiefs were tyrants because their power was not sanctioned, and therefore not controlled, by law, united the characters of servility and lawlessness completely enough to warrant the assertion that 'the Common People are Slaves, in Proportion to the Distance of their Country from the Center of Justice'.⁴² But the contradiction was still felt. It meant, for example, that the extension of 'liberty' to these people, on which the

40. See Walter Scott, Rob Roy, Border Edition, 2 vols (1893), I, cxi-xii.

41. Kinsley No. 84.

42. Lang, The Highlands of Scotland in 1750, p.6.

securing of the constitution seemed to depend, would take the form of heavy policing - as one writer of 1746 put it, of 'keeping garrisons in proper places all over the Highlands, till the people are acquainted with their own interests'.⁴³ The Highlanders, that is, are too benighted to want liberty, so it will have to be forced upon them. After forty years of this attempt, a visitor in the 1780s found the 'spirit of clanship' persisting, and concluded that 'if certain appearances prove that human nature pants after freedom, there are others which seem to indicate a propensity to voluntary slavery.'⁴⁴ The freedom which is caught in this paradox is of a very ideologically particular kind; and the case of the Highlands, to which it came accompanied by new labour discipline, new state and church power, and new rights of private property, was calculated to strain its limits. The popular dream of an illicit freedom expresses the strain.

An odd variant of this is a little poem which appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine after the suppression of the mutiny in the Highland Regiment in 1743.⁴⁵ It claims to have been 'written by a HIGHLANDER the day before he was taken', and turns on an extended and sentimental simile of a robin who,

43. The Gentleman's Magazine, 16 (1746), 261.

44. Thomas Newte, Prospects and Observations on a Tour in England and Scotland (1791), p.277.

45. The Gentleman's Magazine, 13 (1743), 322. For a detailed but partly fictionalised account of the 1743 mutiny, see John Prebble, Mutiny: Highland Regiments in Revolt 1743-1804, paperback edition (Harmondsworth, 1977), pp.13-87.

trusting to your kind protection,
 Makes ay your window his election;
 There, wi his plaid athwart his breast,
 He seeks his meat, or takes his rest,

but who pines away in a cage. The moral is that

Highlanders like Robins be,
 Alive or dead they mun be free.

This sentiment is quite unaffected by the mention, a few lines before, of 'Scottish slaves' forgetting their woes at the sound of the pipes. Whoever wrote the verse, the poignancy of the duped soldiers' hopeless flight from London seems to have set off, not the slightest doubt about the constitutional concept of liberty, but naively an alternative to it. Emptied, by the naturalising imagery, of the rebellious social content of the common lyrics, the romance of lawlessness is attenuated into a nostalgia, a reverie of absolute escape which will become a virulent component of the developed Highland myth.

4 Beggarly Scots

The eccentric Highlander, derided or romanticised, reflects the superior stability of the observer's standpoint. 'Tonalt' wanders, somewhat at a loss, through a perhaps less appealing but certainly stronger Lowland society. In those crises at which Highlanders in a body were temporarily formidable, the tone is different, and harsher. William Cleland, a Cameronian lieutenant-colonel, naturally saw the Highlanders of 1678, who were being used

by the Scottish Government to intimidate the south-west, as exploiters - violent, cowardly, and uncouth. But even here the underlying disadvantage of the Highlanders is preserved in the terms of the invective:

There swarms of vermine, and sheep kaid,
Delights to lodge beneath the Plaids,
For they like not in frostie Weather
To sit upon her open leather.
Her nane sell lapp and clapt her narse,
More like a Monkie, nor like Mars.⁴⁶

The invaders are not powerful and hard, but cold, hungry and lice-ridden. Not that the denunciation is tempered by any sympathy: it's that it's exactly the destitution of the Highlanders, their bestial neediness, which makes them frightening. A closely similar idea appears, with the same rough command of grotesque, in verses quoted in The Highlander Delineated, a somewhat panic-stricken pamphlet published in London in late 1745. For example:

Whene'er his craving Thirst or Hunger calls
For due Subsistence, on his Knees he falls,
And in the Impression of a Hobby's Hoof,
Where Rain lies mix'd with other nasty stuff,
He drops his Oatmeal, stirs it well about,
And, leaning on his Hands, sucks up the Grout.⁴⁷

This extravagantly sordid person is not only repellent but dangerous: if he can survive on mud, it's hard to see how he

46. Cleland, A Collection of Several Poems, p.35.

47. The Highlander Delineated; or, The Character, Customs and Manners of the Highlanders (1745), p.14, where the verses are said to be 'entitled, The HIGHLANDER', and to have been 'writ near fifty years ago'.

can be conclusively defeated, and impossible to guess what he might do on reaching London. The same pamphlet, which is an anthology of quotations, refers the reader to Joel, ii, 3:

A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.

So that here again the Highlanders pose the special threat of people who have nothing. The hostile delineation makes them not so much an invading army as a plague - vermin, as well as verminous - beggars, locusts, banditti. The topical version of 'Lillibulero' -

O Brother Sandie, hear ye the News?
An army's just coming without any shoes -

is a terse memento of the mixture of sneering and fearing which met the invasion and, later, was the context of the atrocities after Culloden. (Brigadier Mordaunt, according to one account, went 'to Lord Lovat's House, that Nest and Cage of unclean Birds, where much Treason and Rebellion had been hatched; he only found the Nest, for the Birds were flown, however, he thought proper to purge it from all Pollutions by Fire.'⁴⁸)

At this point, however, the image of the Highlander gets interestingly merged with that of the Scot in general. As Defoe concisely says, when James VI came to the English Throne,

Scots from the Northern Frozen Banks of Tay
With Packs and Plods came Whigging all away:
Thick as the Locusts which in Egypt swarm'd,
With Pride and hungry Hopes compleatly arm'd:

48. James Ray, A Compleat History of the Rebellion, second edition (1760), p.347.

With Native Truth, Diseases and No Money,
Plunder'd our Canaan of the Milk and Honey.⁴⁹

That union of courts, and therefore of preferment pyramids, between a rich country and a poor one; the complex subsequent Scots involvement in the English Civil War; the new suspicions consequent on the negotiation of parliamentary union; the spectacular electoral corruption of the Scottish burghs down to 1832 - a whole history of Anglo-Scottish rivalry lay behind the sour Scotch stereotypes of eighteenth-century English prejudice. Many of the types were Lowland, as of course were most of the alleged plunderers: the greatest literary representative of the class - Macklin's Sir Pertinax MacSycophant in The Man of the World, the first version of which appeared in 1764 - has no trace of Highland markings.⁵⁰ But Defoe's Scot (from The True-Born Englishman of 1701), or Cleveland's much-quoted character half a century earlier,⁵¹ is poor, proud, plaided and infected, and

49. Daniel Defoe, The True-Born Englishman (1701), p. 6. For anti-Scottish polemic in James VI's own time, see 'A Perfect Description of the People and Country of Scotland' (1617), attributed to Sir Anthony Weldon and reprinted in Early Travellers in Scotland, edited by P. Hume Brown (Edinburgh, 1891).
50. Charles Macklin, The Man of the World, first published in 1764, London premiere 1781, reprinted in Four Comedies by Charles Macklin, edited by J.O. Bartley (1968).
51. John Cleveland, 'The Rebell Scot', Poems, (Oxford, 1967), p.29.

clearly overlaps with the locust-like Highlander. Some Highland insignia, such as the bagpipes, or obsessive family pride, early acquire a role as identifiers of any Scot; and even well-informed writers don't scruple to mingle the types - Smollett's Maclaymore in 1757, though he's supposed to be from Lochaber, is given a Lowland accent and a Latinate legalistic pedantry drawn from a different Scotch formula,⁵² while Macklin's Sir Archy Macsarcasm in 1759 has a carefully done Lowland accent that goes with pedantry, harsh wit, and meanness, but also a patriotism that turns on the Highlanders' exploits at Quebec and the Celticist antiquarian claim that the Scots colonised Ireland and not vice versa.⁵³ The point here is not, of course, that such characteristics couldn't have been united in a single real person, but that makers of Scotch images for English consumption were not then, any more than now, making a consistent distinction between Lowland and Highland.

If, however, the two halves of Scotland tended to fall together in their caricatured form, they were also vigorously pushed. Lord Hardwicke, speaking to the Heritable Jurisdictions Bill in February 1747, felt obliged to dissociate the Government from the 'notion of a general disaffection in Scotland', and threatened to prosecute the disseminators of 'infamous incendiary pamphlets, written and sent abroad into the world, with a design to ... make a breach between the two nations'.⁵⁴ Typical of these would be the letter

52. Smollett, The Reprisal.

53. Charles Macklin, Love a la Mode, in Four Comedies.

54. Hansard, XIV, 9.

in 'Old England' of December 1746, urging Englishmen 'to keep in Remembrance their' - that is, the Scots - 'late odious attempt to subvert our Laws, Constitution and Government', an attempt which originated 'as well in the brutal Ignorance of the barbarous Highlander, as in the politer Treachery of the false Lowlander'. As this last distinction shows, the writer is not confounding Highland and Lowland out of ignorance, but deliberately tarring the whole country with the brush from Culloden. His real concern, it soon emerges, is not the Rising, but the old competition for places: the way to protect the Constitution from Scottish sedition turns out to be to 'give them no Encouragement in the several Professions they are in, and so totally exclude them from sharing in the Benefit of our Plenty'.⁵⁵ Once it was safely defeated, the '45 could be used as a propaganda advantage within factional London politics.

It was most obviously an advantage for English over Scots, but it was also, by a supplementary smear, an advantage for Whigs over Tories: since Tory die-hards had presumably welcomed the prospect of a Jacobite restoration, they could be associated with the ragged-arsed Highland army just as the (in fact largely Whiggish) Lowland Scots could be. This political association spread easily to all Tories, and then to all and any opponents of the ruling Whig oligarchy. A pro-ministerial election rhyme

55. Letter to 'Old England, or the Broadbottom Journal', reprinted in The Thistle: A Dispassionate Examine of the Prejudices of Englishmen in general to the Scotch Nation (1747), pp.43, 46.

of 1754 makes light work of these tortuous connections:

Don't, like asses, cloud your glory;
 Will you change your reds and blues
 For the livery of a Tory,
 For a Highland plaid and trows?⁵⁶

It was this potent associative web - Tory-Jacobite-Scot-Highland-man - which was activated in early 1761 by the rise of the Earl of Bute.

The press war which broke out upon this development and went on at least until April 1763, when Bute resigned and Wilkes was arrested, raged over a complicated political terrain,⁵⁷ to much of which the 'North British' aspect was very marginal. Three strands may be detached as relevant to my interest here. One is, of course, the struggle for State employment: Bute's rise to power was part of, and must have furthered, a general increase in the proportion of Scots in diplomatic, political and military posts. It was generally believed that the London Scots did each other systematic good turns; the North Briton derided Bute's patronage of Home and Macpherson, and dwelt on the scandalous commissioning of Sir Gilbert Elliot's ten-year-old son. A second strand is Bute's invidious status as a Royal favourite, asserting the rights of monarchy against oligarchy: this his opponents interpreted as an attempt to subvert the Constitution and reinstate autocracy. And thirdly, much of the assault was directed at the administration's

56. Quoted in K.G. Feiling, The Second Tory Party 1714-1832 (1938), p.50.

57. Background in G. Nobbe, The North Briton: A Study in Political Propaganda (New York, 1939); see also John Brewer, 'The Earl of Bute', in The Prime Ministers, edited by H. Van Thal, 2 vols (1974), I, 103-13, and Bruce Lenman, Integration, Enlightenment and Industrialisation: Scotland, 1746-1832 (1981), pp.39-42.

winding-up of the Seven Years' War, detecting in every concession the spirit of the auld alliance. All three allegations were calculated to revive the themes of 1745. The tight-knit body of place-hunters projected the Scot as beggarly and clannish; the plot to impose royal tyranny had him as slavish and ambitious; and the collusion with France entailed his being Jacobite and treacherous.

The manner of the North Briton blends all these accusations together so that their mutual contradictions disappear. In No.2, for example, writing in the character of a Scot, Wilkes argues that the rising of 1715, which cost millions to put down, only happened because the subsidies to the clans were stopped:

I therefore most sincerely hope, that as we have now a Scottish nobleman at the head of the treasury, his lordship will consider it as the truest oeconomy to give some proper pensions to his countrymen the Highland chiefs, which may save England the severe and expensive operation of quelling another insurrection... If this is done, I make no doubt but they will as implicitly follow the Earl of BUTE as they did the Earl of MAR.⁵⁸

The knack is to bring Whitehall and Highland politics together to their mutual discredit - place-hunting Scots are denounced as rebels while at the same time rebel chiefs are belittled as place-hunters. The overall implication is that Bute is at the head of a national protection racket. Stereotypical details casually cement the connection: the London Scot recommends a bridge over the Tweed 'as my family are very impatient to pay

58. The North Briton, reprinted in 3 vols (1763), I, 14.

me a visit, and I have not seen any of them since I took a walk up hither' (Scots are clannish and backward); in a joke news item from 'The Future Chronicle: or, the Nova Scotia Intelligencer' - itself a jibe about the second sight, as a typical piece of Scotch nonsense - the Marquis of Kirkcudbright is complimented by the tune of Highland laddy on the pipes 'with which (if we may judge from the various contortions of his features and writhings of his shoulders) his excellency was highly delighted' (Scots have uncouth musical tastes and manners); in a discussion about Canadian trade, a Scottish aristocrat dismisses the importance of furs, for 'such delicacy is rarely found in our hardy, naked-thighed country' (Scots are shivering kilted Highlanders).⁵⁹ The elision of the pro-Hanoverian Lowlands is relentlessly pursued: Smollett's youthful Culloden poem, 'The Tears of Scotland', is joyfully quoted against him with all its national rhetoric;⁶⁰ and the fact that Bute's family name is Stuart is repeated ad nauseam.

Further down the market, in more fugitive and scurrilous productions than Wilkes's ambition allowed of, the identifications were necessarily simpler and cruder. In the political prints collected in the much supplemented British Antidote to Caledonian Poison (1763-66), Scots almost invariably appear in skimpy plaids and Scotch bonnets, often with harsh faces and lank, unkempt hair; and whole sectors of abuse are devoted to the bagpipe, to thistles,

59. North Briton, I, 16, 54; II, 7.

60. North Briton, I, 47-48.

and to the Scotch itch (in unconscious continuity with the Scottish Cleland, kilted figures scratch themselves and make faces). These nasty characters get everywhere: they fly to London on Moggy Mackenzie's broomstick under an insignia compounded of thistle, money-bags, and claymore and target; they gather round the standard of the Boot (a universal punning symbol of the minister) as the wild chiefs of the Hebronites in the satire Gisbal, an Hyperborean Tale (1762); they are seen conniving, between ignorance and malice, at the gross 'evacuation' of the East and West Indian conquests of 1759-60.⁶¹ For a brief but rather horrifying period, the Highlander serves as the devil for a whole political subculture. As the Monthly Review remarked in 1763 of another fictional diatribe, Le Montagnard Parvenu, or the new Highland Adventurer (the old Highland adventurer was of course the Pretender), 'Poor Scotland! how unfortunate art thou in having produced a B — ! Poor B — ! how unhappy art thou in being a Scotsman.'⁶²

It isn't easy to decide how seriously to take this paroxysm of an old complaint. Certainly the excesses of the anti-Scottish party drew immediate reproof, and not only from Scots: John

61. The British Antidote to Caledonian Poison: Containing fifty-three Anti-ministerial ... Prints, for those remarkable Years 1762, and 1763, seventh edition, 2 vols (n.d.), and The Scots Scourge: being a Compleat Supplement to the British Antidote to Caledonian Poison, sixth edition, 2 vols (n.d.).

62. Monthly Review, 28 (2763), 316.

Langhorne's Genius and Valour, 'written in honour of a Sister Kingdom' in 1763, is explicitly an Englishman's antidote to Envy and Faction.⁶³ On the other hand, the lousy Highlander is still thriving in 1771, when an otherwise sympathetic versifying tourist dwells on the subject:

While itch, and flea, and louse, and bug,
Provoke the scratch, or scrub, or shrug ...
(Which most, the feeder or the fed,
Is vermin, yet no sage hath said);⁶⁴

indeed, the itch was persistent enough to figure among Patrick Sellar's sarcasms about his Sutherland tenantry in 1815.⁶⁵ Other elements of the anti-Bute campaign lingered on after their target had departed: The Scotch Hut, published in 1779, is feebly derivative of the scurrility of Charles Churchill.⁶⁶ On the whole, however, there's a sense that by about 1770 the gross, plaided caricature had ceased to be respectable currency anywhere, and that the Monthly Review spoke for a consensus in hailing Pennant's first Tour in Scotland as a candid description likely to dispel the fashion 'to ridicule and vilify the Scots and Scotland in the keenest and grossest manner'.⁶⁷ That was in 1772; in the same

63. The Poetical Works of John Langhorne, D.D., 2 vols (1804), I, 51-64.
64. Anthony Champion, Miscellanies in Verse and Prose (1801), p.65.
65. Letter quoted in Eric Richards, 'The Mind of Patrick Sellar (1780-1851)', Scottish Studies, 15 (1971), 1-20 (p.5). Sellar was the aggressive sheep farmer who achieved notoriety when he was tried (and acquitted) for atrocities committed during the clearing of Strathnaver in 1814: popular history has fixed on him, perhaps arbitrarily, as the villain of the Sutherland Clearances. He was a Lowland Scot.
66. The Scotch Hut: A Poem, Addressed to Euphorbus (1779).
67. Monthly Review, 446 (1772), 48.

year Richard Cumberland's successful comedy The Fashionable Lover virtually stages the shift of attitudes.

The fashionable lover is a foppish heir who is going to the bad through flattery and gaming; his one honest dependant is Colin Macleod from Skye, an immediately recognisable comic Scot. Thus when, on Colin's first exit, the fop exclaims, 'What a Highland savage it is',⁶⁸ the 'fashionable' sentiment is being placed as a piece of metropolitan affectation. Colin's part in the subsequent plot is wholly benign, though occasionally misguided; and some vestigial Wilkesian character traits - he is unreasonably devoted to genealogy and bagpipe music, and would avowedly 'give up his virtue afore his country at ony time' - are set against a naive good-heartedness which is shown to be far more important. The revaluation is polemically pointed from time to time, for instance when Colin satirically introduces himself to the well-heeled villain as 'Cawdie Macleod, a ragged Highlander, so please you, a wratched gaelly', or when at the end the play's raisonneur deplores 'those whose charity, like the limitation of a brief, stops short at Berwick'.⁶⁹ But this very didacticism speaks the precariousness of the new sympathy: the clannishness is sentimentalised into domestic virtue, the beggarly pride used against high-life venality as an image of integrity, the uncouth prejudices patronised as the downright speech of a 'clown' - in short, the

68. Richard Cumberland, The Fashionable Lover (1772), p.2.

69. Cumberland, Fashionable Lover, pp.38, 43, 63.

structure of the stereotype remains firm while its polarities are reversed.

In the following year, 1773, the transcending of national prejudice was marked in a different sense by the Scottish tour of the supposed arch-Scot-baiter, Johnson. The angry reaction in Scotland to his Journey to the Western Islands, which seems disproportionate to a modern reader, can partly be explained as an identification of some of his remarks with the stock-in-trade of sixties propaganda. Thus both Andrew Henderson, who retorted in 1775, and Donald McNicol in 1779,⁷⁰ object to Johnson's open-mindedness about the Second Sight, interpreting his provisional credulity as a North-Britonish gambit to taint Scotland with the imputation of primitive superstition; and both resent, similarly, Johnson's habit of referring back to 'the late conquest' of 'the whole nation', as if all the Highlands, or even all Scotland, had been at war with King George. Johnson, resolute anti-Whig,

70. Andrew Henderson, A Letter to Dr Samuel Johnson on his Journey to the Western Islands (1775), and A Second Letter to Dr Samuel Johnson (1775); and Donald McNicol, Remarks on Dr Samuel Johnson's Journey to the Hebrides (1779). The offending journey was made between August and November 1773, and Johnson's book appeared in January 1775. All my references to it, and to the journal of Boswell, who accompanied Johnson, are to Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland and Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D., edited by R.W. Chapman, Oxford Standard Authors (1930).

certainly doesn't intend the slight: Henderson and McNicol read him so because of learnt responses to anti-Scottish innuendo. Again, McNicol complains about Johnson's comments on 'the laxity of Highland conversation':

To search for information among the lower orders of the people... and catch at every trifling incoherence in their discourse, was, beyond description, mean and ungenerous. But to do all this with the insidious purpose of retailing their crude opinions to the public, as the standard of all Highland learning and science...⁷¹

McNicol's point is that the Highland clergy and gentry enjoy a standard of culture and affluence not much different from the general run. Johnson's text in effect concurs with this judgment, but is nevertheless more particular about the manners of servants and peasants because these are regionally distinctive as the educated class is not. McNicol, however, sees in that deliberate selection a typically Scotophobe reduction of society to the poorest and most ignorant - a disingenuous revival of the kilted beggar of the anti-Bute campaign.

While Johnson's selective blindness to Highland culture is undeniable, this outraged reading of the Journey is mistaken. The early tourists, such as Pennant and Johnson, interpreted such poverty, crudity, and superstition as they found, not in the contemptuous terms of national prejudice, but in a new language of cultural difference, at once more generous and more

71. McNicol, Remarks, p.116. For more Scottish reactions, see E.G.Cox, 'The Case of Scotland vs Dr Samuel Johnson', Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, 31 (1926), 49-79.

ideologically powerful. This language is described in the next section.

It's worth noting in passing, though, what survived, and survives, of the mid-century campaign of vilification: the decor. That all Scots wear tartan, are attached to bagpipe music, are moved by the spirit of clanship, and supported Bonny Prince Charlie to a man - all of these libels of 1762 live on as items in the Scottish tourist package of the twentieth century. Absorbed into the cultural nationalism of the age of Scott, and thence transmitted via royal Scotomania throughout the Victorian Empire, they became romanticised without ever, as the recent 'Scotch Myths' exhibition demonstrated, quite losing their power to express derision and loathing.

5 The History of Civilisation

Traditional stereotypes such as the clown, the freebooter, or the beggar, project the Highlanders as simply an alien nation. They are the more or less popular and prejudiced equivalent of that historiography, dominant in the earlier eighteenth century, which explains differences of life and manners by mapping them on to a taxonomy of 'peoples', each having its own distinct character. This was the academic model available around the time of the '45 itself: early accounts, like the Journal of an English Medical Officer in 1746,⁷² or James Ray's Compleat History of the

72. Journal of an English Medical Officer who attended the Duke of Cumberland's Army 1746, reprinted in The Contrast (1825).

Rebellion in 1749, draw their generalisations from antiquarian classics - Camden, Buchanan, Tacitus - which deal in immanent national characteristics; Camden, for example, says that the Caledonii are 'of a fiercer temper from the extream coldness of their climate, and more bold and forward from their abundance of blood'.⁷³ The memoirists of the rising apply the principle to their own experience; Ray remarks, as if one statement or the other must be true, that 'The Highlanders have been reckoned an indolent people; although, by what I have said, it may appear that they are ingenious and industrious';⁷⁴ while Andrew Henderson, in another History of the Rebellion (1748), characterises particular clans on the same basis, so that Camerons are lazy, Munros 'like the Grants for Selfishness, but not so enticing', and Campbells inclined to 'good Policy and Decency' despite the contamination of their genius through inter-marriage with neighbouring clans.⁷⁵ Nor is this approach out of step with weightier contemporary historians: Pelloutier's Histoire des Celtes in 1750 and Maitland's History and Antiquities of Scotland in 1757 both deploy speculative evidence, mostly etymological and sartorial, to fit the modern Scottish Highlander into a transhistorical racial unity - that of

73. William Camden, Britannia, translated, revised and expanded by Edmund Gibson, 1695, facsimile edition (Newton Abbot, 1971), p.926.

74. Ray, Compleat History, p.354.

75. Andrew Henderson, The History of the Rebellion (Edinburgh, 1748), p.147.

the Scythian-Celt and the Gaul-Gael respectively.⁷⁶

This historical model, though, hardly suited the integrative policy of the second half of the century. Its positing of very stably distinct peoples offered no hope of a truly unified North Britain, and when it became apparent that Scottish society, Highland as well as Lowland, was in fact changing rapidly in language, dress and manners, permanent ethnic categories afforded no explanation of what was happening. (This ideological unhandiness is evident in the writings of John Pinkerton, whose maverick racism incurred some notoriety in the 1790s. His theory involved saying that Highlanders were savages and would 'infallibly remain so till the race be lost by mixture'.⁷⁷) It's curious to find in Maitland a carefully authentic plural - 'the Gael' - which eventually became a fashionable celtophile locution in the early nineteenth century, launched by Alexander Campbell in 1804 and popularised by Scott; in the intervening half-century - the two generations of decisive change - it slept in Maitland's History, activated neither by the Ossianic mania nor the pro-Highland reaction to Johnson's Journey. It's a small sign of the eclipse of racial

76. Simon Pelloutier, Histoire des Celtes, second edition, 2 vols (Paris, 1771), I, Book 2 passim; William Maitland, History and Antiquities of Scotland, 2 vols (1757), I, 40, 49, 151, 164.

77. John Pinkerton, An Enquiry into the History of Scotland, 2 vols (1790), I, 340.

history in the age of Improvement.

The appearance of the alternative historiography that eclipsed it can be identified quite exactly. In 1755 William Robertson preached a sermon before the Society in Scotland for Promoting Christian Knowledge, in which his main theme was that Christ had come at exactly the right point in history: had he come sooner, the progress of civilisation would not have been far enough advanced for the reception and diffusion of the gospel, but yet he came soon enough to mitigate the evils of luxury and infidelity which accompanied the excessive prosperity of Rome. The moral for Scotland, poised, on the eve of its economic 'take-off', between barbarism and over-refinement, was pregnant; and at the end, Robertson turned to the main field of the Society's missionary efforts - the Highlands and Islands:

There, society still appears in its rudest and most imperfect form: Strangers to industry, averse from labour, inured to rapine; the fierce inhabitants scorn all the arts of peace, and stand ready for every bold and desperate action. Attached to their own customs, from ignorance and habit, they have hitherto continued a separate people.⁷⁸

The Highlanders' traits are just the same here as in Forbes of Culloden, with his police categories, or in the hostile parts of Pelloutier, with his ethnic ones. In all three, Highlanders are

78. William Robertson, A Sermon preached before the Society in Scotland for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Monday January 6, 1755, third edition (Edinburgh, 1759), p.39.

Robertson (1721-93) later became a national figure as the historian of Scotland (1759), Charles V (1769) and America (1777), and Principal of the University of Edinburgh (1762-92), as well as leader of the Moderate group in the General Assembly of the Kirk.

idle, thievish, warlike and separatist. But Robertson consciously sets the received data in a chronological scheme: the state of the Highlands is that of an early stage of society. In doing so at the outset of his literary career, Robertson explicitly connects the Enlightenment philosophical history of society with the partnership of Church and State to civilise the Highlands. The 'four stages theory' of social development, which according to R.L. Meek took shape, after a lengthy prehistory, in Adam Smith's Glasgow lectures of 1751-2, appears here as a North British ideology of improvement.⁷⁹

For the operative distinction of the theory is the universal comparability it permits between different societies. The most diverse observations about laws, houses, works of art or manners can be ranged along a single line leading from the hunting through the pastoral and agricultural to the commercial state of life. This unifying principle permeates thinking about the Highland problem: examples are legion. A paper in the Craftsman immediately after Culloden bases policy proposals on the view that the Highlands in 1746 are what England was in Henry VII's time;⁸⁰ Sir James Steuart in 1767 pauses over the example of Highland agriculture 'because I imagine it to be, more or less, the picture of Europe 400 years ago';⁸¹ Adam Smith himself, in 1762, traces the growth of

79. R.L. Meek, Social Science and the Ignoble Savage (Cambridge, 1976), pp.107ff.

80. Paper reproduced from The Craftsman, Scots Magazine, 3(1746), 532-33.

81. Sir James Steuart, An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Oeconomy, edited by A.S. Skinner (1966), p.106.

predatory pastoral tribes in the rugged valleys of pre-classical Greece and comments, 'The several clans ... would plunder on one another as the clans did in this country and in every country where they are established';³² in 1779 John Millar, a pupil of Smith's, illustrates the 'democratical spirit' fostered by the commercial stage of society by contrasting the independence of an English waggoner with the deference of a Highland peasant.³³ All these allusions, made in pursuit of quite different arguments, testify to the power of the assumption that the Highlanders are not a strange people, but a people like any other at a certain stage. The most influential Scottish application of the system - Hugh Blair's Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian - states the rule didactically -

There are four great stages through which men successively pass in the progress of society. The first and earliest is the life of hunters; pasturage succeeds to this, as the ideas of property begin to take root; next agriculture; and lastly, commerce. -

and makes it the basis of his decisive procedure in the essay:

the comparison of Ossian with Homer -

For though Homer lived more than a thousand years before Ossian, it is not from the age of the world, but from the state of society, that we are to judge of resembling times.⁸⁴

32. Adam Smith, Lectures on Jurisprudence, edited by R.L.Meek, D.D.Raphael and P.G.Stein (Oxford, 1973), p.224.
33. John Millar, The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks, third edition (1779), p.296.
84. Hugh Blair, 'A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal', in James Macpherson, The Works of Ossian, 2 vols (1765), II, 313-433 (pp.342, 350). Blair (1713-1800) was an Edinburgh minister who, as Professor of Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres at Edinburgh University from 1762, was the principal exponent of the merits and authenticity of Macpherson's Ossian. The 'Dissertation' was first published in 1763; the philosophically linked Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres, which Blair began giving annually about 1760, appeared in book form in 1783.

We can trace the impress of this progressive theory upon the contemporary Highlands by taking as an example the Highland peculiarity which, as we saw, was the determining one from the Government's point of view - the quasi-independent authority of the chiefs. Edward Burt, writing around 1730, describes this with his usual quick curiosity - how loyalty to one's chief overrides 'the Government, the Laws of the Kingdom, or even ... the law of God', how Scots law acknowledged the fact by making the chief answerable for the depredations of his people, how this power is 'not supported by Interest, as they are Landlords, but as lineally descended from old Patriarchs', and so on.⁸⁵ In all this, as very often, Burt circumstantially anticipates the discoveries of later travellers. But he does so without their interest in origins. Country gentlemen in Surrey and Invernessshire are just different. In concluding his series of letters, Burt indulges in a sententious comparison between a Highland laird and a fox-hunting squire. The squire boasts about his horses and dogs, the laird about the antiquity and prowess of his ancestors:

Thus, one of them places his Vanity in his Fortune, and his Pleasure in his Hounds. The other's Pride is in his Lineage, and his Delight is command, both arbitrary in their Way; and this the Excess of Liquor discovers in both. So that what little Difference there is between them, seems to arise from the Accident of their Birth.⁸⁶

85. Burt, Letters (1754), II, 92, 95, 103.

86. Burt, Letters (1754), II, 275.

The discovered similarities are frivolous and satirical, but the parallel placing which makes them possible comes naturally. The picture of a chief is devoid of developmental assumptions.

Forty-five years later Johnson, though by no means personally sympathetic to Scottish 'philosophical history', is using very different terms:

The Laird is the original owner of the land, whose natural power must be very great, where no man lives but by agriculture ... This inherent power was yet strengthened by the kindness of consanguinity, and the reverence of patriarchal authority. The Laird was the father of the Clan, and his tenants commonly bore his name. And to these principles of original command was added, for many ages, an exclusive right of legal jurisdiction.⁸⁷

In a sense, Johnson knows less about the matter than Burt - he hasn't grasped that the functions of clan chief and landowner are separable. But in assigning the phenomenon a set of causes - economic, moral, juridical - which can in turn be derived from the general state of society in the area, he gives his inferior information a superior shaping power. If such are the bases of chiefly power, it follows that the coming to the Highlands of improved communications, the market economy, and law and order must cause it to decline. The chief acquires a past and a future, and the attitudes which sustain his sovereignty are referred to the situation, rather than to the oddity, of those who hold them.

The rationale of change, however, is not yet a universal history: Johnson doesn't establish a hierarchy of causes, and is prepared to accord topographical and legal factors independent weight.

87. Johnson, Journey, p.77.

That further closure is made, appropriately, by Adam Smith, whose Wealth of Nations appeared the year after Johnson's Journey.

Discussing the prevalence of local jurisdictions, not in the Highlands, but throughout medieval Europe, Smith argues that they didn't originate in feudal law, but predate it:

That authority and those jurisdictions all necessarily flowed from the state of property and manners just now described. Without remounting to the remote antiquities of either the French or English monarchies, we may find in much later times proofs that such effects must always flow from such causes. It is not thirty years ago since Mr. Cameron of Lochiel, a gentleman of Lochabar in Scotland, without any legal warrant whatever, not being what was then called a lord of regality, nor even a tenant in chief, but a vassal of the duke of Argyle, and without being so much as a justice of peace, used, notwithstanding, to exercise the highest criminal jurisdiction over his own people... That gentleman, whose rent never exceeded five hundred pounds a year, carried, in 1745, eight hundred of his own people into the rebellion with him.⁸⁸

The 'state of property and manners just now described' turned on two conditions - the impossibility of exchanging an agrarian surplus for luxuries and its consequent distribution to buy dependents at home, and the power vacuum resulting from regional inadequacies of royal authority - which, according to Smith, obtained as pre-commercial survivals in Lochaber and formed the basis of Lochiel's rule. 'Such effects must always flow from such causes': the chieftainship of the recent Highlands is universalised as an instance of a certain 'state of property'. But then there's also the familiar ideological trademark of negative particulars:

88. Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations, edited by R.H. Campbell, A. Skinner and W.B. Todd (Oxford, 1976). pp.416-17.

what distinguishes the Highlands is the absence of markets, the failure of legality. The positive idiosyncrasies registered by a Burt, or even a Maitland, are eroded by the 'flow' of comprehension: the drive to explain is also a drive to assimilate.

Of course, the immediate purposes of the Wealth of Nations entail a general abstraction. But the book was so influential that its progressivism reacted back upon the Highlands. The Earl of Selkirk's Observations on the Present State of the Highlands (1805), for example, makes the analogy between the mid-eighteenth-century Highlands and medieval Europe the whole starting-point of its argument: to understand 'the progress of society in the Highlands' we must remember 'that little more than half a century has passed, since that part of the kingdom was in a state similar to that of England before the Norman conquest.'⁸⁹ This was a state, according to Selkirk, in which the consequence of a gentleman depended on the number and attachment of his followers; he was therefore obliged to bind these to himself by a 'sacrifice of pecuniary interest', and by an assiduous hospitality and condescension. When these are taken into account, the devotion of the people, which so astonished contemporary writers, is 'an effect easily deducible from the general principles of human nature'.⁹⁰ Here again, the power of the chief is referred to 'general principles', but now with a perceptible political edge. What Selkirk means by a sacrifice of pecuniary

89. Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk, Observations on the Present State of the Highlands of Scotland, (1805), p.10.

90. Selkirk, Observations, pp.12-19.

interest is that rents under the old dispensation were lower than the same land could have yielded in conditions of unrestricted economic exploitation: to call the difference a 'sacrifice' erects the market as a universal norm of valuation and carries the expectations of capitalism deep into the representation of the past.

'Philosophical history' (applied, it should be said, more crudely than by Smith) identifies the erasure of Highland society as the inevitable destination of its previous history. If the 'clannish spirit', therefore, which supported the power of the chief, is evoked without any of the suspicion and intolerance of fifty years before, it's that the writer has no brief to stamp it out. What he has instead is a narrative in which it is stamped out by circumstances. Thus the theory of historical stages, with its abstracting global schematism, speaks the growing dominance of a world market which converts local particulars to a uniform medium of exchange.

The theory can be seen in a vaguer, disseminated form, yet still socially potent, in The Statistical Account of Scotland, that inadvertent anthology of the attitudes of the clergy in the 1790s.⁹¹ Its Highland entries together depict a general and continuing transformation of manners, which the contributors (themselves educated for the most part by the epigones of Smith and Robertson) interpret historically. The comment from Lochbroom - 'The people

91. The Statistical Account of Scotland, reprinted and arranged in counties, 20 vols (East Ardsley, 1975-). The original publication, generally known as the 'Old Statistical Account', was compiled by Sir John Sinclair from the statistical returns of parish ministers, 1791-99. All my references to 'O.S.A.' are to the reprint.

are in general honest, sober and well-disposed. At their burials and marriages, however, they too much adhere to the folly of their ancestors⁹² - is representative both in its overall satisfaction with the state of the people, and in its attribution of what isn't satisfactory to the residual past. In this case the folly is presumably drinking, but the commonest legacy is agreed to be idleness. In Killin, 'Towards the beginning of the present century, the people of the country were rather averse to industry. The spirit of clanship which prevailed was against it.'⁹³ In Kilmonivaig, 'Civilisation and industry are making daily progress'.⁹⁴ In Kingussie, the poverty of the people can't be removed 'till their children shall be early accustomed to be laborious, active and industrious'.⁹⁵ The three ministers place the dawn of industry in the past, the present and the future, respectively, but they agree in according it a central place in the character of the people, and in regarding it as a phenomenon of the progress of civilisation. Other ministers tie the same idea more tightly to a Smithian frame of reference: at Callander, the people 'are fast acquiring the diligence and attention necessary to the agricultural state of society'; while at Lochalsh 'The people being, from their infancy, principally employed in tending cattle, are generally disposed to be idle... Habits of industry, however, begin to be

92. O.S.A., XVII, (1931), 561.

93. O.S.A., XII (1977), 436.

94. O.S.A., XVII, 153.

95. O.S.A., XVII, 205.

acquired.⁹⁶ The concept of a development from a pastoral to an agricultural state, accompanied by an evolution from the chief to the magistrate, has as its sharp end the labour discipline of commercial production. Idleness is not only sinful, but also obsolete.

Thus by the end of the century a theory of Highland change, which powerfully articulated the interests of the British state, had been developed, disseminated, and hardened into an orthodoxy. It enlarged upon a logic which would, it was expected, eventually assimilate the Highlands into a prosperous United Kingdom, and reduce the region's moral and material peculiarities to a memory. With the success of this theory and of the programme of pacification and commercialisation which it rationalised, the image of the Highland barbarian lost its venom: it was easy to tolerate the uncouth savage on the basis that his children would certainly grow into industrious and useful members of society.

However, this smooth prescriptive tale was ruffled by two complicating factors: the increasingly forceful evidence that Highland life in the 1770s and 80s was failing to develop along the lines laid down for it, and the internal tensions and shortcomings of the metropolitan life to which the peripheries were implicitly expected to aspire. The ensuing contradictions in the representation of the Highlands form the subject of the next four chapters.

96. O.S.A., XII, 183; XVII, 551.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SUBLIME

In Mountain-Waves and raging Wind,
 Tell us, what couldst thou hope to find?
 'Tis answer'd - These are Natures Schools
 To teach the Power of Art and Rules.¹

The most evident obstacle which the Highlands placed in the way of Improvement, and one not easily dislodged by political or ideological means, was the form of the terrain itself; the land more barren and mountainous, the coast more stormy and rockbound, than in any other part of Britain. It made a kind of testing-ground, not only for eighteenth-century reason and technique, but also for eighteenth-century taste. Its extremes were called 'sublime', but the term can blur crucial polarities; so I shall distinguish two variants - a bright and a dark sublime, as it were, a positive and a negative. It could be argued, on the basis of Burke, for example, that only the latter is 'truly' sublime, the benign type, free of obscurity or fear, being properly 'picturesque'.² But this would disqualify a significant register of actual usage, which was not always philosophical. A more accurate use of the century's own terms might call a positive sublime 'grandeur', and a negative, 'horror'. However, the distinction which seems to me to be decisive in the representation of Highland landscape is slightly different again: it holds between a 'rich' and a 'poor'

1. Daniel Defoe, Caledonia: A Poem in Honour of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1706), p.8.
2. See, for example, Andrew Wilton, Turner and the Sublime (1980), pp.31-35.

sublimity. These, under shifting terminology, are opposed structures of feeling.

1 Wealth

According to a remarkably stable consensus, the lever that would shift the Western Highlands, at least, out of their backwardness, was to be fishing. James VI had tried to settle Fife fishermen in Lewis from 1598; the British Fisheries Society, launched in 1786, was not wound up until 1893. The secular appeal of the idea did not reflect circumstances, which were consistently discouraging. The economics of the proposition were enriched by aesthetic and ideological considerations, most authoritatively expounded by Thomson, who, holding 'Caledonia in romantic view' as the muse hovers like a seagull over the Hebrides, calls for 'a patriot who will teach the labouring hand

with venturous Oar,
How to dash wide the Billow; nor look on,
Shamefully passive, while Batavian Fleets
Defraud us of the glittering finny Swarms,
That heave our Friths, and croud upon our Shores;
How all-enlivening Trade to rouse, and wing
The prosperous Sail, from every growing Port,
Uninjur'd, round the sea-incircled Globe;
And thus, in Soul united as in Name,
Bid BRITAIN reign the Mistress of the Deep.³

Thomson's synthesising imagination executes, not only the political fulfilment of the Act of Union (fishing leads to trade, and trade,

3. James Thomson, The Seasons, edited by J. Sambrook (Oxford, 1981), 'Autumn', 1.919.

in mercantilist fashion, leads to enhanced national unity and power), but also a union of that dynamism with the agitations of nature; as 'dash', 'heave', 'croud', inspire the fishing industry with the energy of the waves it contends with, and 'rouse and wing' assimilates the trading ships to the swirling Nations of seabirds. It's consistent with this vigorous expansionism that the romantic view includes without a slackening of pleasure

the naked melancholy Isles
Of farthest Thule, and th' Atlantic Surge.⁴

Like the name 'Caledonia', 'Thule' recalls the unsubdued classical Scotland where Agricola's legions found themselves 'in ipso terrarum ac naturae fine':⁵ wherever exactly it is - and in the eighteenth century it wanders on an arc between John o' Groats and Barra⁶ - it glows, for this poetry of improvement, as a hyperbolic measure of the possible. Virgil's compliment to Augustus - 'tibi serviat ultima Thule'⁷ - had not after all been fulfilled; the Hanoverians would really achieve such integration. In 1786 John Knox, the founding publicist of the B.F.S., suggested that the Great Minch

4. Thomson, 'Autumn', l.863.

5. Tacitus, De vita Agricolae, translated by H. Mattingly in Tacitus on Britain and Germany (Harmondsworth, 1948), p.84. (Chapter 33 of the Agricola).

6. For John o' Groats, Pennant, 1769, p.196: for Barra, John L. Buchanan, A Defence of the Scots Highlanders (1794), p.99; for other suggestions, Tacitus on Britain and Germany, p.60, and Camden, Britannia, pp.1073-88.

7. First Georgic, l.30.

should be renamed King George's Channel.⁸

Such associations colour the scenes to which they attach. Pennant, in 1772, met with a busy fishing fleet in 'the wildest scene in nature' - Loch Hourne:

So unexpected a prospect of the busy haunt of men and ships in this wild and romantic tract, afforded this agreeable reflection: that there is no part of our dominions so remote, so inhospitable and so unprofitable, as to deny employ and livelihood to thousands; and that there are no parts so polished, so improved, and so fertile, but which must stoop to receive advantage from the dreary spots they so affectedly despise; and must be obliged to acknowledge the mutual dependency of part on part, howsoever remotely placed, and howsoever different in modes or manner of living.⁹

There's a centralising animus against insularity here, but its target is St James's rather than Barrisdale. The warm apprehension of national interdependence is felt the more powerfully because it is felt here, in an inaccessible sea-loch, which thus acquires a kind of centrality from its very remoteness. A fine picturesque engraving illustrates the scene; the text is an aid to appreciating its glooming taste; the 'dreary' surround heightens the patriotic ardour. By a logic which is at root imperialist, commerce mediates sublimity.

8. John Knox, A Tour through the Highlands of Scotland and the Hebride Isles in 1786 (1787), p.178. Knox was born in Scotland in 1720 and went into London book-selling, from which he retired wealthy in 1764. Over the following twenty years he travelled frequently in the Western Highland before publishing his reflections in A View of the British Empire (1784), and third edition, greatly enlarged, 2 vols (1785); Observations on the Northern Fisheries (1786); and the Tour (1787). All four works are devoted to the same project: the encouragement of the Hebridean fishing as a means of economic development. As his first title suggests, he is one of the more politically systematic Highland Improvers, though his economics are impressionistic.
9. Pennant, 1772, I, 398.

The fisheries were, after all, in prospect at any rate, a spectacular instance of the principle of plenitude. For the modern historian, it's most strikingly applied at a political level: as A.J. Youngson says,

What distressed the men of the 1770s was not so much that the Highlanders were poor as that they were idle, not contributing, or contributing very little, to the power of the state. The aim of regional policy was to use the Highlands...¹⁰

But in contemporary consciousness the most obvious locus of the theory is not the state, but nature. Fish, according to Knox, 'seem to have been intended by the Author of nature as a compensation for the inclemency of the seasons, and the sterility of the soil'; they advance each spring 'from the northern ocean towards our highly favoured shores, to incite our industry, and to supply our wants'.¹¹ Knox is perhaps half remembering Defoe's much-reprinted Caledonia, in which 'Nature's handmaid 'Instinct' is heard instructing the 'scaly Squadrons' to head for the nets of the Scots:

Be You Their Wealth and plenteously supply
What Coldest Soil and Steril Climes deny ...
Present your selves to every Hungry Door,
Employ The Diligent, and feed The Poor.¹²

The shoals are an almost miraculous example of Providential care, yet one that demands investment, risk and labour. The imperatives of capitalism are thus discovered literally in the sea. Knox's practical faith in this benign logic seems altogether indomitable:

10. Youngson, After the Forty-Five, p.66.

11. Knox, Tour, pp.27, 32.

12. Defoe, Caledonia, p.15.

approaching Cape Wrath in October, he contemplates the bare earth, the 'awful grandeur' of the waves, and the savage cliffs, and suggests that a town might be founded on the basis of a repair yard for the battered ships.¹³ No extreme of nature can disconcert so resourceful a principle of unity: as Defoe says:

Thus vanishes the Horrid and the Wild,
And Nature's now with pleasant Eyes beheld;
When Boreas mad with northern Vapours raves,
We smile, and with Contempt survey the Waves.¹⁴

On land too, as the century progressed, there were closely analogous reasons for beholding the Horrid and the Wild with complacency. Road-building, like navigation, involved a direct confrontation of art and nature; and the terms of Aaron Hill's praise of Wade are appropriately combative:

Still shall his living greatness guard his name,
 And his works lift him to immortal fame.
 Then shall astonished armies, marching high,
 Over causewayed mountains that invade the sky,
 Climb the raised arch, that sweeps its distant throw,
 Cross tumbling floods, which roar unheard below,
 Gaze, from the cliff's cut edge, through midway air,
 And, trembling, wonder at their safety there!¹⁵

Wade is a hero of improvement because he subdues the roughness and peril of nature. But rather than vanishing, the wildness is reproduced in the achievement: the soldiers of the future are seen climbing Wade's arch as well as nature's mountains, and the abruptness of the 'cliff's cut edge' reflects the boldness of the

13. Knox, Tour, pp.256, 263-5.

14. Defoe, Caledonia, p.11.

15. Aaron Hill, 'To the Editor of Albania, a Poem', in Leyden (ed.), Scottish Descriptive Poems, p.147.

engineering. The aggressive verbs carry an excited appreciation of the extreme solutions the terrain has forced from the road-maker. The neat paradox of the last line indicates how the imagery almost unites the two - do the soldiers tremble at the danger they would be in were it not for the road, or at the awesome human power which ensures their safety? Thus the mountains amplify Wade's reputation, substantiating with their real height and permanence the faint metaphor of his being raised up to immortality. The wilder they are, the more powerfully they express their conqueror's glory; Hill follows the logic of that in exaggerating their scale. Like Pennant on Loch Hourn, he comes close to turning the gospel of improvement into a converse taste for the horrid. Hill was travelling on Wade's roads around 1730 because he had investments on Speyside, not because he wanted to see the scenery.¹⁶ But his language closely presages that of the travellers of half a century later - not soldiers, but tourists.¹⁷ The romanticism of wild nature is, as it were, heralded by a romanticism of its taming.

