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Carol McGuirk

The Crone, the Prince, and the Exiled Heart: Burns's Highlands and Burns's Scotland

Burns's idealization of the Highlands is not rooted in any deep appreciation of wild and haunting landscapes. During the first of two Highland tours, in June 1787, he wrote an acidulous letter from Arrochar to Robert Ainslie describing a forbidding scene in which "savage streams tumble over savage mountains, thinly overspread with savage flocks, which starvingly support as savage inhabitants."¹ This first impression contrasts sharply with "My heart's in the Highlands," sent to *The Scots Musical Museum* three years later:

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here;
My heart's in the Highlands a chasing the deer;
Chasing the wild deer, and following the roe;
My heart's in the Highlands, wherever I go. —

Farewell to the Highlands, farewell to the North;
The birth-place of Valour, the country of Worth:
Wherever I wander, wherever I rove,
The hills of the Highlands for ever I love.²

¹*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd. edn., ed. G. Ross Roy, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), I, 124. Henceforth *Letters*.

²*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), II, 528. Henceforth *Poems*.

What was it that moved Burns to redefine this “savage” ground as the “birth-place of Valour”? I argue here that Burns turns to the Highlands, especially in songs written after 1788, to address the cost (to all of Scotland) of the mid-century suppression of the clans and their culture. He revives Highland and Jacobite songs as a bard intent on addressing the full range of Scottish historical experience; and his songs also leave open the possibility that reminders of Jacobite intransigence are intended to support and strengthen a renewed spirit of Scottish insurgency during the 1790s.

Yet any political message is only implied, for the speakers in most of these songs stand quite alone; the retrospective view of the Highlands they offer only hints at a political context for sorrowful memories. Burns's title for the stanzas just quoted is “Farewell to the Highlands,” and the song conveys a double sorrow: the agonized moment of leave-taking itself, but also the residue of grief that lingers long after. This speaker's heart is “not here” (wherever it is that he now speaks from) but “for ever” looks back toward scenes where “the wild deer” and “roe” run free. This song does not celebrate a picturesque landscape so much as mourn a scene of past joys; the “hills of the Highlands” stand in for all that the exiled speaker has left behind in life. Pictorial vignettes such as this song's “wild-hanging woods” and “green vallies” are not, then, the pastoral conventions (let alone mere clichés) that some critics have called him. Sketchy vistas, blurred by time and distance, are half-effaced images that lead his speakers down a road to recollection.³ The deer and the roe are not being described but *remembered*, and in his Highland songs it is memory, not landscape (much less wildlife), with which Burns is chiefly concerned. Yet these dramatized moments of tearful parting must have called to mind for Burns's contemporary audience (for whom these events had occurred within living memory) the larger context of Highland depopulation—the national cataclysm of the Jacobite rebellions.

The Highlands serve Burns's imagination as a repository (once rich; now almost emptied) of national cultural memory. The title of the songbook series for which he gathered most of his post-1787 writing, *The Scots Musical Museum*, suggests not only the recovery of artifacts that would otherwise be lost but their redefinition and display as cultural treasures. Most museums preserve the traces of social and aesthetic movements now belonging wholly to the past, and the Highland-inflected songs that Burns sent to *The Scots Musical Museum*

³Ashmead and Davison stress the use of repetition in Burns's lyrics: “In addition to the repeated...‘Farewell’ (five in all), and the nine ‘My Heart’s,’ there are eleven ‘Highlands’ which occur not at the ends of line, but at strong caesural pauses in the midline” (p. 242). In Burns's love songs (“Mary Morison” is one example), the name of the beloved is often repeated in this same obsessive way: here, the speaker's dwelling on the word “Highlands” conveys an unrequited longing. See John Ashmead and John Davison, *The Songs of Robert Burns* (New York, 1988).

likewise seem to come out of an earlier, “purer,” Scotland—even though he may have written his stanzas the very day that he sent them to his editor James Johnson. Burns’s speaker in “My heart’s in the Highlands” can recall the “country of Worth” but he never can call it back. In this song as in so many others, Burns positions the Highlands as the Scottish imaginary’s lost paradise.

In search of the Highland element in Burns’s poetic language and vision, it is instructive to consider his seasoning of Scots dialect with words derived from Erse (Gaelic as spoken in Scotland). In Kinsley’s glossary for his Clarendon edition of Burns’s works, thirty-seven words are defined as probably or mainly Gaelic-derived, but this small group includes some of Burns’s keywords. Here is a list from Kinsley, with brief glosses:

airles	payment made in token of employment
airt	point of the compass
bannock	griddle cake
brae	high ground or hill
brats	mantle or rags
clachan	village
clavers	chatter
coble	flat-bottomed boat
collieshangie	uproar or brawl
cootie	tub
claymore	broadsword
craig	cliff
cranreuch	frost
crouchie	hump-backed
crummie	crooked
curmmurring	rumbling
donsie	unlucky
drummoch	oatmeal and water
Erse	Highland or Gaelic [Irish]
gab	mouth
ier-oe	great-grandchild
ingle	fire or hearth
kane	payment in kind
kebar	rafter
kebbuck	cheese
kelpie	horse-shaped water-spirit
kiaugh	battle or trouble
missan	dog or cur
och and ochon	alas
philibeg	kilt
pibroch	the art of piping
plaidie	tartan cloak
shangan	cleft stick
spleuchan	tobacco pouch

