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Cultural Paradoxes in Alexander Ross's *Fortunate Shepherdess*

Alexander Geddes's view that the muses had left Scotland "sin Ramsay disappear'd" to return almost half a century later with Fergusson and Burns¹ still seems to be widely accepted in Scottish Studies. At best, a significant number of songwriters are acknowledged to have flitted across the otherwise barren poetic scene in the heyday of the Enlightenment,² when the literati dominated Scottish writing with anglicized treatises on rhetoric, taste, theology, moral philosophy, and political economy.

Standing out among the neglected mid-eighteenth-century poets is Alexander Ross (1699-1784),³ whose pastoral verse narrative *Helenore, or the Fortunate Shepherdess* is one of the longest and, from a linguistic point of view, "purest" Scots poems of that period. Having developed over several decades and circulated in manuscript before it was published in 1768, it totals, in the corrected and slightly enlarged second edition of 1778, 4,154 lines of rhymed

¹*Epistle to the President, Vice-Presidents, and Members of the Scottish Society of Antiquaries* (1792), qtd. in David Irving, *The Lives of the Scottish Poets*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1804) II, 407.

²See Thomas Crawford, *Society and the Lyric: A Study of the Song Culture of Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1979).

³Ross is best known as a writer of songs, notably "The Rock and the Wee Pickle Tow," "Woo'd and Married and A'" and "The Bridal O't."

pentameter. In its time *Helenore* enjoyed great popularity. James Beattie, whose general disdain of Scots is well known, nonetheless helped the elderly author, an Angus schoolmaster who had been acquainted with his father, to get his work printed, and even promoted its sale with a commendatory poem in Scots; John Pinkerton thought he heard in *Helenore* an echo of the style of Gawin Douglas, whereas he ranked Ramsay's pastoral comedy *The Gentle Shepherd* with "the very dirt of amusement only for the merest mob" and called its language "queer" and "ridiculous"⁴; Burns considered Ross's verse narrative "precious treasure"; he claims to have shaped his muse Coila on the model of Ross's *Scota*,⁵ and he adopted several rhymes and phrases from *Helenore* in *Tam o' Shanter*; Scott quotes from the poem in *The Heart of Midlothian*⁶; Wordsworth is said to have been influenced by this poem when he wrote "Rob Roy's Grave"⁷; Shelley uses the names of Ross's shepherds in his "modern eclogue" *Rosalind and Helen*⁸; and Thomas Carlyle refers to Ross's "dreamy delineations of a Highland Arcadia and Wonderland" as "an impression which is unique in my experience."⁹ The poem was frequently reprinted until late into the nineteenth century: by 1873 it had run into twenty editions.¹⁰ Ross's Scottish works were published by the Scottish Text Society

⁴"A List of All the Scottish Poets," *Ancient Scottish Poems, Never Before in Print*, 2 vols. (London, 1786), I, cxii-cxiii. Beattie, too, decries the "vulgarity" of *The Gentle Shepherd* and calls its language "ludicrous," *Essay on Laughter, and Ludicrous Composition* (1776), 3rd edn. (London, 1779), p. 381.

⁵*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), I, 170, 256, 312.

⁶Sir Walter Scott, *The Waverley Novels*, Centenary Edition, 25 vols. (Edinburgh, 1889-91), VII, 454. Henceforth Scott.

⁷John Longmuir, "Life of Ross" in his edition of *Helenore* (Glasgow, 1868), p. 78.

⁸Ross probably took the names from Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.ix-x (*Helenore*) and *The Shepheardes Calender* and *Colin Clouts* (*Rosalind*). Only in Ross is *Rosalind* a male name.

⁹Handwritten quotation on the board facing the half-title of a large-paper copy of Longmuir's 1868 edn. in possession of Robert Murdoch Lawrance, mentioned in Lawrance's *Helenore: A Scottish Vernacular Classic* (Aberdeen, 1929), p. 17. Henceforth Lawrance.

¹⁰*The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*. Lawrance and Wattie mention eighteen editions.

in 1938,¹¹ long before the STS editions of Ramsay (1951-74) and Fergusson (1954).

Yet *Helenore* has received little critical attention in our time. Except for three essays from the early twentieth century¹² and Margaret Wattie's prefatory matter in the STS edition, all of which concentrate on biographical, linguistic and editorial problems, no literary study seems to have been published on Ross's verse narrative in the last hundred years. *Helenore*, it is true, is not a flawless piece of writing, but it is of great historical interest. One of the most consistent examples of a realistic pastoral, it illustrates how an originally aristocratic literary genre was appropriated by the rising middle class and what changes it underwent in the process. It also shows how in the middle of the eighteenth century even a poem "in the broad Scotch dialect," by an author who described himself as "Sequestered from the polite world, and by his situation in life, bar'd from society" (p. 3), came to combine elements both of what David Daiches has called the "Watson tradition" (of Scottish popular poetry) and the "Hutcheson tradition" (of the North-British literati), long thought of as antagonistic,¹³ nor was the poem impervious to influences from mainstream British literature.