This priority can be seen in the gradual development of mountain-climbing. As D.B. Horn points out, many of the earliest recorded ascents, in the Highlands as elsewhere, were by botanists, geologists and astronomers, to whom wildness offered very definite opportunities not available in more favoured regions.¹⁸ By the

16. Aaron Hill, Poems, British Poets, 60 (Chiswick, 1822), 'Introduction'.

17. E.g., Charles Ross, The Traveller's Guide to Lochlomond, and its Environs (Paisley, 1792), p.87.

18. D.B. Horn, 'Natural Philosophy and Mountaineering in Scotland, 1750-1850', Scottish Studies, 7 (1963), 1-17.

1790s these pioneers, like Wade, had blessed the landscape with their reputations; men such as Banks, the geographer -

E'en these lone scenes thy keen research proclaim;
Fix'd on Basaltic Columns stands thy Fame!¹⁹ -

Maskelyne, the Astronomer-Royal, who had spent four months testing Newton's gravitational hypotheses

On steep Schehallien's astronomic heights,²⁰
In sordid booth, by Science render'd cheer -

or Aikins, a mineralogist -

On Scotia's barren rocks, though not to thee
Those rocks shall long prove barren, thou shalt gain
From Scotia's sons, the meed of fair renown.²¹

In each of these cases the improvement of the wild place by its acquiring philosophic dignity is only partly a conceit. Such achievements claim their sites for the empire of knowledge, as the military roads claimed theirs for a political and technological empire.

Eighteenth-century Scotland, however, was above everything a society governed by landowners;²² and it's not in fishing, or civil engineering, or science, but in the state of the land, that society and nature most decisively interpenetrate. What Improvement finally is - Adam Smith is wholly of his age on this point - is a general

19. William Parsons, F.R.S., 'Verses written in the Island of Staffa, August 6, 1787', European Magazine, 21 (1792), 309.

20. G. Wallace, Prospects from Hills in Fife (Edinburgh, 1796), p.44.

21. Mr. Dyer, 'Description of Dunkeld', Scots Magazine, 60 (1798), 346-49.

22. L. Timperley, 'The Pattern of Landholding in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', in The Making of the Scottish Countryside, edited by M.L. Parry and T.R. Salter (1980), pp.137-54 (137-39).

increase in the value of land, whether through the economics of agricultural innovation or the aesthetics of landscaping. In the cult of the picturesque, travellers after about 1760 in the Highlands, as in other newly fashionable mountain regions, developed an extraordinarily sophisticated medium for appreciating the continuities, disjunctions and contrasts of the principal event of their epoch: the irreversible appropriation of physical nature.

In 1780, in a remote Sutherland valley, Charles Cordiner epitomises the Highland picturesque:

The verdure of the valley, not without rising corn, became a chearing scene in so dreary a wilderness; a solitary hamlet near the best-cultivated spot, mingled a rural softness with the vast wildness of the rest of the prospect... Picturesque and lofty mountains terminate the view; the head of one immensely high in air, bending over its precipitous sides, seems nodding to its fall, and threatens the dale with its ruins. On every side the scenery is such, as gives Dun-Dornadilla a situation distinguishedly romantic, magnificently wild.²³

The mountains in this nicely judged description are 'dreary' and even threatening, but in the end they are rendered agreeable, as are the billows by the fishing fleet, by their subordination to a harmony: they constitute the 'situation' of the fertile valley floor and the ancient tower. Once their vastness is placed as one element in a plural scene, it heightens the pleasure of variety and imparts dignity and pathos to the works of man. Almost always when Pennant, too, expresses enthusiasm for a Highland landscape, it's one in which mountains 'terminate the view': from the hill

23. Charles Cordiner, Antiquities and Scenery of the North of Scotland (1780), p.105.

of Moncrieff, from Invercauld, from Inverness, from Dundonnell, and from Killin - all these prospects detail a graduated scene, from river and arable field up through forest and rough pasture to the bare crags of the tops.²⁴ Lord Kames, in Elements of Criticism (1762), generalises this inclusiveness of a sensibility still responding essentially to the riant in views:

a flowing river, a spreading oak, a round hill, an extended plain, are delightful; and even a rugged rock or barren heath, though in themselves disagreeable, contribute by contrast to the beauty of the whole: joining to these, the verdure of the fields, the mixture of light and shade, and the sublime canopy spread over all; it will not appear wonderful that so extensive a group of splendid objects should swell the heart to its utmost bounds, and raise the strongest emotion of grandeur.²⁵

Contrast, in Kames's thoroughly psychological system, offers a strenuous pleasure denied by a prospect of uniformly 'delightful' objects; the comprehension of such mighty differences in one view stimulates a corresponding expansiveness of feeling. But then, as the synthesising use of colour and chiaroscuro intimates, the scale should not be so vast that the comprehension becomes impossible. Kames later speaks of the 'pain' of an unbounded prospect, which the eye is stretched in vain to take in.²⁶ Himself a notable improving landlord, he is immune to any imaginative appeal of absolute wilderness; he enjoys successes of the eye.

24. Pennant, 1769, pp.72, 111, 148; 1772, I, 378, II, 20.

25. Henry Home, Lord Kames, Elements of Criticism, second edition, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1763), I, 311.

26. Kames, Elements of Criticism, I, 381n.

How representative he was in this appears in the reputation of the undoubted picturesque highlight of the 'Short Tour' of the Highlands between 1770 and 1810 - Loch Lomond. A long line of admiring travellers is headed by Sir William Burrell, who in 1758 recorded what seems to be the first touristic ascent of Ben Lomond. He describes the 'enchanted scenes' visible from the road between Luss and Tarbet, which 'affords every moment Views of the Islands and that stupendous Mountain above mentioned, wch overtops its craggy Neighbours; the Road is cut through the side of a Mountain, likewise, encompassed on each side with wood'.²⁷

This is a taste which might in 1758 be called 'horrid', but its limitations are suddenly plain when Burrell reaches Glen Croe, 'remarkable only for the most savage and barbarous Appearance', and Glen Kinglas, 'equally horrible, barbarous, & disagreeable'. Burrell's admiration for the 'stupendous' Ben Lomond is evidently conditional on its crowning a variegated setting of wood, water and islands; crags by themselves are merely unpleasant.

No-one read Burrell's account, which remained unpublished, but a dozen years later everyone read Smollett's description of

a sweet variety of woodland, cornfields, and pasture, with several agreeable villas emerging as it were out of the lake, till, at some distance, the prospect terminates in huge mountains covered with heath.²⁸

27. Sir William Burrell, 'Cursory Observations', 1758, National Library of Scotland, MS 1911, f.20.
28. Tobias Smollett, The Expedition of Humphry Clinker, edited by L.M. Knapp (1966), p.248.

That perfectly conventional accommodation of the cultivated and the wild appeared in 1771, the same year as Pennant's earlier Tour, also widely consulted, whose Highland section culminated in a rather pedantic comparison of the qualities of various lochs, finally awarding the palm to Loch Lomond.²⁹ Most travellers with pretensions to taste thereafter echo the terms of this pair of authorities; even Gilpin, who isn't wholly uncritical, treats the subject with exhaustive seriousness, 'as this lake has ever been esteemed one of the most celebrated scenes in Scotland'.³⁰ In 1783 J. Cririe hailed

LOMOND of Scotia's lakes fairest and first,
Tho' great, obscure, neglected and unknown,³¹

but any vestigial truth this last claim may have had disappeared in the 1790s with such indicators as Charles Ross's Traveller's Guide to Lochlomond and its Environs (1792) and, in 1791, Ben Lomond's spectacular appearance on the stage of Covent Garden, with the troops of 'Carrol, a powerful Chieftain', descending its rocky slopes.³²

The basis of the loch's succes d'estime - leaving aside its handy distance from a phenomenally booming Glasgow - is explained

29. Pennant, 1769, pp.205-06.

30. Gilpin, Observations, II, 15.

31. John Cririe, Address to Loch Lomond (1788), p.5.

32. Oscar and Malvina; or, The Hall of Fingal, as performed at the Theatre-Royal, Covent-Garden, third edition (1791).

in naively schematic periodical verses in 1777. Whether, they declare, 'the sublime delights thy roving eye', or, alternatively, 'the softer landscape please thee more',

Know, traveller! LUSS, the contrast well displays,
Here snows appear midst Ben's untrodden ways,
While zephyrs play along the fruitful plain.³³

The judgment is as derivative as the diction: the common theme of all the loch's celebrants is the union in a single prospect of the sublime and the softly beautiful to form, as Thomas Newte puts it, 'an object both awful and pleasing'.³⁴ Most of them, too, are charmed by the islands, and it rapidly became standard practice to hire a boat at Luss and sail out to them.³⁵ In simply visual terms, the surface of the water was perhaps not the best viewpoint, but the islands, so numerous, irregular and diverse, were a rarely immediate and tangible instance of the principle of contrast, which was thus heightened still further by motion in among them. The experience afforded the picturesque par excellence; and it's interesting to note how appropriated to its time it is: earlier in the century Loch Lomond was already famous, but for floating islands, finless fish, and the vicinity of Rob Roy, not for its scenic attractions; and after 1810 it was eclipsed by the meteoric rise to fame of the Trossachs.

33. 'Verses Wrote at an Inn', Weekly Magazine, 37 (1777), 137.

34. Newte, Prospects and Observations, p.75.

35. Mrs. S. Murray, A Companion and Useful Guide to the Beauties of Scotland, 2 vols (1799, 1803), I, 89. See also Gilpin, Observations, II, 19-22, and J. Lettice, Letters on a Tour through various parts of Scotland in the Year 1792 (1794), pp.218-27.

In practice, then, the taste for Scottish mountains in the later eighteenth century is often a limited version of 'the sublime'. For while the word, and its semantic associates such as 'lofty', 'grand', 'magnificent', are freely used in picturesque evocations of the kind I've cited, some important constituents are missing. Sublimity is associated by most writers, including Kames, with simplicity, but the virtue here is variety; vastness sublimely intimates infinity, but these mountains complete the prospect by rendering it finite; sublime objects are somehow transcendent, awing the beholder with a power beyond the human, but the point here is to assimilate even the wild crags into a scenic ensemble which remains fundamentally anthropocentric. Finally, the sublime of mountainous scenery is associated, as M.H. Nicolson has argued, with the ruinous post-diluvian earth of Burnet's Sacred Theory;³⁶ whereas Gilpin, to accommodate mountains into his own picturesque aesthetic, characteristically cites Derham's Physico-theology (1711-12), one of the texts that vindicated the wisdom of God in creation against Burnet by finding out uses - humanistically defined ones for the most part - for the ostensibly waste parts of the world. Derham sets out how mountains provide shelter from the winds, habitat for a variety of flora and fauna, a screen to prevent the evagation of moisture, convenient national boundaries, and a site for the rise and conveyance of rivers, which distribute

36. M.H. Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: the Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite (New York, 1958), pp.184-270.

water through the plains and make them habitable.³⁷ This wholly unapocalyptic theism accommodates mountains conceptually, just as the picturesque accommodates them visually, in a unity of contrasting but interdependent parts: sun, air, water and hills

A social Commerce hold, and firm support
The full-adjusted Harmony of Things.³⁸

Thomson's serene formulation reminds us of the context of political economy: the function of mountains in irrigation, like that of herring in the lives of the Hebrideans, represents an extreme pitch of providential synthesis. Cririe, a conscious imitator of Thomson who in 1803 expanded his Loch Lomond poem into a full poetical 'Short Tour', made the best of the bleak hills around Tyndrum in just these terms:

Here mountains stand attracting wat'ry stores,
To swell the limpid streams, that murmur ring flow,
When undisturb'd, o'er rocks and silv'ry sands...
And, spreading, fertilize the distant vales.³⁹

This background surely completes our reconstruction of the appeal of Loch Lomond: long and narrow enough to resemble an immense river, its continuous expanse leads the eye all the way from the mountains to the distant vales, encompassing the whole meteorological harmony in one 'full-adjusted' view. Sailing among the islands, one is afloat on the very element of nature's unity. This pervasive, reconciling action of water in the aesthetics of

37. William Derham, Physico-theology; or, A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God, from His Works of Creation (1713), Book III, Chapter 4; cited in Gilpin, Observations, II, 121n.

38. Thomson, 'Autumn', l.834.

39. John Cririe, Scottish Scenery; or, Sketches in Verse (1803), p.73.

the Highlands also appears in the recurrence, in the travel literature, of falls, streams, lochs. Gilpin singles out the rivers and estuaries of Scotland as her chief scenic glory.⁴⁰

Moreover, there's an almost equally insistent connection between water and woods: Burrell's pleasure at the combination by Tarbet is repeated at Killiecrankie and by Loch Ness, and in the 1770s and 80s a 'river rolling beneath the dark shade of alders', a cascade that 'graces the centre of a little woody theatre which nature seems to have made on purpose for it', or a plain 'finely divided by the windings of the river; enriched with variety of wood', are the typical components of the picturesque and the romantic in Highland landscape.⁴¹ It's as if the mountain stream's 'fertilizing' power is made directly visible and enjoyable, and its rocky wildness happily accommodated within a productive ideal of nature, when it is fringed with trees. At the same time, in a characteristic picturesque ambiguity, forestry can equally be read as the visible presence of the careful owner of the land, as when Gilpin approaching Inveraray detects 'some powerful hand' in 'the noble decoration of the scene',⁴² or when Cririe salutes the famous plantations of the Duke of Atholl:

Long may his presence bless his wide domains,
To skirt, with sylvan scenes, the mountains wild;
'Mid rocks, to rear the high embow'ring shade.⁴³

40. Gilpin, Observations, II, 129-32.

41. Pennant, 1772, I, 378 (Dundonnell); Gilpin, Observations, I, 154 (Loch Tay); Cordiner, Antiquities and Scenery, p.23 (Braemar).

42. Gilpin, Observations, I, 179.

43. Cririe, Scottish Scenery, p.54.

Planting, with its far-reaching environmental effects and heroically distant rewards, was almost the type of enlightened land management, especially in Scotland, whose treelessness was a long-standing reproach notoriously revived by Johnson. Thus an irregularly wooded bank was a sign, within the system of the picturesque, in which native wildness and cultivated intention - Nature and Improvement - were delightfully blended.

The terms of this cunning satisfaction are negotiated with unusual clarity and vigour by one of the more illustrious poetic tourists of the eighteenth-century Highlands: Burns. On the whole, the literary mementoes of the trip he made in 1787 suggest a degree of formal perplexity, as if he is acknowledging the scenery but is unsure what to do with it. Two fragmentary prospect poems, for example, at Kenmore and the Fall of Foyers, have the sterile skilfulness of pastiche -

The Tay meandering sweet in infant pride,
The palace rising on his verdant side;
The lawns wood-fringed in Nature's native taste;
The hillocks dropt in Nature's careless haste -⁴⁴

and both advertise themselves as 'written with a pencil' on the spot; that is, they offer the external sign of circumstantial authenticity in the absence of any topographical specificity in the writing. Not finding a human point of contact in the scene, Burns resorts to a generalised 'Nature'; as the discourse, however, is wholly conventional and polite, the unresolved

44. 'Written with a Pencil in the Inn at Kenmore', Kinsley No.109.

relationship between the natural objects and the artificial language comes out in the form of insincerity - in pale personifications and dutiful expressions of enthusiasm. The duty is in fact part of the point: Burns' tour, which consisted of a string of more or less high life invitations, calls neither for enthusiasm nor for aesthetic appraisal, but for compliments. The fashionable 'bard' leaves charming dedications at each port of call.⁴⁵ And it's by taking up the possibilities of this trivially social function, in 'The Humble Petition of Bruar Water',⁴⁶ that Burns succeeds in writing about Highland scenery.

The stream, respectful but vain (it claims, after some picturesque self-description, to be 'Worth gaun a mile to see'), and mortified by the dried-up state in which it was seen by 'Poet BURNS', pleads with its noble proprietor for some trees to shade it, dwelling with persuasive sentiment on the collateral advantages of singing birds, shelter for 'coward maukin' and a congenial retreat for lovers and poets. This ingenious rhetorical pretext, by the self-conscious artifice both of its construction and of its proposal, makes a space in which the frigid poses of the prospect poems - the personifications, the devotee of nature - are suddenly free to move. On the basis of the connection between the Bruar and the Duke (itself wittily close to literary patronage: the humble, but pretty and natural burn requests protection of the great), the poem fills with relationship -

45. For Burns' account of the tour, see R.L.Brown, Robert Burns' Tours of the Highlands and Stirlingshire 1787 (Ipswich, 1973), pp.16-49.

46. Kinsley, No.172.

the stream enjoys its own twistings among the rocks, trout play in it, the birds which will be attracted by the trees will cheer them in autumn, the 'birks extend their fragrant arms' to screen the lovers' embraces, the firs view themselves in the river's pools. As the tone of some of these suggests, the underlying figure is amorous: trees, birds, stream and shepherds are all disposed in a mutual courtship, and the poem ends with a compliment to the Duke's sons and daughters which is almost epithalamic. Consistently with the poetical house-guest's status and reputation, the apprehension of nature is at once social and sexy.

The poem, to look at it another way, is in every sense an intervention: intended for 'the coin in which a poet pays his debts of honour and gratitude',⁴⁷ it doesn't only describe, but is, a part of Burns's tour; and its suggestion about planting is a real one, which was apparently followed.⁴⁸ Its whole thrust is transformative, apprehending and naming the appearances of nature only insofar as they make sense, or can be accommodated to a social language. The stream is freshly and richly celebrated, but wholly within the structure of ownership and use.

The grammarian of this assimilation of the land to human purposes is Gilpin; but his synthesis doesn't have quite that sunny simplicity. In his chapter on 'Scenery in a State of Nature', he declares,

47. Brown, Robert Burns's Tours, p.171.

48. Dorothy Wordsworth, Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland A.D. 1803, edited by J.C. Shairp, reprint of the third edition (Edinburgh, 1974), p.201.

Wherever man appears with his tools, deformity follows in his steps. His spade, and his plough, his hedge, and his furrow; make shocking encroachments on the simplicity, and elegance of landscape.⁴⁹

On the face of it, this aphorism cuts straight across the harmony of landscape. It seems that the painter and the improver have irreconcilable interests; and that contrary to the general taste for the unified scene, what makes the land productive also makes it ugly. However, the impression thus given of Gilpin as a scenic primitivist is partly misleading.

Although his enthusiasm is habitually reserved for natural landscapes rather than landscaped parks, Gilpin is by no means uncritical about either. His criterion of the picturesque is at bottom a simple one: he's constantly on the look-out for views 'such as may with little alteration be transferred to canvas'.⁵⁰ Often the Highlands fail this test: a scene may be spoiled by the lack of a convenient viewpoint, or by a banal symmetry of composition, or a monotonous uniformity of texture. In these cases, Gilpin has no dogmatic objection to the interventions of art. He assumes that the painter will alter proportions to make a good picture, and that the landowner will, by judicious building and planting, make up the deficiencies of nature. But at the same time, it's understood that such emendations should be the minimum necessary, and should be governed by the character of the natural scene. The role of art is ancillary and negative:

49. Gilpin, Observations, II, 112.

50. Gilpin, II, 128.

it isn't our business to transform nature, but merely to excise her imperfections. The sentence 'Wherever man appears with his tools, deformity follows in his steps' is thus most accurately read with the emphasis on 'appears': the use of the tools isn't proscribed, but the alterations they effect should be silent, disguised. This demand casts some more light on the ambiguous but positive centrality of trees: whereas arable fields must always carry the blatant evidence of human effort, the time-scale and 'shaggy' appearance of forestry (and the actual existence, here and there, of really natural woodland) conspire to put the labour of planting out of sight. In no other improvement can the landlord so perfectly resemble nature. One of the prime objects of Gilpin's travels, then, is to derive from nature the principles governing this art concealing art. The nicest discriminations are involved. Travelling through Burrell's 'barbarous' valleys, Glen Croe and Glen Kinglas, Gilpin finds that the want of woodland is felt only in the former, which, being smoother and more pastoral, demands that ornamentation as the rugged sublimity of Glen Kinglas does not.⁵¹ Speaking of the painting of mountains generally, he admits uneasily that since a picture can't convey size directly, it may be necessary to exaggerate their scale 'a little beyond nature to make nature

51. Gilpin, II, 6-12.

look like herself.⁵² It's a constant tension between fidelity and taste, always on the verge of a kind of falsification.

When, therefore, nature manages to be perfect without assistance, it's not merely convenient, but a triumphant authenticity, and Gilpin responds with energy:

The whole scene, and it's accompaniments, are not only grand; but picturesquely beautiful in the highest degree. The composition is perfect: but yet the parts are so intricate..that I never found any piece of nature less obvious to imitation... . These high finished pieces of nature's workmanship, in which the beauty, in a great degree, consists in the finishing; and in which every touch is expressive ... are among the most difficult efforts of the pencil.⁵³

The terms of this praise, which is of yet another waterfall, are revealing in several ways. The most insistent note is the difficulty of imitation: in combining such perfection of form with such richness of detail, the scene achieves a local plenitude which beggars art. But then that way of putting it means that the supremacy of nature is being expounded in the language of art. The torrent is a 'composition', its textures 'finishing', and so on. The underlying metaphor of nature as an artist is nominally a Renaissance commonplace, but here it's given a sharply new twist by the radical narrowing of the implied scope of art. Gilpin's 'nature' is not the cosmic artificer of everything under the moon,

52. Gilpin, I, 148. This principle can be seen in practice in two views of Strathtay by Paul Sandby, in John Holloway and Lindsay Errington, The Discovery of Scotland, National Gallery of Scotland exhibition catalogue (Edinburgh, 1978), p.39.

53. Gilpin, I, 122.

but quite specifically a landscape painter, whose works are static, framable ('pieces'), subject to the rules of criticism. And again, when Gilpin attacks the insipid artificiality of the walks beside the stream, it's because of their impropriety in their wild context: they're as absurd, he says, as Horace's human-headed horse. In such formulations, the wild nature of the Highlands is surprisingly assimilated to the 'Nature' of the landscape gardeners - a principle of proportion, decorum and reason. As in Gilpin's own tasteful aquatints, there's a sense that the assimilation is the outcome of a deliberate act of diminishing and framing, in the apprehension of particular land forms as of the concept of nature as a whole.

So that although the picturesque tourist is going to clash with the agrarian improver at incidental points - Gilpin dislikes straight furrows, and black-and-white cows - their activities are linked by an underlying parallelism. Both are engaged in applying a system which will incorporate the intransigent nature of the Highlands into an all-encompassing human design, and both develop this system by trying to read the purposes of nature - Knox or Sinclair to discover the occupation, and Burns or Gilpin to discover the ornaments, which the original local state of things marks out for the inhabitants. It's true that Gilpin's 'improvement' of a scene occasionally consists of leaving it just as it is, but in practice this doesn't happen very often: even a rocky stream is better for a winding path beside it, offering congenially broken glimpses of its cascades; even the gloomy depths of Glen Lyon would

be enhanced by a fence which would enable one to appreciate its imaginative terrors in personal safety. Atholl's 'wilderness' seems to Gilpin 'a beautiful piece of natural scenery ... improved as it ought to be'⁵⁴ - he's conscious of no contradiction here because the assumption all along is that nature is a term, uniquely significant but not dissonant, within the gamut of human satisfactions. What he would have made of places, like Skye or Assynt, which might have offered stiffer resistance to such accommodations, we don't know, since his journey, like that of Burns, was confined to the well-marked trail of great estates - Dunkeld, Blair Atholl, Taymouth, Inveraray.

His conclusion about Scottish landscape is that although it must be judged inferior to Italy because of its poverty of vegetation, it excels in the aspects that really matter:

For scenes like these, are the schools in which the elements of landscape are taught - those great outlines, without understanding which, the art of finishing is frippery.⁵⁵

This isn't a pleasure in bareness and simplicity for their own sake so much as a recognition of their distinctive contribution to a beau ideal of picturesque art. For the painter-gardener, as for the engineer or entrepreneur, 'those great outlines' represent an exacting possibility of improvement.

54. Gilpin, I, 141-42.

55. Gilpin, II, 129.

2 Poverty

The Improver's reading of the land is capable of a quite different inflection, too. If, as it often seems, the presence of trees in a prospect denotes the owner's care, then behind the pleasure of that lies the assumption that the Highlands are naturally unproductive, owing any 'richness' of scenery to human work. Land 'in a state of nature', for Pennant or Knox, signifies idleness, poverty and neglect; 'nature' is here not the standard of taste appealed to by Gilpin, but a zero, an absence of anything better.⁵⁶ Johnson in Lochaber has an interesting metaphor for this negativity:

The appearance is that of matter incapable of form or usefulness, dismissed by nature from her care and disinherited of her favours, left in its original elemental state, or quickened only with one sullen power of useless vegetation.⁵⁷

In a similar fancy, Pennant sees Assynt as 'torn and convulsed: the shock, whenever it happened, shook off all that vegetates'.⁵⁸ The Highlands appear as doubly unimproved, neglected not only by their owners, but also by a personified nature. It is a dark, indigent natural world, a sub-nature, different in kind from the bounteous inheritance of the arable parts of England.

This version of the Scottish hills, wholly unassimilable by the picturesque, was eloquently and maliciously set out by Charles Churchill in 1763:

56. E.g., Knox, Tour, p.220. See also John Walker, Report on the Hebrides of 1764 and 1771, edited by M.M. McKay (Edinburgh, 1980), p.33.

57. Johnson, Journey, p.34.

58. Pennant, 1772, I, 364.

Far as the eye could reach, no tree was seen,
 Earth, clad in russet, scorn'd the lively green.
 The plague of Locusts they secure defy,
 For in three hours a grasshopper must die.
 No living thing, whate'er its food, feasts there,
 But the Cameleon, who can feast on air.
 No birds, except as birds of passage, flew,
 No bee was known to hum, no dove to coo.
 No streams as amber smooth, as amber clear,
 Were seen to glide, or heard to warble here.
 Rebellion's spring, which thro' the country ran,
 Furnish'd, with bitter draughts, the steady clan.
 No flow'rs embalm'd the air, but one white rose,
 Which, on the tenth of June, by instinct blows,
 By instinct blows at morn, and, when the shades
 Of drizly eve prevail, by instinct fades.⁵⁹

As the slanderous references to Jacobitism indicate, Churchill's purpose here is not simple landscape-painting. The point of the hyperbolic penury of the scene is to insinuate that Scots in general are snatching at the metropolitan fleshpots with a rapacity as extreme as their need. As a Scotophobic set-piece, then, it draws on an older tradition than the picturesque tourists: it's in a line from James Howell's Perfect Description of 1649, which Churchill had already used as North Briton XIII -

had Christ been betrayed in this countrey (as doubtless he should, had he come as a stranger) Judas had sooner found the grace of repentance than a tree to hang himself on⁶⁰ -

and Cleveland's 'The Rebell Scot' with its unvarnished conclusion -

Nature herselfe doth Scotch-men beasts confesse,
 Making their Countrey such a wilderness.⁶¹

The bizarre speculative bestiary in Churchill's own description

59. 'The Prophecy of Famine', in The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill, edited by D. Grant (Oxford, 1956), pp.193-210, l.295.

60. North Briton, I, 114.

61. Cleveland, Poems, p.29.

declares his seventeenth-century affiliations, and gives his detail -

There webs were spread of more than common size,
And half-starv'd spiders prey'd on half-starv'd
flies⁶² -

an energy which owes nothing to the observation of nature.

D.W. Jefferson plausibly relates these aspects of Churchill's 'satiric landscape' to the fantastic locations of the Dunciad.⁶³

Still, the relationship between this harsh 'Scots Pastoral' and the land it purports to represent is not altogether arbitrary. The leading features which Churchill's scene lacks - verdure, doves, 'amber' streams and 'embalming' flowers - are blatantly conventional: the caricatured sterility is matched by an equally caricatured Theocritan muse which

To flocks and rocks, to hills and rills proclaims,
In simplest notes, and all unpolish'd strains,
The loves of nymphs, and eke the loves of swains.⁶⁴

The barren Scottish hills are then hailed as the antithesis of all such rustic artificiality. 'Thou, Nature, art my goddess!' Churchill exclaims (characteristically tainting the statement as soon as it's made by the inauspicious allusion to Lear), and

To northern climes my happier course I steer,
Climes where the Goddess reigns throughout the year,
Where undisturb'd by Art's rebellious plan,
She rules the loyal Laird and faithful Clan.⁶⁵

62. 'The Prophecy of Famine', 1.327.

63. D.W. Jefferson, "Satirical Landscape": Churchill and Crabbe, Yearbook of English Studies, 6 (1976), 92-100.

64. 'The Prophecy of Famine', 1.12.

65. 'Prophecy', 1.107.

'Throughout the year' manages to suggest that the reign of the goddess is an eternal winter: she is, more luridly, the negative nature of Johnson's Highlands - that desperate 'state of nature' which is the absence of all improvement. The sarcastic epithets of the second couplet encapsulate the complementary image of a land sunk in seditious and indolent poverty; and the inhabitants, also undisturbed by Art, appear as

Shepherds of Scottish lineage, born and bred
 On the same bleak and barren mountain's head,
 By niggard nature doom'd on the same rocks
 To spin out life, and starve themselves and flocks.⁶⁶

The tightly stated futility of this contains exactly the Improver's impatience with the traditional and unprofitable. Thus Churchill's satiric aim is unsteady: he is using the value of plain, rude nature to discredit artificiality, and then immediately deriding that value as a catchpenny rationalisation of rural idiocy. His rancorous muse is in danger of undermining every standpoint from which it could condemn anything. If, however, we steadfastly ignore his aim, and attempt to read his landscape, its eccentricities largely disappear: it is a powerful portrait of the absolutely unimproved Highlands, the negative dimension of the project described in the first section of this chapter.

As such, it's capable of a curious reception. Anthony Champion's verse epistle 'From a Traveller in Wales to a Friend

66. 'Prophecy', 1.275.

Travelling in Scotland, August 1772⁶⁷ makes the comparison in these terms:

Nor shall the north with Cambria's beauties vie,
 Unknown to mountains of a ruder sky
 (Save that their lakes a just distinction claim,
 And meaner waters shrink at Lomond's name);
 Ne'er with her vales shall highland glens compare,
 Poetic dens of famine, caves of care: ...
 Claude's colours there, and Virgil's style are faint;
 Let Churchill's pen, and Rosa's pencil paint.⁶⁷

The concession to Loch Lomond serves to identify the viewpoint: the writer is no Wilkes, but a picturesque tourist. What's then interesting is his use of Churchill's politically inspired description to schematise a contrast of scenic tone. It's not that the politics are obsolete: as we saw, the legacy of the Bute period went on through 1772. It's simply an alternative use: in aligning him with Salvator Rosa, enshrined as the 'savage' painter in The Castle of Indolence, Champion depoliticises Churchill's abusiveness into a kind of wildness, suited to the 'frowning' scenery of the Highlands. The contrast with 'Cambria's beauties' completes the associative field. Claude - Rosa; Virgil - Churchill; beautiful - 'rude': The Prophecy of Famine is rather unexpectedly lined up as the Scottish sublime.

The very bleakness of the terrain of Famine, that is, comes to look like a value - an integrity, or a magnificence. (Even Churchill's own version 'scorns' greenery, 'defies' locusts, and rises with a sort of pride through its catalogue of negations to

67. Champion, Miscellanies, pp.80-81.

the glooming splendour of the short-lived rose: it is, as it were, evocative in excess of polemical requirements.) Though Champion is classifying rather than enthusing, his frame of reference has space for a preference which simply ignores Churchill's irony. In 1775, 'Lady L.S. aged 16' is surely thinking of the anti-Scottish rhetoric of the 1760s when she writes -

Though 'tis declar'd, no herbage decks thy ground;
 Though rudest rocks thy barren heaths surround;
 Though, when transplanted to thy plains, 'tis said,
 The beeches wither, and the roses fade:
 E'en such descriptions more my soul emblaze,
 More transports waken, and more wishes raise;
 To hail sweet SCOTIA'S hospitable smile,
 And taste such joys, as know not to beguile.⁶⁸

The verse is insipid, of course, compared with what provoked it. But 'emblaze' and 'transports' denote the unfulfilled intention of a matching intensity: what she calls, in exactly Champion's terms, 'the beauties of some southern vale', are being dismissed as pleasant and feeble. The theoretical background of this reversal is Burke's principle, stated most clearly in the section on 'Power' added to the Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful in 1759, that sublime ideas attach only to strength which we cannot use, since the useful is subservient to us and

68. Untitled verses in J. Elphinston, Forty Years' Correspondence, 8 vols (1791-4), VI, 208. The spelling is distractingly reformed in the source; I have restored the usual imperfections. The author is perhaps Scott's closet critic Lady Louisa Stuart, who was born in 1757. If so, she has for her retort to Churchill the ulterior motive of being Bute's daughter.

therefore devoid of awe. Even the wild ass is sublime as the plough-horse is not.⁶⁹ This distinction, enunciated so lucidly in the same year as the first appearance of Macpherson's uncultivated scenes, is a vital key to the appreciation of a Highland landscape 'incapable of usefulness'.

It's Burkean also that the characteristic response to the 'negative' scene is inward: the retort to Churchill or Johnson is not to point out unsuspected attractions in barren countryside, but to appeal to pleasures of the imagination - the soul, 'wishes' - which implicitly reprove the enjoyment of a merely beautiful landscape as shallow and deceptive. The logic of this leads to a sort of scenic contemptus mundi (Lady L.S.'s context is a more conventional polemic against Pleasure in its expensive metropolitan forms) which is frankly at odds with the picturesque search for wealth and variety of visual impression.

Gilpin, though primarily engaged in this search, is too active an observer to be altogether unaware of the emotional force of its occasional suspension. The moorland above Killin seemed to him

wide, waste and rude; totally naked; and yet in it's simplicity often sublime; the ground heaving, like the ocean into ample swells ... The ideas were grand, rather than pleasing. The imagination was interested, but not the eye.⁷⁰

69. Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, edited by J.T. Boulton (1958), pp.65-66. Boulton's copytext is the second edition (1759); the Enquiry first appeared in 1757.

70. Gilpin, Observations, I, 171.

The same hesitation informs the chapters of general comment towards the end of his book: distinctive features of Scottish landscape such as barrenness, emptiness, cloud and rock are

circumstances of a melancholy cast; and tho they are not entirely of the picturesque kind; yet they are nearly allied to it; and give a tinge to the imagination of every traveller, who examines these scenes of solitude and grandeur.⁷¹

Gilpin doesn't explain how the melancholy and the picturesque are allied; he's improvising terminological space for a sensation outwith his aesthetic frame of reference, trying to describe a pleasure which his language doesn't register as such. Interestingly, he has recourse away from his own experience to a somewhat gothic 'character' of Highland landscape by James Beattie:

Long tracts of mountainous desert, covered with dark heath, and often obscured by misty weather; narrow vallies, thinly inhabited, and bounded by precipices resounding with the fall of torrents; a soil so rugged, and a climate so dreary, as in many parts to admit neither the amusements of pasturage, nor the labours of agriculture; ... a lonely region, full of echoes, and rocks, and caverns; the grotesque and ghastly appearance of such a landscape by the light of the moon.⁷²

Beattie's point in developing this picture is that such objects 'cannot fail to tincture the thoughts of a native in the hour of silence and solitude', and indeed explain why 'persons of lively imagination, immured in deep solitude, and surrounded with the

71. Gilpin, Observations, II, 133.

72. James Beattie, Essays on Poetry and Music, third edition (1779), p.169, quoted by Gilpin, Observations, II, 133.

stupendous scenery of clouds, precipices and torrents, and up believing that they possess the Second Sight. Here again, though now projected on to the natives, is the linkage of outward sterility and mental activity, the opposed satisfactions of the eye and the imagination. Whereas the picturesque enlivens the beholder's reflections by means of a demanding variety of ideas, these prospects of deprivation stimulate a different sort of mental life. Almost pathologically, the fancy is roused to feverish activity by the inhuman emptiness of the mountains.

Hardly any of the eighteenth-century Highland tourists are entirely unmoved by this converse appeal, though for all of them it's a peripheral type of appreciation compared with their uncomplicated pleasure at the more opulent scenery of Strathmore or Loch Lomond. Even Johnson describes a storm on the way to Inveraray as 'a nobler chorus of the rough music of nature than it had ever been my chance to hear before'; Knox allows his concern for the fishing industry to be temporarily swept away by the sublimity of Loch Laxford - 'A great sea rushed in at the mouth of the loch, which, having no interruptions from points or headlands, rolled with awful grandeur to the upper end of this beautiful lake, where it broke furiously upon the beach'; and Mrs Hanway, although she really prefers cultivated valleys, knows what her response to mountains ought to be, and comically catches herself up in mid-sentence - 'The road was rather disagreeable, laying between immense "cloud-topt" hills, which strike with awe and wonder the

astonished beholder'.⁷³ Cordiner, again, reveals the aesthetic uncertainty most articulately: in the mountains of western Sutherland

a wide extent of desert country lay before us, and exhibited a most august picture of forlorn nature. The prospect was altogether immense, but wild and desolate beyond conception. The mountains presented nothing to view, but heath and rock; between them formless lakes and pools, dark with the shades thrown from prodigious precipices, gave grandeur to the wilderness in its most gloomy forms.⁷⁴

The epithets here - desert, august, forlorn, wild, desolate, formless, gloomy - are predominantly descriptive of a response (they don't give a clear idea of the place itself); yet the quality of the response remains equivocal. The experience tends towards depression, even a kind of fear, but is it real depression, or is it, rather, an aesthetic gloom which Cordiner indulges in? The distinction isn't a subtle one: it's a question of whether the pile-up of dark adjectives is meant to express admiration or not. But it's a distinction which Cordiner's terms don't quite make; and Pennant's hesitate in a similar way: he uses words like 'horrid', 'grotesque', 'hideous', and 'melancholy', in contexts, like the 'horrible grandeur' of Killiecrankie,⁷⁵ which suggest, without actually declaring, a pre-romantic taste for scenery evocative of suffering.

73. Johnson, Journey, p.144; Knox, Tour, p.256; Hanway, Journey, p.78.

74. Cordiner, Antiquities and Scenery, p.104.

75. Pennant, 1769, p.103.

The first traveller to express this enthusiasm unambiguously was Elizabeth Montagu. She made a brief trip to the Highlands in 1766, and Glen Croe, abhorred by Burrell eight years earlier, was its high point:

It is not within the compass of prose, hardly of poetry, to describe the sublime beauties that here opened upon us. We travelled down a glen encompassed by vast hoar mountains down whose wrinkled sides rushed impetuous streams which ended in the vale below. In a sort of proportion mountain rose above mountain, some from the steep declivity had had all the soil washed away and the rocks like the bones of a giant exhibited its strength without softness or mitigation, and made imagination tremble through all her powers.⁷⁶

Here all regret for the harmonious or the riant in landscape is swept away by the sublime encounter of essences: the 'strength' of the land (revealed precisely by the absence of soil and vegetation) speaks directly to the 'power' of the imagination. The glen is not picturesque, but powerful, and the governing analogy is not painting, but personification: in another letter describing the same scene, the sense of emotive movement is yet more fancifully evoked, with the cheeks of the mountain furrowed by the streams, and a hanging rock waiting for another earthquake to complete its journey.⁷⁷ The land is inert: rocks, bones. But the tremulous imagination construes the titanic struggles memorial-

76. Mrs Montagu, "Queen of the Blues", her letters and friendships 1762-1800, edited by R. Blunt, 2 vols (1923), I, 147.

77. Quoted in I.S. Ross, 'A Bluestocking Over the Border: Mrs Elizabeth Montagu's Aesthetic Adventures in Scotland, 1766', Huntington Library Quarterly, 28 (1965), 213-33 (p.244).

ised or latent in its decrepitude.

This is not a typical eighteenth-century response; and Mrs Montagu was untypical in an exactly analogous way. An independent woman of literary tastes, patronised as a bluestocking by contemporary literati and modern scholars alike, she financed a career in fashionable literary society from the collieries which she owned as a widow. Both as a woman and as an industrialist, she stands outside the framework of Improvement - essentially the ideology of a landowning and land-inheriting class - which underpins the harmonies of the picturesque. It's appropriate, then, to say the least, that she should read *Glen Croe* as a geological drama, an exciting intimation of the earth's violent energy. As Ian Ross points out, the intellectual source of this theme is Burnet's Sacred Theory of the Earth, in which mountains, regarded as apparent imperfections in creation, are explained as ruins left by the Flood. But Montagu's rendering of it has none of Burnet's concern with theodicy: rather, she accepts a given natural world of shocks and discords and expresses a merely personal sympathy with it. It's a scenic taste divorced from agrarian and institutional values, a discontinuous, inorganic sensibility. It takes its language of the sublime, not from Longinus and not from Burnet either, but from a figure as deracinated in its way as Mrs Montagu's - the twenty-five-year-old literary adventurer James Macpherson.

Montagu, who had secured Macpherson for her salon in advance

of the publication of Fingal in 1761, appreciates Glen-Croe by saturating it in his imagery; in fact it appears that the broken, tear-stained ancient she makes of the rock face is partly determined by her identification there of 'the stream of Cona', the result of a confusion between Glen Croe and Ossian's official birthplace, Glencoe. It was Macpherson, after all, who produced the definitive imagery of negative nature: as Blair said, Ossian's paucity of images referred to 'the desert uncultivated state of his country, which suggested to him few images beyond natural inanimate objects in their rudest form'⁷⁸ - rivalling, in the absence of agriculture, industry, most animals and plants, and all but a few references to herding, the catalogue of vacancy of a Churchill. This emptiness is compounded by Macpherson's settings being, so to speak, topographically null: 'the place-names are meaningless, and the scenic elements - 'the tree', 'the rock', 'the lake of roes' - crop abruptly up out of the bardic flow in an abstract fashion which deprives them of spatial relationship, so that they remain arbitrary and inexplicit, wrapped in the mystique of translation. The Ossianic interpretation of the Highlands, then, doesn't resist the Improving view of its moors and rocks as scenic negations; on the contrary, it makes the negations into a style. This election is, typically, projected on to the characters: Fingal, refusing the rewards of victory in Book VI, declares, 'The desert is enough to me, with all

78. Blair, 'Critical Dissertation', Works of Ossian, II, 410.

its deer and woods.⁷⁹ Quoted by Blair, and from him by many others, the line turns the absence of Improvement into the conscious refusal of it in the name of something higher. The higher value, it's clear, is sensibility:

The extended heath by the sea shore; the mountain shaded with mist; the torrent rushing through a solitary valley; the scattered oak, and the tombs of warriors overgrown with moss; all produce a solemn attention in the mind, and prepare it for great and extraordinary events. We find not in Ossian, an imagination that sports itself, and dresses out gay trifles to please the fancy. His poetry ... deserves to be stiled, The Poetry of the Heart.⁸⁰

This unworldly height of taste, the theory of an aestheticised puritanism reflected in Blair's and Macpherson's respective biblical cadences, commissions the Highlands - the more so the more barren - as the landscape of the heart.

The typical Ossianic vehicle for imagery is simile. Sustained natural description is rare; the impression that the text is thronged with heath, deer, woods, torrents, and so on, is partly due to their recurrence in dialogue as the bearers of tropical or associative personal meanings. Although these allusions often get

79. The Poems of Ossian, &c.; containing the Poetical Works of James Macpherson, Esq. in Prose and Rhyme, edited by Malcolm Laing, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1805), I, 193. All references to Macpherson's poetical works are to this edition, which is referred to from now on as 'Laing'. The Works of Ossian, 2 vols (1765), is used only for the dissertations by Blair and by Macpherson himself, which Laing does not reproduce.

80. Blair in Works of Ossian, II, 349.

away, and take on a life in fantasy which cuts across their tenor, nevertheless, the fact of their being deployed in this way has the effect of filling their sensuous inanity with subjectivity. In 'The War of Caros', to take an example at random, the disgraced Hidallan laments,

Lamor will not feel my dogs, with his hands, glad at my arrival from the hill. He will not inquire of his mountains, or of the dark-brown deer of his deserts!

Lamor replies:

I must fall like a leafless oak: it grew on a rock
it was overturned by the winds! My ghost will be seen on
my hills.⁸¹

Here the hills, the mountains, the deserts and the rock are all almost obtrusively gratuitous: they neither define nor heighten the emotion, but simply absorb it - objects, lifeless and undifferentiated in themselves, soak up a ceaseless climate of moods which blow, rise, tremble, flicker, roll, pass. The sterility of the things coupled with the emotional hyperactivity that plays over them is necrophiliac: the representative Ossianic locale is a visited grave. After the fatal triangle in the seventh 'Fragment of Ancient Poetry', for instance -

By the brook of the hill their graves are laid; a
birch's unequal shade covers their tomb. Often on
their green earthen tombs the branchy sons of the
mountain feed, when mid-day is all in flames, and
silence is over all the hills.⁸²

This rather potent mixture of peace with unrest - the unequal shade, the flaming silence, the troubling tangle of the trees

81. Laing, I, 240.

82. Laing, II, 396.

and the antlers - is arrived at by permeating the neglected place with unappeased energies. The life of nature is not substance, but force.

That such force should be elicited, paradoxically, by scenes suggestive of death is consistent with the tendency voiced by Burke for sublimity to be associated with negation and loss. The Enquiry's catalogue of visual sources of the sublime - terror, obscurity, power, privation, vastness, infinity, uniformity, difficulty - details quite precisely those elements of Highland scenery which are found to refuse the picturesque synthesis; and what unites them, for Burke, is that they all draw on 'passions belonging to self-preservation', which must necessarily be the strongest passions of all.⁸³ What's interesting about this theory from our point of view is that it roots the attraction very firmly in practical dangers, so that the affective power of the Highlands is located just where Churchill's tradition directs its contempt: in the environment's inability to support life.