tocher	dowry
usquebae	whisky ⁴

Most of these Gaelic-derived words refer to distinctive articles of dress and furnishing (plaidie, philibeg), to foods and beverages (bannocks, kebbuck, and usquebae), or to landscape (craigs and braes). Some must have been in currency all over Scotland in Burns's day; he may have picked up others from Margaret Campbell (Highland Mary) or from his father, who had grown up in Kincardineshire in the Northeast. After 1787, Gaelic-derived words may have been souvenirs of Burns's Highland tours.

However he acquired them, Burns displays his tiny cache of Erse (as he uses his equally small stock of Latin, French, and Italian) to optimal advantage. These words appear in poems early and late. In the cantata "Love and Liberty," which Thomas Crawford has rightly called the "masterpiece of Burns's early Ayrshire period,"⁵ Burn's "recitativo" or narrative portion uses the Gaelic-derived "usquebae" (l. 19) and "kebars" (l. 49) even before the song of the Highland "Carlin" or crone. Her song is placed third or just at midpoint of the six songs that comprise the musical part of the cantata. Following the cheery songs of the soldier and his doxy (they are bizarrely upbeat, considering the disability and homelessness they describe), the Carlin is the first singer to emphasize a direct defiance of law:

A HIGHLAND lad my Love was born,
The lalland laws he held in scorn;
But he still was faithfu' to his clan,
My gallant, braw JOHN HIGHLANDMAN (*Poems*, I, 200).

A Carlin—according to Kinsley's glossary, the word is derived from Old Scots and Old Norse—is a crone or rough-mannered woman; a secondary meaning is witch. Thieving and hard-drinking, the Carlin (object of desire both for the crippled Fiddler and the brawling Tinker) is presumably a Highlander like her hanged lover. Her song employs the Gaelic-derived "philibeg," "plaid," "claymore," and "Och," though (like the other beggars' songs) it is written chiefly in standard English:

We ranged a' from Tweed to Spey,
An' liv'd like lords an' ladies gay;

⁴Kinsley's glossary provides a kind of snapshot; no doubt Burns used other Gaelic-derived words as well. See *Poems*, III, 1549-1613.

⁵Thomas Crawford, "Burns, Love, and Liberty," in Carol McGuirk, ed., *Critical Essays on Robert Burns* (New York, 1998), p. 95. Henceforth Crawford.

For a lalland face he feared none,
My gallant, braw John Highlandman (*Poems*, I, 201).

Highlanders like John scorn British law, remaining loyal to clan customs that are a mandate to mobility.

If visions of the Highlands in Burns's songs call up memories of a lost paradise, his Highland characters are often used to dramatize resistance and defiance—though a defiance often (like visions of the free-ranging deer and roe) curiously displaced to the past. Once upon a time, John Highlandman held the Lowland laws in scorn; then the authorities hanged him. The crone's Highland rover/lover serves not only as a contrast to place-bound Lowland tenants but also as an index to the difference between "then" and "now."

A double or superimposed contrast (Highland and Lowland, past and present) may also be seen in "The Highland balou," a lullaby in which a love-child's future life as a daring raider is fondly predicted by his mother:

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

* * *

Thro' the Lawlands, o'er the Border,
Weel, my babie, may thou furder:
Herry the louns o' the laigh Countrie,
Syne to the Highlands hame to me (*Poems*, II, 865).

This plainspoken mother is carlin-like in her roughness of speech and, despite her youth, crone-like in serving as a conduit for long cultural memory, for the power of the Highland chiefs had been crushed at mid-century, some forty years before Burns wrote these stanzas.

He implicitly refers to the mid-century Jacobite conflict when his speaker names the Clanronald as her family and their chief as the father of her child. Burns's Scottish audience would have remembered, hearing this name, that the young chief of Clanronald was the first to raise his clan in support of Charles Edward Stuart, and that after the battle of Culloden the clan continued to resist until the British troops destroyed their hoard of ammunition. They were also active in smuggling the prince out of the country: Flora Macdonald was of that clan. Burns's late eighteenth-century audience knows of the mid-century defeat of the Clanronald and the extermination of Highland culture; the speaker, however, knows nothing of what is to come, expressing a serene (if antisocial) confidence about what the future holds for her baby son. She is typical of Burns's Highland speakers in commending activities reprehensible to place-bound Lowlanders, including the acquisition of livestock through thieving (as opposed to careful husbandry) and a fluid, restless mobility across borders. In

Burns, Scotland's law-abiding Presbyterian precincts—literally spelled “Lawlands” in this song—find their radical counterpart in the Highlands.