Ross overtly acknowledges his indebtedness to *The Gentle Shepherd*,¹⁴ but he does not share Ramsay's Augustan leanings nor, apparently, the older poet's craving for recognition. Ramsay had frequently heightened the vernacular by an admixture of English poetic diction, because he obviously regarded Scots as a lower stylistic variant of English; and he made Patie's speech change from Scots to English once the shepherd's noble birth was discovered—Sir William Worthy using English throughout—to comply with the neoclassical rules of decorum. The fact that the positive traits in Ramsay's shepherd couple are eventually attributed to their gentle origin is not only an echo of the traditional pastoral, which presented aristocrats in the guise of shepherds, but also a bow

¹¹*The Scottish Works of Alexander Ross*, ed. Margaret Wattie, Scottish Text Society, Third Series, 9 (1938). Henceforth Ross. References will be entered in the text by line number for poetry, by page number for prefatory matter.

¹²John S. Gibb, "Helenore, or The Fortunate Shepherdess," *Scottish Historical Review*, 9 (1912), 290-300 [Henceforth Gibb]; Alexander Gray, "Ross's Helenore: A Scottish Pastoral," *Scotsman*, 19 January, 1927; and the treatise by R. M. Lawrance quoted above (fn. 9).

¹³David Daiches, *Robert Burns*, 2nd edn. (London, 1966), p. 27.

¹⁴"Invocation," pp. 9-11.

before his polite readership.¹⁵ By contrast, Ross makes both the shepherds and the members of the gentry speak the Doric dialect; moreover, his use of Scots is more idiomatic and consistent than that of Ramsay and, in fact, most of the other major eighteenth-century poets.¹⁶ Beattie even feared that the linguistic authenticity of Ross's poem might render a good deal of it unintelligible to a person not familiar with Scots (Ross, p. xvi). When Ross wrote *Helenore* he obviously did not have the general Scottish, and even less the general British, reader in mind: his intended reading public seems to have been local and unsophisticated. The dedication of *Helenore* to the Duchess of Gordon was added to the second edition only and cannot be seen as proof of the author's orientation towards the upper classes when he wrote his poem.

But even in the first printed edition of 1768, Ross takes a conscious cultural stance. In the "Advertisement" he retrospectively justifies his choice of broad Scots on several grounds, the most patent being that of linguistic realism:

Tho' many of the phrases are broad, the author has endeavoured, as much as possible to avoid gross indelicacies; and the reader will consider, that he represents only the expressions and sentiments of plain country people. Many of them, he is sensible, will not bear to be tried by the rites of grammar, in many cases, to have altered, would have been nearly the same as to have spoiled them (p. 4).

There is no criticism implied when Ross argues that "the lower ranks of mankind cannot think or speak in that elegant and concise manner which distinguisheth those in the higher spheres of life" (p. 4). The term "low life" has no negative connotations here; rather, it is positively employed to rouse the reader's interest: "To set before the reader's eyes, in their plain and native colours, a variety of incidents in low life, was what he [the author] had chiefly in view" (p. 3). This is, of course, a far cry from the traditional pastoral, and in many respects recalls the stance towards "low life" Ramsay adopted in his comic elegies or in his *Christis Kirk* poem: that of an amused observer.¹⁷ Beattie's puff, consciously placing itself in the tradition of the Scottish verse epistle in the Habbie stanza, is even more revealing in this respect:

¹⁵See the discussion of this aspect in my study *My Muse is British: Allan Ramsay und die Neubelebung der schottischen Dichtkunst im 18. Jahrhundert* (Grossen-Linden, 1977), pp. 294-316.

¹⁶See Ross, p. xlv, and John Longmuir's Preface to the 1868 edn. of *Helenore*, pp. 73-4. John Jamieson in his *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1879-87) relies heavily on *Helenore* for his quotations (Gibb, p. 291).

¹⁷Ross claims that "he found much amusement in observing...the conduct and manners of plain country people" (p. 3).

If *The Gentle Shepherd* had intensified the perception of Scots as a predominantly rural dialect, Ross carried this notion much further still. But his realism constantly clashes with, and eventually defeats, the aims of pastoral and primitivist poetry.

Although Ross adopts several motifs from *The Gentle Shepherd*,²⁰ he breaks new ground with regard to plot, characters, and the use of the pastoral genre. The young shepherdess Helenore (Nory) is in love with the shepherd Rosalind²¹ (Lindy; the name is masculine in Ross) and everything points to a future marriage of the couple. When Lindy is captured by a group of Highland reivers, she sets off all alone to roam through the wild mountains in search of him. Exhausted, she is found by Olimund (Mundy), a young nobleman, who falls in love with her at once. First unconsciously in a dream, then with growing awareness, Nory transfers her love from the shepherd to the nobleman, whose wife she eventually becomes. Although Lindy's affection for her has not changed, he has to renounce his claim to her in the end; for when he and Nory's father were held prisoners, he gave a false promise of marriage to Bydby, the reivers' sister, so that she might help them escape, and the girl insists on the fulfillment of this engagement.