The experience of this power Burke is unable to call a pleasure, because it is linked by definition to pain; he therefore makes a purely formal adjustment and calls it 'delight'. (Macpherson, of course, needed a less fastidious terminological solution to exactly this problem: his readers were taught to speak of 'the

83. Burke, Enquiry, pp.8 and 51.

joy of grief'.) What was necessary, as S.H. Monk points out, was a sort of distinction of logical types. It was not, strictly speaking, the instinct of self-preservation (calls upon which are simply painful), but a passion 'belonging' to it; not pain, but the idea of pain.⁸⁴ John Dennis had said: not an 'ordinary' passion, but an 'enthusiastic' one. 'Delight' is thus an enthusiastic passion, whose free play depends on the distinction's being clearly grasped. Johnson is less than delighted with Lochaber precisely because he doesn't keep ordinary self-preservation sufficiently out of the picture:

We were in this place at ease and by choice, and had no evils to suffer or to fear; yet the imaginations excited by the view of an unknown and untravelled wilderness are not such as arise in the artificial solitude of parks and gardens, a flattering notion of self-sufficiency, a placid indulgence of voluntary delusions, a secure expansion of the fancy, or a cool concentration of the mental powers. The phantoms which haunt a desert are want, and misery, and danger; the evils of dereliction rush upon the thoughts; man is made unwillingly acquainted with his own weakness, and meditation shows him only how little he can sustain, and how little he can perform.⁸⁵

In these reflections there are the components of the natural sublime without the feeling itself. The presence of imaginary perils in the absence of immediate ones; the attitude of humility before superhuman power; the coercive force of the landscape in

84. S.H. Monk, The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England (1935), pp.48-49.

85. Johnson, Journey, pp.35-36.

contrast with the voluntary pleasures of tamer settings - with all these, a very slight adjustment of tone would be enough to raise a 'transport'. Consistently with his practice as a literary critic, however, Johnson keeps the aesthetics of the case solidly in touch with its practical and moral aspect. The poetic rewards of remoteness he consigns, emasculated, to 'the artificial solitude of parks'. In insisting on this literalism, he reveals by contrast the basis of the active, Ossianic taste for scenes of desolation: it depends on the partial aestheticisation of the Highlands.

'Partial', because the relation is an impure one: if the Highlands were, in Johnson's terms, a park, they wouldn't afford the sublime idea of a desert; but if they were really a desert, then their practical terrors would extinguish their 'enthusiastic' ones. They have to be a compromise. This equivocation helps to make sense of the chronological paradox that, broadly speaking, admiration for the region's barbarity, remoteness and danger grew up side by side with its actual safety, accessibility and modernisation. It wasn't only that more people could now get there: it was centrally that farms and laws and roads reduced the Highlands to a scale on which they were not too alien to function as a signifier, yet not too tame to signify wildness. It's evidently an unstable balance. At the Hermitage by Dunkeld, for example, the natural splendour of the waterfall received more than a little assistance from art: in the 1770s the summer-house on the brink contained coloured panes of glass through which to view the torrent, an effect whose 'formidable grandeur' so overcame Mrs Hanway that

she was obliged to leave, but which Gilpin dismissed as 'tricks below the dignity of scenes like these'.⁸⁶ By the end of the century, the colours had given way to an arrangement of mirrors, multiplying the agitation of the stream; again, this extravagance inspired awe in Mrs Murray in 1796, but incredulous laughter in the Wordsworths in 1803.⁸⁷ A modern visitor to the Hermitage provides a different frame again: habitu  of Niagara, Everest and the moon, he finds the little cascade, with its well-kept woods, merely pretty, and neither raised to grandeur nor demeaned by the innocuous building and the cameras which inherit the succession of optical devices. Like the tonal contrasts of the age's landscape painting, the extremes of sublime and beautiful are points on a finite, learnt, and never unambiguous continuum.

The sublime Highlands are thus an evasive sign, turning upon a perception of uncontrolled forces which is itself a matter of the nicest control. Waterfalls are much the most generally admired instances of scenic terror - the Fall of Foyers, by Loch Ness, is almost as unanimously celebrated as Loch Lomond⁸⁸ - and this is partly due, I think, to their happy centring of just this ambiguity: their channelled violence exhibits an essence of natural energy which, wholly undebased by usefulness, nevertheless is strictly contained

86. Hanway, Journey, p.105; Gilpin, Observations, I, 123.

87. Murray, Companion and Useful Guide, I, 198; Dorothy Wordsworth, Recollections, pp.210-13.

88. Johnson, Journey, p.29; Lettice, Letters on A Tour, pp.352-56; Murray, Companion and Useful Guide, I, 241-45; and countless others.

and doesn't obstruct the progress of civilisation. It is thus unlimitedly terrific without being in the least inconvenient. As that best case suggests, the appreciation of mountain gloom and glory is inescapably tinged with make-believe, or irony. Gray's well-known letter of 1765 is a stylish example:

the Lowlands are worth seeing once, but the Mountains are extatic, & ought to be visited in pilgrimage once a year. none but those monstrous creatures of God know how to join so much beauty with so much horror. a fig for your Poets, Painters, Gardiners, & Clergymen, that have not been among them: their imagination can be made up of nothing but bowling-greens, flowering shrubs, horse-ponds, Fleet-ditches, shell-grottoes, & Chineé-rails... and this so sweetly contrasted with that perfection of nastiness, & total want⁸⁹ of accommodation, that Scotland only can supply.

Gray is teasing both Mason and himself, but the humour is not just personal. The contemptuously itemised sphere of mountainless landscape is a parody of English Improvement, and the boasted discomfort a parody of Scotch backwardness. Nature and art are set against each other to their mutual discredit: the structure of feeling is not very far from Churchill. It's not that Gray's admiration for what he has seen in Scotland is insincere: it's rather that the ideology of Improvement, so positive and ramified, leaves no uncompromised diction for praising the absolute, the unusable, the 'total want of accommodation'. So the enunciation of the 'negative' sublime is unstable, slips sideways into burlesque, or posturing, or fraud. Burrell, who climbed Ben Lomond in 1758,

89. Correspondence of Thomas Gray, edited by P. Toynbee and L. Whibley, 3 vols (Oxford, 1935), II, 899.

called the enterprise his 'Quixotism'; that judgment is echoed in the slightly facetious magniloquence of some verses inscribed on a window in the inn at the foot of the mountain in 1771 -

If taste for grandeur and the dread sublime
Prompt thee Ben-Lomond's fearful height to climb... -

and in 1775 Mrs Hanway, in the same tone, wanted to make the ascent but could find 'no one willing to accompany me on so romantic a tour'.⁹⁰ The 'extatic' response presents itself as a sort of folly.

Alternatively, and influentially, it is moralised, so that the skittish refusal of the useful is institutionalised as a principled reproof of the uses of the world. This positive value for the negative sublime takes its cue from the long-established rhetoric of mountain liberty. Drummond of Hawthornden in the seventeenth century had hailed the

bulwark of our freedom, giant walls,
which never friend did slight, nor sword made thralls.⁹¹

And Alexander Gordon's Itinerarium Septentrionale of 1726, though it comes upon the image via its predominant interest in Roman antiquities, seizes upon it with a venom that seems to express the nationalism of its own decade:

It is indeed no new Thing to hear People speak,
with Contempt, of the barren Soil and bleak
Mountains of Scotland; but if their Situation
be such, that these very Mountains seem by Nature
to have been placed as so many Bulwarks, for the

90. Hanway, Journey, p.41. Hanway also, like several travellers, quotes the verses from the window, pp.43-46.

91. Quoted in Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory, p.56.

better defending their Independancy and Freedom, and preserving them from the griping Tallons of the grand Plunderers of the World, in that Case, the Advantages accruing from them, are much more eligible than the precarious Possession of a terrestrial Paradise without Liberty.⁹²

But while the thought is almost a cliché among travellers - Newte, for instance, looking north from Loch Lomond, forms 'an idea of a country consisting of mountains without intermission, formed by Nature into an impregnable fortress'⁹³ - its survival after 1746-50 (when the fortress was thoroughly reduced) involves a gentle shift of meaning, since what the giant walls protect can no longer be any kind of political independence. In Newte, the bulwarks enclose a favoured nursery of 'hardiness and valour'; in a letter of the young Anne Grant's it's a kind of cultural identity -

I and my ancestors are genuine Britons, who ...
made the strength of the rocks ours, snuff'd
like wild asses at the voice of the pursuer,

92. Alexander Gordon, Itinerarium Septentrionale (1726), p.138.

93. Newte, Prospects and Observations, p.74.

and still retain "the garb of old Gaul, and the fire of old Rome";⁹⁴

while in a later sonnet by the same Highland amateur, written in 1794 on the occasion of returning from Glasgow, it's strikingly domesticated:

Barriers of holy freedom! your stern brow
 With guardian frown o'erlooks her last retreat,
 When tyrant rapine roam'd the plains below,
 Among your winding glens she found a seat.
 Beyond those dark defiles, thy narrow vale,
 Green Laggan! soon shall cheer my weary sight.
 Young voices sounding on the mountain gale,
 Shall fill this anxious bosom with delight.⁹⁵

94. Anne Grant, Letters from the Mountains; being the real Correspondence of a Lady, between the years 1773 and 1807, fourth edition, 3 vols (1809), II, 54.
 Anne Grant (1775-1838) spent her childhood partly in Glasgow and partly in North America, where her father, Duncan MacVicar, served in the Seven Years' War. In 1773 Mac Vicar was made barrack-master at Fort Augustus, and the family moved to the Highlands; this was a kind of homecoming, as both parents had Highland connections, though Anne had never been north of Glasgow. She married John Grant, the Minister of Laggan on Speyside, in 1779. In 1801 he died, and Mrs Grant, in serious financial straits, began to publish her private writings - her poems in 1803, the first edition of her letters in 1806, and in 1808, Memoirs of an American Lady, a life of someone she had lived with in the colonies. These were quite successful, and she moved to Edinburgh in 1810 as something of a literary celebrity. Her only other significant publication was Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, 2 vols (1811).
95. Anne Grant, 'Sonnet', in The Highlanders and Other Poems, second edition (1808), p.143.

The mountains that balked Agricola become protectors of the absent mother's children, their very grimness guaranteeing the security of the 'green' idyll beyond. The liberty, depoliticised, becomes 'holy': it seems to be a freedom from vice rather than tyranny. The figure aligns with a denunciation of luxury which was already latent in Gordon's rejection of 'the precarious Possession of a terrestrial Paradise': the barrenness of the hills has the value of enclosing austerity and virtue, far from the snares of wealth.

This moralised sublime can be conveniently sketched by looking at the conventional senses of heather (usually 'heath') in the picture of the Highlands. As uses quoted in this chapter indicate (Lady L.S. spoke of 'barren heath', Beattie of 'dark heath', Cordiner of 'nothing but heath and rock') the stable connotation is 'barrenness'. The derogatory sense can hold even for fervent Ossianists: one complains in 1789 that she cannot find the bard's tomb, as 'The sons of negligence have suffered the waving heath to cover it'.⁹⁶ So far, heath signifies the dejected 'state of nature' that precedes all improvement. Its appearance in a lachrymose emigrant lyric printed by Cririe in 1803 is consistent with this:

Thy heath-covered mountains we prize
Above the rich mines of Peru⁹⁷ -

where 'heath-covered' must logically imply 'poor'. But at this

96. Miss Potter, Poetry of Nature, (1789), p.1.

97. Cririe, Scottish Scenery, p.353.

point the thankless plant starts to release its possibilities. Its idiomatic quality makes it a potent sign of home as well as poverty, and connects it with the moralising dichotomy of austerity and luxury. Moreover, the epithet is bound to recall one of the best-known lyrics of Highland romanticisation -

In the garb of old Gaul, wi' the fire of old Rome⁹⁸
From the heath-cover'd mountains of Scotia we come -

where the point is the link (again, an anti-sumptuary theme) between bare hills and valour. By such reversals, heath acquires immanent virtue: in Cririe's own poem, at one point,

The deer bound lightly on the heath-clad hill,
Or browse the lawn around the castle walls⁹⁹

(the image sketching a familiar dichotomy of wild against tame, free against prosperous); and, later,

The barren heath with richest stores abounds,
Its purple bloom attracts the busy bee¹⁰⁰ -

a statement whose literal truth counts for less than its vaguely pious oxymoron of 'barren' and 'richest', the heath-flower providing a parable about the humble sources of true sweetness. Another

98. 'The Garb of Old Gaul', or 'The Highland Character', was much printed in the half-century after its composition in about 1765. Text here from David Herd, Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads, Etc., 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1776), I, 116.

99. Cririe, Scottish Scenery, p.112.

100. Cririe, Scottish Scenery, p.190.

empirical notion about heather was that it's healthy to sleep on;¹⁰¹ this, too, makes a smooth fit with the primary connotation of barrenness via the moral idea of the poor labourer's contented rest, in implicit contrast with pampered insomnia. An elegy of 1787, for example, finds deserted shieling huts in a Highland glen and recalls those who used them:

They fram'd these humble pastoral bowers
And happy slept on heath-strown beds.¹⁰²

'Heath', then, mediates an ideal of noble penury which to some extent cuts across the transformations envisaged by Improvement. The dissent which the idea contains isn't very profound; I shall look at the social values involved in a later chapter. But in formulating a positive signification for the 'hopeless sterility' of the hills, in terms not of its profitable transformation but exactly of its intransigent consistency, the moralised sublime contributed to a mythology which heather continues to carry.

Through such associative systems, the depraved Highlander of 1746 or 1763 gives way, unevenly but with extraordinary ease, to a figure of extreme probity. The Rev Luke Booker's Highlands, for instance, constructed in the Vale of Belvoir in 1787 out of Thomson, Pennant, Knox and James Anderson, conforms outwardly,

101. Martin Martin, A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland c.1695, edited by Donald J. Macleod (Stirling, 1934), p.236.

102. John MacGilvray, 'A Solitary Valley', in Poems, (1787), p.52.

with some picturesque additions, to The Prophecy of Famine:

Cheerless, she views the dank and lurid vales,
 Left matted with their prone and delug'd crops ...
 Awe-struck, she hears the tempest's hollow roar,
 Mingled with sounds from mountain torrents borne,
 Shudd'ring, she sees a patient suff'ring race
 Of friendless mortals quit their lowly sheds,
 And launch, in crazy barks, o'er seas unknown.¹⁰³

However, rather than conclude, like Churchill or Lord Hardwicke, that people so desperate must be a menace to the public, Booker insists that crimes are in fact very uncommon in the Highlands:

these are deeds
 Nurtur'd in climes less rude. The barren North
 Disdains their produce, and wou'd rather see
 Dejected Innocence in tatter'd plaid,
 Sit on his naked cliffs, with trickling tears
 Washing their flinty sides, than crimes so base
 Shou'd stain the annals of his wild domain.¹⁰⁴

The lurid vignette is, syntactically, an adjuratory worst case, like the heath preferred to the mines of Peru. But like that too, the values turn themselves round in the prevailing judgment: it really seems that the North and the domain are pure because they're barren and wild. Oddly, and, despite Booker's humanitarian sentiment, rather nastily, the myth of mountain liberty descends into a guarantee of social quietism in the face of starvation - something which the administration of the Highlands in the ensuing period did in practice secure.

Thus, aesthetically, morally, and in the last analysis politically, the barrenness and hostility of Highland geography were evaluatively turned around, until what had been a reproach

103. Luke Booker, The Highlanders, A Poem (Stourbridge, 1787), p.15.

104. Booker, The Highlanders, p.27.

became an ideal. The very unamenability of the mountains became an amenity, fitting into the prevailing cultural discourse of profitable land use as a marginal grace - an irony, or a relief. The bombast, then, which vitiates all these registrations of Highland sublimity, can be traced to the contradiction which the reversal of value contains: that the celebration of the land's asocial grandeur was a covert function of its specific social appropriation.

3 Bounty

Cultivation or wilderness; improvement or neglect; artificial abundance or natural emptiness; pleasures of the senses or delights of the heart - the polarity is so insistent in the literature that it can come to look natural. Amid so much testimony, it's easy to start talking as if the Highlands simply had been a desert, and as if the choice between transforming them and enjoying their gloomy grandeur were directly and innocently posed by the land. However, any such air of inevitability is effectively dispelled by the presence of a distinct alternative myth:

This air ... notwithstanding its humidity, is so healthy, that the natives are scarce ever visited by any other disease than the small-pox ... Here are a great many living monuments of longevity; and among the rest a person, whom I treat with singular respect, as a venerable druid, who has lived near ninety years, without pain or sickness, among oaks of his own planting ... This ancient couple live in great health, peace, and harmony, and knowing no wants,

enjoy the perfection of content ...

Do you know how we fare in this Scottish paradise? ... We have delicious salmon, pike, trout, perch, par, &c. at the door, for the taking. The Frith of Clyde, on the other side of the hill, supplies us with mullet, red and grey, cod, mackarel, whiting, and a variety of sea-fish, including the finest fresh herrings I ever tasted. We have sweet, juicy beef, and tolerable veal, with delicate bread from the little town of Dunbritton; and plenty of partridge, grouse, heath-cock, and other game in presents.¹⁰⁵

This description by Smollett's Matthew Bramble, coming after the same correspondent's splenetic complaints about the foul air, bad food and polluted water of the fashionable health resorts of England, has, designedly, an Arcadian freshness, cool and reviving. It isn't without parallel in presentations of the Highlands: Smollett is drawing to some extent on Martin Martin's Description of the Western Islands circa 1695. This influential book - it fired the enthusiasm of Collins and Johnson as well as Smollett, and was excerpted as current information as late as the 1780s - projects, though in a much less concentrated fashion, a similar image of intense local abundance: in one stream there are too many salmon to catch; in one island the barley is so plentiful that it's given away; on little rocks in the Minch, a handful of cows produce milk from the patches of luxuriant grass.¹⁰⁶ Martin is also the detailed background to the curative power of the Highlands in Humphry Clinker: medically trained like Smollett himself, he collects instances of wonderful longevity, and a whole herbal of

105. Smollett, Humphry Clinker, pp.250-52.

106. Martin, Description, pp.156, 146, 124.

specifics - eye inflammation in sheep treated with ground shells; horses cured by certain stones steeped in water; stitch and colic relieved by the water of a particular spring; other diseases healed by infusions of seaweed, wild sage, myrtle, plantain; a baby whose mother's milk failed thriving for months on the fat extracted from limpets.¹⁰⁷ There's an impression, not only of a diversely wholesome natural environment, but also of the minute familiarity with it which enables the inhabitants to lead frugally balanced lives. It's an apothecary's idyll. The theme continues to sound through the century, here and there. In Alexander Campbell's poem The Grampians Desolate, in 1804, a somewhat saccharine pastoral includes Niel, a young 'leech' who knows about

Th' astringent tormentil that spreads the heath,
 The caustic spearwort of the lake beneath,
 The kindly groundsel, meet for healing sores,
 The precious eye-bright that lost sight restores...¹⁰⁸
 etc.

In a footnote, Campbell is sceptical about the last of these claims: the credulity of the verse itself reflects not medical naivety but a myth of nature's bounty. To this quasi-natural traditional 'lore', even the most negligible wild plants are full of goodness.

Other idylls, less particularly medicinal, exhibit the same sign of 'good' wilds. Smollett perhaps knew A Full and Particular Description of the Highlands of Scotland, produced in 1752 by a fellow London Scot, John Campbell. This pamphlet, almost provoca-

107. Martin, Descriptions, pp.152, 192, 197, 224, 201.

108. Alexander Campbell, The Grampians Desolate: A Poem (Edinburgh, 1804), p.95.

tively idealising given the prevailing tone of Highland description at the time, represents the same clean air, fresh, varied diet, and long, temperate life; and also - a more unusual touch -

their young Horses are foaled on the Mountains... and are as wild as any of those fierce Creatures that are brought over from the Deserts of Africa, until such Time as they are broke by Labour, which is not easily effected; it is a most delightful Sight to behold thousands of them at a Fare, just come from the Mountains with their long Tails reaching the Ground, their long Mains, and their fine smooth Skins, running and capering about like so many wild Deer; but they become excellent Horses once they are inured to Labour.¹⁰⁹

The conventional 'Highland problem' is felt in the insistence on breaking the horses to labour; but the writing is equally touched by their thronging, long-haired vitality - a prize of the uncultivated hills. It seems an immediate experience: twenty years later Anne Grant, characterising Knoydart by hearsay, is more programmatically primitivistic:

inaccessible precipices, overhanging mountains, and glens narrow, abrupt, and cut through with deep ravines, combining with rapid streams, dark pools, and woods so intricate, that the deer can scarce find their way through them. Yet the natives are looked upon as happier than others. Redundant grass and luxuriant heath offer abundance to their cattle, who are never housed in winter. Deer, wild fowl, and fish, are in great plenty; salmon, in particular, crowd their rivers, and shell fish of all kinds abound on their rugged coasts. All this they enjoy without a rival or competitor, for who would go for it, or carry it away?¹¹⁰

The prelapsarian abundance of this scene, as of Smollett's Argyll, is a gift of nature, not an achievement of industry. Both of the little economies seem unimproved, following the traditional Highland

109. John Campbell, A Full and Particular Description of the Highlands of Scotland (1752), p.16.

110. Anne Grant, Letters from the Mountains, I, 114.

practice of importing cereal for the surplus proceeds of herding and hunting. The Clyde simply 'supplies us' with fish, the salmon 'crowd' the rivers. Even the glens and precipices of Knoydart, the conventional furniture of mountain sublimity, seem rather here to be an expression of nature's superabundant vigour, as well as the providential condition of the inhabitants' pastoral self-sufficiency. Most clearly in Smollett, but implicitly too in all the others, the point about these provisions is that they are to hand, 'for the taking', in the natural setting. Largely independent of foreign luxuries, the natives' diet, as well as being pleasant and healthy in itself, represents their untroubled intimacy with the country.

The significant context of this dissentient version of the land, in which grandeur and challenge give way to friendliness and ease, is that all these writers - Martin, Smollett, Grant, and both Campbells - were, or felt themselves to be, native Highlanders. The sublime, in general, is the expression read on the face of the country by an outsider: the historical encounter underlying the 'prospects' I've documented was ultimately a colonial one, in which the initiative lay with the incoming beholder, and to the land was attributed the passivity, the menace and the pathos of a conquered province - it became, in short, nature as opposed to civilisation. The counter-image of a Highland Arcadia, though no doubt equally mythical, springs the place from that negative typing, and represents it as a habitat, having its own centre and coherence and not simply

waiting to be 'forced to flourish'¹¹¹ by the metropolitan touch. No longer an absence, or a capability of improvement, the Highlands appear freely as an independent locus of goodness and productivity. It was potentially, at least, a strongly anti-imperial myth: in our own century, for example, it works as such in Neil Gunn's novel Butchers Broom (1934), where the figure of Dark Maire is another initiate of the virtues of the mountain flora.

Of course, the idyll received no such political articulation at the time - nor in the early nineteenth-century period in which Gunn's novel is set. But it lingers as the faint sketch of a rejected alternative. Its corollary at the level of land use would have been something like an ecological model of development; and this was not beyond the intellectual range of the age. A prize essay for the Highland Society, written in 1803, urged the claims of what it called 'the true economy of the soil':

The Highlands are laid out for pasturage by the hand of nature, and sheep are the true staple; but the country is also naturally laid out for every part of mixed husbandry...all the necessary materials abounding; and every part, like the links of a golden chain, being connected with, and depending on one another. Cattle alone, are not, and cannot be a safe stock; sheep reared exclusively, turn all into a waste. The trees, if suffered to overspread the country, would convert it into a wilderness; and cropping on a large scale, is more than hazardous, it is impractical.¹¹²

Whether this piecemeal, locally sensitive approach was qualified, in purely agrarian terms, to have saved the Highlands from the tale of destitution and economic decline which marked the next half

111. Aaron Hill, 'The Choice', in Poems, British Poets, 60 (Chiswick, 1822), p.90.

112. Rev. Mr Singer, 'On the Introduction of Sheep Farming into the Highlands', Prize Essays and Transactions of the Highland Society of Scotland, 3 (1807), 536-606 (p.605).

century, can now hardly be asked. It was not a political option: at the time the essay was written, the owners of much of the region were committing themselves to a large-scale sheep-farming whose capitalisation and pricing reflected the requirements of the national economy, and destroyed finally the indigenous social and environmental system of the Highlands, however lavish or pinched that may really have been.¹¹³ And beside this aggressive culture flourished its appropriate myth of nature - a landscape originally bleak, obscure, grand, vast and empty. Clearance and sublimity were secretly paired - the golden chain's broken ends.

113. See Frank Fraser Darling, West Highland Survey (Oxford, 1955), pp.3-13.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SUPERSTITIONS OF THE HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND, CONSIDERED
AS THE SUBJECT OF POETRY1 The Ode

Highlanders were generally understood to be superstitious. Belief in an assortment of supernatural appearances was supposed to be surviving in the north and west, or to have died out only recently; and the Second Sight, extensively documented by Martin, was perhaps the commonest cultural identifier of the Highlands in the earlier part of the century. This motif - in which the themes of backwardness and sublimity are once again combined - brings the history of Highland colonisation oddly into relation with the history of English poetry. The immediate point of intersection is Collins's unfinished last poem, 'Ode to a Friend on his Return &c.' Written in 1749, just as the state's policy of assimilation was forming, the ode envies the friend, a Scottish poet, just his country's strangeness, and the opportunities its uncivilised condition affords the imagination:

'Tis thine to Sing how framing hideous Spells
 In Skys lone Isle the Gifted Wizzard Seer
 Lodg'd in the Wintry cave with
 Or in the depth of Ust's dark forrests dwells
 How They whose Sight such dreary dreams engross
 With their own Visions oft astonish'd droop
 When o'er the watry strath or quaggy Moss
 They see the gliding Ghosts unbodied troop.¹

1. 'Ode to a Friend on his Return &c.', in William Collins, Works, edited by R. Wendorf and C. Ryskamp (Oxford, 1979), line 53.

This image, as Roger Lonsdale points out in his note on it,² counts among its complicated ancestry the moment in Milton's 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' when

The flocking shadows pale
Troop to th' infernall jail,
Each fetter'd Ghost slips to his severall grave.

It's then interesting to set Collins's lines against a separate descendant of Milton's, from Joseph Warton's 'To Superstition', one of the odes published simultaneously with Collins's own 1746 volume:

So by the Magi hail'd from far,
When PHOEBUS mounts his early car,
The shrieking ghosts to their dark charnels flock.³

Warton follows Milton very closely indeed, not only in the shape of the stanza and the content of the image, but also in the figure's rhetorical function: both are using the re-incarceration of ghosts at sunrise as a simile for the routing of superstition by a more powerful illumination - Christ in Milton, Reason in Warton. Collins, by contrast, releases the picturesquely trooping ghosts from the strict and conceited logic of their original context, and - rather than making them mean something else - simply leaves them to make an impression. The syntax leading up to their appearance ('to Sing ... How They ... droop ... When ... They see ...') is no less elaborate than Milton's, but whereas Milton's constructions work to bind the exotic ghosts and fays in to a significative purpose, those of Collins serve an ingenious evasion

2. The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith, edited by R.H. Lonsdale (1969), p.506n.
3. 'Ode to Superstition', in Joseph Warton, Odes on Various Subjects (1746), Augustan Society Reprint (Los Angeles, 1979), line 25.

of statement: the ghosts are seen, not by the poet, but by notably unspecified others; their visions are to be sung, not by Collins, but by the friend he addresses; even that attenuated connection is qualified by the interposition, between the friend and the visions, of the seers' unspoken reactions. Thus the poem refrains, in every sense, from consigning its ghosts to the infernal jail, contriving instead that they should be troublingly, directionlessly at large.

The point of the refused closure is conversely suggested by a distinct uneasiness in Warton's poem. There, the simile of the ghosts is superficially apt, but only because it's drawn from just the repertoire of superstition which it's supposed to be banishing. The belief in ghosts is as hideous and insubstantial as a ghost. So there's a sort of rhetorical duplicity, corresponding to the distinction made in Warton's 'Advertisement'⁴ to the Odes between 'moralizing in verse' (which here takes the form of demystifying superstition's 'ghastly train of terrors' as the delusions of ignorance) and 'Invention and Imagination' (which take the form of exploiting the same terrors as a source of descriptive and affective power); and when the ode comes to rest in the temple of Truth

Where CLARKE and WOOLASTON reside
With LOCKE and NEWTON by their side,⁵

it is disowning its earlier imagery, which is, in turn, shrill - 'shrieking', 'charnels' - with that tension.

4. Warton, Odes (1746), p.3.

5. 'Ode to Superstition', line 34.

The mention of Locke is historically pertinent. Superstition was, as the interest of critics such as Addison or Hurd indicates, a significant test-case for the poetics of the early century, because fairies, ghosts and spirits constituted an area of pure invention, where the poet apparently floated free from the empirical moorings of language and produced, as Dryden had said, a 'kind of writing which depends only upon the Force of Imagination'.⁶ However, Warton's poem is one of many signs that this privileged homeland of imagery is felt to be shrinking because poet and reader cannot continue, in the light of the new science, to believe in its terms. Thus poetry seems to be cut off from its deepest sources by knowledge itself. It is what Geoffrey Hartman has called, taking his phrase from the 'Ode to a Friend', the dilemma of 'False Themes and Gentle Minds': the poet's crippling choice between expression and truth. In less well-informed ages, obscurity and ignorance may have engendered the wonder and fancy that make true poetry, but

the Enlightenment had gone too far for the old superstitions ever to come back. Collins's visionary cry

'Ah Fear! Ah Frantic Fear!
I see, I see Thee near'

invokes an emotion which is truly frantic: it wants to get at the poet, who wishes to be got at, but a historical fatality - the gentle mind, polite society - keeps them apart.⁷

The fatality is generalised, with remarkable historical awareness, by Thomas Blackwell in his essay on Homer in 1735.

6. Quoted in The Spectator, edited by D.F. Bond, 5 vols (Oxford, 1965), III, 570.

7. Geoffrey Hartman, Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-70 (1970), p.291.

It does not, he says,

seem to be given to one and the same Kingdom, to be
thoroughly civilized, and afford proper Subjects
for Poetry. The Marvellous and Wonderful is the
Nerve of the Epic Strain: But what marvellous
Things happen in a well-ordered State? We can
hardly be surprized; We know the Springs and
Method of acting; Every thing happens in Order,
and according to Custom or Law.⁸

He goes on to instance, as characteristic literary successes of a civilised state in this sense, The Way of the World and The Rape of the Lock. The choice is exact: both works, depicting with conscious artifice an artificial life, are the appropriate texts of a society informed and permeated by calculation, method, knowledge and convention. His insight indicates the full scope of the 'polite' context in which Hartman places Collins's desire for a numinous fear: it's not merely etiquette, but the ascendancy of a whole ideology of analysis and control, which stands between the poet and 'the World unknown / With all its shadowy shapes'⁹ - the 'civilized' structuring of both society and knowledge which we have already encountered in the Highlands as Improvement.

In Collins's 'Descriptive and Allegoric' Odes, this alienated predicament of the poet often appears as a missed experience: the speaker of the ode is pleading to hear, or see, or feel, something that would fill his empty, self-imprisoned utterance. At the close of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character', to take a leading example, it seems that the visions of fancy have been withdrawn, and that

8. Thomas Blackwell, An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer (1735), p.26.

9. Collins, 'Ode to Fear', line 1.

poetry, at least in the sense known to Milton, has become impossible.¹⁰ Read in this context, the simpleness of the 'Ode to a Friend' has in it a tone of relief at a remade connection. The poet's world has come back:

Fresh to that soil thou turn'st, whose ev'ry Vale
 Shall prompt the Poet, and his Song demand;
 To Thee thy copious Subjects ne'er shall fail
 Thou need'st but take the Pencil to thy Hand
 And paint what all believe who own thy Genial Land.¹¹

The subjects of the 1746 Odes were only too liable to 'fail' because of their uncertain provenance, half allegorical and half psychological; the 'veil between' of the 'Ode to Fear' could fall as mysteriously as it lifted. Here, in contrast, is a source which is external, stable, and innocent of moods - simply there, like the landscape-painter's chosen spot:

'Thou need'st but take the Pencil to thy Hand'.

The imagery amplifies the delightful practicality of the task: the land is 'soil', and soon afterwards, with a literalism almost oxymoronic,

''Tis Fancy's Land to which thou set'st thy Feet' -
 the 'fancied Glades' tantalisingly glimpsed in the 'Poetical Character' ode can now be visited on foot.¹² Scotland squares the circle, providing the imaginary with an empirical base.

The special condition of this reconciliation is the idea of a community in which belief in fairies is general. This Collins

10. Collins, 'Ode on the Poetical Character', lines 73-76.

11. Collins, 'Ode to a Friend', line 13.

12. 'Ode to a Friend', line 19; 'Ode on the Poetical Character', line 64.

derived from Martin Martin.

John Morison, who lives in Bernera of Harris, wears the plant called fuga daemonum sewed in the neck of his coat, to prevent his seeing of visions, and says he never saw any since he first carried that plant about him. He suffered me to feel the plant in the neck of his coat, but would by no means let me open the seam, though I offered him a reward to let me do it.¹³

Martin's pedestrian prose is comically far from the airily impassioned rhapsody his details occasioned. But for Collins's angle of interest, the plainness, the unenchanted demand for evidence, is just the valuable point, giving exotic fancies the style of quotidian fact. It's an ironic contrast: the metropolitan poet with his warm urgent desire to see visions, and the islander with his charm to avoid seeing them, dry and tangible in his collar. And 'the facts' even at this level are distorted by the diametric opposition of approaches; the very nature of Collins's requirements sets up a number of deviations.

The first of these concerns historical time. The passage just quoted from Martin continues:

A spirit, by the country people called Browny, was frequently seen in all the most considerable families in the isles and north of Scotland, in the shape of a tall man; but within these twenty or thirty years he is seen but rarely.

There were spirits also that appeared in the shape of women, horses, swine, cats, and some like fiery balls, which would follow men in the fields; but there has been but few instances of these for forty years past.

Although the edition which Collins probably consulted was printed in 1716, Martin's book is avowedly describing the islands 'circa

13. Martin, Description, p.347.

1695'; its 'forty years past' thus represents a period almost a century before the writing of the 'Ode'. This lapse of time Collins chooses to ignore, yet covertly reproduces in evasive markers of time -

Where still, tis said, the Fairy People meet;

Ev'n yet preserv'd how often may'st thou hear...
 Taught by the Father to his list'ning Son
 Strange lays;

On Whose bleak rocks which brave the wasting tides
 Fair Nature's Daughter Virtue yet Abides!¹⁴

Such back-handed admissions of the fairy world's decay are gestures of pathos rather than scholarly accuracy: even as the poetry wills the fugitive beliefs to be objectively current, it warms to the nostalgia of their passing. A simply thriving animism could hardly speak to the Augustan predicament at all; a simply extinct animism could offer it nothing. An equivocation of tenses arrests the Hebridean history in the attitude of Collins's own sophisticated, receding supernaturalism.

The supernaturalist emphasis is itself a second, vital deviation from the information Collins has seized upon. Martin's prevailing tone, as we saw earlier, speaks an omnivorous scientific curiosity, particularly about idiosyncrasies of medicine and diet. Since the beliefs and practices of the islanders in this sphere are an undifferentiated mixture of local improvisation, herbal cures, and sympathetic magic, the writing often reproduces a notable indifference to the boundary, essential to Collins's

14. 'Ode to a Friend', lines 20, 36, 156.

poem, between the natural and the 'superstitious'. For instance -

There are several springs and fountains of curious effects; such as that at Loch Carlvay, that never whitens Linen, which hath often been tried by the inhabitants. The well at St. Cowsten's Church never boils any kind of meat, though it be kept on fire a whole day. St. Andrew's Well, in the village Shader, is by the vulgar natives made a test to know if a sick person will die of the distemper he labours under. They send one with a wooden dish to bring some of the water to the patient, and if the dish, which is then laid softly upon the surface of the water, turn round sun-ways, they conclude that the patient will recover of that distemper; but if otherwise, that he will die.¹⁵

The first of these three looks fairly easily assimilable to the criteria of natural science; the second is more dubious; the third is clearly magical. But neither Martin nor the 'natives' has any interest in establishing that great divide. (Martin is interested to know which assertions are true, but that's not the same distinction.) Collins, in complete contrast, has so consuming an interest in the moment of violation of the laws of nature that he can list elf-shot cows, runic bards, and 'wizzards' in simple succession: it's the twilit land of superstition as such that fascinates him, and the various cats that prowl there are all grey. What he seeks is not the substantive belief but the feeling, the shock of numinous disclosure, which accompanies its narrating. Even the most humdrum superstition he mentions - putting out cream for the 'swart tribes' - is therefore heightened by mysterious 'jocund notes' heard in the air; and the test with the floating

15. Martin, Description, p.89.

bowl, we can say, couldn't have been 'used' in the poem, although its imagery is beautiful, because its dispassionate, scientific style fails to arouse awe - there is magic, but no affective rupture with the ordinary world. Thus the quality of Collins's interest in Hebridean superstitions impels him to reorganise their easy intermingling with other kinds of knowledge into an anxious dichotomy; and this motivates a Highlands of melancholy and fear, quite unlike Martin's.

A similar revision affects the idea of the Second Sight. In this case the development is more complicated because more information was available about it by 1749 than about most aspects of Highland life. This reflected a flurry of interest in it towards the close of the seventeenth century, mainly the philosophical curiosity of a number of gentlemen connected with the Royal Society. Pepys, the most energetic of them, corresponded in 1699-1700 with Lord Reay, Bishop Hicke and Lord Clarendon: Reay passed on material from Viscount Tarbat, who had drawn it up some years before in response to a similar inquiry of Robert Boyle's;¹⁶ Evelyn records a casual conversation on the subject in 1685;¹⁷ Aubrey, who published his correspondence on it with two ministers of the Kirk in 1696,¹⁸ speaks for all the members of this loose and enquiring circle when he declares that he is 'curious for nothing

16. Private Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers of Samuel Pepys, 1697-1703; edited by J.R. Tanner, 2 vols (1926), I, 213-25.

17. Diary of John Evelyn, edited by E.S. de Beer, 4 vols (Oxford, 1955), IV, 470.

18. John Aubrey, 'An Accurate Account of Second-Sighted Men in Scotland', reprinted in Treatises on the Second Sight, (Glasgow, 1819), p.207-25.

but the verity'.¹⁹ Martin himself, whose work, published in 1703, grew out of a paper contributed to the Royal Society in 1697, clearly fits this group in date and tone. They all begin by asking whether the phenomenon - the appearance to certain persons of future or distant events, usually deaths - really occurs, and, on being satisfied by the weight of attestation that it does, proceed to ask what exactly it is, and what causes it. Atmospheric, optical, psychological and supernatural theories are variously and coolly canvassed: the motive is evidently the interest, for an intellectual generation which combines experimental method with a rather elaborately populous spirit world, of a marginal manifestation which might suggest a horizon of natural science. A slightly different treatment, the Rev. John Frazer of Tiree's Deuteroscopia, published in 1707 but written before 1700, seems to be actually situated on the boundary. Suspended uncomfortably between his intellectual milieu (the book is dedicated to Tarbat) and his vestigially popish and pagan parish, Frazer compares the Second Sight with more familiar perceptual disorders such as refraction and hallucination, and surprisingly argues that if minor natural causes can produce effects like that, worse is only to be expected from 'the prince of the air ... who is better seen in the nature of the elements and their compounds'.²⁰ This diabolical applied chemist, using his superhuman expertise to

19. Quoted in Norman Macrae, Highland Second-Sight: With Prophecies of Coinneach Odhar and the Seer of Petty (Dingwall, 1908), p.41.

20. John Frazer of Tiree, Deuteroscopia; or, a Brief Discourse concerning the Second Sight (Edinburgh, 1707), pp.30-31. On the title page the first word is printed in Greek characters.

confuse the uneducated Hebridean, is an incomplete rationalisation of the world of the straight demographers like George Sinclair (Satans Invisible World Discovered, in 1685) and Robert Kirk (Secret Commonwealth, in 1691). For these two the Second Sight is not, as it is for Pepys and his friends, an isolated oddity, but a minor means of access to a universe, satanic in Sinclair and fairy in Kirk, which takes on a bewildering variety of forms in different places, this being only one of its Highland forms. The purpose of both is to confound scepticism about the spirit world, which they regard as a step on the broad road to atheism.

These frames of enquiry lasted well into the eighteenth century. Johnson's account in the Journey to the Western Islands, open-minded speculation on the basis of testimony, is in the manner of Aubrey;²¹ and the devotional deployment of the case is seen at length in A Treatise on the Second Sight, produced by 'Theophilus Insulanus' in 1763.²² Exploitation of this exotic and uncertain body of knowledge, however, took rather different directions; an intriguing early example is a pamphlet of Defoe's, The Second-Sighted Highlander. Being Four Visions of the Eclypse, published in 1715. In this unblushingly opportunistic piece (the prophecies are all about European diplomacy; the Highland seer is merely a novel disguise for Isaac Bickerstaffe), the Second Sight is conflated both with astrology and with the unmediated intellectual

21. Johnson, Journey, pp.97-100.

22. Theophilus Insulanus, A Treatise on the Second Sight, Dreams and Apparitions, reprinted in Treatises on the Second Sight, pp.2-173.

vision by which the neoplatonic adept sees 'the natural Coherence of things one with another'.²³ Defoe's fantastic rhetorical framework is thus crudely proleptic of many later fictional uses of the phenomenon in assimilating it with other, heterogeneous types of vision and prevision in a generalised image of what he calls 'sublime Illumination'. The Second Sight, the reader learns, is,

that superiour Gift, by which a more intense Sight of things to come is communicated, and whereby, in sacred Raptures, such Vision is convey'd as is not only incommunicable, but inexpressible from one Man to another.²⁴

Both these ideas - that the reception of the visions is ecstatic, and that their content is ineffable - are quite foreign to all the sources I've mentioned. On the contrary, the sightings seem to be quite matter-of-fact experiences, if sometimes distressing, and as easy to describe as ordinary visible objects. In rendering them more conformable to the models of Delphi and Ezekiel, Defoe also has recourse to a *mise-en-scène*:

Led by this Ray of supernatural Light it was, that, at Midnight ... standing on the highest Pinnacle of the Mountain Aphlec, in one of the floating Islands of the miraculous Lough-loman, I was mov'd to regard the Aspect of celestial Nature.

The Dancers, those Igni fatui of the Northern Regions, those Lights found in the Abyss of Darkness, shone brightly with their dazzling and unsteady Rays, leaving Nature it self ... at a Loss, and in the Dark, to know from whence they proceed.²⁵

23. Daniel Defoe, The Second-Sighted Highlander. Being Four Visions of the Eclypse, And something of what may follow. (1715), p.23. Defoe also wrote The Highland Visions; or, the Scots New Prophecy (1712), a less picturesque version of the same idea.
24. The Second-Sighted Highlander, p.3.
25. The Second-Sighted Highlander, p.6.

The prophet atop the Highland mountain looks like a precociously romantic figure for a moment, and would be more so but for the floating island: Defoe is almost doing a sublime landscape, but not quite, because he confines himself to elements which, like the Northern Lights and the island, are improbable travellers' tales, capable of doubling up as natural and miraculous.²⁶ Still, the lurid visionary setting, the night lit by brilliant and fitful disturbances signifying the uncertain radiance of the vision itself, is oddly anticipatory of Macpherson.

These innovations - the rapture, the inexpressible experience, and the expressive setting - all represent a tendency to emotionalise the phenomenon; to turn away from both the physical and the metaphysical explanations of the straight enquiries, and dramatise the Second Sight as a psychological event. Kirk, for example, had insisted that the objects of vision were

no Nonentities or Phantasms, Creatures proceeding from ane affrighted Apprehensione, confused or crazed Sense, but Realities, appearing to a stable Man in his awaking Sense, and enduring a rationally Tryall of their Being.²⁷

This categorical clarity is just what Defoe's decorations blur, re-immersing the visions in the ambiguities of mood and atmosphere. If this shift towards the subjective tends to impugn the reality of

26. Defoe himself reported the floating island of Loch Lomond as 'a F -'. See Daniel Defoe, Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain, edited by G.D.H. Cole, 2 vols (1962), II, 428.
27. Robert Kirk, Secret Commonwealth, printed from MS of 1691 (Edinburgh, 1815), p.15.

the prescience, so much the better: the political prophet seizes the opportunity to hedge his bets:

every one is at Liberty to take the above Account
either for a real Prediction, or a fictitious Fabulous
Ramble of the Fancy; for we will impose nothing yet.²⁸

This delightful freedom to postpone a definite choice between stating and rambling, fact and fiction, which enables Defoe to outflank the demand that his predictions should be reliable, is for Collins the means of a more complex evasion. It's worth quoting his Second Sight stanza again, at greater length. The friend is to sing

How They whose Sight such dreary dreams engross
With their own Visions oft astonish'd droop
When o'er the watry strath or quaggy Moss
They see the gliding Ghosts unbodied troop
Or if in Sports or on the festive Green
Their glance some fated Youth descry
Who now perhaps in lusty Vigour seen
And rosy health shall soon lamented die
For them the viewless Forms of Air obey
Their bidding heed, and at their beck repair
They know what Spirit brews the storm full day
And heartless oft like moody Madness stare
To see the Phantom train their secret work prepare!

This reproduces the themes that were prominent in Defoe, despite the difference in tone and purpose: the reception of the vision is made into a psychological crisis (though the 'sacred Raptures' have darkened into 'moody Madness'); the conviction that the experience is incommunicable is suggested by 'dreams' and 'secret', and confirmed by the emphatic repetition of 'they' and 'their', identifying the seers as a distinct order of men; and

28. The Second-Sighted Highlander, p.44.

the visionary scenery is deftly sketched in the 'watry strath' and the impending storm. Thus, consistently, the stanza glides away from overt supernaturalism: its air of occult expertise is undermined by 'dreams', 'unbodied', 'perhaps', 'viewless'. The reality of the passage is centrally the seeing, drooping, bidding and staring of the seers, not what they see, whose objectivity remains doubtful. Perhaps they're gifted, perhaps mad. It's Defoe's escape-clause exactly, but used in reverse; for where the prophet tactically escapes from falsifiable assertion, the alienated poet escapes from the merely false theme - from the solipsism of a merely fictional world - to the possibility that far away in the north all this is true. It seems unlikely that Collins was influenced by Defoe's ephemeral and ultimately flippant pamphlet: the structural similarity of the imagery, despite the great disparity of rhetorical cause, suggests how broadly based the cultural demands made on the myth are.