Critics tend to overstate Burns's reliance on traditional fragments and popular songs, for many of his stanzas are wholly original—“Charlie he's my darling” is one example to be discussed below—and most of those that he revised are significantly, not superficially, reformulated. That Burns did not write but folk-collected most of his songs is actually a misconception he was at some pains to promote. In a letter to Frances Anna Dunlop, he described the coding system for his contributions to *The Scots Musical Museum*: stanzas entirely by him would be coded R, B, or X; songs marked Z would identify traditional songs only lightly retouched. He goes on to say, however, that “Those [songs] marked, Z, I have given to the world as old verses to their respective tunes; but in fact, of a good many of them, little more than the Chorus is ancient; tho' there is no reason for telling every body this piece of intelligence” (*Letters*, I, 337).

“My heart's in the Highlands” was a “Z” song (“Auld Lang Syne” was another), and a note about it in Burns's hand says that just two lines were folk-collected—“the first half-stanza of this song is old; the rest is mine” (*Poems*, III, 1334). This would identify the lines “My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here;/ My heart's in the Highlands a chasing the deer” (*Poems*, II, 527) as traditional. Burns's revision is characteristic in dramatizing a single speaker whose subsequent musings amplify the latent power of the evocative phrase “my heart is not here.” His stanzas are characteristic, too, in adding frankly Jacobite touches, notably the references to valor and worth as Highland virtues. Despite the note, it is quite possible that Burns wrote every word of “My heart's in the Highlands,” leaving the note as a red-herring. (He sent his stanzas for “Auld Lang Syne” to Mrs. Dunlop as entirely folk-collected, for instance, and she took him at his word, though the over-the-top blessing given by the “heaven-taught Ploughman” for the nameless author might have given pause to a more perceptive person: “Light be the turf on the breast of the heaven-inspired Poet who composed this glorious Fragment!” (*Letters*, I, 345). When Burns wanted a song to be taken seriously, he often presented it as folk-collected. To return to “My heart's in the Highlands,” *The Scots Musical Museum* itself identifies the stanzas as being “Mr. Burns's old words,” more or less plainly labeling the song as a faux antique.⁶

In his comments on possible traditional sources for Burns's “The Highland balou,” Kinsley quotes from a translation of a traditional song, “Cagaran Gaolach” (Gaelic Lullaby):

⁶For further discussion of Burns's authorship of songs often assumed to be mainly traditional, see my notes to “Auld Lang Syne” and “A Red, Red Rose” in Carol McQuirk, ed., *Robert Burns: Selected Poems* (London, 1993), pp. 250-52; 283.

Little pet, little pet, dear little pet,
 Stalwart little darling, a man of my own people—
 He will steal a goat for me, he will steal sheep,
 He will steal a mare and a cow from the plains (*Poems*, III, 1512).

Yet this stanza (folk-collected in the mid-twentieth century) suggests a significant difference between the popular song tradition and the songs Burns made. Thematically identical to Burns's (Highlanders constitute a counterculture here, too), the folk-collected stanza never brings to mind, as Burns's songs typically do (and as "The Highland balou" does in its allusion to the Clanronald), the destruction of the Highland caterans in the aftermath of Culloden.

The free-spoken challenges that Burns's crones and other Highland speakers offer to settled respectability are situated in the national past. In this insistently retrospective focus, the Highlands, though a site of imagined resistance, are also for Burns a curiously ambiguous or at any rate open space. Sentiments that Burns's crones frame as "scorn" for the law could be taken simply as memorials to happier days "lang syne," elegies for a lost culture; in fact, Burns's strong focus on distant cultural memory encourages this interpretation. Yet if the lost freedom of movement and expression being lamented is not being buried but resurrected—precisely in the act of being called to mind—then Burns's Highland songs might be read also as intending to inculcate some renewed spirit of resistance. I am not suggesting that Burns wishes to incite people to resume cattle-raiding, but pointing out that his repeated return in his songs to sites of Highland intransigence was in part intended (and so taken by at least some of his contemporaries) as calls for a restoration of Scottish freedom as it once was and might become again. Certainly this is how Burns intended the words of Robert Bruce to be taken in "Scots Wha Hae." One point in favor of seeing a covert political commentary in the Jacobite songs is Burns's anonymity as their author. He denied or concealed his authorship of most of his Highland songs, just as he agreed to the suppression (mandated by Hugh Blair) of his most radical work, "Love and Liberty": the cantata first appeared a few years after his death as a pirated pamphlet egregiously mistitled "The Jolly Beggars."

However they are interpreted, songs such as "The Highland balou" are complex rather than simple in their relationship to those who will hear it. The song's original late-eighteenth century audience inhabited a Scotland dramatically different from (and, Burns hints, far more constrained than) the "now" of the speaker's joyously subversive lullaby. In a manner characteristic of his late songs ("The Highland balou" was first printed in *The Scots Musical Museum* volume that appeared a few months after the poet's death in 1796), Burns maneuvers poetic time in order to allow the past—the culture from which the mother speaks—to address the future. How to interpret this speaker's words, along with the memories they evoke of a fiercely independent but decimated Highland culture, is left an open question.