One further equivocation points us to the crux of Collins's particular construction. The stanza, in another emendation of the source information, rewrites the Second Sight, a kind of perception, in the terms of power. On the one hand, the seer is oppressed by the visions - he is engrossed, astonished, heartless. On the other, he is their master - they obey him and come at his call. Is he then the godlike controller, or the helpless victim, of these insubstantial images? This is exactly the question which, implicitly asked of the poet, contorts the structure of the Odes

to Pity and Fear. Thus the crisis from which Collins resorted to the Highlands in the first place - that of the power of poetic imagery - is written into the developed portrayal: the Second Sight functions as the type of Imagination in general. A later critic, William Duff, who is very unlikely to have seen the 'Ode', writes, in 1767, of an 'original author' -

By the vigorous effort of a creative Imagination, he calls shadowy substances and unreal objects into existence. They are present to his view, and glide, like spectres, in silent, sullen majesty, before his astonished and intranced sight.²⁹

In this remarkably smooth conceptual fit, we can see the old supernature of Highland superstition adapted to the new supernature of original genius: Collins's logic is fulfilled in the coalescence of mage, seer and poet. And when, half a century later, a Celtophile essayist, Anne Grant, argues that the Second Sight is evidence of the Highlanders' refined sensibility -

"When coming events cast their shadows before," it is the smooth and calm surface that arrests and reflects them. It is not the vain, the volatile, the turbulent, or artful who combine the habits of deep meditation and sensitive and fantastic feeling, which nourish this creative faculty³⁰ -

the unargued equation of seer and creative poet shows how Collins's half-suggested analogy has grown into a received identity. So the Ode's ingenious suspension of Milton's spectre-banishing sunrise accedes to its full meaning: the superstitious Highlands were being enlisted for the rearguard action conducted by poetic language itself against the absolute criterion of representational truth which threatened to imprison it.

29. William Duff, An Essay on Original Genius (1767), p.177.

30. Anne Grant, Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, 2 vols (1811), II, 35.

Of course, the Ode also contains a more direct image of poetry. The friend, wandering among the mountains, is to hear the performance of 'strange lays':

At Ev'ry Pause, before thy Mind possest,
 Old Runic Bards shall seem to rise around
 With uncouth Lyres, in many-colour'd Vest,
 Their Matted Hair with boughs fantastic crown'd
 Whether Thou bidst the well-taught Hind repeat
 The Choral Dirge that mourns some Chieftain brave
 When Ev'ry Shrieking Maid her bosom beat
 And strew'd with choicest herbs his scented Grave
 Or whether sitting in the Shepherd's Shiel
 Thou hear'st some Sounding Tale of War's alarms.³¹

The wild bards are a sign of how specifically the Highland features are taken up against Enlightenment. Collins has assembled the image from a number of negative sources. The apparent source of the 'Runic' idea is Sir William Temple, who describes the 'Runers' as surviving until fairly recently in Ireland, singing about the deeds of great men's ancestors; and remarks, 'In such poor wretched Weeds as these was Poetry cloathed'.³² Martin authorises the application of this judgment in commenting on the bent for poetry of the people of Skye: their verses 'powerfully affect the fancy' but 'the unhappiness of their education ... deprives them of the opportunity to cultivate and beautify their genius'.³³ Collins seems to have adorned this impression of uncouth forceful-

31. 'Ode to a Friend', line 40.

32. Sir William Temple, 'Of Poetry', in Temple, Five Miscellaneous Essays, edited by S.H. Monk (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1963), pp.173-203 (p.194).

33. Martin, Description, p.241.

ness with equally unpromising material: behind the realisation of the 'wretched Weeds' Lonsdale traces 'A tribe, with weeds and shells fantastic crown'd'³⁴ - the sordid virtuosi of the Dunciad - and behind them is surely the mad Lear. The image is thus a fine example of primitivism piecing itself together out of the rejects of cultivated sensibility.

But the negativity runs deeper than that. The complication is that Collins isn't imagining that the fantastically crowned bards exist, or even that they ever existed: they are the visions that will appear to the friend's 'possesst' mind in the intervals of hearing the lay, so that what we have is a poem describing a poet imagining other poets while listening to a poem. The shrieking maids, who are mentioned because they accompanied the original performance of the dirge the well-taught hind now repeats for the visitor, are barely more substantial. And the action - the bravery of the Chieftain or the War's alarms - lie still more remote beyond the bards and maids, as if at the far end of a tunnel of mirrors. The whole society, historically real in theory, dissolves in practice into the same play of poetic self-consciousness which engulfs the figments of superstition. The trick the Highlands are to bring off for Collins's poetic friend - that there the unreal is real - is unluckily reversible.

34. Lonsdale, p.505n.

2 The Friend

It's well known that both the Ode and its addressee, John Home, had curious subsequent histories. The poem somehow disappeared among the papers of Home's friend Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk, whence it was excavated only after Johnson's 'Life' of the author had passed on a rumour of its existence obtained from the Wartons. It was eventually published in 1788.³⁵ By that time Home had of course long been famous as the author of Douglas, the national and historical tragedy which, first staged with sensational and controversial success in 1756, enjoyed equal acclaim later in the century as a vehicle for Siddons, who first appeared in it in Edinburgh in 1784. At the time the Ode was written, Home had been a country minister and unsuccessful author - the object of his journey to London had been to sell his first play, Agis, to Garrick, who turned it down. When his literary career emerged, did it take the course Collins pointed out for it?

The difficulties of this question are neatly illustrated by what is, as far as I know, the only direct connection between the Ode and Douglas: the 'Kaelpie'. This malevolent water-sprite is the subject of an extended episode in the Ode, and since it isn't mentioned by Martin, it's reasonable to assume that Collins heard

35. Lonsdale, pp.492-501.

about it from Home. In Act III of Douglas it appears as local colour for the stormy night 'some eighteen years ago' on which Norval's adoptive father rescued him from the river:

The wind and rain beat hard upon our roof:
Red came the river down, and loud and oft
The angry spirit of the water shriek'd.³⁶

The use of the image doesn't seem very striking to a modern eye unused to the pallor of eighteenth-century tragic decorum. But then it's odd to see how Home's line is in fact remembered and gets crossed with Collins: Tytler, annotating the Ode in 1788, glosses 'Kaelpie' as 'A name given in Scotland to a supposed spirit of the waters';³⁷ and a letter of Thomas Warton's, written long after he saw the manuscript but before the poem's publication, recalls 'a beautiful description of the spectre of a man drowned in the night, or in the language of the old Scotch superstitions - seized by the angry spirit of the waters.'³⁸ This conflation of the two passages (which were eventually juxtaposed explicitly by Nathan Drake in an essay of 1798)³⁹ suggests how well Home's diction interpreted the Kaelpie to the taste of his age. By toning the monster down until it is an invisible, faintly idiomatic personification of a natural force, his image retains just enough

36. The Works of John Home, edited by Henry Mackenzie, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1822), I, 330.

37. 'Ode to a Friend', line 100 and n.

38. Lonsdale, pp.495-96.

39. Nathan Drake, Literary Hours; or, Sketches Literary, Narrative and Poetical, fourth edition, 3 vols (1820), II, 157-59.

of the 'uncouth' superstition to enliven, without destroying, the neoclassical frame of tragic universality. Both Tytler and Warton have forgotten where their phrase comes from: 'the old Scotch superstitions' speak directly in Home's words, which are as it were the obvious ones.

This thoroughgoing translation into the prevailing poetic code is typical of the tragedy as a whole. Its claim to a national heritage seems to turn on its allegedly being based on the ballad of Gil Morrice; but although connections can be traced, it is at least equally dependent, as Alice Gipson points out, on Voltaire's Merope, which was playing in London at the time of Home's visit.⁴⁰ As far as the story goes, Douglas is not in the shadow of either source: the crucial point is that the dramatic convention - the confidante, the painfully plotted high points of recognition and reversal, the delayed, demystifying appearance of a sub-Sophoclean shepherd - is wholly from Voltaire. If it was homespun, the cut was certainly French. Collins had urged:

Proceed, in forcefull sounds and Colours bold
The Native Legends of thy land rehearse
To such adapt thy Lyre, and suit thy pow'rfull
Verse.⁴¹

But in the upshot the adapting and suiting left little of the native force and colour. Collins had justified some deviation from the canons of criticism in the use of popular beliefs by pointing to the precedent of Shakespeare, but a more immediately pressing counter-view was put by David Hume, writing in 1755/56

40. Alice Gipson, John Home (Caldwell, Idaho, 1916), pp.59-61. Compare Mackenzie's comments in The Works of John Home, I, 92.

41. 'Ode to a Friend', line 185.

after seeing the draft of Douglas:

The story is simple and natural; but what chiefly delights me, is to find the language so pure, correct and moderate. For God's sake, read Shakespeare, but get Racine and Sophocles by heart. It is reserved to you, and you alone, to redeem our stage from the reproach of barbarism.⁴²

This mission was not compatible with the theatrical exploitation of native ghosts and fairies.

Despite the prevailing correctness and moderation, one revealing touch of gothic is to be found in Act IV. It comes in response to a typically naturalistic problem: the hero, young Norval, has been brought up as a shepherd's son in the Grampians, yet he appears at Lord Randolph's establishment a fully fledged warrior. What is the source of his military skill? Norval explains that he has been taught by an old hermit, formerly a soldier, now the melancholy tenant of a remote mountain cave, but tempted to relive his youth by Norval's enthusiasm. This figure was once a Crusader, but retired from the world after killing his brother by mistake:

In the wild desert on a rock he sits,
Or on some nameless stream's untrodden banks,
And ruminates all day his dreadful fate.
At times, alas! not in his perfect mind,
Holds dialogues with his loved brother's ghost.⁴³

'Not in his perfect mind' is holding the uncanny very firmly at arm's length, and a ghost of this sort is clearly not tied to a particular folklore. But it's striking, nonetheless, that the conscientious attempt to motivate an expertise arbitrarily required

42. Quoted in The Works of John Home, I, 100.

43. The Works of John Home, I, 349.

by the plot should have produced an ensemble so close to that of Collins: the picturesque desert setting, the youth attending to the rehearsal of a far-off time of war and sorrow, and the appearance of the supernatural in a context of extreme emotion. Clearly there's a strain in Home's imagination that tends beyond the disciplines of the neoclassical stage, in the direction of the native exotica offered by the Ode.

Three years later, on 2 October 1759, Home delightedly told Carlyle 'that he had at last found what he had been long wishing for, a person who could make him acquainted with ancient Highland poetry, of which he had heard so much'. This well-taught hind was James Macpherson, and Home was particularly pleased because he was not only 'a native of the remote Highlands', but also 'an exceeding good classical scholar'.⁴⁴ The project of a reconciliation between barbaric superstition and polite learning was inscribed upon the strange cult of Ossian from its first day. This is immediately visible in the 'translations' Macpherson produced on the spot, for example in the very first - the account of the death of Oscar subsequently printed as the seventh of the Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland

44. Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland, appointed to inquire into the nature and authenticity of the poems of Ossian, drawn up by Henry Mackenzie (Edinburgh, 1805), pp.66-68. This document is cited hereafter as Highland Society Report. The story of Macpherson's literary career doesn't need repeating here. The clearest and most accurate of many accounts is in R.M. Schmitz, Hugh Blair (New York, 1948), pp.42-60 and 88-90.

in 1760.⁴⁵ In it, a lover contrives to be killed by his friend and rival, who then contrives to be killed by the beloved, who then dies: this geometric murderousness reflects the formalism of Home's tragedy, both in the episode of the Crusader and in the main plot. It turns out to be typical of the Fragments in general: time after time, lovers, friends, or siblings cause each other's deaths through error or trickery, in symmetrical, grotesquely unlucky patterns of destruction. Of course Home wasn't unique in constructing his tragedies along these lines: the point is not so much a particular connection between the two writers as Macpherson's general indebtedness, before any talk of the 'epics' that were to follow, to the devices and conventions of late neo-classical literature, and especially to the stage. Many of the Fragments are in fact dramatic in form - dialogues, or soliloquies, or else (like the death of Oscar) stories which include a narrative pretext, a grief-stricken narrator, and an interlocutor, and so resemble dramatic exposition.

So what was the situation of the para-normal in this fragmentary tragic drama? P.M. Spacks suggests that the belief that Macpherson's poems were ancient provided an escape-route for the imagination from the Collins dilemma between power and truth: the ancient bard could be presumed, on rather better grounds than Collins had presumed Tasso, to have been a

45. Fragment VII, Laing, II, 393. For the background to the Fragments, see R.H. Carnie, 'Macpherson's Fragments of Ancient Poetry and Lord Hailes', English Studies, 41 (1960), 17-26.

Prevailing Poet, whose undoubting Mind
Believ'd the Magic Wonders which He sung!⁴⁶

In a limited sense this is clearly true. Speaking in the persona of Ossian, a modern poet could dispense with such concessions to the 'natural' as would otherwise be required. But in practice Macpherson's superstition is 'translated' into a code as firmly, if not as narrowly, constrained as Home's. Here is the first violation of the laws of nature encountered by the reader of the

Fragments:

Yes, my fair, I return; but I alone of my race.
Thou shalt see them no more: their graves I raised
on the plain. But why art thou on the desert hill?
why on the heath, alone?

Alone I am, O Shilric! alone in the winter-house.
With grief for thee I expired. Shilric, I am pale in
the tomb.

She fleets, she sails away; as grey mist before
the wind!⁴⁷

Shilric, one gathers, is the last survivor of a shadowy and disastrous expedition; the girl, who died because of her love for him, appears in spectral form because of his love for her. The external justification of the ghost is the primitive and therefore superstitious culture from which the text is supposed to come, but its inherent, formal justification is the extreme psychological pressure of the situation. Where Collins's ghosts were, with dubious authenticity, accompanied by emotion, Macpherson goes a step further and reduces this one to an epiphenomenon of

46. P.M. Spacks, The Insistence of Horror (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 85-87. The quotation is from 'Ode to a Friend', line 19⁸.

47. Fragment II, Laing, II, 387.

emotion. Characteristically it 'fleets', is relinquished as a dear illusion. The next one is similar:

But Oh! what voice is that? Who rides on the meteor
of fire! Green are his airy limbs. It is he! it is
the ghost of Malcolm! Rest, lovely soul, rest on
the rock; and let me hear thy voice. He is gone,
like a dream of the night.⁴⁸

Again, the crux of the haunting is the expression of emotion: the theatrical utterance, with its pedantically marked transitions from one passion to the next, refers the production of the ghost to the inflamed emotional state of the speaker. Such apparitions are condensed, as it were, from the apostrophes of the diction itself: as Hartman says, 'Their essence is vocative'.⁴⁹ Thus the reader is offered a ghostly thrill of fear, but at the same time the pathos of the all-but-unhinged mind to which the ghost is real. The Augustan control of Home's

At times, alas! not in his perfect mind is not slipped by the bold device of antiquity, but merely rendered implicit; and the hesitant, finely compromised subjectivisation of the Ode hardens into a dependable formula.

The broad rhetorical utility of this attenuated and sentimental supernaturalism is ingenuously revealed by Blair:

It is a great advantage of Ossian's mythology, that it is not local and temporary, like that of most other ancient poets; which of course is apt to seem ridiculous, after the superstitions have passed away on which it was founded. Ossian's mythology is, to speak so, the mythology of human nature; for it is founded on what has been the

48. Fragment III, Laing, II, 388.

49. Geoffrey Hartman, The Fate of Reading and Other Essays (1975), p.165.

popular belief, in all ages and countries, and under all forms of religion, concerning the appearances of departed spirits. Homer's machinery is always lively and amusing; but far from being always supported with proper dignity. The indecent squabbles among his gods, surely do no honour to epic poetry. Whereas Ossian's machinery has dignity upon all occasions.⁵⁰

This conveniently theorises the prevailing inversion of priority: just as, in Collins, the supposed beliefs and experiences of the Hebrideans appear only to prompt the song, and as in the Fragments the ghosts are called into existence by the speech which pretends to be a response to them, so here the deities who by a paper-thin alibi are to be honoured by the poetry, actually face the demand that they should honour it. Macpherson's success is that by assimilating his 'machinery' to what his critic thinks of as extra-historical - sensibility - he creates a spirit world with no objective particulars to check the current of sympathetic feeling. It is, exactly, 'the mythology of human nature', the immaterial pantheon of a universal rationalism. The Fingalians have spectres and portents but no divinity: this bizarre cosmology, at once credulous and agnostic, turbidly reflects the ambiguities of the Kirk of Robertson and Blair, from which it was projected.

The absence of any supernatural beings of a more highly differentiated kind is not in the least accidental. The translator's easy amusement and contempt for the 'extravagance' of folk-tale comes out in an attack on some published Irish Fingalian material,

50. Blair, 'Critical Dissertation', Works of Ossian, II, 375.

whose giants, wizards and spells he assumes to be from the fifteenth century.⁵¹ That Macpherson found no such fairy-tale wonders in the Highlands is unlikely: Martin Martin had heard of 'Fin-Mac-Coul' as a giant from Spain;⁵² the Highland Society report cited Dunbar, Hector Boethius and Gavin Douglas to suggest that 'Fingal' had long been known throughout Scotland as a legendary outsize superman;⁵³ and the Book of the Dean of Lismore, which Macpherson certainly handled,⁵⁴ includes, in Ossianic contexts, marvels like a country under the sea, talking birds, and a magical cloak which detects adultery.⁵⁵ Presumably these features counted among the 'corruptions' which Macpherson excised in 'restoring' the work of Ossian 'to its original purity', an editorial principle later recalled by a collaborator, Andrew Gallie.⁵⁶ Perhaps Macpherson is referring to this process of selection when he speaks of having 'rejected wholly the works of the bards', whose heroic poetry, he says, is marred by vulgarity and local idiosyncrasy.⁵⁷ In other words, a criterion not very different from

51. In 'A Dissertation', Works of Ossian, II, i-xlii (p.xxviii).

52. Martin, Description, p.206.

53. Highland Society Report, p.21n.

54. D.T. Mackintosh, 'James Macpherson and the Book of the Dean of Lismore', Scottish Gaelic Studies, 6 (1949), 11-20.

55. Norman Ross, Heroic Poetry from the Book of the Dean of Lismore (Edinburgh, 1939), nos. XXI, XXVI, VII.

56. Highland Society Report, p.44.

57. 'A Dissertation', Works of Ossian, II, xx.

the neoclassical 'nature' which governed the stage was being applied as a touchstone to determine the 'true' Ossian (who was of course a poet of nature, ex hypothesi).

Home's connection with the Ossianic venture was only briefly so close: having struck the spark, he left Blair to tend the flames. His note for the Highland Society report suggests that he continued to admire the poems and believe in their authenticity throughout the controversy, but he didn't engage in critical appreciation of them. He did, though, accompany Macpherson on his second collecting tour, in July 1761, 'to gather if I can some of Nature's gems, to adorn Rivine the daughter of Kew'.⁵⁸ 'Rivine' is the tragedy later staged in 1769 as The Fatal Discovery.⁵⁹ This was a free dramatisation of the ninth of the Fragments; and is thus Home's only attempt to exploit dramatically the sensational legendary matter his curiosity had indirectly unearthed.

Perhaps predictably, the impact of the new material on the dramatic practice is superficial. Scott, reviewing it in 1827, detected 'the false gallop of Ossianic composition'⁶⁰ in the writing, and this is audible in the names, the occasional inversion, and a predilection for roe-deer, clouds and aged trees in the imagery; but none of this dents the blank verse, the five-act structure, or the classical commitment to natural causation. There are ghosts,

58. Quoted in R.G. Thomas, 'Lord Bute, John Home and Ossian: Two Letters', Modern Language Review, 51 (1956), 73-75.

59. The Works of John Home, II, 39-178.

60. Quarterly Review, 36 (1827), 206.

but they conform to the rules I've already extrapolated: they are phenomena of ancient sorrow, they merge with an atmospheric or picturesque setting, and they could be the imagery of distraction:

In the still air
 (For not a breath then stirs the silent bay)
 Are heard the saddest, yet the sweetest sounds,
 That ever touch'd the ear or heart of man,
 The melody of woe. - Then from the skies
 Descend the shadows of the murder'd pair,
 Pale as the colours of the lunar bow.
 Hov'ring before the cavern's mouth they spread
 Their arms; they fix on me their pitying eyes,
 And with a shriek, they vanish into air.⁶¹

Other eighteenth-century dramatisations also respect these conventions, even when they violate formal ones: thus The Muse of Ossian, staged in 1763, preserves the Ossianic prose, but still confines the ghosts to the vocatives of the distracted Comala;⁶² while the Covent Garden 'Oscar and Malvina', not a tragedy at all, but a melodramatic spectacle, excluded the ghosts altogether.⁶³ An interesting extreme case is James Mylne's Darthula, published in 1790, a closet drama so far as I know. Mylne, evidently uneasy at pouring his hyperemotional material into classical form, ingeniously devises lyric entractes written in the frantic style and shifting metres of the eighteenth-century sublime ode. In the first of these, supernatural portents in the Hall of Fingal alert

61. The Works of John Home, II, 123.

62. David Erskine Baker, The Muse of Ossian: A Dramatic Poem (Edinburgh, 1763), p.26.

63. Oscar and Malvina; or, the Hall of Fingal.

the heroes to the bloody events then occurring in Ireland. Shrieking is heard outside, lightnings and meteors flash, an unseen hand brushes a harp hanging on the wall - 'the insistence of horror' could hardly be more pronounced. But when Fingal instructs Ossian to invoke a ghost to explain the signs, it is Ossian alone, the 'Bard of the Second Sight', who sees anything. 'Blindness, mortals, here is bliss!' he exclaims with Tiresian bitterness:

I see, I see with inward light,
I see, and curse the dire anticipated sight.⁶⁴

That so extravagant a conception should nevertheless draw back, despite the sanctioning precedent of Shakespeare, from actually having a ghost come on, suggests how psychologically Macpherson, at the height of his British popularity, was being read. Even when cordoned off from the main action by the reservation of the rhymed interlude, the hauntings have to be kept explicable - just - in terms of mind. In a later entracte, bards watching a battle see clouds hovering above the field, and chant:

Gray mists to mortals these appear!
But, mortals, could ye see aright,
Ghosts of warriors muster there
To behold the important fight.⁶⁵

Thus far the false theme; the gentle mind is clearly reserving a tacit vice versa.

The haunted cave-dweller of The Fatal Discovery is Orellan, yet another aged refugee from the frigid Ossianic world of

64. James Mylne, Poems (Edinburgh, 1790), p.280.

65. Mylne, Poems, p.370.

inadvertent slaughter. One of the 'murder'd pair' is his beloved, Namora; and at the end of the scene, Orellan, alone on the stage, foretells the death of Rivine and promises to sing a lament for her:

Namora's gentle shade will love the song⁶⁶
That joins her sister - memory to thine.

Here the old man imagines the ghost, already herself described as the sweet singer of 'the melody of woe', listening to the dirge which he will later sing for someone else. With this touch, Home enters the phantasmagoric, self-referential world of Collins's Ode to him, in a manner which is also specifically faithful to Macpherson (the ghost-environed solitary, telling his tale of woe to the no less woebegone heroine, is a substitute Ossian with a substitute Malvina). By an apparent fatality, each new scene fills up with reduplicated images of poets and their audiences. Home doesn't emerge from the tunnel of mirrors: the poet has set his feet to Fancy's Land and met nobody but himself.

3 The Tale of Other Times

Writing about Macpherson's Ossian in 1805, Scott observed, 'The ghosts, which are the eternally recurring subject of simile and of description, we cannot trace in any of the Gaelic ballads'.⁶⁷

66. The Works of John Home, II, 142.

67. Review of Highland Society Report and of Laing, Edinburgh Review, 6 (1805), 429-62 (p.446).

Where had they come from? It's true, as Scott cynically points out, that if Fingal was to be an epic it had to have machinery, and that common beliefs about apparitions were a less precarious basis for it, from Macpherson's point of view, than any adapted or concocted pantheon. This may well have been Macpherson's motive: Blair would teach him that the epic poet 'is not at liberty to invent what system of the marvellous he pleases. It must always have some foundation in popular belief.'⁶⁸ But the spectral fluency of the writing is wildly in excess of generic requirements; and the literary impact is then significantly different from Homer's gods, or Milton's angels, or even from the authenticated phenomena of the Second Sight. For whereas all these imply parallel worlds, interventions from altogether outside human and historical time - unless indeed the Second Sight is regarded as an intimation of the literal future - ghosts are the personalities of the past. The Ossianic vision is typically not of a paradise, or of a portended occurrence, but of dead friends. Even the aged Ossian's lush apotheosis at the end of Berrathon presents nothing but reunion with a disembodied Fingal in a Selma in the clouds: the transformation is wholly regressive.⁶⁹ Moreover, Macpherson's ghosts don't generally intervene in the action even to the extent of informing or exhorting. They watch, and are watched,

68. Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, second edition, 3 vols (1785), III, 227.

69. Laing, I, 571-77.

and that's all. Then, as we've already seen, they fade away. So that Fingalian supernaturalism is strikingly devoid of transcendence. There is no divinity and no revelation; there is only the ceaseless but impotent and impalpable presence of the past, into whose shadowy, illusive whirlings everything constantly slips.

This compulsive evanescence affects every time-scale of the fiction - the moment, in the fading of ghosts or the darkening of the moon; the life, in the recurrent image of the old, blind warrior-bard looking back on his youthful prowess; the epoch, in the no less insistent rhetoric of the last survivor of Fingal's heroic age; and the whole of history, in the editorial insistence on the immense age of the text. Thus (to take one example from dozens) to read of the death of Agandecca as related by Carril in Fingal -

She fell, like a wreath of snow, which slides from
the rocks of Ronan; when the woods are still, and
echo deepens in the vale! 70 -

is to gaze into a kaleidoscope of surceases: that of the girl, that of the snow, and that of the echo; that of Fingal's youth long ago when the death occurred, that of Carril's youth (he is a grey-haired bard telling the story), that of Ossian's youth long ago when Carril - now himself dead - was alive and telling stories, and that of the whole heroic age which is the context of all the lesser ageings and losses. 'Lovely the tales of other

times! Cuthullin has exclaimed, inviting Carril to recite and incidentally generalising the sevenfold nostalgia in a phrase whose own syntactic archaism gratifies the taste it expresses. And he goes on: 'They are like the calm dew of the morning on the hill of roes, when the sun is faint on its side' - the chain of evaporations is endless, except that it, too, is on the point of disappearing. Nothing is more appropriate to these elaborately self-abolishing performances than their subsequent critical history, a meteoric descent from hyperbolic fame into ridicule and neglect. 'The harp is not strung on Morven. The voice of music ascends not on Cona. Dead, with the mighty, is the bard':⁷¹ the rhetoric of oblivion denotes, ironically, the handsome editions with their uncut pages that are to be found in libraries all over Europe. As Hazlitt remarked in 1818, cleverly catching the authenticity debate up into a critical perspective, 'If it were indeed possible to show that this writer was nothing, it would only be another instance of mutability, another blank made, another void left in the heart.'⁷²

The context of this formulation in the Lectures on the English Poets is a very general schematisation of world literature in which Ossian figures as the poet of privation par excellence; as the negation of Homer. The influential source of this polarity is Goethe's The Sorrows of Young Werther,⁷³ whose hero reads Homer in

71. Laing, I, 200.

72. Complete Works of William Hazlitt, edited by P.P. Howe, 21 vols (1930-34), V (1930), 18.

73. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Die Leiden des jungen Werthers, first published in 1774, edited and translated by Harry Steinbauer (New York, 1962).

summer and sanity, but declines into storm and suicide under the sign of Ossian. Coming only a dozen years after Macpherson, Werther writes the two antithetic 'primitive' poets into a reverberant myth of 'healthy' classicism and 'sick' romanticism which recalls, among many other motifs, the polarity of positively beautiful and negatively sublime developed by Burke only a few years before. In our own particular context, it's easy to see how this placing of Ossian as the bard of negation fits smoothly in with the British imagery, growing up beside it, of the Highlands as the country of negations - of lack of law, commerce, agriculture; of virtue in uncorrupted purity and nature in uncultivated grandeur. Even in the rather pedantic arguments about the poems' genuineness, the congenial negativity of Macpherson's translations can prove the antiquity of their originals: Blair says:

from beginning to end, all is consistent; no modern allusion drops from him; but every where the same face of rude nature appears; a country wholly uncultivated, thinly inhabited, and recently peopled.⁷⁴

And Kames in 1774 concurs:

Every scene in Ossian relates to hunting, to fighting, and to love, the sole occupations of men in the original state of society ... Can it be supposed, that a modern writer could be so constantly on his guard, as never to mention corn, nor cattle?⁷⁵

This is the sociology of Hazlitt's 'blank' - an 'original'

74. Works of Ossian, II, 344.

75. Henry Home, Lord Kames, Sketches of the History of Man, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1774), I, 282.

state of life materially and culturally void, defined by absences.

Thus Macpherson's visionary troop, assembled on the minimal legitimising basis of quite generally diffused knowledge about the Second Sight, is structurally central to his poetry: indistinct and subjectivised, the ghosts epitomise the Ossianic world as a whole. As Blair comments, 'The greatest praise that can be given to the beauty of a living woman, is to say, "She is fair as the ghost of the hill; when it moves in a sunbeam at noon, over the silence of Morven."⁷⁶ Since the living society of Selma is itself spectral, its inhabitants are incomplete; they fulfil themselves by becoming spectres; only then does their fictional existence correspond with their literary essence. The height of power, or beauty, or virtue, is found in the height of negation.

The reading solicited by this insubstantial fiction can be reconstructed with the help of Charles Cordiner, a traveller already quoted as a reader of sublime landscape. In Sutherland in 1780 he came upon a crag called Carril. Part of his rhapsodic reaction reads:

Whether the memory of lapsed ages was preserved by the bards, or if only, like a morning-dream, the visions of Ossian came in later days, yet "pleasant are the words of the song;" well do they paint these wilds, in all the striking forms of their native grandeur and beauty. "Lovely are the tales of other times;" they are faithful to the story, which deceives the winter evening among the hills. "O Carril, raise again thy voice; let me hear the song of Selma, which was sung in the halls of joy, when Fingal, king of shields, was there, and glowed at the deeds of his fathers."

76. Works of Ossian, II, 376.

But the light and joy of the song are fled;
 the halls of the renowned are left desolate and
 solitary, amidst rocks that no more echo to the
 sound of the harp, amidst streams which murmur
 unheeded and unknown.⁷⁷

Cordiner was a connoisseur of ruins, still more than of scenery, and what he's doing here is treating Ossian as the literary equivalent of a picturesquely derelict tower; having the same poignancy, offering the same stimulus to the reconstructive imagination, and tainted with the same margin of acknowledged inauthenticity. And in fact the two contemporary cults intertwine: at least two ruined castles appeared in Runciman's great Ossianic ceiling at Penicuik, perhaps taking their cue from the popular description of fallen Balclutha in Carthon;⁷⁸ and the Fragments of Ancient Poetry themselves are misleadingly named, as Gray at once observed⁷⁹ - the pieces are complete, but the reader is invited to see their laconic emotionalism as a sign of antiquity and damage. Cordiner arrives at the same feeling through the type of receding series I traced in Macpherson's text: Fingal 'glowed' at the memory of his ancestors; Ossian, recalling that, glows at the memory of Carril who sang about them; and now, recalling that, Cordiner glows, modelling himself to the point

77. Cordiner, Antiquities and Scenery, p.77. For the quotation, from 'Fingal', see Laing, I, 89.

78. William Ross, A Description of the Paintings in the Hall of Ossian, at Pennycuik (Edinburgh, 1773), pp.30, 34. Compare Laing, I, 320-23.

79. Correspondence of Thomas Gray, II, 680 (June, 1760).

of pastiche on the fictitious heroes, at the memory of Ossian. This luxuriance makes sense of Cordiner's otherwise surprising indifference to the matter of authenticity: if the sequence of lapses is unending, it matters very little at what point the actual words were inserted to set it in motion. The light and joy of the song are always fled: that is all the song is about. The characters in the poem who glimpse and mourn the fleeting ghosts are teaching Macpherson's readers to do the same for them. One could say that the phrase 'of other times', which Macpherson and his admirers attach tirelessly to 'tale', 'song', 'bard', owes its potency to an irreducible and delightful double entendre in the 'of'.

What is the content of this strange and sterile vortical form? M.P. McDiarmid has attempted to answer this question by recalling the 'national plight' of its time: the Scottish aftermath of 1707 and 1745, which he conflates with each other and with the state assault on Highland particularity in a single epochal defeat.⁸⁰ He compares the Poems of Ossian to a class of 'politically inspired fantasies', of which the most notable member is Ramsay's 'A Vision', an imitation of the sixteenth-century makars, written in 1714 and really lamenting the Union of Parliaments. This comparison seems to me to flatter Macpherson for the sake of a nationalist myth. Whereas Ramsay's language is a revival of literary Scots, cultivated for unmistakably political reasons, Macpherson's is a blandly international

80. M.P. McDiarmid, 'Ossian as Scottish Epic', Scottish Literary News, Vol.3, No.3 (1973), pp.4-9.

English. Whereas 'A Vision' is pointing sharply and designedly at a particular event, the stories of Macpherson's Ossian offer no definite parallels with eighteenth-century history, and McDiarmid points none out. And above all, whereas the status of Ramsay's poem as 'fantasy' is acknowledged in the appropriately late-medieval convention of an allegorical vision, Macpherson is demanding, implicitly and explicitly, that the world he depicts be taken for real. Regardless of the plausibility of this claim, the mere fact that it is advanced makes any clear reference to present events impossible. So that when McDiarmid gamely concludes that 'Fingal especially is indeed a heroic poem, celebrating in its national hero the vision and the values that an imaged past recommends to the present,' he is attributing to the poem a historical and national self-awareness which it nowhere displays, which in fact it is prohibited from displaying by the terms of its production.

On the other hand, it's evident that the poems have something to do with their real historical situation. Macpherson was from Ruthven, whose ancient castle was a barracks between 1715 and 1745, was taken by the Jacobite army in the '45 and burnt down in the reprisals after Culloden, when Macpherson was ten. His adolescence in the 1750s, moving backwards and forwards between a rapidly disintegrating Gaelic society and the Lowland seats of classical learning by which he could better himself, anticipates the dichotomy - a past of solidarity and fighting, a present of isolation and poetry

- which is gloomily dominant in Ossian.⁸¹ And if we accept for a moment that Macpherson really was rescuing priceless relics of Gaelic tradition from the oncoming bulldozers of progress and anglicisation, then his chosen representative of the tradition, bereaved, decrepit and blind, has a historical pathos and irony of some subtlety. Some of these connections can indeed be made through one of Macpherson's juvenilia, 'On the Death of Marshal Keith', which mourns, not only the Jacobite exile whose death in 1758 was its occasion, but also his house:

But chief, as relics of a dying race,
The Keiths command, in woe, the foremost place ...
Now falling, dying, lost to all but fame,
And only living in the hero's name.

See! the proud halls they once possessed, decayed,
The spiral towers depend the lofty head;
Wild ivy creeps along the mouldering walls,⁸²
And with each gust of wind a fragment falls.

The ruin is, as Laing points out, a sketch for Balclutha; equally Ossianic is the walls' hypersensitivity to the wind.⁸³ An emotional formula not essentially different from the one in Ossian is being applied to a heroic age which is clearly conceived of as continuing down to 1745, and elsewhere in the poem fervent appeals to 'Caledonia' relate its subject to just the context McDiarmid indicates.

But then that relationship, in its Ossianic form, thoroughly refuses, or fails, to meet the patriotic demands McDiarmid places on it. So far from elaborating national values with which the past can fire the present, the poems collapse back, as we've seen,

81. Bailey Saunders, The Life and Letters of James Macpherson (1894), pp.32-48.

82. Laing, II, 588.

83. Laing, I, 321n.

through several layers of the past, resigned to a present which is twilit and geriatric, exhausted by the multiple burden of ghosts. Not only that, but if we do reconstruct Fingalian society from the songs of the blind bard, it turns out to be luridly dysfunctional. In Fingal the main action is punctuated by what Macpherson calls episodes, usually sentimental tales performed by the kings' bards in the intervals of the war. In Book I these tell of two separate fatal triangles, with one survivor out of the six participants. Book II ends with two stories about unintended killings. In Book III two damsels, in different episodes, are murdered while under Fingal's protection. In Book V there is another triangle, again fatal to all three lovers. All this on top of the thousands who perish in the battles which make up the main action of all these Books.⁸⁴ It's a level of destruction typical of the Poems of Ossian in general, and suggests immediate reasons for the size of the spectral population.

The serious point here is not simply the number of deaths, which is likely to be high in any military epic, real or fabricated. It's that love, the motive in all these tragedies, is the only serious business of the Fingalians apart from fighting, as Kames observed. (He adds hunting, but this is normally an amusement, mentioned in the poems only if it is about to be interrupted by one of the other two.) The world of Ossian thus appears, schematically, as one whose energies are all directed towards death. The heroes who don't die in battle fall victim

84. Laing, I, 19-26, 46-48, 78-81, 81-84, 94-95, 112, 166-72.

to the misunderstandings and crimes of passion which inescapably accompany desire. Seen, as they always are, in retrospect, the friends of Ossian's youth resemble a monstrous species which has become extinct because its mating patterns were too destructive of life. There are no births in Ossian, no children, no sexual pleasure, and almost no mothers; only virgins, longing, and death. In his editorial capacity, Macpherson more than once asserts that suicide was unknown among the ancient Highlanders; this taboo - the point underlines Goethe's percipience - betrays the underlying principle of the culture he has imagined.

Whatever may be the hinterland of this in individual psychology, its comprehensive deadliness distinguishes it historically from later new or reconstructed national epics such as Pan Tadeusz or the Kalevala, even though these were sometimes inspired by Macpherson's example. In them, certainly, a more or less imagined past was offered, as tradition or example, to the present and the future. But Macpherson himself, though he was proposing his 'Caledonians' as Scottish, and not only Highland, ancestors, never expresses the mildest particularist sentiment, and every stroke of his portrayal shows the ancestral culture as doomed. Insofar as the matter of Ossian is the razing of either Highland or Scottish identity by the assimilating British state, the poems are not resisting, or even lamenting, these processes so much as they are symptomatic of them.

For what was happening, on the least cynical interpretation of Macpherson's activities, was that the ancient poetry of the

Highlands was being drastically improved. The Highland Society Report, attempting to conclude the controversy in 1805, formed the opinion that Macpherson had added

what he conceived to be dignity and delicacy to the original composition, by striking out passages, by softening incidents, by refining the language, in short by changing what he considered as too simple or too rude for a modern ear, and elevating what in his opinion was below the standard of good poetry.⁸⁵

Dignity, delicacy, softness, refinement, elevation – the criteria by which Fingal was prepared for the press are not merely 'modern' ones in general, but specifically those by which the Edinburgh lawyers and divines who were its sponsors measured the brightening polish of their own social intercourse. The outcome, as Scott put it, reviewing the Report in language more vigorous than its own, was a primitive hero who resembled Sir Charles Grandison. The third-century Highlands were rendered genteel.

This was a more serious contradiction than the Report acknowledges, because the general literary interest in Ossian bore upon just those features of his poetry which it now appeared Macpherson had supplied. It was the discovery of such 'civilised' aesthetic and social qualities in the works of such a primitive age which constituted both their attraction and their value for an intellectual generation fascinated by the transitions between barbarism and civility. In John Millar's Observations concerning the Distinction of Ranks, for example, published in 1771, Ossian is

85. Highland Society Report, p.152.

adduced to illustrate the proposition that sexual relationships, a matter of animal appetite in extremely barbaric periods, are capable in quite primitive pastoral conditions of 'a degree of tenderness and delicacy of sentiment which can hardly be equalled in the most refined productions of a civilised age.'⁸⁶ Again, in 1776 Ossian is (with due caution) grist to Gibbon's mill: contemplating the decadence of Caracalla's empire, he contrasts 'the untutored Caledonians glowing with the warm virtues of nature' and the 'degenerate Romans, polluted with the mean vices of wealth and slavery'.⁸⁷ And for Adam Ferguson the poetry itself confirms that 'The artless song of the savage, the heroic legend of the bard, have sometimes a magnificent beauty, which no change of language can improve, and no refinements of the critic reform.'⁸⁸ All these allusions turn on the comparison of sentiment in a primitive and an advanced stage of society, all with the more or less covert implication that the primitive stage reveals the true virtues and capacities of mankind more directly and freshly than the rule-bound state of high civilisation: if, therefore, the 'artless song' has in fact been subjected to 'change of language'

86. Millar, Origin of the Distinction of Ranks (i.e., the third edition of the Observations), p.76.

87. Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, edited by J.B. Bury, 7 vols (1896-1900), I, 129.

88. Adam Ferguson, An Essay on the History of Civil Society, edited by D. Forbes, (Edinburgh, 1966), p.173. The remark appeared in the first edition of 1767, but a footnote instancing Ossian by name was added only in the revised edition of 1814.

and 'refinements of the critic', as the Report concluded, then this is far more than a detail of presentation; it disqualifies the poems from answering the very question which the literati want to ask them.

Yet the interest in the question of nature and art, of what poetry is like without politeness, is, paradoxically, strongest of all in Blair himself. The ancient poems of nations, he argues in the opening paragraph of the 'Critical Dissertation',

make us acquainted with the notions and feelings of our fellow-creatures in the most artless ages; discovering what objects they admired, and what pleasures they pursued, before those refinements of society had taken place, which ... disguise the manners of mankind.⁸⁹

The equation of civilisation and disguise is more dramatically repeated in Blair's Homer lecture: ancient manners are

without any of those studied forms of behaviour which now conceal men from one another. They give free scope to the strongest and most impetuous emotions of the mind ... They show us our native prejudices, appetites, and desires, exerting themselves without controul.⁹⁰

The characteristics of Macpherson's writing which meet these specifications for the primitive, despite the evident gentility of its manners, are its irregular rhythms, its 'spontaneous' facility in digression, and above all, its rhapsodic emotionalism. Historically, it's plain that these features are the signature of the poems' real time: they can be matched quite closely in exactly

89. Works of Ossian, II, 313.

90. Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric, III, 234.

contemporary experiments such as Tristram Shandy and Emile.

That is, Macpherson's bold gesture of translation enlists the antique Gaelic world on a particular side in a contemporary set of dichotomies: the Fingalians are charged, as it were, with being natural rather than civilised, feeling rather than knowing, committed to passion rather than order and to loyalty rather than progress, and so on. In the immediate context of the Highlands we could say, loosely: to tradition rather than improvement.

To that extent we are after all talking about a protest - at the level of artistic form rather than political allusion - against an imposed 'civil society' conceived of as alienating and falsifying the 'native prejudices, appetites and desires'. But then of course the alienation and the falseness surface, blatantly, in the work - as a fraudulent antiquity, but also as a fraudulent romanticism; for the pre-civilised values the writing ostensibly carries are brought to nothing by its unresisting nostalgia, its shameless love of the dying fall, the dilapidation of its narrative structures. Whether as the refiner and softener of rugged old texts, or as the moneyed builder and planter on his return to the Highlands as a nabob, Macpherson is in unconditional accord with the forces of expropriating civilisation. The negativity of Selma is correspondingly profound.

Even so, it can be exaggerated. The 'good poetry' of the translator can't abolish the rude adversary language, which is present in the form of repression. Perhaps a great part of the

allure of Macpherson's world comes from this perverse sense of desire held back, denied; oozing and sighing round the characters, darkening the sky and shaking the trees. The whole of nature is lost in a low-pressure sexual reverie, while on the other hand sexual action is rigidly excluded from the stories: expressions of yearning abound, and white breasts are revealed at every climax, but consummation of every kind is withheld. When 'dark' villains express their physical power over hapless maidens, it is by stabbing them. So that what disappears is not sexuality in general but generation; the nobility of Fingalian society, its strained purity of motive and conduct, is bound up with its repression of the genital; it is literally a historical nation which doesn't reproduce itself. In the fictional present time in which the stories are being told, Ossian, the last survivor, sings alone or to Malvina, the beautiful, tearful widow of his heroic son Oscar. This recurrent narrative relationship is typical of the whole structure in being at once sexually charged and futureless. Tremulously aroused by every memory, the two of them wait for death.

Thus all the forces of transmission and reproduction in the heritage Macpherson claims turn into dreams. This logic goes on even in writers who are resisting it: Anne Grant, for instance, insists half a century after Macpherson that a living Gaelic tradition could have been recovered if its amateurs had tried harder:

In the deep recesses of our Alpine glens, they might have wooed and won the nymph who presides over the hidden treasures of antique lore. In the Celtic Muse,

they would have found an Egeria, who would have enlightened them by her mystic counsels, and told them the secrets of other times, now doomed to long oblivion. Now it is too late.

'Tho, caimine Malmhine gu dian'

The fair form, where inspiration has for so many ages, awaked the bard, animated the hero, and soothed the lover, is fast gliding into the mist of obscurity, and will soon be no more than a remembered dream, 'When the hunter awakens from his noon-day slumber, and has heard in his vision the spirits of the hill.'⁹¹

The Gaelic line evokes Malvina's imagined death from the opening of Croma: as the woebegone heroine approaches the cloudy kingdom of ghosts she personifies the whole lost tradition. This passing, moreover, is amplified, not as a crime or a tragedy, but as the awakening from a dream, the relinquishing of a pleasant illusion. The 'Celtic Muse' doesn't merely cease to exist; it is revealed never to have existed in reality; it was as a cloudy vision that it was 'mystic' and 'secret'. Macpherson's influence - which is for this reason a characteristically imperialist one - tends to repress the concrete and contradictory realities of Highland history and sublimate them into an ideal; an imposing exhibition of ghosts.

91. Grant, Essays, I, 2-9. For the Gaelic tag, see Laing, I, 537n. and II, 375. The English one is misquoted from Fingal, Laing, I, 176.

4 The Spirit of the Mountain

Rather as his lack of civilised manners unleashes his emotions, the artless barbarian's lack of science brings him into intense confrontation with the weather. At the beginning of an essay on superstition published in 1798, and mostly devoted to Ossian, Nathan Drake explains how,

ignorant of the causes and effects of all the mighty phenomena of nature which surround him, and conscious, from dire experience, of his own frequent inefficiency to gratify his appetites, or satiate his resentments, the savage naturally looks for assistance beyond the pale of mortality. Unacquainted however with any rational system of religion, he calls into being, and gives local habitation and a name to, the wanderings of a terrified imagination; the thunder, the lightning, and the whirlwind, the roaring of the mountain-torrent, the sighing of the gathering storm, the illusive meteors of night, and the fleeting forms of cloud and mist, are with him the appalling tones and awful visitations of supernatural beings.⁹²

The prose is subject to a slippage characteristic of the ambiguity about superstition in general: the philosophical certainties of the participles ('ignorant of', 'conscious of', 'unacquainted with') are undermined by the personifications ('roaring', 'sighing', 'fleeting') which reach out in an attempt to identify with the anthropomorphising savage, and by the Shakespearean allusion, which makes him into a poet. (The same passage is used to the same end by Anne Grant, who in an essay already cited compares the Second Sight to 'the fine frenzy of the poet's eye.'⁹³ So that when Drake goes on to attribute

92. Drake, Literary Hours, II, 126.

93. Grant, II, 35.

to the terrors of the mountain savage, in particular, 'the wild and melancholy sublimity which the objects before him are calculated to inspire', it's clear that his real interest is less in primitive beliefs than in their imagery. The marriage, familiar by now, of superstition and imagination, makes the supposed supernatural system a code for the natural sublime.

We can display this process by going back to the source - quoted by Drake later in the essay - of one of his 'appalling tones': 'the sighing of the gathering storm'. It's from Thomson's 'Winter':

Along the Woods, along the moorish Fens,
Sighs the sad Genius of the coming Storm;
And up among the loose disjointed Cliffs
And fractur'd Mountains wild, the brawling Brook
And Cave, presageful, send a hollow Moan,⁹⁴
Resounding long in listening Fancy's Ear.

Thomson is adroitly decorating natural description with no more than the suggestion of numinous presence: the woods provide a scientific pretext for the sighing, and 'listening Fancy', itself a shadowy personification, withdraws the animism of the moaning brook and cave while leaving its attendant eeriness intact. And in the last line, 'resounding' neatly avoids committing itself to either the physical or the mental world. A less delicate rhetoric can't sustain this folding in, so to speak, of subjectivity: Beattie's essay on Highland music, for example, quoted earlier in connection with the sublime of landscape, seems to be drawing on a half-memory of 'Winter', but in unambiguously naturalised

94. Thomson, 'Winter', line 06.

form:

narrow vallies thinly inhabited, and bounded by precipices resounding with the fall of torrents; ... the mournful dashing of waves along the friths and lakes that intersect the country; the portentous noises which every change of the wind, and every increase and diminution of the waters, is apt to raise, in a lonely region, full of echoes, and rocks, and caverns... 95

Wind, cliff, waterfall and cave are all reproduced, permeated as before with strange and unlocalised sounds. But then the supernaturalism comes out in a theory: Beattie goes on to argue that these impressions determine the melancholy and superstitious cast of imagination which produces the illusions of Second Sight. Thomson's 'listening fancy' is thus projected on to the inhabitants, and superstition bound in with climate in a kind of aesthetic anthropology just like Drake's.

The factual authority for superstitions about gathering storms, however, Drake derives from another source again. In Dar-thula, an omen comes to Selma thus:

The wind was abroad, in the oaks. The spirit of the mountain roared. The blast came rustling through the hall, and gently touched my harp. The sound was mournful and low, like the song of the tomb.⁹⁶

In a note on 'the spirit of the mountain', Macpherson glosses, 'that deep and melancholy sound which precedes a storm, well known to those who live in a high country.' Laing, in a fury of detection,

95. Beattie, Essays on Poetry and Music, p.169.

96. Laing, I, 401.

traces the note back to Thomson and the line itself to the shrieking spirit of the water in Douglas;⁹⁷ however, in this case it isn't necessary to wander so far from Highland belief. Pennant and Gilpin each report that Ben Doran emits a hollow sound twenty-four hours before heavy rain.⁹⁸ Pennant, indeed, illustrates this observation with Macpherson's line, but the exactness of his account, in time and circumstances, establishes it as substantially independent. In this case, if in no other, Highland travellers were actually able to go and find the other-worldly meteorology the Poems of Ossian led them to expect. Even here, though, the data are thoroughly written. Both Pennant and Gilpin cite, as an ancient parallel to what they regard as an interesting instance of popular prognostication, the presageful sounds from the mountains described in the meteorological sequence in the Georgics - 'et aridus altis/montibus audiri fragor'.⁹⁹ This text, with its sophisticated deployment of common forecasting lore producing a portentous ensemble of sounds, is evidently a source for the description in Thomson, and thus indirectly for the whole chain. The Highland savage, hearing an awful voice in the wind, is really the outcome of a highly literary tradition of half-transcendental picturesque description.

97. The first edition of Dar-thula had read 'shrieked' instead of 'roared'.

98. Pennant, 1772, II, 13; Gilpin, Observations, I, 174.

99. Virgil, Georgics, I, line 357. Compare 'Winter', lines 148-52 and note.

This descent of atmospheric spirits arguably culminates in Fingal's personal combat with the Spirit of Loda in Carric-Thura, an incident which stimulated some of the most exciting conceptions of Ossian's illustrators, and of which Blair said, 'I know no passage more sublime in the writings of any uninspired author.'¹⁰⁰ The apparition is barely within the Virgilian landscape of diffused sounds, luridly wrought up:

The spirit of Loda shrieked, as, rolled into himself,
he rose on the wind. Inistore shook at the sound.
The waves heard it on the deep. They stopped in their
course with fear: the friends of Fingal started.¹⁰¹

What then raises the scene to the apogee of sublimity is that Fingal meets the spirit and speaks with it: it's as if the hero actually penetrates the environing tones and echoes and confronts the essence of the storm. What makes this audacious apocalypse possible is that the spirit of Loda is defined by Fingal as a superstition - it is a deity believed in by the Scandinavians, understood to be more superstitious than the Fingalians, and the king accordingly braves it on the model of Elijah defying Baal:

Son of night retire: call thy winds and fly!
Why dost thou come to my presence, with thy shadowy
arms? Do I fear thy gloomy form, spirit of dismal
Loda? Weak is thy shield of clouds; feeble is
that meteor, thy sword. The blast rolls them
together; and thou thyself art lost. Fly from
my presence, son of night! call thy winds and fly!

This vaunting, which depends dramatically on the spirit of Loda's being a gigantic adversary, enforces rhetorically the fact that it is a cloud. It's the apotheosis of that equivocation between

100. Works of Ossian, II, 377.

101. Laing, I, 430.

nature and supernature which is the condition of the whole convention. Macpherson observes the condition in such admired apparitions as the ghost of Crugal or Cormar's fight with the son of the wind, both in Fingal;¹⁰² but here the need to have it both ways is blown up from an ambiguity into a kind of frenzy of inconsistency.

This perpetual resolution of the delusive into the natural not only provides a recourse for the scepticism of the reader, but also, used in reverse, teaches a way of reading the weather. In the early 1790s, to take one example of many, a young lady crossed Corrieyairick in cold cloud. Her depression has a peculiar tone:

we shuddered with apprehension of a general rain. On those bleak and dreary mountains, how much are one's spirits in the power of the weather. Should the storm prevail, one is left utterly comfortless and forlorn. Were night to fall down with all its shades, the phantoms of the desert would be truly formidable: broken rocks and blasted pines, withered with age and moss, seen by the glimpse of the moon; while the roar of torrents, and unequal gales of wind howling around, would play some ghastly measures on the ear; - how easily could imagination hear, "The spirit of the mountain shriek, and see the ghosts of the departed, becoming from the passing cloud."¹⁰³

102. Laing, I, 57-63 and 96-97.

103. Printed in Charles Cordiner, Remarkable Ruins, and Romantic Prospects, of North Britain (1795), unpaginated. In the last sentence, 'becoming' is presumably a misprint of the less interesting 'beckoning'.

Ossian here forms the transition, not only from scenery to spectres, but also from practical anxieties, which are inconvenient, to terrors of the sensibility which, so far from being unwelcome, constitute the motive for the writer's trip: 'After long sharing in the pleasing enthusiasm which these wilds impart, I left them with regret'. Scenically feeble, the Poems of Ossian compensate for their topographical nullity by providing, and animating, an unprecedented catalogue of states of the weather. A reviewer observed that the ghosts 'are drawn exactly after phenomena that in Ossian's country are very common, local mists settling upon a hill';¹⁰⁴ the delightful corollary for the fanciful visitor was that every local mist looked exactly like a ghost.

By the 1790s, 'Ossian's country' had been established all over the more accessible Highlands. The bard's birthplace was Glencoe (with Glen Croe, as we saw in Elizabeth Montagu's case, as an erroneous but handy substitute), his grave was in the Sma' Glen north of Crieff, and there was a grotto for him at the Hermitage at Dunkeld. Fingal had his grave at Killin, and of course his cave on Staffa.¹⁰⁵ It wasn't fortuitous that all this classic ground lay close to well-defined tourist trails, even Staffa being within manageable range of that other Hebridean

104. The Gentleman's Magazine, 40 (1770), 322.

105. Pennant, 1769, p.193; Newte, Prospects and Observations, p.235; Gilpin, Observations, I, 126 and 169; Pennant, 1772, I, 302.

attraction, Iona. But for the touristic locating of spirits, which, as I say, is rather a meteorological than a topological process, the more illuminating evidence is found in the texts themselves. In the figure of the hunter, for example, Macpherson makes a space available, within his shadowy landscape, for the reader. Minona's lament in The Songs of Selma ends:

When night comes on the hill; when the loud winds
arise; my ghost shall stand in the blast, and
mourn the death of my friends. The hunter shall
hear from his booth. He shall fear but love my
voice! ¹⁰⁶

Over and over this hunter appears, never hunting, always musing over the mossy graves of the protagonists, or waylaid by their ghosts. He is one with the reader because of his solitary and random situation vis-à-vis the text, but he is also one with the winds and the hills because of the naturalness of his occupation. In short, he is, with remarkable historical precocity, an idealised tourist. In this case, moreover, he enables Minona to issue instructions about how to react to the voice of the rising storm which exactly shape the ambiguous enthusiasm of the young lady on Corrieyairick: 'fear but love'.

A more extended instance, characteristically involuted, is offered by the appearance of Fingal on the battlefield early in Book VIII of Temora:

First appeared the sword of Luno; the spear half
issuing from a cloud, the shield still dim in mist.
But when the stride of the king came abroad, with

106. Laing, I, 458. The hunter is also found, for instance, at I, 194 (in Fingal), I, 267 (The War of Inis-Thona), and I, 550-57 (Berrathon).

all his grey, dewy locks in the wind; then rose the shouts of his host over every moving tribe. They gathered, gleaming, round, with all their echoing shields. So rise the green seas round a spirit, that comes down from the squally wind. The traveller hears the sound afar, and lifts his head over the rock. He looks on the troubled bay, and thinks he dimly sees the form.¹⁰⁷

Here the narrative proper doesn't contain any ghosts: Fingal, the living man, is descending from the cloud-covered hill where he spent the night. But the simple action is haunted at every turn - by the normal Ossianic associations of misty appearances; by the confounding of the two winds, the actual one blowing through Fingal's hair and the squall within the simile; by the phraseology which separates the king from his stride and the tribes from their shouts; by the recourse to a half-supernatural 'form' in the simile; and by the syntactic detachment of the traveller (twin to the hunter), which leaves the original description behind and renders it yet more hazily phantasmagoric. The whole metaphoric drive - and here again this is one example of many - is to intermingle dramatis personae, spirits, and the weather, in such a way that any one of these can be regarded as a vehicle for the tropical presentation of the other two. William Duff's praise of the same passage shows how this works:

The simile with which the description concludes is remarkably sublime ... extended...by the addition of circumstances which render the representation perfectly picturesque. The traveller's imagining he hears the sound afar; his raising his head above the rock, and peeping over it with cautious terror,

107. Laing, II, 232.

and his fancying he dimly sees the dreadful form,
are the fictions of a truly plastic Genius.¹⁰⁸

Apparently without noticing, Duff's enthusiastic response expresses itself through further invention. The peeping and the cautious dread heighten the traveller's fear, and the imagining and fancying heighten his creative role in the little scene. The effect is to deepen the 'plastic' quality of the figure, and the toehold it offers for a reader's identification, at the expense of what little rhetorical function it has in the discourse. The peeping traveller is in fact functioning as Duff's point of entry into Macpherson's dream-world of whorling and moaning spirits; and the bridgehead is, once again, the voice of the rising storm.

To turn back from this literally atmospheric reading of Macpherson in 1770 to Collins twenty years before is to see, by contrast, how strikingly unnatural the spirits in the Ode to a Friend are. The second-sight visions, the ghosts of the kings on Iona, the spells from Macbeth - all burst abruptly from the zero weather of romance. Even the 'Kaelpie's drowning flood' is too insistently 'Instant Furious' and 'sudden' to be acceptable as a fancifully described spate. It's a somewhat paradoxical contrast: Collins, although it's important to him that he derives his details from factual sources, presents a Highland scene which is a literary and intellectual construct not finally discontinuous with the abstract mode of his earlier

108. William Duff, Critical Observations on the Writings of the Most Celebrated Original Geniuses in Poetry (1770), p.123.

odes; while Macpherson, with his reckless disregard for truth, is nonetheless seeking, in the windy instability of viewpoint and visualised scene, to assimilate his imaginary creatures with the actual experience of being in the Highlands. The literary improvement of Highland superstition turns out to involve a crucial act of naturalisation.

It's signally marked in the rediscovery of the Ode. When Carlyle found the manuscript in about 1783, its fifth stanza and half the sixth were missing, so Tytler, who was responsible for its first publication in the Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1788, asked Henry Mackenzie to fill the gap. Mackenzie, by his own account, produced the verses almost extempore, endeavouring 'to keep up a congenial wildness of Imagery, with which indeed I have, from my Infancy, been well acquainted.'¹⁰⁹ His casual lines, written in 1785, thus have a peculiar interest as the record of what by then seemed 'congenial' with Collins's original. Mackenzie's fifth stanza elects to stay with the seers from the fourth, and begins:

Or on some bellying rock that shades the deep,
They view the lurid signs that cross the sky,
Where, in the west, the brooding tempests lie,
And hear their first, faint, rustling pennons
sweep.¹¹⁰

This is already more natural observation than all Collins's lines contain. Automatically, it seems, Mackenzie veers away from

109. Lonsdale, p.495.

110. Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (Edinburgh, 1788), Part II, p.69.

the Ode's fantastical supernaturalism and, reviving the storm-warnings of Virgil and Thomson, attaches the spirits firmly to natural phenomena: storm, whirlpool, darkness and ignis fatuus.

A little later the same visionaries:

lift the nightly yell
Of that dread spirit, whose gigantic form
The seer's entranced eye can well survey,
Through the dim air who guides the driving storm,
And points the wretched bark its destin'd prey.

The diction is quite successfully Collins, but the 'gigantic form', which might be a malevolent agency, but might equally be an excited representation of clouds in a gale, is out of Macpherson. The assimilation of the spirits into the natural sublime is too thorough for them to be extricated even for the purposes of pastiche. The genius of the storm is a manner of speaking.

5 A Second-Sight Procession

As it unfolds, then, the project of drawing on Highland superstition as a source of poetic power turns out to be no less problematic than the form of Collins's original declaration suggested. The effort to construct a poetic speaker

whose undoubting mind
Believed the magic wonders which he sung

inevitably involves the utterance in a kind of inauthenticity, whether it's the delicate evasions of a noncommittal naturalism, or the unembarrassed fraudulence of a Macpherson.

The predicament is illustrated negatively by the transmission of Albania, the anonymous patriotic poem 'Addressed to the Genius of Scotland, and dedicated to General Wade', which has already been mentioned in connection with Wade's roads. First published in 1737, the piece does on the whole have the Improving and centralising tendency suggested by its subtitle, but the writer is not indifferent to the appeal of outlandish beliefs: one notable passage describes the ghostly hunt of the Thanes of Ross. The relaxed, topographical genre to which the poem as a whole belongs permits a somewhat touristic detachment -

(So to the simple swain tradition tells) -

but the tightened, enlivened blank verse at the climax of the description of the haunting speaks of the imaginative pull:

Forthwith the hubbub multiplies, the gale
Labours with wilder shrieks, and rife din
Of hot pursuit, the broken cry of deer
Mangled by throttling dogs, the shouts of men,
And hoofs thick beating on the hollow hill.¹¹¹

What underlies this momentary poetic quickening is what underlies Collins's pursuit of similar states of terror: a submerged analogy between such visitations and those of poetic inspiration. The lonely herd, hearing the sounds of the hunt, sees nothing and does not know

To what, or whom, he owes his idle fear,
To ghost, to witch, to fairy, or to fiend,
But wonders, and no end of wondering finds.

'Wonder', a mated contemplation intimating infinite possibilities,

111. Scottish Descriptive Poems, p.163.

is the emotion common to rustic ignorance and poetic sensibility. Its arousal is the point of the episode.

Thus the passage is as it were self-sustaining: it does what it describes. It owes nothing to its context, and in fact it had an odd independent after-life when the poem had sunk into obscurity. Beattie quotes it in the essay on national music to 'show, that what in history or philosophy would make but an awkward figure, may sometimes have a charming effect in poetry'.¹¹² (Despite this dilettantish resolution, it's noteworthy that when Beattie himself used the image of unseen sounds to evocative effect in The Minstrel, he was careful, despite the 'rude age' of his poem's setting, to motivate the invisibility with a mist:¹¹³ again, one can trace the naturalising impress of Macpherson.) It was presumably in Beattie that the young Scott found the passage for his commonplace book in 1792,¹¹⁴ and Nathan Drake for his compendium of poetic superstition in the essay of 1793.¹¹⁵ Scott printed it as a congenial accompaniment to his own 'Glenfinlas' in the Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border in 1802,¹¹⁶ before the entire poem was eventually republished by Leyden in 1803.¹¹⁷ Even later this

112. Beattie, Essays on Poetry and Music, p.170.

113. James Beattie, The Minstrel; or, The Progress of Genius, poem in two books first published 1771-74 (Edinburgh, 1807), I, st. xxi.

114. J.G. Lockhart, Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, edition in 10 vols (Edinburgh, 1902), III, 303.

115. Drake, Literary Hours, II, 152.

116. Walter Scott, Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, 2 vols (Kelso, 1802), I, 391-92.

117. In Scottish Descriptive Poems, pp.157-69.

history has repeated itself: Maurice Lindsay's recent History of Scottish Literature illustrates its complimentary remarks about Albania by quoting these same lines.¹¹⁸ The image is quoted, passed on, admired, passed on again, its original abstraction from Highland life and belief reproduced in its diffusion. Like Macpherson's first productions it is professionally a fragment. As such, its position is representative of that of Highland 'superstition' in general: everyone acknowledged its 'poetry', but by what real mediation, what legitimate connection, could that poetry be a part of the elaborate, metropolitan, unsuperstitious poetic discourse of late eighteenth-century England? 'Tis thine to sing...' Collins had said of one of the items in his obstinately inert list of wonders; but arguably it always belonged to others - to the 'simple swain', the 'wizard seer', or other reductively conceived spokesmen of the uncomprehended Gaelic tradition. To conclude this chapter, I shall examine a range of these attempted connections, all dating from the period between the unveiling of Collins's Ode in 1788 and Scott's poetic debut proper in 1805.

a) Invalid Connections

Noticing W. Richardson's Ossianic drama The Maid of Lochlin, published in 1801, The Monthly Review singled out the lyric

118. Maurice Lindsay, History of Scottish Literature (1977), p.239.

opening of Act IV, whose 'imagery is particularly appropriate, because it exhibits an instance of Second-Sight'.¹¹⁹ This refers to a rhetorical climax in which Fingal's second-sighted bard Ullin describes a vision of Albion's future greatness - a speech wholly in the mould of the eighteenth-century prophetic-imperialist peroration derived from Pope and Thomson. It employs the Second Sight only as a means of importing a little substance into a convention of rapture hollowed by long, narrowly political use. Richardson could have said, as Thomas Blacklock, deploying exactly the same device to end The Graham; an Heroic Ballad (1774) with a vision of the Act of Union, actually did say:

He is no believer in the second sight; but takes the advantage of an opinion prevailing in an early and uncultivated age, to introduce his moral with greater importance and solemnity.¹²⁰

This wholly opportunistic use of the idea recalls Defoe rather than Ossian; it is formally the same as the gleefully silly moments of Highland prophecy which adorn the vituperation of the North Briton.¹²¹ Wilkes and Churchill are hostile where Blacklock and Richardson are friendly, but for all, the Second Sight is nothing more than a peg on which to hang a declaration made within the secure speech-world of a neoclassical genre - satire or ode. It's within the attendant criteria of decorum, too, that the reviewer can enjoy the 'appropriateness' of the peg. The problem

119. W. Richardson, The Maid of Lochlin: A Lyrical Drama, (1801); reviewed in Monthly Review, second series, 3rd (1802), 310.

120. Thomas Blacklock, The Graham; an Heroic Ballad (1774), p.vi.

121. North Briton, Nos. 7 and 41.

of validity only exists outside that world; in other words, it's posed by realism.

When it is posed, there is one available response which is equally simple: to deny the supernaturalist imagery any validity at all. For instance, Verses written in the Isle of Staffa in 1792 by William Parsons, a visitor to what was already Fingal's Cave, begin:

What sounds harmonious mingle with the Storm?
The Stars dim gleaming through his misty form,
Does Cona's voice renew the thrilling rhimes,
The streamy Morven's tales of other times?¹²²

The systematic confounding of natural and ghostly impressions seems to prepare a fantasy of a familiarly evasive kind. But in fact the poet rejects his own surmises as

Vain fictions, these, which youthful Bards
delight,

and the dominant impulses of the poem are a wish to redirect the native boatmen's 'uncouth surprize' into rational and enquiring wonder at the natural processes the rock-forms represent, and a laudatory address to Sir Joseph Banks, who had given the first systematic description of the cave as well as reporting its Fingalian associations. In this most straightforward encounter between Highland 'fancy' and metropolitan science, the latter simply wins. Only the anomaly, then, of having opened the poem in that way, intimates a possible regret that this is so. The Ossianic allusion doesn't legitimate the superstition so much as provide a formula to cover its illegitimacy.

122. European Magazine, 21 (1792), 309.

b) Actual History

See, round thee the cairns of the dead are disclosing
 The shades that have long been in silence reposing!
 Through their form dimly twinkles the moon-beam descending,
 As their red eye of wrath on a stranger are bending.

The dimly seen heavenly bodies, evidence of the ghostliness of the form in front of them, are the same Ossianic signature as the one in the Staffa verses; its source is in fact the ghost of Crugal from the opening of the second book of Fingal. But this context sets it to work rather differently. It's John Leyden's 'Macgregor', written in Glenorchy on a tour in 1800, and bringing the suggestions of the scenery together with the story of the massacre of the Macgregors and the legal extinction of their name.¹²³ Thus the insubstantiality of the warriors denotes, as in Ossian, the obliteration of a heroic race, but now the imagery of loss has a definite pretext, located in place and in history, which arrests Macpherson's endless phantasmagoria. The conspicuous anapaestic metre is a sign to that effect: reminiscent of the famous regimental song, 'The Garb of Old Gaul', it connotes a clannish and spirited Highlander, characterised by tartan, pipes, and a gusto very foreign to Macpherson's listless almost-hexameters.

The best-known exploitation of the vein of 'Macgregor' is Thomas Campbell's dramatic dialogue 'Lochiel's Warning', written two years later. Like Leyden's poem, it stirs up an adroit

123. John Leyden, Poetical Works, edited by T. Brown (1875), p.174.

mixture of visionary beings, recent Highland history, and picturesque imagery. The 'Wizard' (the un-Scottish word recalls Collins) sees Lochiel as an eagle whose eyrie is burnt to the ground while he hunts abroad:

Heaven's fire is around thee, to blast and to burn;
Return to thy dwelling, all lonely return!
For the blackness of ashes shall mark where it stood,
And a wild mother scream o'er her famishing brood.¹²⁴

In this kind of transport, a somewhat mechanical facility in the sublime is sustained by the detailed engagement with documented reality. Cameron of Lochiel's heroic behaviour in 1745, adhering for honour's sake to a cause he believed to be doomed, was a well-known story, and at his house at Achnacarrie 'the marks of the fire' were 'still too visible' when Hogg went there in 1803.¹²⁵

With such a grounding, the poem could convince as a portrayal of the stormy essence of the Rising - the wildly noble intransigence of the hereditary chief confronting the prevision of eventual defeat. The magical prescience of the Wizard justified its improbability by its integral role in expounding a heroic, barbaric, but historically actual state of mind.

Both these pieces, then, contrive to validate their supernatural rhetoric by inserting it in a known history. But then it's significant that in both cases the history is of disaster - the extirpation of the Macgregors, and the fall of the clans as a whole at Culloden. What both have done, independently, is to find

124. Thomas Campbell, Poetical Works (1848), p.89.

125. James Hogg, Highland Tours, edited by W.F. Laughlan (Hawick, 1991), p.72.

a historical equivalent for the pathological feeling of defeat which pervades Macpherson, thus reconnecting the emotion with its object, and producing a writing which doesn't only exploit the Highlands but ventures - albeit very exotically and reductively - to describe them. The lines of Campbell's which passed into the nineteenth-century stock of quotations and assured the place of 'Lochiel' in a hundred school-books -

'Tis the sunset of life gives me mystical lore
And coming events cast their shadows before -

make the visionary faculty a function of decay, and so cleverly combine Macpherson's two controlling images, apparitions and old age, in a single, lavishly picturesque naturalisation. The clairvoyant powers attributed to Gaelic culture are definitively linked to the latter's historical extinction, a current and accelerating fact.¹²⁶ It's this evening light, elegiac and glamorous, which in the 1840s and 50s tinges the fur of Landseer's doomed stags. Campbell had perhaps not written a very good poem (though it was enthusiastically admired, even by Leyden, who detested him); he had, almost as remarkably under the circumstances, written a modern one.

Oddly enough, the immediate stimulus for the piece is very likely to have been John Home's History of the Rebellion of 1802, in which a certain afflatus in the account of the 'gentle Lochiel' was the only exception to the prevailing timid plainness of narrative.¹²⁶ Thus the original recipient of Collins's injunctions

126. John Home, Works, III, 5-8.

provided, not after all the spark, but the equally necessary resistant material, for a minor but genuine fulfilment of them.

c) The Presence of the Poet

In many ways, Scott's first Highland excursion, 'Glenfinlas; or Lord Ronald's Coronach', falls into the kind of inauthenticity which simply ignores the question of what place ancient superstition could have in a modern poem. Written in 1799 for M.G. Lewis's Tales of Wonder, it appeared in the Minstrelsy in 1802 as one of the 'Imitations of the Ancient Ballad'.¹²⁷ Scott says of it in the 1830 notes:

As it is supposed to be a translation from the Gaelic, I considered myself as liberated from imitating the ancient language and rude rhythm of the Minstrel ballad. A versification of an Ossianic fragment came nearer the idea I had formed of my task.¹²⁸

This formula combines the authority of a Gaelic source with the freedom to refine of a literary translator, and so seems calculated to reproduce the alienation of its model in Macpherson. This can indeed be read in, for example, the pressure of purification. In the traditionary outline, the young nobleman meets his fate because he is seduced by a strange girl in green who is really a fiend; Scott, however, is careful to shield his Lord Ronald from the reproach of casual promiscuity by having the evil spirit impersonate the woman he loves, and whose arrival he expects. The various changes this emendation entails

127. Scott, Minstrelsy, II, 375-89.

128. Sir Walter Scott, Poetical Works, edited by J.L. Robertson (1894), p.683.

have the effect of bowdlerising the tale, but also of rendering the sexuality in it perverse; the two demons become troubling, distorted doubles of the maidenly Glengyle sisters, the violent climax a paranoid fantasy of consummation, and the story in general, with its intrigue and its off-stage catastrophe, anxious and secretive, fraught with repression in a manner very familiar from Macpherson. But the equivalence is incomplete simply because Scott comes clean: he presents the thing as an original poem and points out the alterations he has made to the tale on which it's founded. The result 'is supposed to be a translation from the Gaelic', not in the sense that anyone really supposes so, but in the sense of a poetic convention.

This characteristically devious elaboration of Macpherson's naive dishonesty equips the 'ballad' with an elusive thread of self-consciousness which is, amid much conventional gothic, its life. The carrier is, once again, the Second Sight as it derives from Collins's 'Ode', from which 'Glenfinlas' takes its epigraph.

In the original as Scott gives it there are two hunters, one of whom survives by performing 'some strain consecrated to the Virgin Mary'. It's this character, not the noble victim named in the sub-title, who becomes the central consciousness of the poem, in the form of Moy, a chieftain from 'Columba's isle' and a second-sighted minstrel. Scott asserts in a note that the Second Sight is associated with a melancholy disposition (the authority for this questionable psychologising is perhaps Beattie, perhaps the 'moody madness' of Collins's seers), and

has Moy's clairvoyance date from the death of his beloved,

Morna:

E'en then, when o'er the heath of woe,
Where sunk my hopes of love and fame,
I bade my harp's wild wailings flow,
On me the seer's sad spirit came.

Moy is also devout, apparently in the service of St Oran, a notably celibate follower of Columba. Second Sight, music, sorrow and a certain monkishness are thus closely woven into a single figure who is then explicitly opposed to his companion Lord Ronald, a laughing philistine who says, when Moy declares his prevision of his death:

Alone enjoy thy dreary dreams,
Sad prophet of the evil hour!
Say, should we scorn joy's transient beams,
Because to-morrow's storm may lour?

Through this characterisation, the different fates of the two heroes are associated with two distinctive codes of value and language - Moy's Ossianic and Ronald's cavalier (the quatrains can allude to Caroline lyric as well as folk ballad, and the derisive use of Collins's phrase 'dreary dreams' is a suitably neat turning of poetic diction.) So that the formal lament of the 'coronach' proper, which opens the poem -

O hone a rie'! O hone a rie'!
The pride of Albin's line is o'er -

has acquired an ironic resonance by the time it's repeated at the end. The princely Ronald, the Highland chief, aligned with activity, sexuality and living in the present, has been torn to pieces, leaving unharmed the helpless spectator of the dismember-

ment Moy, the Highland bard, aligned with contemplation, mourning and anxiety. The dichotomy is tensely present at the moment of Moy's victory over the evil spirit who tempts him:

Rain beats, hail rattles, whirlwinds tear;
 The slender hut in fragments flew;
 But not a lock of Moy's loose hair
 Was waved by wind, or wet by dew.

The artist is separated by an invisible screen from the violent physical forces which bear upon both the hut and the physically actual chief. He survives the destruction of his surroundings, but the cost of his immunity is abstraction, paralysis, isolation from experience.

Strikingly, then, 'Glenfinlas' turns out to be Ossianic, not only imitatively in some of its imagery, but directly and structurally in that it rediscovers the figure whereby the lament for departed Gaelic grandeur turns into the self-reflection of the bard who has outlived it. Second Sight, a phenomenon which is not necessary to the story, becomes central to the telling of it, because it mediates, in appropriate terms, the special insight, and also the special alienation, of the 'imitator of the ancient ballads' in 1799. The most radical falseness is in the title: the poem is not a collective or ceremonial lament, though it gestures towards that mode for five stanzas at the beginning and end. Inside that frame it is a personal and romantic drama.

This reading is confirmed by the rather similar structure at work in a stylistically very different piece, also presenting the poet in an enchanted Highland setting: Leyden's 'Sonnet,

Written in the Isle of Skye in 1800:

At eve, beside the ringlet's haunted green
 I linger oft, while o'er my lonely head
 The aged rowan hangs her berries red;
 For there, of old, the merry elves were seen,
 Pacing with printless feet the dewy grass;
 And there I view, in many a figured train,
 The marshalled hordes of sea-birds leave the main,
 And o'er the dark-brown moors hoarse-shrieking pass.
 Next in prophetic pomp along the heath
 I see dim forms their shadowy bands arrange,
 Which seem to mingle in encounter strange,
 To work with glimmering blades the work of death:
 In Fancy's eye their meteor falchions glare;
 But, when I move, the hosts all melt in liquid¹²⁹
 air.

Here, in a parallel use of Collins's phantom train, the contemplative modern poet appears in person, 'lingering', 'at eve', consciously seeking the sites of those allied forces, antiquity and magic. Because of the realism of this dramatised presence, the interplay of natural and supernatural is unusually refined, the fancied armies being prepared by the real hosts of birds (tinged with ghostliness by 'figured' and 'shrieking') and the record of old beliefs, which are also real in a different sense. The tone is gentle and bookish compared with the pseudo-barbaric savagery of 'Glenfinlas'. Yet the imagery of airy violence is the same, and so is the dependence of the poet's power - that of 'I' and of Moy - on motionlessness and isolation (the 'lonely head' of the second line is kept in view by constant contrast with the 'hosts' of elves, of sea-birds, of 'dim forms': this solitary figure descrying visionary hordes is a demythologised Ossian).

Beattie had remarked, in the essay where he quoted 'Albania':

it is admitted, even by the most credulous highlanders, that, as knowledge and industry are propagated in their country, the second sight disappears in proportion: and nobody ever laid claim to this faculty, who was much employed in the intercourse of social life.¹³⁰

A para-normal faculty of vision, ambiguously a gift, a curse, and a delusion, which thrives in inverse relation with 'the intercourse of social life' - the mystery and pathos of the Second Sight made it a vivid myth of the predicament of the romantic poet. In a gesture of identification which at once boasts of magic power and confesses to folly, the poet pictures himself on a mental Hebrides, dreaming awake.

It's in these terms that Collins makes a minor but piquant contribution to a much greater romantic self-reflection:

Thus have I looked, nor ceased to look, oppress'd
By thoughts of what, and whither, when and how,
Until the shapes before my eyes became
A second-sight procession, such as glides
Over still mountains, or appears in dreams.¹³¹

This version of the Second Sight, an experience at once calm and tumultuous, is, Wordsworth comments, a feeling

which belonged
To this great city by exclusive right..

In a strange reversal, the lines which I began this chapter by quoting, and which were a metropolitan imagining of the remote Highlands, are eventually (late in 1804) picked up at

130. Beattie, Essays on Poetry and Music, p.170n.

131. William Wordsworth, The Prelude (1805), edited by E. de Selincourt and revised by H. Darbishire (Oxford, 1959), p.256.

Grasmere in an imaginative attempt on the impact of London. Wordsworth supplies the most far-reaching reconnection of all, his passing allusion inserting the misty fragmented poetry of Highland superstition back into the social relations which (and not the actual beliefs of Highlanders, whatever they were) are their true context. As 'knowledge and industry are propagated' from that phantasmagoric metropolis, exorcising the strange spirits of the mountains, they raise as many more of their own.

CHAPTER FOUR

A POETICAL PEOPLE

And if villages are increased, without due regard to their police, their employment and their manners, it were much better for the people, and their country, that they had never seen a village, but had remained in the simplicity of rural life, wrapped in their plaids... on the brow of a hill, attending their cattle, and composing sonnets.¹

The transformation of Highland society implied by 'the propagation of knowledge and industry' is the determining context of the disintegration of old myths, and formulation of new ones. As James Hunter has categorically said, 'The commercialisation of the agricultural structure in response to chieftains' financial necessitousness ... is the great fact of eighteenth century Highland history. From it all else follows.'² This commercialisation was not a simple metropolitan imposition, like the policing programme in the immediate aftermath of the '45. It was a social revolution initiated by the owners of the land - they doubled the rents in the third quarter of the century; they reset estates in such a way as to exclude the tacksmen and so unpick the traditional hierarchy of landholding; they leased to the big sheep-farmers who recast Highland husbandry along capitalist lines between 1770 and 1815; they unconsciously called a new peasantry into being by their

1. O.S.A., XII, 183.

2. James Hunter, The Making of the Crofting Community, (Edinburgh, 1976), p.9.

encouragement of subsistence potato culture and their labour-intensive exploitation of kelp; and when the combined effect of these departures proved incompatible with the existing patterns of population, they evicted the people.³ Thus on the one hand the Highlands entered into a relationship with metropolitan Britain which was economically colonial: it was, for example, the revolution in the textile industry, mediated through prices, which at once stimulated raw wool production and undercut native spinning and weaving, thus shaping a classic client economy in which a debilitated primitive agriculture struggled on side by side with an 'advanced' alien monoculture. But on the other hand, this colonisation was presided over, or actually carried through, by the indigenous pre-capitalist ruling class, which remained in place, consenting more or less uneasily to its own ignominious but temporarily profitable subordination to the logic of a global market.

It shouldn't be imagined that the landlords brought off this coup unnoticed. The vigorous press attack on the early Sutherland clearances, a real factor in the politics surrounding the trial of Patrick Sellar in 1814,⁴ could draw its rhetoric

3. See I.H. Adams, 'The Agents of Agricultural Change', in The Making of the Scottish Countryside, edited by M.L. Parry and T.R. Salter (1980), pp.155-75; Eric Richards, A History of the Highland Clearances (1982) pp.121, 192-96, 202-03; Hunter, The Making of the Crofting Community, Chapter 1; Malcolm Gray, The Highland Economy, 1750-1850 (Edinburgh, 1957), pp.86-100; 124-51.
4. See Eric Richards, The Leviathan of Wealth (1973), pp.180-89.

from a line of literary protests going back to the shafts directed at rack-renting chiefs in the early 1770s by Johnson and Pennant. John Knox, a London Scot who began to write about the Highlands after the disastrous famine of 1782-83, argued bitterly that the people were in misery not because the land was poor -

But as the value of its natural produce, by sea and land, is almost wholly absorbed by the great landholders, and by many of them spent at Edinburgh, London, Bath, and elsewhere.⁵

In the 1790s J.L. Buchanan, for eight years Church of Scotland missionary to the Outer Hebrides, courageously exposed the slavery of the kelp workers there.⁶ Many of these denunciations were extracted at length in the monthly press, and echoed by innumerable travellers, pamphleteers and versifiers.⁷ By the end of the century the proposition that the Highland lairds had disgraced their ancestors by preferring sheep to men was as familiar, though also as strongly contested, as it is today.

However, the political edge was almost invariably taken off this powerful movement of opposition by its inability to question the legitimacy of the landlords' position. In 1804 Alexander Campbell, in a note to his poem The Grampians Desolate, looked wistfully at the condition of the Norwegian highlands, possessed by equal and independent peasant owners -

5. Knox, Tour, p.39.

6. J.L. Buchanan, Travels in the Western Hebrides: from 1782 to 1790 (1793).

7. E.g., 'An Address to the Lairds of Scotland', Gentleman's Magazine, 46 (1776), 397-9^o; or the article on Knox's View of the British Empire in Monthly Review, 71 (1784), 266-71.

a state of property, rights, and privileges, truly primitive, patriarchal and independent; - an enobled peasantry ... What a happy state of society, could such be realized in the more southern empires of Christendom! - but I much fear it is a thing at an indefinite distance, owing to the present state of property and established order in these sections of the civilized continent, or islands of the British empire.⁸

This states the impasse with unusual clear-sightedness.

Alternatives to the self-destructive tale of clearance and immiseration were not inconceivable, but the 'state of property and established order' placed them out of reach. The expropriated Gaelic poor spent their strength in leaderless and ill-directed resistance,⁹ and the horror of English educated observers ran to the bizarre cultural displacements which are the subject of this chapter.

1 Poetry and Emigration

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay;
Princes and lords may flourish or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,¹⁰
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

8. Campbell, The Grampians Desolate, p.284.

9. See K.J. Logue, Popular Disturbances in Scotland 1780-1815 (Edinburgh, 1979), pp.54-74.

10. Oliver Goldsmith, 'The Deserted Village', (text in Lonsdale, pp.669-94), line 51.

Goldsmith's beautifully chiselled antitheses are quoted over and over again by Highland commentators in the generation following the first notable emigrations, and not only adorned, but arguably influenced, the terms of the extensive debate. In 1824 the political economist John McCulloch deplored the influence of The Deserted Village, which in his view had muddled consideration of the Highland problem by introducing pretty irrelevances.¹¹

The poem was certainly timely: it appeared in 1770, and emigration from the north-west coast of Scotland was first raised as a matter of public concern in the spring of 1771. This is not quite a coincidence: the events in the Highlands were after all a 'substantial regional variant', as Eric Richards calls it, of a general history of enclosure and eviction between 1760 and 1815,¹² so that Goldsmith himself was not writing out of a wholly separate predicament. At all events, the two crises of literary anxiety on the Highland emigrations - in 1771-76 and again in 1801-06 - reflect, though differently, his illumination. Not that The Deserted Village had much to offer sociologically. Its prelapsarian Auburn, a society of independent peasants, could hardly be equated with the old Highlands, which were understood to have been clannish and hierarchical. But ethically

11. Quoted in Richards, The Leviathan of Wealth, p.159.

12. Richards, History of the Highland Clearances, p.24.

its powerful linkage of emigration and luxury can be seen in a Highland application in the hands of Goldsmith's scarcely less influential friend, Johnson.

The Journey to the Western Islands, published at the beginning of 1775, reproduces 'the general opinion, that the rents have been raised with too much eagerness', and agrees with Pennant in attributing 'this epidemick desire of wandering, which spreads its contagion from valley to valley' principally to this cause.¹³ Johnson's distinction, though, appears in the authority of the explanation he provides for the epidemic of landlord rapacity. The Laird, he argues, was deprived by the legislative aftermath of the '45 of his social and judicial power.

When the power of birth and station ceases, no hope remains but from the prevalence of money. Power and wealth supply the place of each other.

The tenant, however, gained no power from the changes whereby the Laird lost his, and so has no corresponding motive for the substitution.

He refuses to pay the demand, and is ejected; the ground is then let to a stranger, who perhaps brings a larger stock, but who, taking the land at its full price, treats with the Laird upon equal terms, and considers him not as a Chief, but as a trafficker in land. Thus the estate perhaps is improved, but the clan is broken.

Though Johnson had been told about destructive levels of rent increase, he doesn't, as some contemporary polemicists did, put

13. Johnson, Journey, pp.85-86. Cp. Pennant, 1772, I, 242.

the weight of his explanation on mistakes. The notional new rent is the 'full price' - that is, all, but not more than, the land market will afford. So the quantitative increase turns out to contain a qualitative change in social relations: the hereditary subordination of 'ancient dependent' to chief gives way to the impersonal equality of buyer and seller.

Suppressed within this account by Johnson's trenchant abstraction of manner is a conflict of value. The old relation, after all, was a 'multifarious and extensive obligation', compounding filial, moral and political dependencies with the economic one; whereas the new relation is only economic. In the words of a later critique, a complex human nexus has given way to a simple cash nexus. Emigration thus appears as an unanswerable comment on the choice between humanity and money: choose money, and the humanity literally departs. Although Johnson is very far from making an idyll out of the 'muddy mixture of pride and ignorance' which he supposes the clan ethos to have been, his comments on the depopulation reproduce Goldsmith's dichotomy with scathing urbanity:

to make a country plentiful by diminishing the people, is an expeditious mode of husbandry; but that abundance, which there is nobody to enjoy, contributes little to human happiness.¹⁴

Evidently this level of generality gives access to wider anxieties than those of the Highlands. It's not only that a tradition of rural moralising lends itself to the particular issue; it's

14. Johnson, Journey, p.79.

equally that the particular history - the literal patriarchs in the recent past, and the literal exodus in the present - offers a vivid and exemplary case of wealth accumulating while men decay.

However, the case isn't an innocent one. In Henry Erskine's 'The Emigrant. An Eclogue', published in 1776 but said to have been written in 1773, the 'ancient dependent' of Johnson's analysis fills out, by a large access of sentiment, into a full-blown old retainer. Standing beside a stream on a heath-clad hill, looking down at the ship which will carry him from his native land, the grey-haired Caledonian recalls the living his family's 'niggard lands' used to afford:

Scant as it was, no more our hearts desir'd,
Nor more from us our gen'rous lord requir'd.
But ah, sad change! those blessed days are o'er,
And peace, content, and safety, charm no more;
Another Lord now rules these wide domains,
The avaricious tyrant of the plains;
Far, far from hence, he revels life away,
In guilty pleasures our poor means must pay.¹⁵

The guiltiness of the pleasures taints by association the rent rises that pay for them: the choice of cash values instead of human ones is not so much condemned as excused by the reassurance that it is the preference only of bad men. That the old landlord has not changed his policy, but arbitrarily disappeared, seals the moral insulation. Conversely, the choice of

15. 'The Emigrant. An Eclogue', by 'Scots Spy'. Weekly Magazine, 31 (1776), 399.

human values over cash ones is unworldly:

In vain, of richer climates I am told,
 Whose hills are rich in gems, whose streams are gold;
 I am contented here; I've never seen
 A vale more fertile, or a hill more green;
 Nor would I leave this sweet, tho' humble cot,
 To share the richest monarch's envied lot.

Although the poem had some affective power (it was much reprinted during the following decades, including a chapbook version and an extract in an anthology for schools),¹⁶ its polemic is negated by the paralytic nature of its social ideal. The old man's contentment directly reflects the narrowness of his experience, and it appears that his tranquil relationship with the old lord was based on a threadbare minimum of demands on both sides. Movement is a symmetrical disaster: it's because the landlord is 'far, far from hence' that the tenant is compelled to emigrate. In 'those blessed days', one gathers, everybody stayed still. Highlanders were deferential and poor, dominated by unquestioned custom and hereditary overlords.

In the same vein, The Present Conduct of the Chieftains, a pamphlet of 1773 which denounces the proprietors in terms as round as Erskine's, marks out its ground with an epigraph from Fingal - 'Be thou a Stream of many Tides against the Foes of thy People, but as the Gale that moves the Grass to those that ask thine Aid' - which holds out to them an ancient ideal of

16. D.N.B. on Henry Erskine (1746-1817); William Scott, Beauties of Eminent Writers (Edinburgh, 1793), p.206.

natural patriarchal authority. On that ground, it argues that only the harshest necessity could be driving away a people so tied to their home places:

It was common to see many families in the Highlands, who had lived on the same spot from father to son, for hundreds of years, without having any property, which made them have a surprizing affection for it, and look upon themselves as having a kind of hereditary right to possess it. And where was the harm of this amusing idea? Why should people be hindered from being happy in imagination?¹⁷

The idea of a hereditary tenure is offered as grounds for sympathy with those who are cruelly disabused and evicted, but there is no conviction that the people really have such rights: the only alternative to emigration is implicitly that the agreeable illusions of clanship should somehow be allowed to continue. The protest contains its own withdrawal. The writer ends, neatly enough, by imagining the reaction of the American Indians on learning that the poor newcomers to their country have been driven out by their own tribal chiefs: 'they will call you Barbarians'. It's a telling but defeated point: the chieftains' policy is condemned by the standards of a primitive social role. The structure of the choice between 'men' and 'wealth' is not resilient; in practice the opting for 'men' turns sclerotic, antique, unreal.

The politics of this wan protest can be seen by contrast with a far more energetic poem about emigration, Burns's 'Address of Beelzebub'. Written in 1786, this satire was provoked by a newspaper report that the Highland Society of London had agreed

17. The Present Conduct of the Chieftains and Proprietors of Lands in the Highlands of Scotland, by a Highlander (n.p., 1773), p.4.

to co-operate with government to frustrate the design of five hundred tenants of Glengarry who were planning to go to America. The Prince of Hell congratulates the aristocrats of the Society on their determination to deny their vassals 'that fantastic thing - LIBERTY', exclaiming sympathetically -

THEY! an' be d - mn'd! what right hae they
To Meat, or Sleep, or light o' day,
Far less to riches, pow'r or freedom
But what your lordships PLEASE TO GIE THEM?¹⁸

While this attacks the same substantive target as the conservative critics of the chiefs - the regime of 'factors, greives, trustees an' bailies' that oppresses the people - it does so from a quite different point of view. The standard is not custom, but liberty, and this generates a different image of the Highlanders themselves. For Burns, they are naturally free and wild: Beelzebub fears, on Breadalbane's behalf, that in the land of the American Revolution

Some daring Hancocke, or a Franklin
May set their HIGHLAN bluid a ranklin' -

or that even kept at home

Yet while they're only poin'd, and herriet
They'll keep their stubborn Highlan spirit.