Sir Walter Scott likewise juxtaposes Highland and Lowland cultures in *Waverley* (1814) but unlike Burns, he provides guidance and commentary. In Scott's view, the eighteenth-century suppression of the clans was all for the best:

There is no European nation which, in the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland. The effects of the insurrection of 1745,—the destruction of the patriarchal power of the Highland chiefs,—...the total eradication of the Jacobite party, which, averse to intermingle with the English, or adopt their customs, long continued to pride themselves upon maintaining ancient Scottish manners and customs, commenced this innovation.⁷

"Insurrection" has been eradicated in Scott, as it was in history. Yet Scott's novel goes further, insisting on viewing the extirpation of an independent Highland culture as wholly providential. Defeat of the Jacobites smooths the way for much needed "innovation" and improvement. In the final chapters, Baron Bradwardine's estate is repurchased and renovated by Edward Waverley's English money; and it is through the exertions of the Englishman Colonel Talbot that the bear of Bradwardine, the drinking cup that is the Baron's favorite heirloom, is restored to the Bradwardine family. In *Waverley*, Scott suggests that coexistence with English culture (not to mention access to English wealth) was a blessing even for the defeated Jacobite families.

There is no such voice-over in Burns, no steering of his audience toward the view that time marches on. When Burns's crones and rough-mannered women speak, no editorial voice is raised to contradict them. In foregrounding these women's voice of rebellion and resistance, Burns actually evokes a Scottish history all the more haunting because (like his Highland landscapes) somewhat blurred: unlike chiefs and princes, proud Highland mothers or grieving "widows" such as the Carlin in "Love and Liberty" are private persons free to focus on their feelings. Burns's crones narrate Scottish historical experience as personal experience; this is true even of the speaker's passing reference to the Clanronald in "The Highland balou," which, though it would lead Burns's contemporary audience to remember mid-century national affairs, is in her own mind a reference to a strictly unofficial, off-the-books liaison. By contrast to these songs of Highland women, songs of the Prince, soon to be discussed, are linked to particular dates and historical speakers. Yet even in more historically specific songs, Burns leaves to his audience the interpretation of his speakers' words.

A bard's use of time can be much more fluid than that of a historical novelist. In "Love and Liberty," anything from twenty to forty years might have passed since the Carlin's lover John Highlandman was hanged (it depends on

⁷Walter Scott, *Waverley: or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Claire Lamont (New York, 1986), p. 340. Henceforth *Waverley*.

how long he stayed out of Scotland before illegally returning from transportation). The longer time-range, which might make her age about sixty-five, is more likely, for she remembers a time in their early days together when raiding was easy and profitable. Whatever the specific time-frame of her happy youth with John, the Carlin's song soon enough must move on to the sad conclusion: "Law"-landers finally hang her lover after ever-mobile John returns to Scotland from afar. In the bleak later season and setting of the cantata—Mauchline, late 1785—she is for the moment happy drinking punch in a tavern and choosing a partner for the night. But next day she will resume her wanderings. While the beggars' songs in "Love and Liberty" insist that freedom (of movement, actions, and speaking) is a benefit of homelessness, the heavily vernacular "recitative" portion undercuts the songs' boozy optimism with its emphasis on hailstones, hoar frost, and biting wind. That is the Novemberish reality that the beggars will wake up to next morning, and they will have to face it without the rags and blankets that they have pawned to purchase their punch.

The Carlin in her youth chose John and his roving life, but in her old age she is driven to her constant travels through a wintry landscape. Song-tradition remembers two kinds of Scottish beggars: "gaberlunzies" or blue-gown beggars, licensed to beg in their own parish, and thieving "sorners" like the Carlin, "déracinés" forced to move perpetually because no parish would maintain them (Crawford, p. 97). All Burns's beggars belong to this second group, and any "freedom" of movement the Carlin now experiences is (being involuntary and compelled by law) a rather cruel parody of the free range across Scotland that she remembers from her time with John. Though so different in style from "My heart's in the Highlands," the Carlin's song too remembers a lost world. In "Love and Liberty," Burns invites his audience to consider the distance between a free-spoken, free-moving Highland-inflected "then" and the bleak here-and-now of Scotland in his own place and time.

Hilton Brown has irritably contested Burns's right to leave his heart in the Highlands at all, since he was there only twice, and briefly. Yet Burns needs this malleable, depopulated space. In order to address Scotland as its bard, Burns must himself become a kind of raider, traveling "the country thro' and thro'" to bring back all of Scotland, past and present, northeast to southwest. After his early success with *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), he sought, especially in songs sent to *The Scots Musical Museum*, to move beyond the observation of parish scandal and parish flirtation, seeking the high land or higher ground of a more comprehensive poetic speech. But again, if the parish is Burns's "now" (and he continued to the end to write memorably of local courtships and parish doings, sending the marvelous "Last May a brow wooer" to George Thomson in 1795), his songs addressing the Highlands engage with "then"—a mistier, nobler, more dangerous (at any rate, less tame) Scotland-that-was.