So far from lamenting or tensely resisting the decay of the bond between chief and clansman, the poem accepts it, and even draws a sort of genial swagger from the openness of class hostility. Thus, ironically, the strength of the satire comes from its not seeking moral meaning in the loss of some traditional Highland way of

18. Burns, 'Address of Beelzebub to the Earl of Breadalbane', Kinsley No.108.

life. It's the Highland Society, attempting to reassert paternal authority in the face of a new social mobility, which is implicitly taking up the imperatives of the dichotomy between humanity and money. Burns brushes aside that conservative problematic, and judges actions, with scant regard to cultural distinctions or organicist regrets, by the universal criterion of the rights of man. That hard radical light reveals the other face of clan nostalgia to be social repression.¹⁹

In thus dismissing the patriarchal idea, Burns, despite the inflammatory tone which was presumably what delayed the poem's publication until 1818, was abreast of the time. By the 1800s, no-one among an acrimoniously divided group of commentators is recommending chieftainship as a practicable social institution.²⁰

Andrew Irvine, who in 1802 argues that emigration is undesirable and preventable, concedes that the attachment of the clansman to the chief, once 'like the ivy which entwines the oak', is now

19. The mechanics and ideology of this repression are detailed in J.M. Bumsted, The People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America 1770-1815 (Edinburgh and Winnipeg, 1982). Bumsted argues that emigrants before 1815 were usually pursuing ambitions for a better life rather than fleeing from catastrophe, and shows how deeply mixed were the motives, and the methods, of those who tried to stop them. See especially the chapters on 1802-03, pp.108-54.

20. Andrew Irvine, An Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of Emigration from the Highlands (Edinburgh, 1802); Selkirk, Observations (1805); 'Amicus', Eight Letters on the Earl of Selkirk's Pamphlet on Highland Emigration (Edinburgh, 1806); Robert Brown, Strictures and Remarks on the Earl of Selkirk's Observations on the Present State of the Highlands of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1806).

'ultimately extinguished by the progress of society';²¹ and the Earl of Selkirk, replying in 1805 that emigration is harmless and inevitable, agrees that residual 'feudal' sentiment 'cannot long continue to have a perceptible effect'.²² The corollary of this conclusion is, quite directly, the fulfilment of a narrowly economic logic. Selkirk:

Gradually, however, men educated under different circumstances came forward, and feeling more remotely, the influence of antient connexions with their dependants, were not inclined to sacrifice for a shadow the substantial advantage of a productive property. The more necessitous, or the less generous, set the example; and one gradually followed another, till at length all scruple seems to be removed, and the proprietors in the Highlands have no more hesitation than in any other part of the kingdom, in turning their estates to the best advantage.²³

The striking thing about this passage is that while it portrays the transition from social to economic values as necessary (the change from 'shadow' to 'substance'), it doesn't at the same time discard the moral content of the 1770s agitation. It's still an abandonment of 'scruple' which is in question, shamefully led by the needy or the grasping; only now, the proprietors no longer have the option of acting well. (This asymmetry, incidentally, shows how faithfully Selkirk is the Highland disciple of Adam Smith, for whom the transition from allodial sovereignty to

21. Irvine, p.6.

22. Selkirk, p.24.

23. Selkirk, p.23.

commercial legality is at once 'the silent and insensible operation of foreign commerce and manufactures' and 'the gratification of the most childish, the meanest, and the most sordid of all vanities'.²⁴) The Highland debate is thus darkened by an unusually local and referential sense of human virtues denied a home in social reality; of a good exiled.

It becomes, in other words, the matrix of a romantic attitude to social order, and this is reflected in the poetry which accompanies this second wave of emigration. In Cririe's 'The Emigrant's Lament', printed in 1803, the dramatic situation is the same as Erskine's, but the tone has changed:

Ye wilds and ye mountains, farewell!
 Ye springs, and ye murmuring streams!
 Though forc'd to forsake you by day,
 We'll visit you oft in our dreams...

Though dimm'd by our tears as they flow,
 Their image becomes more obscure,
 We wish that the ship might sail slow,
 And the picture for ever endure.²⁵

The things the emigrant is losing have dissolved in the prettiness of the metre and the insubstantiality of the representation. Home is a dream or a picture; the wish to stay only the consciously vain wish to linger indefinitely over a tear-dimmed image. It's not only that the 'wilds' are subjectively preferred: they connote subjective preference as such, as opposed to the coercive facts encountered 'by day'. Similarly, Alexander Campbell's The

24. Smith, Wealth of Nations, pp.418-19.

25. Cririe, Scottish Scenery, pp.352-53.

Grampians Desolate, in 1804, recalls:

Time was, when some fond pair in wedlock bless'd
 Enjoy'd content, the sunshine of the breast,
 On some lone spot amidst the Grampians hoar,
 Where down the glen was heard the cataract's roar;
 Where birch and hazel, mountain ash and oak
 Entwined their arms, through which some bothan's smoke
 Curl'd up the heath-clad height, a token sure,
 That all was tranquil, joyous and secure: ...
 But now, where nought appears along the steep,
 Save here and there a wandering group of sheep.²⁶

Here the detail, including the focus on the real social question of the sheep, is less misty. But the lavish protective involvement of picturesque decoration, rendered systematically indefinite by the repeated use of 'some', reduces the retrospect to the same dreamy picture, not on the same level of existence as the contemporary reality of the sheep.

In other cases the same abstracting impulse has the odd effect of abolishing the gap between 1746 and 1770, so that in David Carey's Craig Phadric, for instance, a prospect poem of 1811, emigration becomes a spontaneous reaction to the Battle of Culloden:

While cruel mirth in yonder camp resounds,
 And Horror pale, and Rapine walk their rounds,
 The swain retiring seeks the sea-bent shore,
 Where, stretch'd immense, Atlantic billows roar.²⁷

In line with this revision, James Hogg's repro Jacobite laments in The Forest Minstrel of 1810 are full of emigrant sentiment - and

26. Campbell, The Grampians Desolate, p.55.

27. David Carey, Craig Phadric: Visions of Sensibility, with Legendary Tales, and Occasional Pieces (Inverness, 1811), p.73.

vice versa:

We stood by our Stuart, till one fatal blow
 Loos'd Ruin triumphant, and Valour laid low.
 Our chief, whom we trusted, and liv'd but to please,
 Then turn'd us adrift to the storms and the seas.²⁸

By crystallising the whole historical passage of compromise and change into the 'one fatal blow' of the battle, the Jacobite motif removes to an unattainable distance of time and fatality the virtues whose exile is symbolised by the voyage to America. The old Highland world - before the sheep, or before the rents were put up, or before the '45 - is now not merely doomed or paralysed, but avowedly a work of the reconstructive imagination. Its distinctive qualities - wild scenery, extravagant loyalty, remoteness, valour - are not necessarily those of utopian happiness; but they are those of a mental or spiritual (as opposed to a social and material) fineness. The rather incongruous identification, therefore, which the gentle reader or writer of verse automatically makes with emigrating peasants of a wholly alien culture and experience, is essentially an identification of the lost home as poetical.

We are still, that is, within the terms of The Deserted

Village:

And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,²⁹
 Still first to fly where sensual joys invade.

The richly circumstantial history, with its costumes and 'manners' and pathetic embarkations, is adopted, by what Raymond Williams

28. James Hogg, The Forest Minstrel (Edinburgh, 1810), p.214.

29. Goldsmith, 'Deserted Village', line 407.

calls a 'negative identification', on behalf of the writer's personal situation of alienation and displacement.³⁰ The strange particularity of this process with regard to the Highlands comes out in another 'emigrant' poem - Anne Grant's The Highlanders, published in 1803. This loosely discursive piece opens with the poet convalescing after a winter illness. There's a natural contrast between the health of returning spring and the lingering sickness, which is then complicated by reflection on the melancholy condition of the community:

But who, alas, can spring's delights restore?
Since social joys and cheerful toils are dead,
And all the train of mountain virtues fled.³¹

The use of persona is cruder than Goldsmith's as well as dependent on him; nevertheless, the structure of feeling, in which the loss of the rural community is equated with the solitary malaise of the poet, is taken over unchanged. Within this outline, however, the geographical shift produces significant differences of detail:

Now, where the dappl'd fawns and bounding roes
Were wont their sprightly gambols to disclose,
Slow wand'ring sheep gaze round with vacant eye
While sullen rocks return their plaintive cry.

The reverberant bleating echoes Goldsmith's wild birds:

Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,
And tires their echoes with unvaried cries.³²

But where the birds are, so to speak, impressionistic - invented counters for a mood - the sheep, as well as providing a fairly

30. Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (1973), p.78.

31. Anne Grant, Poems (1803), p.23.

32. Goldsmith, 'Deserted Village', line 45.

exact antithesis of feeling with the deer, are also a well-known local fact. Mrs Grant's valley was only forty or fifty miles from the scene of the Ross-shire anti-sheep riots of 1792, which she had mentioned in her letters at the time, not without sympathy for the rioters.³³ Comparably, the next couplet -

Pensive and slow I climb the mountain brow
To view each social hamlet's mutual plough -

is glossed by a note about joint-farms, where the plough is owned by perhaps eight families together. The pleonastic emphasis - 'social' and 'mutual' - reflects the detail's double function: it is a value, the assertion of 'social joys' in the face of depopulation; but it is also a piece of information. Feeling and history are adroitly induced to rhyme.

Such an enterprise of course seizes with particular eagerness on the idea that Highland poets have, or had, an acknowledged central place in the community whose passing is lamented. The perceived traditions of communal singing, piping, eloquence and bardic prestige give a kind of sociological confirmation to the imaginative gratification afforded by Highland society in general:

Say, banish'd masters of the tuneful art,
Who sway with latent pow'r the willing heart,
Where are you now? across the Atlantic's roar
Do your sad eyes your native hills explore? ...
Or wakes the harp the well-known notes of woe,
That wont along the funeral path to flow,
That, while our vanish'd comforts we deplore,
Repeats emphatic, "They return no more."³⁴

The allusion is to a pipe tune, printed in 1784 as 'Cha till mi

33. Anne Grant, Letters from the Mountains, II, 233-37.

34. Grant, Poems, pp.25-26.

tuille' and later known as 'Macrimmon's Lament', which is supposed to have become a traditional accompaniment to the embarkation of emigrants.³⁵ Mrs Grant here Ossianises it - by transposing it for harp, and by translating its title in a phrase from Macpherson³⁶ - and so contrives to stage as current actuality the allegorical departure of Goldsmith's 'loveliest maid', Poetry. The identification of the poet's alienation with that of the community is made over into a positive one by an image of the community as literally poetic.

2 The Social Tribes

Emigration was the clear and dramatic image of the destruction of human community by the priorities of an economic Improvement. There were others less palpable, and perhaps less arbitrary. Francis Jeffrey, reviewing Anne Grant's writings in 1811, acknowledged that she had identified

circumstances which have a tendency, in all rude societies, to confer on the lower orders a certain degree of dignity and intelligence, which they are not found to attain in the more advanced stages of national prosperity, - and which may seem to make it doubtful, whether the great improvement which society has made in wealth, splendour, and power, is not accompanied with some diminution of the happiness of the larger body, as it undoubtedly is, with a great falling off in the polish of their

35. See V.S. Blankenhorn, 'Traditional and Bogus Elements in "MacCrimmon's Lament"', Scottish Studies, 22 (1978), 45-67.

36. Laing, II, 390, 433.

manners, and the elevation of their sentiments.³⁷

This points through the accumulation of wealth to a more pervasive and less easily identifiable human decay than that of population; and despite the Enlightenment dogmatism of its language, its concern with the state of the common culture anticipates the attempts of current historiography to transcend the limiting debate about the 'standard of living' and talk about qualities of mind, of relationship, of 'dignity and intelligence'.³⁸ That emigration was the nemesis of luxury was after all only a conviction, a moral logic: many writers at the time, including poets like Campbell and Carey, still believed that the conflict between population and prosperity could be resolved by stimulating the Highland economy so as to employ those who would be displaced by capital-intensive agriculture. But was such a cure, from the more radical point of view succinctly stated by Jeffrey, much better than the disease? The 'mountain virtues fled' in either case - with the people or from them. Campbell is a good example of the prevailing confusion here. His praise of Highland character is tied up, in a familiar way, with a subsistence level of farming -

His cot, his croft, the hill that rose behind
And shelter'd all from Winter's stormy wind,
That yielded pasture for his little store,
'Twas all his soul desir'd, nor wish'd for more -

37. Review of Grant, Essays, Edinburgh Review, 18 (1811), 480-510 (p.488).

38. For a relevant example, see Ian Grimble, 'Emigration in the Time of Rob Donn, 1714-1778', Scottish Studies, 7 (1963), 129-53.

but later on his swains are regaled, by a prophetic 'Genius of the Celtic line', with the sight of a future of almost decadent plenty:

The joyous hind from cultured heaths inhales
ARABIA'S fragrance in soft-breathing gales;
Nor famed CALABRIA, nor ARCADIA fair,
Shall with the smiling GRAMPIANS more compare.³⁹

The ideological incoherence is yet more serious than the ecological implausibility. Campbell is trying to eat his cake and have it.

Anne Grant's writing elaborates a position hostile to Improvement which is at once less disingenuous and more intelligent; and in doing so suggests quite concretely what it means, in terms of social and even political values, to regard the Highlands as poetical. A Highland minister's wife and so the supervisor of a glebe farm, she finds in literature a space to enjoy as freedom -

Here all is open as the ambient sky,
Nor fence, nor wall, obstructs the wandering eye⁴⁰ -

a state of agriculture which her husband, writing for the Statistical Account, sees as backward -

Farmers have at last found out the advantages of enclosures.⁴¹

That enclosure was the necessary precondition of improved land use was not seriously questionable: Improvers had been urging it on the Highlands since the Annexed Estates Commissioners began work around 1760.⁴² But Mrs Grant's mild dissent represents more

39. Campbell, The Grampians Desolate, pp.52 and 87.

40. Grant, Poems, p.34.

41. O.S.A., XVII, 223.

42. See Youngson, After the Forty-Five, pp.29 and 168-69.

than the irresponsible pleasure of the 'wandering eye'. Her couplet, from Part II of The Highlanders, opens a sequence enlarging on the attractions of the open rig:

Each hamlet's flocks and herds, a mutual charge,
That wander up the mountain's side at large;
Alternate claim the rustic's daily care;
And thus each various rural toil they share.

As with the joint-farms mentioned in the first part, the great point of this laborious way of managing is its sharing of work and responsibility: unlike a shepherd on a lonely ranch, the people are carrying on their social and their economic activity at the same time. The sequel specifies further:

The lesser Children guide the bleating lambs,
When wean'd and forc'd to quit their tim'rous dams;
The more advanc'd the sportive kidlings guide,
Where rocks o'erhang the torrent's dashing pride.
The little Maiden, whose unsteady hand
Can scarce the distaff's yielding weight command ...
Her flowing tresses decks with garlands gay,
Then spins beside her playful calves the day.
The Youth, whose cheek the manly down o'er spreads
Wide o'er the hills the stronger cattle leads.

Despite its somewhat tawdry poetic diction, this is a realistic portrayal with a definite assessment of its object. It ironically matches the accounts of the disapproving agricultural writers: one can easily accept William Marshall's list of drawbacks to the 'Youth's ramblings with the cattle -

the drift of the stock; the driving across intermediate grazings; the inconveniencies and dangers of having stock at a distance; the never-ceasing disputes with the occupiers of the surrounding lands ...⁴³

or the impression of a modern historian that

43. William Marshall, General View of the Agriculture of the Central Highlands of Scotland (1794), p.31.

True sheep farmers, indeed, were apt to regard this old sheep economy as a sort of slovenly domestic petting.⁴⁴

By the criteria of a wider political economy, Mrs Grant's pastoral is no less deplorable. The maiden who spins as she tends the calves is the type of 'various rural toil': a few lines later her father

forms the hamlet's fold,
Or else with patient labour turns the mould.

Much of the appeal of the description lies in this sense of leisurely variety: it seems that not only the poet's eye and the flocks, but all the different members of the family, are 'wandering'. Just this rural dilettantism is one of the reasons for identifying the division of labour as the master key to the wealth of nations:

The habit of sauntering and of indolent careless application, which is naturally, or rather necessarily acquired by every country workman who is obliged to change his work and his tools every half hour, and to apply his hand in twenty different ways almost every day of his life; renders him almost always slothful and lazy, and incapable of any vigorous application even on the most pressing occasions.⁴⁵

This is from Adam Smith's first chapter: the 'sauntering' rhythms of country work can be morally condemned as 'slothful', despite the acknowledgment that they are 'necessary', because of the adjacent new criterion of the famous pinmaking, with its tense productivity. The new order changes the meaning of what remains unchanged of the old. As another improver rather ambivalently says of communal farming:

44. Gray, The Highland Economy, p.39.

45. Smith, Wealth of Nations, p.19.

This is one of the most ancient customs in our country. It is a relic of the pastoral age, or feudal system. But it is ruinous to the interest of the landlord, the tenant, and the public, in the present enlightened state of agriculture.⁴⁶

In implicit opposition to such enlightenment, Mrs Grant's description of 'rural toil' is informed by values which are ultimately, and characteristically, educational. The hamlet's children all have tasks suited to their sex and age, calculated to make them independent, brave, responsible and physically strong. If it is considered as a productive unit, the farm is clearly typical of the eighteenth century highlands in being overstocked, overmanned, and under-capitalised; however, Mrs Grant is rather considering it as a school of useful virtue. Later in the same description of the joint-farm, she explains that people build their own houses:

For here scarce known the sordid arts of trade,
They seek no gross mechanic's frigid aid:
Tho' mean the dwelling thus uncouthly rear'd,
'Tis still by kindly gratitude endear'd:
While each his neighbour aids with cordial smile,
To build, like lab'ring ants, the rustic pile.⁴⁷

Again Mrs Grant appears to be in a sort of unconscious dialogue with Adam Smith: although there's no sign of her having read him, it's as if his ideas were so influential in the period as to function

46. Dr. Rennie, 'Of those Obstacles to Improvement which are Local to the Highlands', in Appendix to the General Report of the Agricultural State and Political Circumstances of Scotland, edited by Sir John Sinclair, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1814), II, 395.

47. Grant, Poems, p.37.

as economic rationality as such. Her observation here confirms his mention of the Scottish Highlands as an example of an area too sparsely populated to admit of much specialisation or exchange. But in relegating the productive limitations to a concessive clause, and emphasising instead the attendant neighbourliness, Mrs Grant is differing from a way of seeing. Smith observes

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages. Nobody but a beggar chooses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens.⁴⁸

This is precisely the 'gross mechanic's frigid aid': Mrs Grant is resorting from its logic to the Highlands, imagined as a place so remote from this network of commercial dependencies that 'humanity' does, routinely, figure as a practical motive in the satisfaction of needs. The insecurity of the identification then appears, not in any particular doubts about the facts, but in the attribution of a subjective attachment to subsistence farming. 'They seek no gross mechanic...' - the rhetoric denies, what its topography tacitly admits, that the Highlanders would be self-interested Smithian citizens if they could.

The conjoint labours of the hamlet, then, are a great deal more than pretty. They connote a way of life filled with harmonies - between man and nature (the children's nuanced intimacy with the animals and their habitats), between man and man (the mutual help-

48. Smith, Wealth of Nations, p.27.

fulness seen in the herding and building), and between the subjective and the contingent worlds - for the scenery and arrangements of the valley seem to be alive with feelings, without any details which are merely instrumental. The crucial concept informing all these rapprochements, especially the last, is the ideal of the 'social'. Mrs Grant uses the word often (we have seen it twice already), and usually in a way which includes the strong emotional sense which it carries, for example, in Thomson:

The social Tear would rise, the social Sigh;
And into clear Perfection, gradual Bliss,
Refining still, the social Passions work.⁴⁹

In Thomson's relatively abstract context, the word alludes to society as a sort of psychological principle: the love of humankind in general. Mrs Grant's use, by an equivoque whose structure recalls that of the symbolic-and-literal sheep, embraces both the ideal and the specific societies of her Highland glens. Here is the romance at some length, in explicit contrast to the 'cultured' south,

Where grovelling interest draws each sordid plan,
And all things feel improvement's aid but man -

Far to the North, where Scotia's Alps arise,
And shroud their white heads in the misty skies;
In peopled straths, where winding streams prolong
Their course familiar in the CELTIC song:
Or where the narrow wooded glens display,
Their verdant bosoms opening to the day,
And each its tributary torrent pours,
To swell the midland river's copious stores:
While near their confluence stand the mouldering seats

49. Thomson, 'Winter', line 356.

Where ancient Chieftains rul'd those green retreats,
 And faithful Clans delighted to obey
 The kind behests of patriarchal sway;
 The social tribes branch'd out on every side,
 The pleasures and the toils of life divide;
 And long experienc'd in the ages gone,
 Peculiar toils and pleasures all their own.⁵⁰

The ramified system of streams, closed to the lowland world but open to the sky, furnishes, with its circuitous but inexhaustible pattern of interdependence, at once a setting and a symbol for the system which is the clan. The force of this rather subtle trope is, first, that the community is natural (the branching imagery reminds us that the clan is a kind of family), and then, that the human presence on the scene, represented by the songs and the mouldering castles, is ancient: the stream also flows through time.

Both these emphases are neatly confirmed by another use of the image, in one of the Essays:

By thus directing every petty rill of intellect or intelligence into the common current of tradition, however scanty the sources might be, the stream gradually increased in force and magnitude. Nor can those accustomed to endless wells, and pipes, and reservoirs of far-fetched intelligence, easily believe what salutary draughts of useful and pleasing knowledge were hence obtained.⁵¹

No less striking than the duplication of the metaphor here is the amplification of what it signifies. Whereas in the poem, the streams ran with literal, picturesque water, here it acquires a meaning; and it turns out that the element of the branching

50. Grant, Poems, p.33.

51. Grant, Essays, II, 7.

system is, once again, mental. For instance, a little later in the same essay, Mrs Grant argues that the valley, being a tiny principality because of its seclusion, is a stage for great qualities as a small part of a larger whole is not:

Every thing perishes but immortal mind; and to it all perishing things are subservient. It is, then, the display of its powers that gives dignity and consequence to the cause that elicits them.... Any community that has a public form of distinct rule, - any district divided by distinct boundaries, forms a scene of action, sufficient to call forth ability, and give scope for wisdom or valour.⁵²

Society, then, is essentially immaterial; it is the transmission and exercise of qualities of intellect and feeling. The old society of the Highlands, whose inferiority is precisely material, but for which Mrs Grant claims both a purer transmission of mind and more various scope for its powers, thus appears as closer to the essence than the commercial south. It's not a neutral opposition between ideas and things: the contrast of the stream and the water-pipes neatly encapsulates a value-laden opposition between authenticity and technology. It's then not surprising to read, of the nature of the tradition represented by the stream and its tributaries:

In respect to general knowledge, useful arts, and profound or elegant science, this volume of tradition was very scanty, or entirely silent. Not so with regard to the heroic, the tender, the ludicrous, the moral, and the decorous...⁵³

52. Grant, Essays, II, 19-20.

53. Grant, Essays, II, 8.

Here, in a decisive alienation, the improver's judgment on the clan system and its farming is internalised by the counter-ideal: Mrs Grant's highlanders cede the territory of knowledge to Sir John Sinclair and rest content with the credit of an expertise of sentiment. Thus, although the appeal of, and for, the traditional Highlands is grounded in real experience, the structure of the myth remains unchanged. The Highlanders are condemned to be poetical, and the poetical to be impractical.

3 A Golden Age

The society of the 'social tribes' is immaterial; a culture of feelings, not artefacts. This isn't an idiosyncrasy of Anne Grant's. Ramsay of Ochtertyre, for instance, writing about Highland music, says that pipers were traditionally required to serve a long apprenticeship, but that most trades were free, and finds this a typical priority: the Highlanders 'were satisfied with bungling artificers, but required a degree of excellence in their musicians.'⁵⁴ This image, suggestive of a foolish and admirable aristocratic indifference to considerations of interest, is reactively projected out of an Improving ethos which narrowing circumstances, as we've seen, rendered increasingly and exploitatively utilitarian. It shows up on a still larger scale in the constructions of philosophical history.

54. 'Dissertation', in P. McDonald, A Collection of Highland Vocal Airs (1784), p.14.

The feelings and the things are fairly directly opposed, for example, in James Dunbar's Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude and Cultivated Ages (1780). In the first of these, 'On the Primeval Form of Society', civilisation is depicted as a process of escalating artificiality in which human nature has become so fluctuating, altered, and disguised that 'its independent character has become dark and problematical'. The nature of man is directly observable - not in the absence of society, for Dunbar contends that the qualities we recognise as human are social ones - but in the origin of society. Of this imaginary social moment, Dunbar's view is optimistic: he rejects the theory that men banded together out of fear, and asserts that they associated out of fellow-feeling, so that society is 'not the sickly daughter of calamity, nor even the production of an aspiring understanding, but the free and legitimate offspring of the human heart'. Society, in this account, is not primarily a means of furthering its members' interests, but a direct expression of their feelings. It follows - though Dunbar is not fully in command of this consequence - that as arts and institutions develop, alienation develops beside them: human nature is less and less realised in human behaviour, and sociability less realised in the forms of society, as civilisation advances. The argument comes to rest on an elegiac compromise:

The serene and joyous period between the rudeness of mere animal life, and the dissensions of civil society, constituted, perhaps, that short but happy period, to which antiquity refers in her descriptions of the golden age.⁵⁵

55. James Dunbar, Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude and Cultivated Ages, second edition (1781), pp.1, 17, 32.

Although the era of Ossian could hardly be described as free of 'dissensions', its combination of poetry, flawless virtue, and technical paucity make it a significant source for this fragile primitivism. Dunbar says himself in a later essay:

If fidelity, generosity, true dignity of mind, are preferable to disingenuity, perfidy, servile adulation; if the former qualities are to be numbered among polite accomplishments, and the latter to be placed in the opposite column; who would not prefer the civilization of Fingal's court to that of the other, though embellished by all arts and sciences.⁵⁶

The high-toned scepticism about the value of arts and sciences suggests Rousseau, whom Dunbar had certainly read. But although the Ossianic cult is sometimes assigned a vague historical place in Rousseau's retinue (the dates fit very neatly), the terms of the respective golden ages aren't altogether convertible.

Dunbar's vision, like Anne Grant's and like Macpherson's too, is of an intensely social kind of life, where communal feelings are all the stronger for being pristine; this is a very different emphasis from the Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité (1755), in which men are happy only so long as they don't contract dependencies by engaging in joint enterprises. Nor does Rousseau draw the line between the golden age and 'mere animal life' with that humanistic decisiveness. The Scottish inflection of the noble savage has communal loyalties, codes of conduct, social superiors - in fact, it's courting confusion to call him a savage at all.

56. Dunbar, Essays, p.199.

But Blair - who rather than Macpherson is the authority for the philosophical cult - is interestingly uncertain on just this point. His 'Critical Dissertation' opens with a grand theoretical perspective of the 'infancy of societies', when passion and imagination predominated over understanding, and language and manners had a vivacity and directness unchecked by method and rule. The confident procession of generalisations seems certain to herald the appearance of Ossian as the wild and lofty poet of the primeval state. But then in fact Ossian is introduced by way of a contrast with a barbarous scaldic war-song which throws into relief his 'amazing degree of regularity and art'. These cultivated qualities are in turn explained thus:

We must not therefore imagine the Celtae to have been altogether a gross and rude nation. They possessed from very remote ages a formed system of discipline and manners, which appears to have had a deep and lasting influence.⁵⁷

This revelation, however, doesn't simply negate the impression left by the opening, which is revived in its turn a few pages later when Blair assigns Ossian to the hunting stage of society and the 'roving indolent life' of an independent savage.⁵⁸ The two models of Fingalian society - the absolutely primitive and the culturally established - run side by side through the essay and its extensive reception. The advantages of 'rudeness' and 'cultivation' are combined, not so much by a compromise as by a brazen inconsistency.

57. Works of Ossian, II, 333-34.

58. Works of Ossian, II, 341.

The resolution of the dilemma, the mythic signifier which unites the contradictory data, is the figure of the poet himself. The code of heroism by which Fingal lives - his 'moderation, humanity, and clemency', and his extravagant gallantry towards women and fallen opponents - was first developed by a 'college or order of men' whose profession was literature. These virtues

would enter into their panegyrics; they would afford materials for succeeding bards to work upon and improve; they would contribute not a little to exalt the public manners. For such songs as these, familiar to the Celtic warriors from their childhood, and throughout their whole life, both in war and peace, their principal entertainment, must have had a very considerable influence in propagating among them real manners nearly approaching to the poetical; and in forming even such a hero as Fingal. Especially when we consider that among their limited objects of ambition, among the few advantages which in a savage state, man could obtain over man, the chief was Fame, and that [immortality which they expected to receive from their virtues and exploits, in the songs of bards.]⁵⁹

In this passage, which executes, once again, the tacit shift from an 'improved' to a 'savage' model of Ossianic society, Blair constructs a way of life which is literally governed by poetry. Fingal's world, as we've seen, is agnostic; but here Blair supplies the place of religion, with bards for priests, an institutionalised poetic tradition for doctrine, and for heaven, the prospect of literary immortality. As if in premature parody of Matthew Arnold (a belated admirer of Macpherson), poems are seated on the throne vacated by dogma and legislate directly for conduct. In war, for example, the poet not only functions

59. Works of Ossian, II, 338.

instead of a drill sergeant -

Those precepts and examples, which are set before them in the engaging dress of poetry ... teach them that generous contempt of danger, and even of death, to which the common people of commercial countries seldom attain, till they have been thoroughly disciplined⁶⁰ -

but actually (in the ex hypothesi absence of any material interests to fight for) produces the casus belli: as Kames legitimately concludes -

According to Ossian, the ancient Caledonians had no idea of plunder: and as they fought for fame only, their humanity overflowed to the vanquished.⁶¹

The heroes' motives are aesthetic: they know they are fictional characters.

A spectacular instance of this occurs in the fourth book of Fingal. The Caledonians are losing a battle, but Fingal delays coming to their aid at the request of one of his sons, who wants an opportunity to distinguish himself independently. Rather than injure the boy's 'fame' by effective intervention, Fingal sends a bard to encourage him.⁶² David Hume asks of this behaviour, 'Are these the manners of barbarous nations, or even of people that have common sense?'⁶³ The answer to his question can be reconstructed by returning briefly to the appeal of the Ossianic day-dream and its specific foundation in reading.

One of Anne Grant's most ambitious post-Ossianic ventures is

60. Ramsay, 'Dissertation', p.15.

61. Henry Home, Lord Kames, 'Critical Observations', in Poems of Ossian (Edinburgh, 1797), II, 297.

62. Laing, I, 132-37.

63. David Hume, 'Of the Authenticity of Ossian's Poems', in Philosophical Works, edited by T.H. Green and T.H. Grose, 4 vols (1874-75), II, 415-24 (p.417).

a versification of 'Morduth', a spurious piece published by John Clark, an emulator of Macpherson, in 1778,⁶⁴ but which she believed to be ancient. It's a heroic narrative, framed by the dramatic presence of the narrator in precisely Macpherson's manner:

O you that pour'd the tempest on your foes,
 Look smiling from the clouds of your repose;
 And while your children hear your proud renown,
 See tears of transport silently steal down: -
 My soul grows bright while former years arise,
 With all their deeds of fame to glad my eyes:
 In long succession see the scenes unfold, -
 Hunter, attend! a tale of times of old!⁶⁵

This presents no fewer than four audiences. There is the speaker, the spectator of the visions of 'former years'. There is the 'Hunter', the silent individual to whom the tale is supposed to be addressed. There are the listening 'children' - a whole generation, a virtual rather than an immediate audience, resembling the addressees of a published poem. And finally there are the ancient warriors, watching the emotional reactions of their descendants. Thus Mrs Grant's lines, considered as a record of the experience of enjoying Macpherson, indicate how the act of reading itself admitted the reader to a fantastic company which included both the book's characters and its other purchasers. Through this misty transhistorical medium, the third-century Caledonians, objects of fantasy, appear as fantasists too. The blurring of the division between reality and dreams is what

64. See D.S. Thomson, 'Bogus Gaelic Literature c. 1750-1820', Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Glasgow, 5 (1958), 172-88.

65. Grant, Poems, p.374.

distinguishes, not only the poetry, but also the people it depicts:

The train of images that floated in dim succession over their pensive and labouring minds when waking, came arrayed in all the forms and colours of reality to visit their slumbers after this previous preparation. Hence, in time they could hardly distinguish on recollection, 'The visions of the night, when sleep cometh upon man,' from the unreal forms which haunted their waking fancy. Whatever effect this might have upon life in the period of society, which might properly be termed the reign of the affections, it gave much pathetic effect to their descriptive poetry, in which this indistinct mixture of day dreams with night visions, is very perceptible. 66

This bizarre piece of speculative history is the outcome of at least three interlocking circularities: Macpherson's fabrications, which supply as antique evidence a simple reflection of contemporary assumptions about antiquity; the specifically academic circularity of setting those poems in a historical context whose details have been culled from the poems themselves; and, perhaps most structurally, the cultivation of a type of poetry whose only real subject is the experience of reading poetry. The image thus precipitated is that of a race of people who mirror exactly our idea of grace, of fear and courage, of tenderness, sentiment and passion - in short, who lead an imaginary life; and one which, moreover, is imaginary not only for us, but for them too. 'Are these the manners of barbarous nations, or even of people that have common sense?' The answer is that the Fingalians are liberated from the constraints of common sense precisely by their barbarism: they are denizens of 'the period of society, which might be termed the reign of the affections'. The opposition of feeling to Improvement, which we saw controlling the emigration question as

66. Grant, Essays, I, 100. The quotation is from Job, iv, 13, via Blair, 'Critical Dissertation', Works of Ossian, II, 373.

the specific definition of a choice, is projected, enormously exaggerated, on to whole epochs of history.

One vigorous strain of this fantasy has been a myth of Gaelic. The primeval society of Dunbar had its peculiar and pure feelings, which we can't recover; 'nor, if the feelings remained, could artificial language, in this respect, supply the language of nature.'⁶⁷ The language of nature, as it appears from the next essay, is that first universal expression which was neither arbitrary nor chosen, but knit by inevitable harmonies to sentiment - an irrecoverably forceful and genuine language of the heart.

Monboddo apparently argued literally that the Adamic language was Gaelic.⁶⁸ No-one else was prepared to maintain this position in set terms,⁶⁹ but the idea was not absolutely eccentric. The whole story of Macpherson's enterprise points to an undeclared assumption that the language of his originals was, in this metaphysical sense, the original language. As is well known, he was supposed to have collected Fingal, and the sixteen other pieces published along with it, on a trip round the Highlands in the autumn of 1760. He was twenty-four, he had no demonstrable knowledge of Celtic antiquities, his gifts as a scholar and translator were untried except by a few fragments whose accuracy nobody had examined. He had been asked, by Blair, Robertson, and other

67. Dunbar, Essays, p.25.

68. Lettice, Letters on a Tour, pp.263-64.

69. No-one else in Anglophone culture: for Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's version of the idea, see Chapman, Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture, p.60.

Edinburgh luminaries, to comb a large tract of country, inhabited by a quarter of a million people, for the definitive oeuvre of a particular poet; and in the case of Fingal (since the preface to the Fragments had already promised an epic poem) for the complete text of a particular work. Had it been really a matter of empirical enquiry, it would have been more rational to circulate a questionnaire to the ministers of Gaelic-speaking parishes; many of the ministers spoke the language, and several were reputable antiquarians. But this idea wasn't suggested until afterwards, when Macpherson's reliability was impugned.⁷⁰ To start with, his patrons seem to have acted on the unconscious belief that only Macpherson could find the poem. Their lack of curiosity about sources; their support for the strange policy of publishing the translations without the originals; their readiness to believe that Macpherson had located, established and transcribed such a mass of material in under four months; their acceptance of his unsupported assertions about a remote and obscure period of Scottish history -- all these flights from 'common sense' are intelligible if we suppose that they regarded Macpherson as inspired. The sign of translation, with which the laconic and turbid English texts were marked, pointed not to another artificial language, with its expectable problems of orthographic variation, scribal interpolation, philological change and so on, but to a natural language whose interpretation was a work of genius.

Macpherson encouraged the idea explicitly, as well as

70. Saunders, Life and Letters of James Macpherson, pp.203-10.

depending on its tacit prevalence. In his prefatory dissertation, he explained that the compositions of the bards were orally transmitted, and

admirably contrived for that purpose. They were adapted to music; and the most perfect harmony was observed. Each verse was so connected with those that preceded or followed it, that if one line had been remembered in a stanza, it was almost impossible to forget the rest. The cadences followed in so natural a gradation, and the words were so adapted to the common turn of the voice, after it has been raised to a certain key, that it was thought almost impossible, from a similarity of sound, to substitute one word for another. This excellence is peculiar to the Celtic tongue, and is perhaps to be met with in no other.⁷¹

This seems to mean that Gaelic poetry and music were so suited to the nature of the language, and the language in turn so adapted to the nature of the organs of speech, that it was physically easier to sing a poem correctly than to get it wrong. As the last sentence assures us, with its fraudulently judicious air, other languages may be articulatory and abstracting - Gaelic is organic.

This belief is part of the Ossianic creed. In the 1790s

J.L. Buchanan explains that in Gaelic,

Harsh objects are denoted by harsh sounds, in which consonants greatly predominate; whilst soft and tender objects and passions are expressed by words which bear some analogy to them in sound.⁷²

About the same time, the minister at Lochcarron reports to the Statistical Account that

Gaelic is the language of descriptive poetry. It is strong, nervous and comprehensive. No language can do greater justice to the feelings of the human heart.⁷³

71. Works of Ossian, I, xvii.

72. J.L. Buchanan, A Defence of the Scots Highlanders (1794), p.46.

73. O.S.A., XVII, 572.

Anne Grant, writing in 1785, concurs in an interesting context:

I am determined my children shall all drink "from the pure wells of Celtic undefiled." They shall taste the animated and energetic conversation of the natives; and an early acquaintance with the poetry of nature shall guard them against false taste and affectation. I never desire to hear an English word out of their mouths till they are four or five years old. How I should delight in grafting elegant sentiments and just notions on simple manners and primitive ideas! ⁷⁴

Here, in the metaphor of grafting, Gaelic is very roundly identified as the organic language - an Ossianic primitivism of antiquity shifts easily into a Rousseauistic primitivism of childhood. But the proposed value is reductive as well as idealised: the child's intellectual and moral education is to be in English; for Gaelic, the language of the heart, therefore contains no ideas, only feelings. The only slightly earlier attitude - that 'To spread the English language over the Highlands, has always been a laudable endeavour of the church, as it is at once the most effectual means for the religious instruction of the inhabitants, and the improvement of the country' ⁷⁵ - is not fundamentally challenged: English remains the language of Improvement, and Gaelic, the reverse. Just as the Improver's contempt for runrig is complemented rather than contested by Mrs Grant's idyll, so here her apotheosis of Gaelic as the language of nature is not a reversal, but a function, of its decimation as a living speech.

74. Grant, Letters from the Mountains, II, 94.

75. From Rev. John Walker's report to the General Assembly of the Kirk, Scots Magazine, 34 (1772), 289. For the linguistic story in detail, see V.E. Durkacz, The Decline of the Celtic Languages (Edinburgh, 1983), especially Chapter 2.

Within this dichotomy of feeling and civilisation, however, there is an additional complication, which is that the Gaelic past, considered as the reign of the affections, the era of the heart, tends to coincide in effect, as it were, with the finest pitch of late eighteenth-century refinement. Music provides an example: in the Collection of Highland Vocal Airs to which Ochtertyre contributed his dissertation, already quoted, a preface explains that although the airs are conventionally printed in bars of uniform length, the Highland singers from whom they have been collected actually indulge in extreme rhythmic freedoms for the sake of emotional expression. Defending this irregularity, it adds:

It is now become the practice of the most polished and improved musicians, in executing a pathetic air, to use freedom with the measure, for the sake of expression and effect.... This is returning to nature: it is the genuine dictate of emotion and sentiment. It need not, therefore, be a matter of surprise, that an untutored Highlander, whose feelings are strong, and whose impression of measure is probably weak, should depart still farther from regular time.⁷⁶

The sentimental Highlander, whose emotional authenticity renders him unable to count, is a product of the familiar dualism. But then he is grouped with 'the most polished and improved musicians', who, in a musical climate tinged by the Sturm und Drang, are themselves breaking out of the formalism of which he is innocent. This full circle could have been predicted, in general terms, from Macpherson's own characteristically confident version of the theory

76. McDonald, Collection of Highland Vocal Airs, p.3.

of determined stages in the history of society. Meeting the objection, whose basis in fact he accepts, that the Highlanders were distinctly ignoble barbarians two hundred years ago, let alone fifteen hundred, he asserts:

There are three stages in human society.... As the first is formed on nature, so, of course, it is the most disinterested and noble. Men, in the last, have leisure to cultivate the mind, and to restore it, with reflection, to a primaeval dignity of sentiment. The middle state is the region of compleat barbarism and ignorance.⁷⁷

On this view, the cultivated salons into which Macpherson's success propelled him were educated reincarnations of Selma, aspiring by study to the 'dignity of sentiment' which had been natural in the first ages of Caledonia. Turned the right way up, this fanciful theory reveals one basis of the Fingalian world: it is a dream representation of contemporary society. Ossian and his contemporaries, with their poetry recitals and concerts, their intermittent wars, their indefinite theology, their tensely puritanical sexual code and their unending round of dinners and games, are the aristocrats of late eighteenth-century Edinburgh and London, idealised and muted, as a landscape by a Claude glass, by the illusory interposition of fifteen centuries. Thus the golden age reproduces the age which dreamed it: it is this secret identity which underlies Blair's inability to decide whether Ossian is rude or cultivated, and which also explains the immaterialism, the productive incapacity, of the Fingalian projection. It reflects

77. Works of Ossian, II, xv.

the genteel intellectual's fantasy of a pure life of the mind, uncomplicated by the constraints of social and economic necessity. Selma is devoid of labour and profit as the drawing-room is - not because these things don't exist, but because taste has placed them out of sight.

4 Holidays

One of the odder relics of early Highland tourism is a description by Anthony Champion, an English lawyer, of a pleasant few days he spent in a remote valley in July, 1771. When he arrived there, the farmer who occupied it was away, and his wife, anxious to be suitably hospitable, sent a boy to the hill to fetch 'a lamb and a kid'. Intoxicated by this pastoral injunction, and clearly a little titillated by his sudden intimacy with the pretty mistress of the isolated holding, Champion recorded the whole encounter in the style of the Authorised Version.⁷⁸ Thus, when, for example, the woman is naively puzzled by her visitor's delight at the scenery, she says:

the country from which thou comest ... is a rich and plentiful country, and the people thereof live in fair dwellings, and eat of the fat of the land; but this country, thou seest, is poor and barren, and the manners thereof are rude and ignorant; thou canst not surely be pleased with such things.

Champion replies:

78. Anthony Champion, Miscellanies, pp.72-78.

The very wildness of the country is pleasing to me, and for the manners thereof, this kindness to the traveller must indeed seem strange to those who come from afar.

It isn't altogether barren in any case: there is a stream, and good pasture, with trees -

And he cast his eyes around, and the place seemed to him as a portion of Eden.

The thought here - the contrast between the material assets of the south and the immaterial assets of the poor Highlands - is a familiar one; we can also recognise the literalism that ties the intangible superiority down to a well-documented Highland fact - the laws of hospitality. These values are gravely and rather touchingly enforced. But the Biblical pastiche impugns their seriousness in a peculiar way: despite its aptness to the content - or rather, because its aptness is really a neat coincidence - it has a kind of facetiousness. Its very extravagance is like a costume: Champion is playing Abraham's servant meeting Rebekah at the well, and it's the unreality of the impression, the sense of escape into a written world, that constitutes its Edenic charm. The formal aspect of this frivolity appears in the treatment of time: the farm (which is actually a sheepwalk run by a Lowlander and thus a part of Highland change) is wilfully frozen into an immutable survival of 'the ancient world'; and the visitor, having neither connections nor commitments in the neighbourhood, takes everything in the frame of mind of someone who is only staying for a few days. (At the end he looks back, sighs, and bends his way into the hills.) In other words, Champion's eccentric form is

appropriate to that historically new relationship with place, crucial to the Highlands: going on one's holidays.

That's to say that the flimsy structure of feeling is a sociological trace, having to do, ironically, with the southern affluence which the figure of pastoral poverty deploras, and whose growth was creating a leisured middle class, a picturesque literature, and a national ethos, all calculated to swell the volume of domestic tourism; and also, no less ironically, with the improved communications in the Highlands which had been designed to bring the 'ancient world' to an end. But it's also an aesthetic development, a decadence of the notion of poetry as an 'unworldly' value; for a holiday in this sense is a privatised and packaged refusal of 'the world', a consciously indulged impracticality which is contained within wholly practical arrangements. The social and aesthetic dimensions emerge wittily together from Mrs Grant's letters.

In a hamlet in Argyll, for example, she takes a fancy to goats:

I am so fond of the kids, that dance and frisk with so much humour and meaning, and cry so like children, I would fain have one of them follow me tame, and am sadly distressed when I must needs eat them. I think if ever I run wild on the rocks, which at times I feel much inclined to, I will not be a shepherdess, but a goatherdess. These creatures have more sense and spirit than heavy-headed sheep; they differ just as highlanders do from plodding lowlanders.⁷⁹

The opposition is much the same as the one in The Highlanders

79. Grant, Letters from the Mountains, I, 50-51.

between sheep and deer. But the tone is at once lighter and more self-questioning: the practical context of the slight poetic image seems to gild it as silly, and so the preferences are skittish, defiantly unreasonable. The taste for wildness is itself tame; and in the final simile (which really shows the Highlanders not as better or happier than Lowlanders, but as more entertaining) one views the whole Highland scene through a decorative frame - almost, through the window of a coach.