Burns's stanzas for "O an ye were dead Gudeman" use the same tune as the Carlin's song in "Love and Liberty" and draw yet another High-

land/Lowland contrast. Recalling a song in David Herd's collection, Burns's revised stanzas for *The Scots Musical Museum* (1796) feature a speaker who rejects her Lowland husband:

O an ye were dead gudeman,
A green turf on your head, gudeman,
I wad bestow my widowhood
Upon a rantin Highlandman (*Poems*, II, 835).

Between the settled husbandman and the roving Highland thief, the link in Burns is often a plain-spoken, pleasure-seeking crone: embraced by both, she favors the Highlander.⁸ Burns's crones also sometimes serve as foils to male speakers. "The Author's Earnest Cry And Prayer," written in 1785 or 1786, is a burlesque address to Parliament whose clownish speaker (an Ayrshire farmer, judging by the politicians he addresses most particularly) gravely draws the Parliament's attention to the desperate thirst of his "auld, respected" parent, "Mither Scotland." She is a crone and, like the Carlin in "Love and Liberty," a Highlander, for she wears a tartan petticoat and carries about with her a small arsenal of concealed weaponry. The speaker accuses the recently

⁸The tradition of popular songs of the Highland rover and his sexual potency—they predate the mid-century Jacobite rising and were adapted to political purposes by the Loyalists—is discussed by William Donaldson in *The Jacobite Song: Political Myth and National Identity* (Aberdeen, 1988), pp. 49ff (henceforth Donaldson). One early example appears in Allan Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany*, Vol. I (1723), "The Highland Laddie," with lyrics by Ramsay himself. The song also appears in Vol. II of his *Poems* (1728). These songs often dramatize the seduction of a naive Lowland girl by a Highland thief. The poem entitled "The Highland Laddie" appears in *The Tea-Table Miscellany: or a Collection of Choice Songs, Scots and English*. 10th edn. 4 vols. (London, 1740), I, 85. See *The Works of Allan Ramsay*, ed. Burns Martin, John W. Oliver, Alexander M. Kinghorn, Alexander Law, Scottish Text Society, Third Series, 19, 20, 29; Fourth Series, 6, 7, 8 (Edinburgh and London, 1951-1974), II, 81. See also "The Highland Lassie" at III, 56.

A song-chorus that parallels Burns's "O an ye were dead Guidman" is transcribed in Herd's collection, but its diction is predominantly English:

I wish that you were dead, goodman,
And a Green sod on your head, goodman,
That I might ware my widowhead,
Upon a ranting highlandman (David Herd, ed., *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs*, 2 vols. [Edinburgh, 1776], II, 207).

The contrast between "good" farmer and "ranting" Highlandman also structures the earlier text, but Burns's use of a denser vernacular more vividly suggests that the speaker herself is a Lowland Scot.

passed Wash Act, a law that has raised the price of whisky, of creating a national emergency by depriving Mother Scotland of her last comfort:

An' L—d! if ance they pit her till't,
 Her tartan petticoat she'll kilt
 An' durk an' pistol at her belt,
 She'll tak the streets,
 An' rin her whittle to the hilt,
 I' th' first she meets!

For G—d sake, Sirs! then speak her fair,
 And straik her cannie wi' the hair,
 An' to the *muckle house* repair,
 Wi' instant speed,
 An' strive, wi' a' your Wit an' Lear,
 To get remead (*Poems*, I, 188).

The poet's speaker stands between ferocious Mother Scotland and the pusillanimous consensus-forgers of the House of Commons, emphasizing the gulf between the two. As in so many other poems, Burns's crone is grotesque, comical, but also formidable. The Parliament is inclined to think lightly of Mother Scotland's capacity in the mid-1780s to redress her grievances, but the speaker reminds them that she is nonetheless up there in the Highlands nursing them.

The Prince is a second Highland-inflected figure who recurs in Burns, sometimes as subject, sometimes as speaker. His full name is, of course, Charles Edward Louis Casimir Stuart (1720-1788), though to award the title "Prince" to him was in itself a gesture of disaffection. (Indeed, after the death of his father in 1766, Jacobites called him King Charles III; but cautious people referred to him as the Chevalier.) As with Burns's idealized Highland landscapes, his tributes to the difficult Charles Edward have little to do with documentary fact. The poet may have heard some of the negative stories—the long estrangement from his father, the beating and abuse of his mistress and his wife—but his songs memorialize an idealized figure associated, like the landscape of the Highlands, with a lost "then" superior to an impoverished, diminished "now." Charlie, a once-hopeful prince, has survived (like Burns's crone-speakers) into the 1780s, but as a much reduced figure. Burns's songs of "Charlie and his men" might be intended to suggest that a spirit of Scottish resistance survives, too, its fire banked but having the potential to blaze up again. If so, a spirit of change is paradoxically strong in these tributes to a fallen prince—though the poet was surely also aware that any insurgency of the late 1780s and 1790s was likelier to overthrow monarchy than to change one dynasty for another.

Even considered just as elegies and not as covert calls for national liberation, these songs are powerful, "remembering" a lost prince for a diminished

Scotland. It could well be because of Burns's reconstruction of the Jacobite song tradition through his contributions to *The Scots Musical Museum* that so many songs of the '45 persist to this day in Scottish national lyric (i.e., Scottish national memory) despite the brutal depopulation of the Highlands in the century following defeat. As William Donaldson has observed, "Burns... single-handedly invented the Jacobite song as an independent type... [He] was creating a myth, and must have been aware that he was doing so" (p. 4). Sir Walter Scott, James Hogg, and Carolina Oliphant (Baroness Nairne) all follow Burns's lead as writers of neo-Jacobite lyrics and tales. Most of what we think of as Jacobite songs were either written by Burns himself or were creations of the post-Burns popular song tradition (cf. Donaldson, pp. 1-3).

In "O'er the water to Charlie," probably written in January 1788, Burns offers a translation from a mid-eighteenth century Gaelic Jacobite lyric. Kinsley says that the song derives from "a stock Jacobite theme" and quotes this chorus by Alexander Macdonald:

O togamaid oirn thar uisge's thar tuinn;
O falbhmaid thairis gu Tearlach

[O let us go over the seas and the waves,
O let us cross over to Charlie] (*Poems*, III, 1270).

Yet if the song's imagery is conventional, its occasion is interesting. Burns evidently made his English stanzas in response to news of Charles Edward's final illness, and "O'er the water to Charlie," unsigned like the majority of Burns's Jacobite work (not even a Z marks the text), was published in Vol. II of *The Scots Musical Museum* in February 1788 within a month of the prince's death. The stanzas sound mild enough today, but in the context of 1788's succession crisis (caused by the mental illness of George III and the ensuing uproar over the Regency Bill, which transferred some power to the Prince of Wales), this song's pledge of loyalty to a Stuart might be read, like Mother Scotland's concealed dagger in "The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer," as more than casually subversive. The title of the stanzas by Alexander Macdonald quoted above is translated as "Incitement" (*Poems*, III, 1270). And yet what I have called the open-ended quality of these songs holds true; for the place to which Charlie has "crossed over" in 1788 is no sphere of political change.

Sometimes Burns incorporates an implied self-portrait in his tributes to the defeated Prince. "Scots Ballad—," written about a year before "O'er the water to Charlie" and perhaps also inspired by stories of Charles Edward's failing health, conveys the poet's defensive love for his own child, Elizabeth, born out of wedlock in 1785. At the time the stanzas were written, the title Duchess of Albany had been newly assumed by Charlotte, Charles Edward Stuart's illegitimate daughter by his mistress Clementina Walkinshaw. From 1774, fol-

lowing the refusal of France and other nations to continue to support his claims, Charles Edward had been styling himself Count of Albany, so Charlotte (rather late in her life—born in 1752, she died in 1789) in the mid-1780s was legitimized by her father. This parental recognition allowed her to inherit some of her father's estates in France following his death, but did not supersede the claims to the British throne of her uncle, Henry Benedict, a Cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church. Burns may have known that she was not in the line of Jacobite succession (several of his friends in Edinburgh were fully versed in the Stuart dynastic claims), but his song chooses to hail the Duchess not only as rightful heir to Scotland (Albany is a title in the Scottish peerage), but also as in every way superior to that "witless" youth, the Prince of Wales:

My heart is wae and unco wae,
 To think upon the raging sea,
 That roars between her gardens green,
 And th' bonie lass of ALBANIE.—

This lovely maid's of noble blood,
 That ruled Albion's kingdoms three;
 But Oh! Alas! for her bonie face!
 They hae wrang'd the lass of ALBANIE!—

...But there is a youth, a witless youth,
 That fills the place where she should be,
 We'll send him o'er to his native shore,
 And bring our ain sweet ALBANIE (*Poems*, I, 374-5).

Burns mocks the British ruling family while standing up for the rights of "love-begotten daughters," including his own. The poet liked these stanzas well enough to fair-copy them into his *Second Commonplace Book* but they were suppressed, presumably for being politically offensive, until the 1850s, when they were collected in Robert Chambers's edition from a manuscript now lost.

In another song transcribed in the *Second Commonplace Book* but not printed until three years after Burn's death, Charles Edward is speaker, though this is not revealed until the final stanza:

The small birds rejoice in the green leaves returning,
 The murmuring streamlet winds clear thro' the vale;
 The primroses blow in the dews of the morning,
 And wild-scattered cowslips bedeck the green dale:
 But what can give pleasure, or what can seem fair,
 When the lingering moments are numbered by Care?
 No birds sweetly singing, nor flowers gaily springing,
 Can sooth the sad bosom of joyless Despair.—

The deed that I dared, could it merit their malice,
A KING and a FATHER to place on his throne;
His right are these hills, and his right are these vallies,
Where wild beasts find shelter but I can find none:
But 'tis not my sufferings, thus wretched, forlorn,
My brave, gallant friends, 'tis your ruin I mourn;
Our faith proved so loyal in hot, bloody trial,
Alas, can I make it no sweeter return! (*Poems*, I, 411-12).