It's a perspective which doesn't preclude sympathetic understanding, but promotes and deforms it. A gentleman escorting Mrs Grant from Fort William to Fort Augustus reproaches her for not admiring the military roads. She retorts with some cogency:

I do not just take it for granted, that they are to civilize the country so speedily and effectually; the people were very civil when they were well treated; they were so agile and familiar with their own bye-paths, and so accustomed to go

'Over moor, over mire,
'Thro' bush, and thro' briar,'

that I am not clear they will always forsake their old short cut, for the pleasure of going ten miles round on hard gravel.... I am so provoked at seeing shallow, artificial people, who have no ideas but what they borrow, treating the inventive children of the wild with scorn. Those who pace all their lives on an even-paved road, doing every day just what they did yesterday, are unable to estimate the powers of those, who must bend their mind every hour to some new and unpremeditated exertion.⁸⁰

80. Grant, Letters from the Mountains, I, 107-08.

This is a characteristic mixture of qualities. The quick verbal imagination, querying clichés and turning the facts of the case into metaphors, produces both an accurate sympathy for the Highlanders' point of view⁸¹ and a fantastic literary vision of their wild freedom as fairies from A Midsummer Night's Dream. The crucial insight - the existence of a full alternative habit of life which the crude concept of 'civilising' denies - is thus expressed, but not quite allowed to be serious. With this point hanging in the air, the journey reaches a hamlet in the Great Glen:

Lagganachadrom charmed me: it seemed so rural, so peaceful, and so social. Thinking what innocent sylvan beings dwelt in those huts, I contemplated them with secret pleasure.

This extends into a formal picturesque description of their setting in a lavish landscape of birchwood and loch, which is broken in on by the pro-Wade gentleman's happening to mention that the houses are inhabited by one of the last cattle-stealing organisations, left over from the lawless times of the rebellions.

I felt a kind of horror on finding that the cluster of innocent peasants' cottages I had been admiring was merely a den of thieves. I now began to hold the military road, and civilizing the natives, in all due reverence.

Now of course, the naive overthrow of naive expectations is an outcome of literary artifice: Mrs Grant has set up the idyll in deliberately exaggerated language in order to amuse her correspondent. But the joke is founded on a real conflict, as one sees when

81. Cp. A.R.B. Haldane, The Drove Roads of Scotland, revised edition (1968), pp.32-33.

her disillusion is allowed to taint, not just the houses, but her more concrete perception about the roads. The enforced legality which is bringing cattle-lifting to an end is adequately represented by the military roads with their hard gravel, their engineered gradients, and their contempt for the vagaries of local tradition. The sensibility carried through the glens on those highways can warm to the old paths, but the condition of the enjoyment is the supremacy of the new. The imagination is therefore daydreaming, and the affection petting. 'I would fain have one of them follow me tame, and am sadly distressed when I must needs eat them.'

All this was in 1773; Anne Grant was seventeen, well-read and excited; however, the type of response is not confined to her. In 1774, when Mary Anne Hanway, delighted at the 'Arcadian liberality' of a family near Crieff who take her in when it rains, sits in the middle of their kitchen and recites Goldsmith's lines on humble hospitality from The Traveller,⁸² there is the same sense of a personal flight into literature; and the same again in 1776 when Gilpin's party amuse themselves 'with desiring some highlander, whom we accidentally met, to perform the exercise of his plaid by changing it from one form to the other.'⁸³ These people wander in a region where they encounter, not so much houses and clothes, as

82. Hanway, Journey, p.80.

83. Gilpin, Observations, II, 137.

sets and costumes.

There's a story that Simon Fraser, the notorious Lord Lovat of Jacobite mythology, caused a pan of boiling water to be set beside a rushing stream on his estate, so that from time to time a salmon, failing to clear the falls, would twist as it dropped back, land in the pot, and instantly be cooked for Lovat's astonished guests.⁸⁴ This possibly apocryphal device epitomises the theatricality of poetical Highland tourism. A hyperbolic literary image (nature's gifts bring themselves spontaneously to the master's table) is realised by stealth. The imaginary is made over into the literal by a coincidence which is beguiling: that is, it's delightful but inauthentic. The magic is ambiguously a miracle and a trick. The aesthetic (very much of its time) is that of the tableau vivant.

Johnson, also travelling in 1773, is a notable figure on this gaudy stage. To Boswell, whose main object is always Johnson, the Highlands are of charming use as decor: he points up the piquancy of Johnson on a horse, Johnson practising the Rambler's stoicism in a poor inn, Johnson in a bed once slept in by Prince Charlie, or posing with broadsword and blue bonnet, or walking upon the locations of Macbeth.⁸⁵ It's unmistakably a holiday album, and despite the sombre balance Johnson holds in the historical views of the Journey, Boswell shows the patriarchal past eliciting an interesting hilarity:

84. O.S.A., XVII, 167, 179.

85. Boswell, Journal of a Tour, pp.243, 253, 281, 379, 394.

My endeavours to rouse the English-bred Chieftain, in whose house we were, to the feudal and patriarchal feelings, proving ineffectual, Dr Johnson this morning tried to bring him to our way of thinking. - Johnson. 'Were I in your place, sir, in seven years I would make this an independant island. I would roast oxen whole and hang out a flag as a signal to the Macdonalds to come and get beef and whisky.'⁸⁶

Boswell's ear has preserved an element of wilful caricature which he doesn't appear to have noticed himself: Johnson's lavish vision of patriarchal hospitality is a fantasy which delights in its own absurdity, like another notion he entertains of owning a small island:

He talked a great deal of this island; - how he would build a house there, - how he would fortify it, - how he would have cannon, - how he would plant, - how he would sally out, and take the isle of Muck; - and then he laughed with uncommon glee, and could hardly leave off.⁸⁷

The attraction and the absurdity have the same source: the small, personal scale of the imagined unit. It's not only that Johnson is aware that his plans aren't real; the content of the schemes, with their Lilliputian principalities and directly personal systems of power, has itself a playacting quality; he is imagining being an imaginary king. So that when Johnson exclaims, in high spirits, on Raasay, 'This is truly the patriarchal life: this is what we came to find',⁸⁸ his pleasure is complex. As a philosophical inquirer, he is pleased at the chance to observe, as he

86. Boswell, Journal of a Tour, p.256.

87. Boswell, Journal of a Tour, p.327.

88. Boswell, Journal of a Tour, p.268.

said later, 'quite a different system of life';⁸⁹ but the particular system he chooses to identify on Raasay (his description in the Journey shows that he is conscious of change here too)⁹⁰ is also something he is playing at.

The point of the game is suggested by comparison with an oddly similar passage in Gilpin, who didn't visit the Hebrides, and is not attracted by the 'feudal' vigour which features in Johnson's fantasy, but who pauses on Loch Lomond to sketch what he rather apologetically calls a 'Reverie'.⁹¹ His plan is that the numerous islets should be taken over by a group of 'philosophical friends', who, with an island each, would normally live in solitude and 'improve their little territories into scenes of simplicity and beauty - academic groves, Elysian fields'; yet could also enjoy 'the charms of converse' by calling on each other in boats. In this way, the advance of commerce and wealth would be locally arrested 'at the critical time, when they have done their utmost to enlighten mankind', but before they bring their attendant corruptions.

In that desire to jam the mechanism of progress at the point between barbarism and luxury we can recognise the structure of the golden age: having it both ways. The felt opacity and privatisation of relationships in commercial and metropolitan life generate the

89. Boswell, Life of Johnson, p.1218.

90. Johnson, Journey, pp.52-53, 58-59.

91. Gilpin, Observations, II, 33-35.

vision of a completely immediate, personal society. But then to imagine such a state is to imagine getting off the moving vehicle of history, and protecting the precarious optimal moment by hiding it away. So that the real loss of connection is reproduced in the compensatory idyll, and Johnson's and Gilpin's islanders, like Macpherson's heroes, turn silently back into their opposites: with their conspicuous consumption, their insular domesticity, and their invisible sources of wealth, they are bourgeois incomers - rentiers, or holidaymakers. The advance of commerce and wealth overtakes even the impotent intention to arrest it.⁹²

92. Gilpin's idyll of course differs from Johnson's in that it isn't based on even the most fanciful idea of what Highland society was ever like. Rather, it's an Enlightenment dream of extreme retirement, related to the wholly fantastical Green Isle of Thomas Amory's Memoirs: containing the Lives of Several Ladies of Great Britain (1755). Here, on an island somewhere beyond St Kilda, a sorority of ladies devotes itself to rational religion, music, languages, and elegance, all in an elaborate landscaped park like a sort of sea-girt Stow. Amory's wild eccentricity makes him an intriguing link: his picturesque tourism, and his advanced taste for 'charming horror' in scenery, look forward to the holidaymakers of the later part of the century; while the monastic basis of his fantasy, its complete unhistoricality, and the Swiftian way he launches into it from a Hebridean journey minutely authenticated with the assistance of Martin Martin, look back to a Renaissance tradition of paradoxical utopias. His book, which also includes harsher Hebridean islets featuring a gothic hermit and an ideal life of poverty and pristine Christianity, graphically illustrates the remote provenance and arbitrary naturalisation of some of the ideas which took up residence in the region.

One visitor who, with an eccentricity as pregnant as Champion's, made active efforts to realise something like a fantasy of chieftainship, was Col. Thomas Thornton, a wealthy Yorkshire landowner and fanatical sportsman whose ingenuous enthusiasm for the Highlands anticipates the gun-and-rod Scotland of the Victorian gentleman. In the summer of 1784, Thornton established a camp on Speyside on a military scale, transporting, by two baggage waggons and a sea-going sloop, equipment including boats, fishing tackle, guns, ammunition, hawks, horses, dogs, furniture, hay and corn, materials for stables and gardens, and a gargantuan quantity of provisions for himself, his retinue, and his numerous guests.⁹³ Throughout the summer, he supplemented these basic supplies with a steady haul of fresh fish and game. Thus, although he socialised with the local gentry, his overall plan of campaign treated the Highlands as if they were uninhabited: he lived on what he had brought and what he killed.

His enjoyment of this style of life, at once primitive and princely, comes freshly off the pages. Sitting on the top of the Cairngorms in August, eating soup made from newly killed ptarmigan and drinking champagne which has been chilled in a nearby snowdrift, he reflects, somewhat sententiously, that this meal

was relished with a keenness of appetite that none but those that have been at Glen Ennoch can experience; an appetite, far, very far superior to the palled one, with which the gentlemen at Weltgie's or Lethellier's

93. Thomas Thornton, A Sporting Tour through the Northern Parts of England, and great part of the Highlands of Scotland (1804), 'Advertisement'.

eat their sumptuous and costly meals.⁹⁴

Nor does his devotion to the pleasures of the rifle and the table exclude everything else; he's a connoisseur of scenery, familiar with the conventional contrast between the beauty of Lowland views and the grandeur of Highland ones:

South Britons may talk of their beautiful, highly-finished landscapes ... but from their small, pitiful extent, they soon grow flat, and lose their effect. Here the case differs; for the immense extent of these views, and the reflection of the sun, presenting various tints, each differing from another, though all beautiful, give the country every advantage, and a decided superiority over all the laboured works of a Brown or a White.⁹⁵

The preference for the open forms of nature over the 'laboured' effects of art suggests the sublime; but here the distinction is quite without 'horror'. Thornton's taste for extensive mountainous country, isn't mediated through any obvious negativity. It's rather that he likes his scenery, as he likes his establishment, rough and lavish, suggestive of the adventures of the chase rather than the achievements of work.

It's a style at once nostalgic and playful. Thornton is recreating the enormous hunts and royal hospitality of the old lords of the Highlands, such as the famous stag drive of the Earl of Mar, attended in 1618 by John Taylor, whose description Thornton will have seen in Pennant.⁹⁶ But whereas, historically, such occasions had an intelligible function in the life of the

94. Thornton, Sporting Tour, p.93.

95. Thornton, Sporting Tour, p.166.

96. John Taylor's 'Pennyless Pilgrimage', quoted in Pennant, 1769, p.108.

nobility, Thornton's hunting and fishing summer is a private extravaganza, requiring personal inventiveness and disposable income acquired elsewhere. (Thus the real cost of dining in rude splendour on the top of a mountain is much greater than the price of a meal at Lethellier's. Barbarism is more of a luxury than luxury.) So although Thornton breaks through Anne Grant's, or Boswell's, decorative frame into a practical relationship with the land, the practice in question is, in every sense, sport.

Thornton went back to the Highlands several times in the years following his epic summer of 1784, and his book was eventually published in 1804. Its Highlands are therefore those of the most conscious age of Improvement - of the British Fisheries Society, of the 'General View' series of agricultural reports and the Statistical Account, of the first years of the largely agricultural Highland Society of Scotland.⁹⁷ The keynote of all this ideological activity was what one influential pamphlet called, on its title page, the 'means of exciting a spirit of national industry'.⁹⁸ In 1803, the year of Anne Grant's leisurely pastoral, the Caledonian Canal was begun, explicitly in the hope

97. The Highland Society of Scotland was founded in 1784, the British Fisheries Society in 1786, the British Wool Society in 1791. The 'General View' series covered Argyll and the Central Highlands in 1794, the Northern Counties in 1795, Perthshire in 1799, Inverness in 1808. The Statistical Account appeared between 1791 and 1799.

98. James Anderson, Observations on the Means of Exciting a Spirit of National Industry, (1777).

'of improving the Habits of the Country by Teaching Lessons of systematic Industry'.⁹⁹ Thus the identification of the Highlands as a scene of conscious, even whimsical leisure, goes in step with an intensifying attack on the spare time of the natives. The opposed extremes are, indeed, the product of the same articulation: the continuities of a customary life in which harvesting, herding, hunting, fighting and playing could all appear as variant cultural practices within a single natural necessity are cut in two by a political economy which requires the distinction between working and not working to be unambiguous. And just as that world-view, with its practical ruthlessness, generates the reactive idea of a 'poetical' state of life - unworldly, impractical, sentimental, so the priority of labour discipline creates the dream image of a territory whose economic hopelessness released it from the curse of Adam:

At two seasons of the year, they were busy; the one in the end of spring and beginning of summer, when they put the plough into the little land they had capable of receiving it ... the other just before winter, when they reaped their harvest; The rest of the year was all their own, for amusement or for war. If not engaged in war, they indulged themselves in summer in the most delicious of all pleasures to men in a cold climate and a romantic country, the enjoyment of the sun, and of the summer-views of nature; never in the house during the day, even sleeping often at night in the open air, among the mountains and woods. They spent the winter in the chase, while the sun was up; and, in the evening, assembling round a common fire, they entertained

99. Thomas Telford, Survey and Report (1803), quoted in Youngson, After the Forty-Five, p.145.

themselves with the song, the tale, and the dance.¹⁰⁰

This appealing way of life, described by Sir John Dalrymple in 1771, offers a model for the Highland pleasures of the following half-century. His Highlanders derive from their poverty what the privileged classes in commercial society derive from their wealth: the leisure to cultivate their sensibility; and this undemanding mixture of poetry, scenery and field sports, whatever its accuracy as social history, was a fairly exact programme for the future.

Thus, freakishly, the fantasy of poetical Highlanders realises itself in the form of tourism. Thornton, despite his gentlemanly philistinism and his material extravagance, resembles Macpherson's heroes in his unconvincing alternation between the earliest and the latest stages of civil society - the day's kill washed down with champagne, the nomad's camp to which the newspapers are delivered - and also in the secret priority of the aesthetic motive: this unremitting pursuit of food looks like a productive activity, but actually everything is done for the sake of the sensation of doing it; Thornton is consuming, not only the fish, but the fishing too. Like the ancient Caledonians, he fights only for fame, disdaining plunder.

Of course the holiday, like a poem, is a representation of the natural life whose idea inspires it: like any sign, it is unable to be what it denotes. In this curious case, however, the

100. Sir John Dalrymple, Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland, second edition, 3 vols (1790), Vol II, Part II, p. 77.

difference runs to a direct incompatibility. Game was in practice a minor issue of Improvement. Alexander Irvine, for instance, a Highland minister and Improving writer, notes in 1802, among the 'inconsistent prejudices' which are boiling up into a spirit of emigration, the fact that

Some things in the Highlands were not considered by the peasants property till very lately. It was necessary to change their ideas, and teach them to respect the rights of their superiors to game, fish, and wood.

The old notions are yet strongly retained in some districts, and not infrequently put into practice; for it is not easy to convince a Highlander, that a landlord has a better right to a deer, a moor-fowl, or a salmon, than he has himself, because he considers them the unconfined bounty of Heaven.¹⁰¹

This seems to record the survival into the commercialised Highlands of attitudes appropriate to the natural economy idealised by Dalrymple. And although the 'savage' attitude described is one that must appeal to the particular romanticism of a Thornton - the last phrase suggests that Irvine himself is not wholly unsympathetic - there's no question, for that reason, of a concession to it; for it's the sportsman, precisely, who makes it so 'necessary' to enforce shooting and fishing rights, because of the value his interest confers on the game. It was, by coincidence, in the season of 1784-85 that a system of game certificates was first introduced in the Highlands:¹⁰² Thornton was remarkable, but by no means unique. Sociologically, then, the

101. Irvine, Inquiry into Emigration, p.56.

102. Forest Sketches: Deer-stalking and other Sports in the Highlands Fifty Years Ago (Edinburgh, 1865), p.xxi.

new hunters were hastening the final extinction of the way of life to which, aesthetically, they did homage.

By a more delayed irony, it was Thornton's amusements, rather than Telford's works, which contained the practical future of the region. By the time the Caledonian Canal was finished, even the sheep would be under pressure from the spread of sporting estates, and tourism, rather than trade, would be the beneficiary of the new forms of transport. 'Fancy's Land' imposed itself on reality.

CHAPTER FIVE

WARRIORS

1 Recruiting

Fear not, Britannia! fear not now the hand
 That bravely sinn'd against its native land.
 The sword that on Culloden blaz'd afar
 For England's King now courts the shock of war.¹

In 1790 there appeared, according to the bibliographer of the Scottish eighteenth-century drama,² the first Gaelic-speaking role on the British stage. It was in The Highland Drover; or Domhnul Dubh M'Na - Beinn at Carlisle, and was a personal vehicle for the author, Archibald Maclaren. This piece is a one-act farce which must have depended on a bilingual audience: the star, Domhnul Dubh, who speaks no English, falls in with young Ramble, who is busy arranging a friend's elopement, and who speaks no Gaelic. The two of them have almost come to blows when the situation is saved by the heroine's bilingual maid Betty, who not only resolves the misunderstandings, but also enlists Domhnul Dubh's help with the intrigue. In the end the couple get away and the drover has a second and more useful quarrel, this time with the girl's unsympathetic old guardian.

Domhnul Dubh, whose haphazard but vigorous involvement in someone else's plot makes him a sort of harlequin, is a comic Highland type, innocently narrow-minded and, as the scenario

1. Carey, Craig Phadric, p.96.

2. T. Tobin, Plays by Scots 1660-1800 (Iowa, 1974).

indicates, indiscriminately pugnacious. The stereotype is most deftly displayed in Betty's attempts to win him over to the lovers' side: she wins his confidence by claiming to be a Campbell (whereupon he concludes that they must be related), and ensures his hostility to the guardian by representing him as a man with no chief. The Glasgow audiences, presumably fairly recent Gaelic immigrants, must have derived a rather complicated amusement from the caricature - which is of course a friendly one: the eventual moral is a regional compliment to the effect that

though a Highlander through ignorance may be brought to espouse a bad cause, whenever he becomes sensible of his mistake, he thinks himself bound to double his diligence in friendship, to atone for his error.³

In other words, Maclaren, himself a half-pay soldier from a Highland regiment, has produced in his little comic plot a knock-about version of the recent military history of the Highlanders. They begin by fighting on the wrong side through misunderstanding, but once their quaint prejudices are soothed and suitable propositions put to them, they fight no less enthusiastically on the right side. The inconvertibility of the two languages is not exactly resolved - Domhnul Dubh's idea of what is happening is ultimately little less cock-eyed than it was at the start - but the happy ending is content, with some cynicism, to rest on illusions which serve the interests of the juvenile leads. The theme here lightly played is one which penetrates every level of the image of the Highlands in the period, moral and

3. Archibald Maclaren, *The Highland Drover; or, Domhnul Dubh M^o Na-Beinn at Carlisle* (Greenock, 1790), p.17.

aesthetic no less than political: that of putting the Highland warrior to good use.

It was, after all, the figure of the warrior that was repetitively and inevitably projected out of the early encounters between the Highlands and the British state. Cromwell had turned his attention to the region because of Montrose, as William of Orange later did because of Dundee, and Wade because of the Earl of Mar. It was as a military problem that the Highlanders made themselves conspicuous, and this preoccupation highlighted the military implications of their perceived way of life. A pamphleteer in 1743 expected London readers to have heard of 'clans' - at least 'since the Revolution' - and explained:

A Clan is pretty much the same thing with what the Tartars call a Hord ... that is a small body of people under the absolute command of a chief.⁴

And he added that this arbitrary power rested on an agrarian system of military tenures. James Ray, an instant historian of the '45, had recourse to a different tribal parallel:

The Barbarians indeed, that over-ran your country, were, like the ancient Goths, intrepid, bold, daring, and inur'd to Hardships and Fatigues from their infancy.⁵

Ray is addressing the Duke of Cumberland, and the point of his comparison is to suggest why the Prince's underequipped army had proved so hard to beat. It was a common preoccupation. Defoe in

4. Remarks on the People and Government of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1747), p.5. This is an unacknowledged reprint of A Short Account of the Highland Regiment, probably published in London in 1743.

5. Ray, Compleat History, p.vii.

1715 and Forbes of Culloden in 1746 both argued that regular hunting provided the Highlanders with a thorough and natural military training;⁶ and the Gartmore writer reported soon after the Rising that the endless feuds arising from the fragmented power structure made the ordinary Highlander cunning and acute.⁷ In thus grounding the military threat in what is known of the Highland system of life, the analysts generate, conversely, the theory of a system of life wholly geared to military aims.

In this their accounts resemble, both in form and detailed content, the profiles of the classical barbarians. So that Alexander Cunningham, for instance, prepares the ground for the story of Killiecrankie by explaining that the Highlanders are a clannish race, addicted to arms, inured to cold, and given to liquor⁸ - all these epithets, besides anticipating a Highland stereotype still recognisable today, directly reproduce characteristics of the German nation described by Tacitus. Sir John Dalrymple's similar account, at the same juncture in his Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland, adds that Highlanders are hospitable,

6. Defoe, View of the Scots Rebellion, p.19; Forbes in Culloden Papers, pp.298-301.

7. Burt, Letters (1818), II, 340.

8. Alexander Cunningham, History of Great Britain from the Revolution in 1688 to the accession of George the First, translated from the Latin (1787), quoted in Newte, Prospects and Observations, pp.266-70. Cunningham's text must have been written between 1714 and 1737.

given to feuds, believers in auguries, and fond of music, which they use especially to rouse their spirits in war.⁹ This is a different selection from the same chapter of the Germania. The barbarian model is by no means uniformly hostile: though in Defoe it produces a picture of 'wild Men ... voracious, cruel, insolent and unmerciful',¹⁰ Dalrymple's extended delineation is strikingly idealised, as we have seen. The point is rather that all shades of judgment are expressed within the same repertoire of barbarian manners. The Germania on its side is only one example: in Pennant's 'Character of the Highlanders', for instance, with its emphasis on the old life's uncivilised alternation of indolence and violent sport or action, there's a family likeness to the Huns of Gibbon's twenty-sixth chapter.¹¹

These similarities can most obviously be ascribed to actual resemblances in the data, and to the influence exerted by classical history upon the mental sets of the observers. But the third and most cogent factor is the analogy of viewpoint. Both Tacitus and Gibbon, as historians of Rome, were interested in 'barbarians'

9. Dalrymple, Memoirs of Great Britain, Vol II, Part II, pp. 77-81.

10. Defoe, View of the Scots Rebellion, p. 23.

11. Pennant, 1769, p. 176. The relevant section of Gibbon appeared in 1781. For more examples of the formal delineation of the Highlanders, see the review of W. Belsham's History of Great Britain, Monthly Review, 34 (1801), 179-85.

only insofar as they impinged upon the civilised world, which they did primarily through their prowess and mobility in the field. The priority tends to draw out a guerrilla type, a fighting man whose accoutrements, methods and motivation all emerge unpremeditatedly from the texture of his life - in short, a natural soldier. The Highlander's parallel position on the fringe of empire comes out in the same image, which is also a form of the question: is a commercial society not then at a crucial disadvantage when it must fight a more backward one? It was a question posed with obvious insistence by the Government débâcle in Scotland in the autumn of 1745.

A writer in the Gentleman's Magazine for March 1746 - just before Culloden - recalls the military disasters of the late Greek Empire, and imagines the reactions of the courtiers in Constantinople. They blamed the generals, or bad luck, or the weather -

In short, nothing was omitted that could screen the true cause, which was the courage of their enemies, that led them to practise a discipline and method of attack 'till then unknown, and therefore despis'd.¹²

The conclusion is that imperial troops shouldn't be too proud to learn from 'undisciplin'd Highlanders':

Can we imagine that a Camillus, a Scipio, a Marius, or a Caesar, would have stood upon the decency and conveniency of a fellow's being very neat, and having his hair tuck'd under his cap, while their raggamuffin enemies, by a new method of attacking, discovered the emptiness and folly of their own military discipline.

12. Gentleman's Magazine, 16 (1746), 153.

This recalls the hirsute, untrammelled figure of the Highland Rogue: the ragged barbarian is, so to speak, expressing himself in battle, while the operations of regular troops are vitiated by artificiality. Of course, that particular anxiety subsided after Culloden, which was seen as precisely a victory of discipline over wild valour. Still, the central thrust of the argument, which is the military importance of 'enthusiasm', continues to reverberate. The writer ends by saying that success in the national crisis requires 'the assistance of those who are capable of thinking, that they have somewhat to fight for, that ought to be more dear to them than sixpence a day'.

The context of this last reflection was the new aggressiveness of British imperialism. After a generation of peace, Britain had embarked at the beginning of the 1740s on a war, essentially with France, which would last for something like forty out of the following seventy-five years. The requirements of this prolonged global struggle, in terms of manpower but also of morale, very quickly transformed the northern barbarian threat into a national asset. Only a month before Charles Edward's landing in the Hebrides in 1745, the 42nd Regiment, in which there was 'not a soldier born south of the Grampians',¹³ had distinguished itself at Fontenoy, its first battle. This could be regarded as erasing the stain of its mutiny of 1743: the same logic, writ large

13. David Stewart of Garth, Sketches of the Character, Manners, and Present State of the Highlanders of Scotland, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1822), I, 278.

across the Highlands, connects the '45 and the war of 1756-63. There's an early hint of it in Smollett's comic melodrama The Reprisal, in which an absurd French privateer captain, who captures a genteel English couple, is thwarted because his ex-Jacobite lieutenants, Oclabber and Maclaymore, turn against him.¹⁴ In a vulgarised but pointed echo of Henry V, the deviant bits of Britain unite behind the English hero. Smollett was, as usual, abreast of the times: in the year of his play - 1757 - Pitt took his famous decision to raise regiments from the Jacobite clans, and arranged the first such establishment, Fraser's.

The ensuing war was in general an ideologically fertile one, producing such myths as Clive, the death of Wolfe, the unstable genius at the helm of state, the 'wonderful year' (1759) of Garrick's 'Heart of Oak', and so on. The immense effort of the orchestrated campaigns in three continents had as its political dimension a strenuous national self-consciousness, a recognisably modern sort of jingoism. Even 'Theophilus Insulanus', introducing his abstruse collection of Hebridean superstition in 1761, hopes that its enforcement of the truths of religion will be a 'powerful motive to inspire courage, greatness, and intrepidity of soul in defence of our king and country'.¹⁵ Within this pursuit of an imperial ethnicity the legend of the Highland regiments was formed.

Stories soon abounded about their effect. A decade after the

14. Smollett, Miscellaneous Works, III, 455-86.

15. Theophilus Insulanus, Treatise, p.iv.

war ended, Johnson could say, 'England has for several years been filled with the achievements of seventy thousand Highlanders employed in America';¹⁶ the figure is, as he observes, a vast exaggeration, and suggests how the impact of Louisburg, Ticonderoga and the Heights of Abraham had penetrated the public memory of the campaign. 'They cut them, and slashed them, and whupt them aboot, and played the vary deevil with them, sir. There is nai siccan a thing as standing a Highlander's Andrew Ferrara', exults Macklin's Sir Archy Macsarcasm in Love a la Mode:¹⁷ on the play's first night in December 1759, he would hardly have been recognisable as a Scot if he had not. In 1762 the Scots Magazine delighted its readers with a description by an inhabitant of Minden, who had gathered that these outlandish soldiers

are caught in the mountains when young; and still run with a surprising degree of swiftness. As they are strangers to fear, they make very good soldiers when disciplined.... They discover an extraordinary submission to and affection for their officers, who are all young and handsome.¹⁸

In a similar vein, Knox records in the 1780s that 'The French tremble at the sight of them, calling out, the English Lions!'¹⁹

A different vein of magniloquence was put into circulation by Macpherson, whose own wonderful year was 1761, and whose success may well have owed something to the general climate of

16. Johnson, Journey, p.89. For an anthology of the stories, see Stewart, Sketches of the Highlanders, I, 294-360 and II, 18-35.

17. Macklin, Four Comedies, p.57.

18. Scots Magazine, 24 (1762), p.701.

19. John Knox, A View of the British Empire, third edition, 2 vols (1785), I.134.

enthusiasm for Scotch warriors. A major in Campbell's, killed in Germany in 1762, was commemorated in the Scots Magazine with Fingalian pomp:

Where is car born Maclean? why lags my son behind?
Foremost was his sword in battle, though last to receive
his praise.

Say'st thou the mighty is fallen in battle! yet
not without his fame....²⁰

Fame of this order was evidently enough to wipe out the stain of rebellion, despite the North Briton's sour allusions to the Scots' other 'late glories; the victories of Preston-Pans and Falkirk, gained, I own, without the least assistance from the English.'²¹ Langhorne's retort to the anti-Bute campaign, 'Genius and Valour', a poem published in 1763 'in honour of a sister kingdom', was typical in celebrating the valour as a thing known of old and

Witness'd once more by recent heaps of slain
On Canada's wild hills and Minden's plain.²²

Pitt's policy proved, in fact, a triumph on most of its several grounds. It produced half a dozen regiments of quality; it probably did, as he envisaged, 'drain the Highlands of some disaffected clansmen';²³ it offered career prospects for frustrated and latently rebellious Highland gentry (a policy which Duncan Forbes had urged as early as 1738).²⁴ And it was

20. Scots Magazine, 24 (1762), p.604.

21. North Briton, I, 47.

22. Langhorne, Poetical Works, I, 54.

23. Basil Williams, The Life of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, 2 vols (1913), I, 294.

24. Rosalind Mitchison, 'The Government and the Highlands, 1707-45', in Scotland in the Age of Improvement, edited by N.T. Phillipson and R. Mitchison (Edinburgh, 1970), pp.24-46 (p.29).

a splendid propaganda success as well. In 1766 Pitt looked back proudly in a speech which is worth quoting again, despite its familiarity, as it is historically central to the whole conversion:

I sought for merit wherever it was to be found. It is my boast that I was the first minister who looked for it; and I found it in the mountains of the north. I called it forth and drew it into your service, a hardy and intrepid race of men; men who, when left by your jealousy, became a prey to the artifices of your enemies, and had gone nigh to have overturned the State in the war before the last. These men, in the last war, were brought to combat on your side: they served with fidelity as they fought with valour, and conquered for you in every part of the world; detested be the national reflections against them! 25

The immediate context of the speech is relevant to the imperial rhetoric. Pitt is attacking the ministry over the Stamp Act, and here dissociates himself from the anti-Scottish element in the opposition. The digression about the Highland regiments is thus both an assertion, of a kind we've seen before, of Great British unity, and a warning (prophetic, as it turned out) about the dangers of alienating far-flung minorities in the Empire. This gesture, embracing the Highlands in the oratorical sweep of an imperial ideal, alerts us to the nice ambiguity in Knox's story, mentioned above. That the French should call troops from Scotland 'the English lions' is satisfying in one way because it shows how little the panic-stricken foreigners understand; but in another sense the phrase is accurate. The barbarians who once threatened the English-dominated state are now trained to maul its enemies.

25. Williams, Life of Pitt, II, 189.

British solidarity is vindicated, and the Lyon in Mourning is beginning its metamorphosis into the noble beast of Victorian imperialism.

Pitt's speech has a companion piece, no less widely quoted: the song 'The Garb of Old Gaul', written during the war and adopted as the regimental tune of the 42nd in 1767.²⁶ The words, allegedly translated by Sir Harry Erskine from a Gaelic original composed by a soldier of the regiment, have a faded but still perceptible swagger:

In the garb of old Gaul, wi' the fire of old Rome,
From the heath-cover'd mountains of Scotia we come,
Where the Romans endeavour'd our country to gain,
But our ancestors fought, and they fought not in vain.²⁷

The continuation runs through the familiar repertoire of inherited military assets - the 'loud-sounding pipe', the freedom from 'effeminate customs', and so on; until the chorus, with a jolt which is ideological as well as metrical, declares:

Then we'll defend our liberty, our country and our laws,
And teach our late posterity to fight in freedom's cause.

The unsatisfactory tone of all this comes from an interesting incompatibility, which is that the song is trying to be a general description of the 'Highland Character', and at the same time an authentic particular manifestation of it. The first person

26. Stewart, Sketches of the Highlanders, I, 360. Stewart says the words were also written in 1767, but they were published in The Lark; being a Select Collection of the Most Celebrated and Newest Songs (Edinburgh, 1765). Erskine died in 1765.

27. Text from Herd, Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, I, 116.

plural, the springy anapaests, the macho meiosis in the fourth line - these features indicate the voice of the fiery Scotians in person. But the allusive and linguistic Latinity, the Hanoverian constitutionalism and the careful historical placing advertise, on the contrary, the metalinguistic presence of the English political establishment. That this disabling incoherence didn't stop the piece becoming very popular says much for the political potency of the conjunction it reflects.

The meaning of this stylistic duplicity becomes clear if we look again at Pitt. He had conducted the war with the support of the City - the merchants, financiers, and to some extent industrialists. As J.H. Plumb says, 'His world and their world were one; he voiced, as no one else could, their aspiration, and he had given a moral purpose to their appetite for wealth, power, and dominion.'²⁸ The objects of the fighting were markets, raw materials, control of trade routes. For the landed classes, who were taxed to pay for it, the adventure had less to offer, and they eventually came to oppose it: it was the commercial nation that was at war. It's thus wholly consistent with the 'Great Commoner's ideological role that he speaks of the Highland recruiting as an application of the principle of free competition - 'I sought for merit wherever it was to be found'. In fact, however, it was understood to be a clan levy, working through the residual authority of dynastic chiefs - the hardiness and

28. J.H. Plumb, England in the Eighteenth Century (1950), p.115.

intrepidity represented, not the unleashed energies of the new order, but the habits of an old one, intentionally doomed to extinction by the successes of, exactly, the commercial nation. Only three years later, Pennant found that the sword and target,

since the disarming act, are scarcely to be met with; partly owing to that, partly to the spirit of industry now rising among them, the Highlanders in a few years will scarce know the use of any weapon.²⁹

This, simultaneously with the recruiting drives, is the model of Highland development, familiar from earlier chapters, which deliberately seeks to extinguish the fire of old Rome and to substitute labour discipline - hands who will give value for 'sixpence a day'. The state is trying to eat and have the cake of Highland belligerence: as Knox optimistically puts it -

At present that barbarous ferocity, which was the offspring of feudal institutions, is completely extinguished; while their native valour, and military character, remain unimpaired.³⁰

It was a radically unsustainable ideal.

2 Battles Long Ago

It was as a military threat, then, experienced, countered, and then turned around, that Highlanders first impinged on the life of the empire. The attendant emphasis was projected back

29. Pennant, 1769, p.174.

30. Knox, View of the British Empire, I,133.

into Highland history, which was reduced to an unbroken tale of violence. What Knox calls 'that barbarous ferocity, which was the offspring of feudal institutions' was very widely understood to have been the normal state of both society and morals in the mountains until those institutions were broken by central power. Johnson's account of the matter is both representative and influential:

A tract intersected by many ridges of mountains, naturally divides its inhabitants into petty nations, which are made by a thousand causes enemies to each other.... Mountaineers are warlike, because by their feuds and competitions they consider themselves as surrounded with enemies, and are always prepared to repel incursions, or to make them.... Among a warlike people, the quality of highest esteem is personal courage, and with the ostentatious display of courage are closely connected promptitude of offence and quickness of resentment.³¹

It's a quasi-anthropological argument of some sophistication, in which geography determines social forms, which in turn determine social values and so, eventually, personal character. As striking as the rationality of the profile, however, is the slightness of its empirical base. The documented facts sustaining it are two stories about clan feuds, one between Mackintosh and Macdonald of Keppoch, said to have been the last inter-clan war, and the other an incident in which some Macdonalds suffocated some Campbells by lighting a fire at the mouth of a cave where they had taken refuge. The lurid anecdotal quality of the evidence jars curiously with the reasoned generality of the argument. Other details, equally picturesque if less circumstantial, confirm the

31. Johnson, Journey, pp. 39-40.

suspicion that Johnson is handling the data in a particular way:

Highlanders, we are assured,

were so addicted to quarrels, that the boys used to follow any publick procession or ceremony, however festive, or however solemn, in expectation of the battle, which was sure to happen before the company dispersed.

It's easy to imagine Johnson himself, in a different vein, pointing out that the tendency of boys to follow processions does not require such a formidable explanation; or that a society quite this addicted to battles would not have survived to be suppressed by legislation. His credulity in this case has to do with the unacknowledged way in which details which are officially illustrating a generalisation are really enforcing an image. The sanguinary Highland past has a latent fascination, whose typical expression is this type of brief, shocking story.

A collection of these had appeared in 1764; it was apparently a simple printing of a seventeenth-century manuscript, but the date of publication - the year after the end of Pitt's war - suggests the context of its appeal. The History of the Feuds and Conflicts among the Clans, which was reprinted in 1780 and 1818, consists of thirty-odd accounts of violent disputes in the Highlands between 1031 and 1619, most of them from the sixteenth-century islands.³² In chronicle fashion, the writing has recourse to formulas - one side enters the other's territory 'with all hostility' and 'spoils' it; fighting normally ensues 'with great

32. The History of the Feuds and Conflicts among the Clans (Stirling, 1907), originally published Glasgow, 1764.

slaughter on both sides' - and quite often killings are aggravated by cruelty, or by a violation of sanctuary or trust. These details, repeated, exacerbate the sense of unrestrained butchery, though the actual extent of the destruction described is usually very limited. The style of narration is flatly factual, and the impact of the whole very like that of the almost contemporary publication of Theophilus Insulanus on the Second Sight: both are dull, repetitive accounts of wild and exotic events which seem, by their very objectivity, to launch the imagination the more securely. In this anecdotal form the legend of the Highland savage circulated. Gilpin, remarking that the Highlander's cold climate denied him the torpor of the southern barbarian and gave him 'the vigour of a wild beast', extracted fifteen pages of the History of the Feuds;³³ in 1779 one of the earliest systematic tourist guides, Charles Burlington's, retailed the History's tale of the battle of the North Inch, as well as a story of stones being rolled on to the heads of an invading force in Glen Lyon.³⁴ Dalrymple in 1771 records a tradition of Killiecrankie in which Sir Ewan Cameron, disarmed in hand-to-hand combat, tears out his adversary's throat with his teeth: it's not clear whether it's this resourcefulness or the heroic fidelity of Cameron's servant, related in the sequel, that Dalrymple judges 'characteristic of

33. Gilpin, Observations, I, 189-206.

34. Charles Burlington, The Modern Universal British Traveller (1779), p.773.

a highland engagement'.³⁵ Of course, very many Highland families will have had such stories in their traditional records: the point is their dissemination through the 1760s and 1770s, the finest years, as they would later seem to Stewart of Garth, of the original Highland Regiment.³⁶

The tone in which the stories are passed on is interestingly ambivalent. Burlington's guide, for instance, mentions the Fiery Cross, which picturesque call to arms it interprets as a wordless threat to burn down the draft-evader's house. 'This was certainly one of the most ancient customs in Europe, and seems to have been invented by a ferocious and barbarous people.'³⁷ Especially in the touristic context, the ferocity seems somehow dignified by the antiquity: the detail, although it isn't different in itself from those in the policing descriptions of thirty years before (Burt mentioned this very practice³⁸), is now being offered overtly for the reader's enjoyment.

Gilpin's rather uncharacteristic interest in deeds of violence is also an aesthetic matter in the end: he presents the savage tale of Maclean's nuptials as a specimen of 'characters drawn from the life', and as being associated with scenes such as his

35. Dalrymple, Memoirs of Great Britain, II, 88.

36. Stewart, Sketches, I, 391-95.

37. Burlington, Modern Universal British Traveller, p.772.

38. Burt, Letters, II, 227.

book describes, just as his descriptions of Bannockburn and Killiecrankie are adorned with dramatic reconstructions of the respective actions. It's in the same spirit that he praises the 'Highland castle' of Inveraray, deploras the decrenellation of Blair Atholl, and enthuses, as we've seen, over the falls of the Braan, 'a continued scene of violence, opposition, and every species of agitation'.³⁹ Tumult and wild grandeur are the distinctive pleasures of Highland scenery, and the traces of the violent past, in castles, battlefields and tales, form an apt text for the pictures. This taste is perhaps unusually articulate in Gilpin, but not unique. Pennant at Castle Campbell says:

the Marquis of Montrose, carried fire and sword through the whole estate. The castle was ruined; and its magnificent reliques exist, as a monument of the horror of the times.⁴⁰

And Newte writes similarly about Kilchurn Castle,

the antient den or strong-hold of the family, from which they issued forth, at the head of their retainers, like the princes and heroes of Homer, and like those of all uncivilized times and countries, to commit occasional depredations on their neighbours.⁴¹

The family is Breadalbane, and Newte goes on to praise by contrast the cultivated taste and natural benignity of its current representative. Both these travellers look back on the age of lawlessness with unfeigned relief that it's over; yet in the imagery of uncivilised magnificence, and even in the word 'horror', a converse

39. Gilpin, Observations, I, 85-88, 135-37, 185, 139, 125.

40. Pennant, 1769, p.69.

41. Newte, Prospects and Observations, p.86.

delight, analogous to the negative sublime of scenery, presses against the enlightened attitudes. Boswell registers a comparable feeling with more self-consciousness:

The very Highland names, or the sound of a bagpipe, will stir my blood, and fill me with a mixture of melancholy and respect for courage; with pity for an unfortunate and superstitious regard for antiquity, and thoughtless inclination for war; in short, with a crowd of sensations with which sober rationality has nothing to do.⁴²

It hardly flies in the face of 'sober rationality' to feel a mingled respect and pity for the brave prejudices of 1745: indeed, it was part of Hanoverian ideology that the chiefs had made an honourable stand upon mistaken principles. What Boswell feels prompted to apologise for is, rather, his sharing, in reverie, the prejudices themselves. As with the travellers, the terms of constitutional orthodoxy are disconcerted by a half-articulate romanticism of violence.

The eighteen-year-old Anne Grant, possessed of a greater share of fashionable sensibility, takes the romance further. On seeing the 'solemn and melancholy grandeur' of the mountains above Loch Lomond,

I peopled their narrow and gloomy glens with those vindictive clans, that used to make such fatal incursions of old. I thought I saw Bruce and his faithful few ascending them, in his forced flight from Bute. A train of departed heroes seemed to pass on their clouds in long review, and do but guess who closed the procession; no other than the notorious Rob Roy, riding up the Loch side with the lady he forced away, and the "twenty men in order," who make such a

42. Boswell, Journal, p.249.

figure in the ballad. My mother knew the family, and tells the whole history of the transaction.⁴³

The epithets - 'vindictive', 'notorious', 'narrow and gloomy' (with the implication that the inhabitants were narrow and gloomy as well as the glens) - are continuous with the hostile barbarian stereotype of the mid-century; and the newer warmth is detectable in the little flourishes of style ('of old', 'faithful few'), as well as the explicitly active imagination 'peopling' the glens. But the striking thing, from a historical point of view, is the easy imaginative conflation of different epics: the heroes on their clouds are unmistakably Ossianic, while Rob Roy was at large within living memory, as she says, and not so much a warrior as a bandit.⁴⁴ Legendary kings and modern criminals merge, together with Robert the Bruce, in a general dream of primitive prowess.

The tendency of this fantasy is that violence ceases to be understood as an expression of real historical conflicts, and comes instead to seem a natural, timeless aspect of Highland identity. In retrospect, therefore, the enlistment of the Highland warriors for the far bloodier wars of the modern British state can be celebrated not only as a triumph of policy, but also as a blessing to the people themselves. The conversion of fratricidal strife into honourable service is celebrated, for instance, in the anonymous Caledonia⁴⁵ (published in the middle of

43. Grant, Letters from the Mountains, I, 10.

44. This is, of course, not the Rob Roy of Wordsworth and Scott, but his son, Robin Oig.

45. Caledonia; a Poem (1778).

the American war), and in Luke Booker's The Highlanders of 1787, which praises 'illustrious CHATHAM' for it, while rather inconsistently denouncing the press-gang by which men are 'Dragg'd to encounter foes ne'er prov'd their own'.⁴⁶ The cynicism which Booker almost admits to is repressed by the conviction that recruitment was saving the Highlands from continual slaughter at home. Alexander Campbell, in 1804, makes the connection most schematically. In his poem, the great release engineered by Pitt ends a long dark age:

Murder was manly deem'd - and deeds most dire,
Day after day succeeded sword and fire!
Hence rose the FEUDAL STATE. High-minded chiefs
Then dealt their wide demesnes in servile fiefs;
As VASSALS to the field the GAËL were led,
In causes not their own they oft-times bled.⁴⁷

And David Carey's Craig Phadric in 1811, apparently going back to the History of the Feuds for its detail, dwells with similar horror on the time when

faint and powerless on this northern clime
Fell the blest light of polity sublime....
Discord unsheaths her fratricidal sword,
And marks the footsteps of each savage horde.
On war and rapine bent, the Clans awake
Bold issuing forth from mountain, glen and brake.⁴⁸

Strikingly, in these retrospects, the clan is defined as a military unit (not a social one), under the absolute command of its chief. The mechanism, noted for example by Burt, and by Ramsay of Ochtertyre,⁴⁹ whereby chiefly power was tempered and controlled

46. Booker, The Highlanders, p.17.

47. Campbell, The Grampians Desolate, p.19.

48. Carey, Craig Phadric, pp.34-36.

49. Burt, Letters, II, 96; Scotland and Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century, edited from the MSS of John Ramsay, Esq. of Ochtertyre, edited by A. Allardyce, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1888), II, 392-95.

by the corresponding hereditary privileges of the clansmen, is filtered out of the account: the Highland potentate is simply imagined to have been, as William Robertson had described him as early as 1759, 'at the head of followers who, counting that cause just and honourable which their chief approved, rushed into the field at his command'.⁵⁰ Campbell even asserts in a note that runrig farming had prevailed in the pre-1745 Highlands because it made crops and herds more defensible.⁵¹

In short, as the Highland Regiments were consciously constructed as heirs and replicas of the clans, the clans were retrospectively remade in the image of the regiments. The botanical badge of the mountains, conspicuous in 'The Carb of Old Gaul', takes on an extra and distasteful connotation: in a recruiting poem of 1779 - a year of particularly frantic ideological effort following the entry of France into the American War - the 'Caledonians' appear in arms on the 'purpl'd heath' where their Fingalian ancestors shed the invader's blood.⁵² Even the vegetation is militarised.