Burns's title is "Song—": the dramatic effect is heightened by his suppression of the speaker's identity until the last stanza (an effect that Burns's first editor, James Currie, spoiled in 1800 by creating the alternative title "The Chevalier's Lament," which is still often used). The first stanza's generalized, sketchy landscape conveys the mood of retrospective sorrow characteristic of Burns's Jacobite songs. Charles Edward speaks here as a hunted fugitive still in Scotland, for the "hills" and "vallies" he joylessly surveys are, he says, his father's by "right."

"Charlie he's my darling" has no Gaelic text as a forerunner—at any rate none has been found to date. Most Burns songs written in praise of the Prince pan outward to praise the Highland virtues of Charlie's followers—their fierce independence and loyalty: "Wha in his wae days, were loyal to Charlie?! Wha but the lads wi' the bannocks o' barley.—" (*Poems* II, 866). In these famous stanzas, Burns views "Charlie and his men" entirely through the eyes of the dazzled young women of the capital:

As he was walking up the street,
The city for to view,
O there he spied a bonie lass
The window looking thro'.—
And Charlie he's my darling, my darling, my darling,
Charlie he's my darling, the young Chevalier.—

...He set his Jenny on his knee,
All in his Highland dress;
For brawlie weel he ken'd the way
To please a bonie lass.—
An Charlie &c.

It's up yon hethery mountain,
And down yon scroggy glen,
We daur na gang a milking,
For Charlie and his men.—
An Charlie &c. (*Poems*, II, 846-47).

Written during Burns's last illness in 1796, the stanzas hint at the poet's own triumphant, if equally brief, conquest of Edinburgh in 1787, a short season

during which he was feted by the literati, the aristocrats of the Caledonian Hunt, and the roisterers of the Crochallan Fencibles—well-received, too, by a cross section of Edinburgh's women, including May (or Meg) Cameron, Margaret Chalmers, Jenny Clow, and Agnes Craig M'Lehose ("Clarinda"), to name only those named in his poems, songs, and correspondence of that period.

The final Highland-inflected image to be considered in this essay is the exiled heart, which appears in Burns's songs more often even than dispossessed princes and warlike crones. This frame of reference is not, however, exclusively Highland or Jacobite. These songs, and their imagery of exile, draw from the deep well of Scottish history in general. Contemplating emigration to Jamaica in 1786, Burns anticipated his own exile, writing two poems titled "Farewell" in a single week in early spring and also, around the same time, writing "To a Mountain Daisy," a stanza of which laments the emigration of a "simple Bard" (*Poems*, I, 229). In other songs such as "Auld Lang Syne," Burns evidently remembers his father's dispossession, what Gilbert Burns described to James Currie as the "anguish of mind" felt by William Burnes as he parted from his brother Robert on the top of a hill, forced to leave Kincardineshire following the bankruptcy and ruin of the poet's grandfather.⁹

Dispossession in Burns is common to Highlanders and Lowlanders, afflicting not only Jacobite noblemen who have forfeited their estates but Lowland cotters who lose their health or their "masters" ("The Twa Dogs," *Poems*, I, 80). Exile is often in Burns's songs the common experience drawing together otherwise disparate or contrary elements in Scottish culture. Even his songs of joyous reunion, such as "The Soldier's Return," take place against this backdrop of prior displacement. Burns's settings for these exile songs span Scottish history. In "The Thames flows proudly to the sea," a thirteenth-century Lowland speaker is displaced south to London. Like Burns's exile whose "heart is not here" but in the Highlands, this speaker, John Comyn (d. 1303), looks to "the North." The historical John Comyn was imprisoned in London following the abdication of John Balliol, his brother-in-law. As revived in Burns's stanzas, he speaks simply as a homesick exile:

The Thames flows proudly to the sea,
Where royal cities stately stand;
But sweeter flows the Nith, to me,
Where Cummins ance had high command.

* * *

⁹For Gilbert Burns's narrative of his father's parting with his uncle, see James Currie, ed., *The Works of Robert Burns; with an Account of his Life, and a Criticism on his Writings*, 2nd edn., 4 vols. (London, 1801), I, 57-8.

Tho' wandring, now, must be my doom,
Far from thy bonie banks and braes,
May there my latest hours consume,
Among the friends of early days! (*Poems*, I, 424).

Other exiled hearts speak not across time but from cultures far removed from Scotland:

It was in sweet Senegal that my foes did me enthrall
For the lands of Virginia-ginia O;
Torn from that lovely shore, and must never set it more,
And alas! I am weary, weary O!
Torn from &c.

* * *

The burdens I must bear, while the cruel scourge I fear,
In the lands of Virginia-ginia O;
And I think on friends most dear with the bitter, bitter tear,
And Alas! I am weary, weary O!
And I think, &c. (*Poems*, II, 647-8).