50. In the History of Scotland. William Robertson, Works, 8 vols (1840), I, 23.

51. Campbell, The Grampians Desolate, pp.158-60.

52. R.Colvill, The Caledonians: A Poem (Edinburgh, 1779), p.10.

3 Virtue

The myth of the Highlands' bloodstained past was certainly promoted by an assumption that social order was the same thing as state power. Johnson's readiness to generalise from his anecdotal atrocities is based on his understanding that the pre-eighteenth-century Highlands lacked any central authority, and must consequently have been chaotic:

Those who had thus the dispensation of law, were by consequence themselves lawless. Their vassals had no shelter from outrages and oppressions; but were condemned to endure, without resistance, the caprices of wantonness, and the rage of cruelty.⁵³

'Outrages', 'caprices', 'cruelty' - the vocabulary unhesitatingly selects the worst that could come of such parcellised jurisdiction; ignoring, pessimistically, any principle of social cohesion alternative to overriding and restraining legality. This reading, however - the reflection of an individualistic and legalistic, that is to say a Lockean, political ideology - has an obverse. Part of the appeal of Highland violence was its phantom offer of, precisely, an alternative social idea.

The frequent practice of war tends to strengthen the bands of society, and the practice of depredation itself engages men in trials of mutual attachment and courage. What threatened to ruin and upset every good disposition in the human breast, what seemed to banish justice from the societies of men, tends to unite the species in clans and fraternities;

53. Johnson, Journey, p.41.

formidable indeed, and hostile to one another, but, in the domestic society of each, faithful, disinterested and generous. Frequent dangers, and the experience of fidelity and valour, awaken the love of these virtues, render them a subject of admiration, and endear their possessors.⁵⁴

This is from Adam Ferguson's Essay on the History of Civil Society, whose appearance in 1767 is a central event in the process of reevaluation. Although the Essay never mentions the Highlands, its tracing of an ethically ambiguous progression from barbarism to civility was, as Duncan Forbes has argued, a theoretical representation of their recent history.⁵⁵ In its contemplation of the fighting man's virtues, it may be regarded as another literary response to the Highland soldier's successes of 1756-63: Ferguson, the only eminent figure in the Edinburgh Enlightenment actually to come from the Highlands, had for several years from 1745 been chaplain to the 42nd; and in 1761-62 he had taken part in the campaign for a Scottish militia. What could be called his philosophic militarism turns on an almost pagan polarity of virtue and languor,⁵⁶ arising from the vigorous or the relaxed state of the 'national spirit'. This ethical model of society, which looks

54. Ferguson, Essay, p.101.

55. Ferguson, Essay, pp.xxxviii-xl.

56. The most significant intellectual ancestor of this formation is Sir William Temple's essay 'Of Heroic Virtue', which originally appeared in 1690. Temple's speculative primitivism informs the Highland image in several ways: his idealised Scythians stand near the head of the descent of barbarian stereotypes reviewed in the opening section of this chapter; his reflections on barbaric heroic poetry form a starting-point for Blair's 'Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian'; and in the present case his paradoxes are a basis for Ferguson's ethical dialectic. See Temple, Five Miscellaneous Essays, pp.98-172.

for the securities to justice 'not in mere laws ... but in the powers by which those laws have been obtained',⁵⁷ judges establishments primarily by the human capacities which they call forth or allow to decline. In these terms, the feud-torn social life attributed to the old Highlands can come to have an independent value, as the opposite of enervation.

This reading of Highland barbarism was available in mythical form even in 1746, when a curious pastoral version of the Rising, called Alexis; or the Young Adventurer, actually offered the rescue of national manners as the object of the whole attempt.⁵⁸ Alexis, the Prince, deploring the dejected state of the shepherds of 'Robustia', resolves to lead them 'back to that happy Simplicity and Innocence, for which their hardy Ancestors are so famed in Story'. He accordingly assembles a band of followers who 'eat the brown Crust, and drink the cold Stream. The Grass and the Heath is their Bed, and the hard Stone their Pillow. In this hardy Way they advance their laudable Enterprise.' However, the shepherds of neighbouring 'Felicia' turn out to be 'fatally drowned in Luxury and thoughtless Indolence', so that it's impossible to rouse them from 'their lethargick and grovelling State', and the Robustians are unsuccessful. Alexis, apparently the work of a Macdonald of Skye, surprisingly insists on this moral Jacobitism to the exclusion of any consideration of the dynastic question; but of course the theme isn't the property of

57. Ferguson, Essay, p.166.

58. A. Macdonald, Alexis; or, the Young Adventurer. A Novel (1746).

the Stewarts. Not long afterwards a solidly Hanoverian Highland partisan, John Campbell, writing in indignant correction of the ignorant notions of his own side, makes the same contrast:

Their Infants are no sooner brought into the World than they are pretty roughly handled, wrapt up in a Highland Blanket, and nursed in a very homely and masculine Manner, not bound and painted up in their Trinkets like so many Dolls, but are often carried in and about the House as naked as when they were born, and nourished with good and substantial Cheer, not with Dates and Sugar Plumbs.⁵⁹

The products of this austere regime employ their leisure in hunting, fishing and running up hills, disdaining cards, dice, and the covetousness that goes with them. In these steadily moralistic contrasts, as in the image of Robustia, a virtue at once mental and physical defines itself: 'hardy' (a word which clings to the Highlanders for the rest of the century) refers to an admirable elasticity of character as well as muscle. A comparable equation shapes the assertion of Donald McQueen, minister and antiquarian on Skye, that the ancient Highlanders, if narrow in their views, were strictly honourable: 'Men used to determine their disputes by the sword will detest fraud and duplicity as the true ensigns of cowardice.'⁶⁰ In view of the lurid and, as we saw, well-known annals of Highland treachery, this confidence can be taken to represent the power of a myth.

Some time later a prospect poet, viewing the Highlands from his vantage-point in Fife, declares,

59. Campbell, Full and Particular Description, p.17.

60. Pennant, 1772, II, 428.

Amid those rude incult and dreary wilds,
 The tartan-cinctur'd Caledonians dwell;
 A rough, a brawny, incorrupted race,
 By hardships tutor'd, blood, and dreadful things.⁶¹

The casual scatter of valuations, between 'dreary' and 'incorrupted', indicates how conventional the paradox has become: the human rewards of underdevelopment are widely understood. Later still, Lockhart's mock-heroic description of the phenomenal stair-climbing powers of the largely Gaelic Edinburgh cadies⁶² wittily testifies to the general faith in Highland vigour, and to the exploitation of it. At this comic point we can see how the idea connects with the broadside image of the sexually potent Highland lad - the tartan-cinctured Donald (or Charlie) of the Merry Muses⁶³ suggests another dimension again of the 'virtue' arising from lean living and bare legs. Thus the myth runs right through the culture, from philosophic history to pornographic rhyme.

Its content is the suspicion that a peaceful commercial society undermines military qualities, such as endurance, loyalty and courage, whose human value transcends their merely military functions. It's typical of the historical irony that no-one states this reservation more vehemently than the recognised spokesman of unrestricted commerce, Adam Smith:

Even though the martial spirit of the people were of no use towards the defence of the society, yet to prevent that sort of mental mutilation, deformity

61. Wallace, Prospects, p.45.

62. J.G. Lockhart, Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk, third (in fact second) edition, 3 vols (1819), I, 236-39.

63. See above, p.33; also, e.g., 'Comin' o'er the Hills o' Coupar' (Kinsley No. 177) and 'Had I the Wyte' (Kinsley No. 559).

and wretchedness, which cowardice necessarily involves in it, from spreading themselves through the great body of the people, would still deserve the most serious attention of government; in the same manner as it would deserve its most serious attention to prevent a leprosy.⁶⁴

As Smith's context makes clear, the historical core of the moral question is, in turn, the division of labour. The republican Roman, Ferguson says, could hardly have foreseen that in later, more refined ages,

citizens and soldiers might come to be distinguished as much as women and men; that the citizen would become possessed of a property which he would not be able, or required, to defend ... that, in short, one set of men were to have an interest in the preservation of civil establishments, without the power to defend them, that the other were to have this power, without either the inclination or the interest.⁶⁵

Ferguson is no primitivist: he's fully aware of the rewards, in wealth, refinement and cultural achievement, which flow from 'the Separation of Arts and Professions'. But he also identifies the same division as tending to relax the spirit of the society it enriches. In this context the Highlands, where military and social institutions were inseparable and 'every person wished to be thought a soldier',⁶⁶ appeared as an asset of which recruiting was a specifically inadequate use: the model of a lost unity of life.

Johnson, usually fairly immune to pastoral, warms to this martial one:

64. Smith, Wealth of Nations, p.787.

65. Ferguson, Essay, p.231.

66. Ramsay of Ochtertyre, Scotland and Scotsmen, II, 408.

It affords a generous and manly pleasure to conceive a little nation gathering its fruits and tending its herds with fearless confidence, though it lies open on every side to invasion, where, in contempt of walls and trenches, every man sleeps securely with his sword beside him; where all on the first approach of hostility come together at the call of battle, as at a summons to a festal show.... Every man was a soldier, who partook of national confidence, and interested himself in national honour.⁶⁷

Johnson doesn't, any more than Ferguson, finally assent to this image, which is embedded in an argument to the effect that the miseries of perpetual domestic feuding outweigh the felicity of communal self-reliance. Still, the 'confidence', the 'honour', and the 'festal show', celebrate in a more than merely concessive sense the community which has been lost as the region advances to specialised forms of production and defence. As Ferguson generalises it:

A state of greater tranquillity hath many happy effects. But if nations pursue the plan of enlargement and pacification, till their members can no longer apprehend the common ties of society, nor be engaged by affection in the cause of their country, they must err on the opposite side, and by leaving too little to agitate the spirits of men, bring on ages of languor, if not of decay.⁶⁸

It's not only that associations are most enthusiastically treasured in the hour of danger. It's more crucially that in a society where the relationships of father and child, landlord and tenant, magistrate and subject, and above all war-leader and soldier,

67. Johnson, Journey, p.82.

68. Ferguson, Essay, p.219.

are all superimposed, the 'national spirit' is evoked by every social transaction and feeling; whereas in a mediated, economic society such as rapidly came to dominate the Highlands after the mid-century, individuals 'may, like the inhabitants of a conquered province, be made to lose the sense of every connection, but that of kindred and neighbourhood.'⁶⁹ It's another facet of the problematic of the 'social tribes' - the feeling that the Highlands are being 'improved' by a rationality which is irrefutable, but fragmenting and desolate.

This is a question of the transformation, not just of the Highlands, but of British society as a whole; and as it is given as rational, it is unavoidable. Ferguson, though not insistently deterministic, speaks only of 'how long the decay of states might be suspended'⁷⁰ - he doesn't suggest that the 'relaxation' can be reversed. However, it can be resisted, by 'cultivating' the military character which barbaric circumstances produce naturally. Ferguson rejects the magical idea of physical enervation, maintaining that 'That weakness and effeminacy of which polished nations are sometimes accused, has its place probably in the mind alone.' To remake in the mind, then, the national virtue which the division of labour mutilates, is the ideological task adumbrated by the Essay. (It does not say so, but the point was immediately grasped by Kames and Montagu, who wrote of its weaning people from

69. Ferguson, Essay, p.219.

70. Ferguson, Essay, p.227.

selfishness, or infusing in them a Spartan spirit.)⁷¹ The necessary object of patriotism, the affective nation, is not in the gift of the modern commercial and imperialist state. But it is possible to recreate it from - or more precisely project it on to - the relics of the local past, inventing tradition to retie by conscious effort the bands of society which an insensible historical logic unpicks. It was in the service of this project that the myth of the mettlesome Highland clans - insignia of a real 'conquered province' - would grow great.

4 Regimentals

The dignity of the Highlands' developing ideological function is signalled quietly by a growing trick of nomenclature. In 1773 Anne Grant, travelling to the Highlands in the company of a dour and materialistic native, is distressed at his failure to conform to her 'hardy' and 'enthusiastic' stereotype:

He and I are a complete contrast; he has nothing of a highlander but by his birth; now that is the precise and only circumstance wanting to make me a complete one.⁷²

A few years later Donald McNicol implies the same enhanced sense less frivolously in wondering who told Johnson that 'Earse' is 'the rude speech of a barbarous people':

71. Ferguson, Essay, p.xxvii.

72. Grant, Letters from the Mountains, I, 22.

That a Highlander, who could be the only judge of the matter, should have passed so unfavourable a verdict on his own language and countrymen ... is improbable to the last degree.⁷³

Here a Highlander is not just a person from a certain place, but also someone with certain loyalties; the co-existence of the two senses makes the argument slightly sophistical.

What matters about this spiritual 'Highlander' is that, unlike the merely geographical one, he is incompatible with historical change. Anne Grant again, in 1811:

Nature never meant Donald for a manufacturer: born to cultivate or defend his native soil, he droops and degenerates in any mechanical calling. He feels it as losing his cast; and when he begins to be a weaver, he ceases to be a highlander.⁷⁴

In this usage, the assertion of extra-economic values, which we have seen variously in Ferguson and Mrs Grant herself, coarsens into a mystified ethnic type: 'Donald'. An ethos, abstracted from its real history to be set as a pseudo-nature against history, therefore becomes at once gaudy and immutable. The problem of cultural identity is stated, not as a choice among ways of living, but as a question of preservation. The 'Highlander' thus becomes an ideal object, the source of a norm. At about the same time, Sir John Sinclair wrote of membership of the Highland Society of London that 'the true qualification is not so much the distinction of "Highland Birth" (though this is certainly desirable...) but the possession of a "Highland Spirit".⁷⁵ Thus institutionalised,

73. McNicol, Remarks, p.293.

74. Grant, Essays, II, 143.

75. Sir John Sinclair, An Account of the Highland Society of London (1813), p.5.

the ideal was pedantically defended against adulteration and change, though not vigilantly enough for the egregious Macdonnell of Glengarry, whose Society of True Highlanders, formed in 1815, upstaged the London organisation in an orgy of bogus ethnic purism.⁷⁶

In practice the inevitable institutional home of the Highland essence was the army. Although Mrs Grant's own depiction of the Highlanders is unusually pacific and domestic, the rambling speculations of both the 1803 poem and the 1811 essays come to rest in the pseudo-clanship of the regiments.⁷⁷ Hierarchical, communal, resistant to change, labour-intensive and commercially senseless, the military establishment offered the nearest approximation to the unimproved Highlands which the British Empire could make use of. The identification was greatly strengthened by the early history of the highland regiments, when they could really offer private soldiers the prospect of serving under officers of their own name, and when they were the only setting in which tartan could legally be worn.⁷⁸ So that the recruiting sergeant appears as the deus ex machina in the stalemate of economic sense and ethnic sensibility which Mrs Grant presents: he holds out to the Highlanders the only chance

76. J. Barron, The Northern Highlands in the Nineteenth Century 3 vols (Inverness, 1903-13), I, 88.

77. Grant, Poems, pp.106-07.

78. Prebble, Mutiny, pp.95-100.

of accommodation in the commercial state which does not have the effect of 'extinguishing their high-toned enthusiasm, degrading their character, and effacing all [their] peculiar habits'.⁷⁹ The punctilios and icons of regimental tradition function as a preservative of Highland differentness, and the amenability of warfare to the poetic diction of Ossianic or Homeric heroism ensures that the poetical mountaineers don't simply descend into prose.

However, recruiting was as usual an equivocal solution. In 1803, the year of The Highlanders, it chimed exactly with the 'nursery of soldiers' idea which was the main argument for Government action to resist emigration: a House of Commons committee, for instance, reporting in that year, recommended unprecedented levels of civil expenditure on Highland roads and canals in order 'to prevent that emigration which will deprive the country of its hardest and bravest protectors, who have distinguished themselves most conspicuously by land and sea.'⁸⁰ In this typical instance the same Pittite rhetoric which lies behind Mrs Grant's separatist heroics is brought out to justify a highly assimilationist programme of development. In 1805 Selkirk devoted a whole chapter to the nursery-of-soldiers argument, evidently feeling that it was the most cogent objection to his support for emigration. His retort was that the military

79. Grant, Essays, II, 145.

80. Quoted in Joseph Mitchell, Reminiscences of my Life in the Highlands, 2 vols (1883-84), I, 22.

excellence of the Highlanders had been founded on their social system, which was now disappearing - and had to disappear, in fact, if the area was to be economically dynamic enough to employ its population. The nursery of soldiers was thus bound to be lost, either through the departure of the men or through the measures required to keep them at home.⁸¹ The only escape from this elegant bind was to believe in a magic of place and race; this is indeed the line adopted by Selkirk's critic 'Amicus', who looked for the causes of the Highland character, not in 'the progress and increase of commerce', but 'in the climate, in the constitution, and in blood'.⁸² Evidently that train of thought leads back to the abstract True Highlander.

So the war pulled the concept of Highland particularity in both directions at once. On the one hand, its overheated military rhetoric proposed a Highland identity of new definition and absoluteness. On the other, its politics tied Highland society more and more closely to the metropolis - through the raising of regiments and the attendant patronage, through intensified Government efforts to promote regional development, and through the high wartime demand for such commodities as beef, wool and kelp.

The bellicose Highland Laddies of the Napoleonic War songs - Mrs Grant produced one in 1799;⁸³ in 1800 came Hogg's very

81. Selkirk, Observations, pp.60-74.

82. 'Amicus', Eight Letters, p.27.

83. 'On the Marquis of Huntly's Departure for the Continent with his Regiment', Grant, Poems, p.407.

successful 'Donald McDonald' - are, after all, imperial figures before they are local ones. Thomas Campbell's imagery of 'Invincible romantic Scotia's shore'

Where Fingal stemm'd the tyrants of the world,
And Roman eagles found unconquer'd foes,⁸⁴

is typical in its repertoire of regional boasts, but also in the context which calls them forth - in this case, the Highland Society of London's dinner honouring the Highland Regiment's Egyptian victories of 1801. The Highland content of such heroic allusions is essentially an idiomatic colouring in of an imperial outline, just as regimental loyalties, however particularist they might appear, are really nothing but expressions of loyalty to the army as a whole. The special character of the Highlands grows more strident and less substantial. This relation is extended, however, by the question of Scottish nationality.

This can be introduced by saying that at the level of iconography, at any rate, the Highlands had throughout the eighteenth century an irregular capacity to signify the Scottish nation as a whole. This was partly founded on the sense that the Highlands were a reservoir of the national past - that the social system, say, or the language, of the recent Highlands, showed what had obtained all over Scotland in remote ages.⁸⁵ The name of 'Caledonia' gave easy currency to these beliefs: Caledonia was

84. Campbell, Poetical Works, p.175.

85. E.g., Robertson, Works, I, 23.

sometimes the whole country, sometimes only the Highlands, and sometimes a blur which gave either definition access to the privileges of the other. The praise of Scottish arms and freedom - the claim, which we have just seen in Campbell, but which is repeated ad nauseam, that the Romans were here repulsed - is similarly flexible: one can be thinking of Hadrian's Wall or of Agricola's ne plusultra on the edge of the Grampians, so that lowland Scotland is part of Caledonia or not, according to taste. Macpherson was doubly influential in cementing these associations: as an antiquarian he gave succour to the 'pro-Celts' who maintained, against both 'pro-Scythians' and Irish scholars, that the Scottish Gael were the 'original' Caledonians; and as a popular poet, he set all his classic ground in the Highlands, but at the same time produced a national mythology (the earliest staging of the poems, in Edinburgh in 1763, huffed that

the author of this piece
Had fix'd on Caledonia, not on Greece;
That he had scorn'd towards foreign climes to roam,
When he'ad such fair examples here at home.)⁸⁶

But the prime medium of the Scottish nationalisation of the Highlands was tartan. The famous 'tartan mania' of 1822, whose decor can still be traced along the Royal Mile, certainly decked out the nation on a scale not seen before, and probably not practicable without the specialist textile firms who rose to prosperity by clothing Wellington's troops. But its imagery had been anticipated on paper a century before:

86. Baker, The Muse of Ossian, p.10.

Our native Prince who then supply'd the Throne
 In Plaid array'd magnificently shone:
 Nor seem'd his Purple, or his Ermine less,
 Though cover'd by the Caledonian Dress.
 In this at Court the Thanes were gayly clad,
 With this the Shepherds and the Hinds were glad,
 In this the Warrior wrapt his brawny Arms,
 With this our beauteous Mothers veil'd their Charms;
 When ev'ry Youth, and ev'ry lovely Maid
 Deem'd it a Deshabille to want their Plaid.⁸⁷

This, Ramsay's 'Tartana' (1721), is already fully fledged tartanry, not only in its picturesque patriotism (its occasion is apparently a falling-off in a post-Union fashion for tartan, its declared aim to recommend native finery at the expense of imports), but also in its elaborate frivolity - the vision of a tartan-saturated Caledonia is consciously unconvincing, a national fantasy. A ballad in praise of the second Duke of Argyll, presumably from about the same period, transposes Ramsay's courtly flattery into a rougher idiom:

I'll quickly lay down my sword and my gun,
 And I'll put my plaid and my bonnet on,
 Wi' my plaiding stockings and leather-heel'd shoon,
 They'll mak me appear a fine sprightly loon.⁸⁸

Here again the point is not at all Highland, but Scots-patriotic: Argyll adopts this costume to show that London has not sapped his loyalty to bannocks of barley and Paisley Fair. And here too, the vision is a little ludicrous: the colourful gear, selected with care and vanity, is clearly fancy dress; almost, it is a disguise.

87. Allan Ramsay, Works, edited by Burns Martin and John W. Oliver, Scottish Texts Society Publications, 3rd series, Vol.19 (Edinburgh, 1951), p.27.
88. 'Bannocks of Barley-meal', Herd, Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, II, 130.

These early instances are significantly military. Ramsay introduces a 'hardy race' of soldiers

Who 'midst the snows the best of limbs can fold
In tartan plaids, and smile at chilling cold.⁸⁹

This connotation must obviously have been greatly strengthened by the period of proscription (1746-82) when Highland dress was little worn except as a regimental uniform (or, occasionally, as a Jacobite provocation - but that had warlike overtones too). The first 'authentic' Macbeth - Macklin's in 1773 - dressed the protagonist in a plaid when he was the general but not when he was the king.⁹⁰ In a humbler entertainment, John O'Keefe's comic opera The Highland Reel in 1790, the plot requires the heroine, a Hebridean lass, to enlist in drag to trick a recruiting party. She enters 'dressed as a Highlander'⁹¹ - the stage direction marks how completely the appearance has been detached from the region. A Highlander, at any rate visually, is now a romantic and military sort of Scot.

Thus the sartorial dividing lines between the Scottish nation, the Highlands and the army are everywhere blurred. J. Telfer Dunbar, the historian of Highland dress, has traced how the upper-class cult of tartan in the years following

89. 'Tartana', line 75.

90. Allardyce Nicoll, The Garrick Stage (Manchester, 1980), pp.170-72.

91. John O'Keefe, A New Comic Opera, called the Highland Reel (1790), p.64.

relegalisation incorporated into civilian fashions the pomp of regimental costume: Raeburn's Macnab (1802), to take a famous example, wears a military feathered bonnet but not military uniform.⁹² The first tartan appearance of the Prince of Wales, in the character of 'the Royal Highland Laddie' at a masquerade in the summer of 1789,⁹³ presumably also reflects regimental prestige. Certainly the rash of kilts among the Edinburgh beau monde, preserved with pleasant absurdity in John Kay's Original Portraits, was associated with the volunteer corps, paramilitary clubs and short-lived Fencible regiments which rose up in response to the spectres of revolution or invasion between 1793 and 1802.⁹⁴ In all this usage, the patriotism is British; the costume is only meant to add a 'Caledonian' accent to a King-and-Country message; yet the nationalist content isn't quite a matter of mere style. When the Highland Society of London voted in 1804 to wear tartan at its meetings, in order to recall 'the high character of our ancestors', there's no doubt that its decision was a response to the resumption of the war and its demands on British morale. But at the same time, Sir John Sinclair, who wrote the resolution, also alluded to the need to assert national identity before

92. J. Telfer Dunbar, History of Highland Dress (1962), p.9.

93. D.B. Horn, 'George IV and Highland Dress', Scottish Historical Review, 47 (1968), pp.209-10.

94. John Kay, A Series of Original Portraits and Caricature Etchings, edited by Hugh Paton, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1877). And for the political context, see William Ferguson, Scotland, 1689 to the Present, paperback edition (Edinburgh, 1978), pp.259-65.

'Scotland becomes completely confounded in England.'⁹⁵ The militarised 'National colour', flamboyantly idiomatic yet subordinated by adaptation and association to the overriding imperial sign, was the perfectly innocuous insistence of Scottish particularity. The contradictory requirements of the Scots ruling class - cultural autonomy combined with political affiliation to England⁹⁶ - were glowingly reconciled in the image of the Highland soldier.

It was the glow of stage fire. In the society masquerades, the theatrical transvestism, the kilted meetings in London coffee-houses, the camp quality of Ramsay's performance, its poseur's assurance, can still be felt. Sinclair's account of the Highland Society enthusiastically describes its observance of ancient Caledonian customs (with cakes, whisky and the Fingalian 'shell' as well as appropriate wear) 'transporting the spectator, as if it were by magic, among a new race of people':⁹⁷ this spectator, previously unmentioned, is made necessary by the theatricality of the observance. Nor is this a matter of Sinclair's eccentricity: in a very different branch of literature, a silver fork novel of 1797, we're regaled with a nuptial boating party on the lake of a stately home:

95. Sir John Sinclair, Observations on the Propriety of Preserving the ... Customs of the Ancient Inhabitants of Scotland (1804), p.3.

96. This ideological predicament is discussed by N.T. Phillipson, 'Nationalism and Ideology', in Government and Nationalism in Scotland, edited by J.N. Wolfe (Edinburgh, 1969), pp.167-88.

97. Sinclair, Observations, p.15.

the music stopped, and from a little rock, at the end of the walk by the water side ... there sat two youths finely dressed in the highland dress, with a table before them, and bread and cheese, a clean wooden dish with milk in it, and at the far end of the board (a table it scarcely could be called) an old man with grey locks playing on a bagpipe, and a bottle of whiskey by him.⁹⁸

In the story, these people turn out to be real tenants of the bridegroom's, but the picturesque 'discovery' of the little genre scene gives it the same masque-like quality as the Society's Ossianic feasts. The form of both is the tableau vivant - the fashion was moving from the stage to the drawing-room at just this point in its history⁹⁹ - offering the pleasure of being deceived: in another society novel, in 1788 -

I had like to have committed a dreadful faux-pas; for, as our carriages approached the inner court, I saw the old Lady attended by the two young ones, whose trains were borne by boys in Scotch bonnets and plaid dresses; and I really, as they did not stir, took them for figures in a piece of painting which was to represent some device emblematical of the present occasion. I was even going to express my admiration of the artist when the ladies began to curtsey.¹⁰⁰

This antiquarian dressing up elusively but suggestively pervades the Highlands of the time, from Johnson's antics on Coll (in target and blue bonnet, 'he seemed much pleased to assume the appearance of an ancient Caledonian'¹⁰¹) to Robert Mylne's ingenuity in designing the great house at Inveraray, where neo-

98. Mrs A. McDonald, Evening Amusements, or, What Happens In Life, A Novel, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1797), I, 149.

99. G.M. Bergman, Lighting in the Theatre (Stockholm, 1977), pp.220ff.

100. Fatal Follies; or, the History of the Countess of Stanmore, 4 vols (1788), II, 22.

101. Boswell, Journal of a Tour, p.329.

classical interiors were combined with the ostensibly chieftainly castle by means of windows which were round-headed on the inside and Gothic without.¹⁰²

What is happening in all these images is that the supposedly characteristic appearances of Highland life are being made into a uniform - that is, a decor whose signification is fixed. Locked into a national and imperial sign-system by their new ideological function, the Highland dress and character free themselves from the shabby mutability of historical existence and become essential, with rigid forms and primary colours - objects 'emblematical' of themselves. One paradoxical result of this abstraction is a growing anxiety about authenticity - hence the argument, launched in the Edinburgh Magazine in 1785 and later reopened by Sinclair himself, about whether the short kilt was 'genuine' Scottish dress or whether, as some maintained, it was invented by an Englishman called Thomas Rawlinson in about 1720.¹⁰³ The idea, dismissed as unhistorical by Telfer Dunbar, that setts were appropriated to particular clans, was in circulation by 1810 and furnished matter for many more authenticity arguments. Standardised for a global market, Highland manners can no longer afford idiosyncrasy even in detail. Minutiae require authority, because they mediate, not any more a way of life, but an order.

102. I.G. Lindsay and M. Cosh, Inveraray and the Dukes of Argyll (Edinburgh, 1973), p.200.

103. Dunbar, History of Highland Dress, p.13.

5 Reaction

Abstracted from his social life, the Highland warrior becomes a magical superman, an uncomplicated phenomenon of hardiness and intrepidity. One of the breed appears in a pamphlet of 1791 entitled Memoirs of the Life and Gallant Exploits of the Old Highlander, Serjeant Donald Macleod. Apparently written on Macleod's behalf by an anonymous hack, it tells how the sergeant has fought with astonishing success in every major conflict since Malplaquet. He apparently enlisted under age in about 1702, having escaped from an uncongenial apprenticeship in Inverness by walking to Perth in the middle of winter at the age of eleven. After fighting in Marlborough's wars, he was at Sherriffmuir, where he defeated the champion of Mar's army in single combat. At Quebec, aged seventy, he was hit twice, but still managed to donate his plaid to be used to carry the dying Wolfe from the field; the following year, his shattered shin bone completely healed, he was in action in Flanders. His involvement in the American War was confined to volunteering as a drill sergeant at Charlestown; and now, at the age of one hundred and three, he has walked from Inverness to London to claim a pension promised him by George III in person. These are only the most notable adventures in a career packed with incident, and there are one or two phrases in the telling to suggest that even the narrator doesn't believe the old man's every word. But as fiction, the story has great historical eloquence. Macleod is unmistakably a barbarian: his chosen weapon, whether in battle

or in the frequent private duels which relieve the intervals of peace, is the broadsword, and his use of it is bloody, indelicate, and often almost motiveless. Yet there is practically no ambivalence in his presentation: the ferocity is redeemed by its encyclopedically Hanoverian orientation. Born in 1688, he seems to be, almost allegorically, the eighteenth-century constitution in arms, the fantastic length of his active service not only reflecting the hardiness myth (the Highlander is physically indestructible), but also suggesting a corresponding immunity to historical change.

In all this there is the Pittite conquering hero, but also something more, a specifically conservative emphasis directed against political enemies at home as well as abroad. It speaks, for instance, in the naive royalism of Macleod's conception of Government: he has come to London to claim his due from the King, just as he would claim it from a clan chief. He is thus acting unconsciously on the principle, enunciated in the same year by Mrs Grant, that monarchy is

an institution, naturally growing out of that patriarchal sovereignty, which, in the primitive ages, the parent, doubly revered for his many years and great experience, was wont to exercise over his numerous and obedient offspring. 104

This paternalistic inflection of patriotism had not been particularly germane in 1756-63, when the enemy was a Catholic

104. Grant, Letters from the Mountains, II, 227.

and absolutist state. But the last war - that of 1776-82 - had been an attempt to suppress a democratic revolution, and by 1791 it was clear that the next one would be too. Moreover, both revolutions spoke to political departures within Britain. The 'Wilkes and Liberty' agitation, the new articulacy of demands for parliamentary reform, the stimulus given republican and deistic thought in Britain by America and France, the dim beginnings of a class-conscious labouring mass, the polarisation, represented by Burke and Paine, of British opinion concerning the Parisian events of 1789 - these broad and ultimately revolutionary developments had the effect, even as the Highland regimental image remained static, of changing the meaning of its stasis. Its fixity, increasingly, was just where its value lay: in the conventional bundle of military virtues, the theme which came to predominate was 'attachment'. If it could really be arranged that, through the clan spirit, a soldier's commitment to the King would have the warmth and spontaneity of a family attachment, then, as a pamphleteer observed of the earliest Highland companies, 'this gave great life and spirit to the friends of the present establishment'¹⁰⁵ - it founded monarchy on a principle of loyalty which was, so to speak, anterior to politics. This seemed the nub of the Highland question to Henry Dundas in the 1770s: he recommended that to arrest the decay of the clan ethos militias

105. Remarks on the People and Government of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1747), p.21.

should be set up whose officers 'would recruit from their own [clans] and thereby renew that cement of connection which my opinion leads me to think ought now to be cherished, not to be checked.'¹⁰⁶ ('Now' is 1775 - the eve of the American Revolution.) An anonymous state paper makes the same point during the next crisis, in 1797: the Highlanders are 'Strangers to the levelling and dangerous principles of the present Age', and can therefore, unlike the populace in the rest of the country, be safely trusted with weapons.¹⁰⁷

The usefulness of the cement had early been demonstrated by the zeal and 'simplicity of mind' with which the new Highland troops helped to suppress the Shawfield Riots in Glasgow in 1725;¹⁰⁸ comparably, Serjeant Macleod looks back with relish to the 42nd's service in Ireland against Whiteboys and Hearts of Steel ('to all of whom the Highland impetuosity and broad-swords were objects of great terror')¹⁰⁹ - insurgents resisting just such rack-renting as was simultaneously wasting the Highlands.

The ideological projection of this manoeuvre takes two notable forms: the rehabilitation of the chief, and the elaboration of sentimental Jacobitism.

106. Letter printed in C.R. Fay, Adam Smith and the Scotland of his Day (Cambridge, 1956), pp.11-14.

107. Quoted in Bumsted, The People's Clearance, p.83.

108. Remarks on the People and Government of Scotland, p.26.

109. Memoirs of the Life and Gallant Exploits of the Old Highlander, Serjeant Donald Macleod (1791), p.69.

The first of these appears rather startlingly in Pennant's 1772 Tour. On the whole, Pennant is in sympathy with the prevailing metropolitan view that chieftainship is a dangerous and lawless anachronism: he depicts pre-¹⁰⁴⁵ potentates praying, 'Lord! Turn the world upside down, that christians may make bread out of it', and administering their heritable jurisdictions 'too often with vindictive severity'; and he retails island history of 'the great Mac-donald' with Great British mockery.¹¹⁰ At the end of his Hebridean voyage, however, he departs from his usual unpretentious diaristic manner and launches on a gradiose poetical dream:

I imagined myself again wafted gently down the sound of MULL; bounded on each side by the former dominions of mighty chieftains; or of heroes immortalized in the verse of OSSIAN.¹¹¹

One of these ancient warriors, with target and 'clymore', and a 'graceful vigour ... apparent in his countenance', appears to the sleeping traveller and harangues him on the past and present state of the Highlands. He describes his own career as a patriarchal chief, the fierce despot, but also the protector, friend and father of his people, courting wounds for their sake as they for his. He evokes a complex, branching interaction reminiscent of Anne Grant's idea:

The crowds of people that attended at a humble distance, partook of my bounty: their families were my care; for I beheld in their boys a future support of the greatness of my house: an hereditary race of warriors.

110. Pennant, 1772, I, 399; II, 39; I, 252.

111. Pennant, 1772, I, 421-28.

My numerous kindred lived on lands the gift of my distant progenitors, who took care to plant their children near the main stock: the cions took firm root, and proved, in after-times, a grateful shelter to the parent tree, against the fury of the severest storms.

Pennant, protected from complete commitment to it by his whimsical device, here allows himself a lavish idealisation of clan fealty - a system of authority and duty which is explicitly set against the coming society of free exchange:

The ties of affection amongst relations are now no more: no distinction is at present made between proximity of blood, and the most distant stranger. Interest alone creates the preference of man to man.

The immediate polemical target of this fantasy is economic exploitation: Pennant is denouncing, as he often does, the cruelty and short-sightedness of landlords who drive their tenants away by excessive rent rises. But the form of the attack is reactionary: with a sanguine opportunism we have seen before, the ancient chief exhorts his degenerate descendants to 'restore ... the laudable part of the ancient manners; eradicate the bad', explaining periphrastically that this means using the remnants of patriarchal authority to lead the people to become fishermen, weavers, soldiers and sailors. The opportunity is there because 'they would submit to any restrictions; and think no restraints, founded on the safety of the whole, an infringement of liberty, or an invasion of property.' This last phrase situates the medieval Hebrides firmly in the 1770s. Potentially, the clansmen are not only productive workers, but also exemplary subjects, because their

paternalistic traditions make them strangers to the whiggish jealousy of civil rights which is unsettling England and ruining America. Thus events turn the old hereditary despot, rather surprisingly, into a patriotic emblem.

The transition must have been eased by the emblem's overlap with the English ideal of landed patriotism: in the chief who stays in his Highland castle, dining hospitably on his own produce and preferring influence and affection to the metropolitan pleasures money can buy, Pennant's generation, and especially Johnson, can hardly have failed to recognise the rural Augustan, or rather Horatian, hero of Pope or Fielding. Knox, a moderniser who doesn't talk about chiefs, still appeals to that standard in his examples of enlightened Highland landlordism:

Mr Mackenzie never wanders abroad, and his home is a source of pleasure, the seat of ease, affluence, and health. He has lived to see the trees of his own planting become considerable. He is under the influence of no factor, and he oppresses no tenant; yet his rent-roll increases with his years.¹¹²

Here the reconciliation of natural harmonies with commercial profits is conscious, and also precarious, since it depends on a steadily growing agrarian prosperity. When hopes of this fade, so does the ideal of a progressive native landowning style: the image of a worthy heritor becomes more archaic and uneconomic, as when Johnson, lacking Knox's ill-founded optimism, improvises the Theophrastan character of 'a rapacious Chief', one who has

112. Knox, Tour, p.227.

only the position of a Chief and not the 'soul' - like the 'Highlander', the 'Chief' is abstracted from social practice and turns into a moral essence.¹¹³

In this form the image circulates easily. Boswell's book, which appeared in 1786, was the source of the local colour in O'Keefe's The Highland Reel, staged in 1788. The play consists mostly of stock comic business which is only superficially localised, but at one point the Laird of Coll appears and declares, 'The moment I set foot on my little territory here, I found my heart glow with all the regal pride of an ancient Scottish chieftain.'¹¹⁴ The character goes on to function as the wise authority who sorts out the misunderstandings of the plot: in marked contrast with earlier theatrical exploitations of a Highland idiom, the affective power of chieftainship underwrites comic justice. This noble chief quickly gained the currency of a cliché: by 1804, for instance, Alexander Campbell, despite his vignette of

High minded chiefs
[Who] dealt their wide demesnes in servile fiefs,

could also obliviously exclaim:

Behold a CHIEF! - at heart his kindred's weal,
Dispensing justice due, with upright zeal;
No discontents or murmurings are heard,
All seem convinced that just is each award.
Behold! - the hospitable board now spread,
The Father of his People at its head.¹¹⁵

113. Boswell, Journal of a Tour, p.417.

114. O'Keefe, The Highland Reel, p.42.

115. Campbell, The Grampians Desolate, p.27.

The absence of discontents and murmurings is oddly arbitrary: the image is too obviously projected out of a society in which the justice of each award is by no means universally convincing. The appeal is that of an authority which possesses a magical legitimacy. For this, however, there was now a second charm, at once more extreme and more popular.

It's not easy to fix the origins of Hanoverian Jacobitism. Hostility to Cumberland, sympathy for Lochiel, admiration for the Highlanders' high-mindedness in disdaining the reward offered for the Chevalier's capture - these latently Jacobite sentiments were current among firm loyalists at an early stage; and tales of George III's playful indulgence of minor Jacobite indiscretions suggest that the Hanoverian monarchs themselves saw the advantages of a whimsical toleration as soon as the real threat was dispersed.¹¹⁶ But Boswell, again, is near the source of the articulation. The Journal takes an extended break from the sayings and doings of Johnson in order to give an account, collected from eye-witnesses and incorporating several romantic legends, of the Chevalier's Hebridean wanderings. At the end of this sequence, Boswell

116. The introduction to The Life and Songs of the Baroness Nairne, edited by Rev. C. Rogers (1849), relates how the poet's father was complimented on his unbending Jacobite principles by 'the Elector of Hanover'. Another such tale provided the germ of Sir Walter Scott's Redgauntlet (1824), which is also a historical analysis of the predicament of real Jacobitism in the new context.

discloses the object of his enthusiastic researches:

I am not satisfied with the cold sentiment which would confine the exertions of the subject within the strict line of duty. I would have every breast animated with the fervour of loyalty; with that generous attachment which delights in doing somewhat more than is required, and makes 'service perfect freedom' They are feelings which have ever actuated the inhabitants of the Highlands and the Hebrides. The plant of loyalty is there in full vigour, and the Brunswick graft now flourishes like a native shoot.¹¹⁷

Here Jacobitism is frankly situated at the level of affectivity: the dynastic, even the national question disappears, and what remains is the quality of sentiment they inspired. The divine-right piety of the quotation from the Collect, and the somewhat machiavellian grafting metaphor, make loyalty to the Stewarts into an emotive style of loyalty to George III. From the extravagant devotion which ran risks for hapless royalty, Toryism in a revolutionary age draws the warmth to counter 'the querulous growlings of suspicious Whigs and discontented Republicans'.

This deliberate revivalism makes a significant context for the collected, revised, or actually invented Jacobite lyrics whose vogue was gathering momentum when the Journal came out in 1786, and peaked around George IV's Edinburgh extravaganza with Hogg's Jacobite Relics (1819-21) and Baroness Nairne's adroitly lachrymose songs for the Scottish Minstrel (1821-24). Hogg dedicated the Relics to the Highland Society of London in terms which suggest that Boswell's logic was not lost on him. The Shepherd confesses that his Whiggish heart was strangely drawn

117. Boswell, Journal of a Tour, p.294.

to the Highlands and their lament for an Episcopalian prince,
and explains

When kings were degraded, to ruffians a prey,
Or driven from the thrones of their fathers away,
Who then could sit silent? Alas for the while,
That now there are myriads, the worst of the vile,
Whose highest ambition is bent to defame
All greatness and sovereignty, order and name!¹¹⁸

In the post-war world of the Holy Alliance this versified para-
phrase of Burke's reflections on Marie-Antoinette makes the
content of retrospective Jacobitism almost disabblingly plain.

Hogg's songs, indeed, steadily argue the connection, whether
in looking forward from 1746 -

O Cumberland! what mean'd ye then
To ravage ilka Highland glen?
Our crime was truth an' love to ane;
 We had nae spite at thee, man.
An' you or yours may yet be glad
To trust the honest Highland lad;
The bonnet blue an' belted plaid
 Will stand the last o' three, man¹¹⁹ -

or backward from 1800 -

What though we befriendit young Charlie? -
To tell it I dinna think shame;
Poor lad, he came to us but barely,
An' reckon'd our mountains his hame.
'Twas true that our reason forbade us,
But tenderness carried the day; -
Had Geordie come friendless amang us,
Wi' him we had a' gane away.¹²⁰

The subjective emotional pose loosens the sentiment from its
occasion: the clans' Jacobitism becomes a 'truth an' love to ane'

118. James Hogg, Jacobite Relics of Scotland, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1819-21), I, vi.

119. 'Bauldy Fraser', in The Forest Minstrel, p.166.

120. 'Donald McDonald', in Selected Poems, edited by D.S. Mack (Oxford, 1970), p.111.

so strong in itself that, paradoxically, it can easily be transferred. The almost comically indiscriminate attachment declared in 'Donald McDonald' - civil war presented as an over-enthusiastic expression of hospitality - is, exactly, a 'fervour of loyalty', a predisposition to fidelity as such, in excess of any object.

Hogg's presentation, though, is marked by a second and more peculiar paradox. The real condition of the whole Hanoverian takeover of Jacobite mythology is, of course, the '45's total failure. And these sentimental reconstructions of the enterprise guarantee the blamelessness of the Highlanders' motives by reading that failure back into them. These clansmen, who are too good-natured to be hostile toward the enemy, support the Pretender, not despite his disastrous unpreparedness, but actually because of it: one feels that if the rising had held out the slightest chance of success they would have superbly refused to take part in it. A more pedestrian but usefully schematic poem by Boswell's son confirms this impression:

Fierce and untam'd, yet devoted to thee,
Proud that their death should their loyalty seal
In the torrent of battle, the block, or the tree;¹²¹
Though blind and mistaken, we honour their zeal.

Here, representatively, Culloden and its aftermath so eclipse the successes of 1745 that defeat appears as the object of the whole adventure (the piece ends -

Exulting we'll think on Glenmorrison's cave -

121. 'On the Fidelity of the Highlanders in the Rebellion 1745-6', in Sir Alexander Boswell, Songs, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect (Edinburgh, 1803), p.23.

it's the figure of the fugitive that carries the decisive value). The Highland army exhibits consciously the splendid virtues of the doomed; and so the suppressed rebellion is collapsed back into the death-obsessed world of Macpherson's Ossian - this literally happens in Anne Grant's The Highlanders when the melancholy royal survivor greets the new day with a soliloquy based on the address to the sun from Carthon.¹²²

It's at this level, too, that Burns's Highland militarism consents to the conservative legend of hyperbolic loyalty. Avoiding on the whole expressions of modern royalism - even exploiting, with sly radicalism, the opportunity to call down curses on England and 'Br - ns - ick'¹²³ - he nevertheless reproduces the excessive and vaguely erotic honour of loyalist emotionalism, popular -

If I had twenty thousand lives,
I'd die as aft for Charlie¹²⁴ -

or 'heroic' -

In the field of proud honor, our swords in our hands,
Our King and our Country to save,
While victory shines on life's last ebbing sands,
O, who would not die with the Brave!¹²⁵

In both these sunset images - the patriarchal chief, and the dying Jacobite warrior - there is a reactionary force which goes

122. Grant, Poems, p.85.

123. 'A Birth-day Ode. December 31st 1787' (Kinsley, No.189).

124. 'O'er the Water' (Kinsley No.211).

125. 'Orananaoig, or, The Song of death' (Kinsley, No.330).

beyond the simple statecraft of the recruiting drive. The mournful light picks out qualities of solidarity and fealty even, or rather especially, at the expense of effectiveness; the principle of the style is a glamorous futility, military as well as economic; the ritual which sustains the irrational mystique of authority is sacrifice. Death appears in the military ethos, not as a risk attendant on it, but as its essence, the sublime gesture of compliance with the sovereignty of the State. The imagery thus tacitly acknowledges that not only the warrior, but also the culture his gaudy uniform denotes, is to die for King and Country.