The speaker of "The Slave's Lament" is another of Burns's involuntary exiles "torn" from his homeland by "foes."

In an emotional landscape that Wordsworth's early lyrics evidently remember and emulate, Burns's songs of exile gaze at scenes of joy across an unhappy gulf of years. Hearts are exiled in Burns not only in a geographical but in a temporal sense (John Highlandman was hanged long ago). Time and space are powerfully evocative forces when joined with grief; and in an unusually frank letter, Burns links the power of the sad songs that convey these feelings to the power of the religious impulse itself:

I had an old Grand uncle with whom my Mother lived a while in her girlish years; the good old man, for such he was, was long blind ere he died, during which time, his most voluptuous enjoyment was to sit down & cry while my Mother would sing the simple old song of, The Life & Age of Man. —

It is this way of thinking, it is these melancholly [sic] truths, that make Religion so precious to the poor, miserable Children of men.—It is a meer [sic] phantasm, existing only in the heated imagination of Enthusiasm—[yet]

"What Truth on earth so precious as the Lie!"

(*Letters*, I, 306-307, quoting Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*).

Burns's Highland-inspired lyrics serve as an outlet for feelings that many would define as religious but that he re-constitutes as national (in the sense that speakers such as John Comyn or Charles Edward Stuart are drawn from Scottish history).

In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson writes of Enlightenment ontology and its link to the development of modern nationalism:

With the ebbing of religious belief [in the Age of Enlightenment], the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear. Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required [in the eighteenth-century] was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning.... [F]ew things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation. If nation-states are widely conceded to be "new" and "historical," the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.¹⁰

The focal point of Burns's vision of grief and joy is not heaven but a composite and richly contradictory nation—both the surviving Lowlands and the old Highland culture(s) waning into memory. His focus on a reunited Scotland links him to Enlightenment values just as surely as his focus on recollected strong emotion links him to the first generation of Romantic poets.

Yet Burns employs solitary speakers, leaving to his audience what to make of what they hear. We tend to read Burns through the sugared bardolatry of the Victorians; and even any rare attempt to read pre-Victorian contexts must first strip away Sir Walter Scott's massive and influential reconstruction of Scottish history. For Burns simply cannot be read through the prism of Scott. In *Waverley*, as mentioned earlier, Scott sees the fall of the Jacobites as entirely fortunate. He begins to make this case as early as his subtitle, "Tis Sixty Years Since," which reminds readers of the long established triumph of constituted authority. Though the novel itself goes on to dramatize the dangerous attractions of rebellion and insurgency, readers have been coached from the outset to bear in mind just how long ago the spirit of Highland independence was quelled. In his final chapter, "A Postscript, which should have been a Preface," his narrator speaks of the "absurd political prejudice" that has vanished with the suppression of the clans (*Waverley*, p. 340).

Scott's novel frames subversive speech wholly as a language of the dead; the eloquent Highland chief Fergus McIvor ends the tale as a severed head impaled on the north-facing gate of the town of Carlisle. Burns's use of intransigent speakers, as with his dramatization of the Carlin in "Love and Liberty," is very different, accessing their long memories while also bringing them into the present-day of his contemporary audience. In "Love and Liberty," subver-

¹⁰See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), pp. 11-12. This study never mentions Robert Burns despite a lengthy discussion of Scotland's relation to England, including the relationship of Scots vernacular to the "standard" language, during the eighteenth century.

sive speech is not associated with self-destruction but with survival: it is the solace as well as the earned privilege of those driven away by the consensus culture and its cult of stability at any cost. In later songs such as "The Highland balou," Burns often chooses a speaker located more firmly in the past, but never merely to dramatize the benevolent march of history.

Scotland as Burns imagines it is an intricate lacework of contraries and possibilities. Images drawn from Highland landscape and culture serve in his writings as an idealized counterpart to more down-to-earth imagery of the Lowlands, the native region that the poet, knowing better, has perhaps more difficulty refashioning as a visionary space. His songs evoke the Scottish rebellions, reasserting Highland culture as a crucial part of Scottish heritage. These lyrics that dramatize Highland speakers can be read as elegies or as "incitements": they address a lost world receding into memory but also a Scottish spirit of insurrection that might someday revive. The songs he sent to *The Scots Musical Museum* could be intended mainly as "museum pieces," touching memorials; but they might also be intended as gifts to be held in trust for a future resurgence of Scottish activism. Unlike Scott in *Waverley*, Burns dramatizes Highland customs that stubbornly persist in the memories of scattered survivors. All is not quite lost for Burns's rebels, though free-spoken characters such as the Carlin in "Love and Liberty" have fallen on evil days. His exiles live on, turning back to Scotland and addressing it across the oceans; his crones and even his prince have lived on, too, despite their losses—if only to testify that the high ground that they remember has been transformed into a nearly empty wasteland. The poet leaves up to his audience, however, what to do with these commemorations of Highland defiance—whether to weep or whether to regroup and act.¹¹

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