One of the key concepts of the conventional pastoral was the blend of simplicity and sophistication. For all its realistic touches, *The Gentle Shepherd* accomplished this, if only through a cleverly devised plot which attributed to Patie, the eponymous hero, the double role as shepherd and laird. But, of course, the principle of realism, when applied consistently, excludes such a solution. Thus in *Helenore*, Olimund enters the scene as Lindy's rival; Nory (and the reader along with her) must make a decision in favor of one of them; this choice also acknowledges the superiority of the social realm represented by the successful competitor.

The primitivist groundwork of the first part of the verse narrative would have suggested the shepherd's victory. For almost 1,500 lines the poet tries to rouse and maintain the reader's sympathy for Lindy. The description of his childhood and adolescence, his growing love for Nory and her love for him, his strength, judgment and honesty make him appear to be the ideal embodiment of the virtues of the peasantry, which the poet praises in the Advertisement:

²⁰Wattie mentions the combination of the Cophetua motif with the motif of the founding of noble birth (Ross, p. xxvii).

²¹Hugh Walker holds, not entirely without reason, that these high-flown names applied to "northern rustics" are "insufferable...., a mark of the pedagogue's taste, and a relic of his unwillingness to sink the scholar in the popular poet." *Three Centuries of Scottish Literature*, 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1893), II, 30. Henceforth Walker.

one...meets sometimes with a degree of innocent simplicity and honest meaning, among the lower ranks of people in remote parts of the country, which he [the poet] can hardly expect to find in large towns, or among the higher ranks of mankind (p. 3).

In view of this assertion it is difficult to accept that the shepherdess eventually prefers the nobleman because of his alleged moral superiority over the shepherd. Ross counters the reader's predictable disapproval of the treatment of Lindy with the observation that the events leading to the shepherd's downfall seem "possible and natural" (p. 4). In other words, when his realistic handling of the traditional genre fails to convince, Ross quotes the mundane reality of everyday life that ignores the constructed harmony of the fictitious world, as incontestable proof.

Like the traditional pastoral poets, Ross evokes, at the beginning of his verse narrative, an image of the Golden Age as a contrasting foil to present-day life:

When yet the leal an' ae-fauld shepherd life
Was nae oergane by faucet, sturt an' strife,
But here and there part o' that seelfu' race
Kept love an' lawty o' their honest face (*ll.* 74-7).

But even then, he suggests, it was only "part o' that seelfu' race" that "here and there" met the ideal of perfection. Both Nory's and Lindy's parents were, of course, among "the honest sort, that did nae ken / Naething but that was downright fair an' plain" (*ll.* 80-1); however, the reference to the reivers in the lines immediately following the introduction (*ll.* 78-9) shows that Ross's realistic pastoral world is not one of prelapsarian innocence, but one where virtue exists side by side with vice. This fact points to the didactic concern of the poem. Following the teachings of the Scottish literati, Ross expresses the conviction that social intercourse should be governed by a continuous practice of virtue, and that virtue can be taught and learned in order to eradicate vice. In the Advertisement Ross comments on "the trouble and disappointment that Rosalind met with" and the "important lesson" he wants to convey to the reader:

that when two young people have come under strict engagements to one another, no consideration whatsoever should induce them to break their faith, or to promise things incompatible with keeping it entire (p. 4).

Similar remarks, stressing the importance of the shepherd's example for the reader's conduct, can be found in the Conclusion (*ll.* 4135-42).

Yet there is some flimsiness about Ross's moral arguments. For obvious reasons, the poet chooses Nory's father as his mouthpiece to comment on Lindy's offense. Colin is not only at the top of the social scale in his native valley, but he is also esteemed for his "glegger wisdom" (*l.* 2795). What

makes his role as a moral judge ambiguous in the present case, however, is the fact that it was he who, in order to be rescued with Lindy from their Highland prison, had urged his prospective son-in-law to use the trick of a feigned marriage proposal to Bydby (ll. 1422-55), which he now condemns. Colin tries to force the young shepherd to marry the cateran girl even if Lindy protests that he cannot love her. In vain does Lindy remind him of his longstanding engagement with Nory and of Colin's repeated affirmation that he would never cross their plans:

“Well, Lindy man,” says Colen, “that’s a’ true;
But then was then, my lad, an’ now is now” (ll. 2840-1).

The purpose of ethical rules, the old shepherd argues, again popularizing an important tenet of the Moral Sense school, is to safeguard personal, social, and economic security.²² Thus the present plight caused by the caterans' inroads and their imminent revenge for Bydby's seeming abduction require Lindy's readiness to stand by his new commitment and give up his former love. That the old shepherd and his family profit most from this decision is quite obvious. Nory's marriage with Olimund, we are told in the end, also brings a considerable social rise for Colin.

The latter part of the poem reads in fact like a parody of the pastoral: the young shepherd's moral integrity is being called into question to the same degree that the nobleman's is reasserted, in an obvious effort to make the poetic justice of the solution seem convincing. Traditionally a means of aristocratic self-perception, the pastoral has now come to express a bourgeois view of literature. Significantly, some of the paradoxes in *Helenore* are also found in Richardson's novels, notably in *Pamela*. In both cases the ethical debate placed so prominently in the foreground serves mainly as a justification of the heroine's wish (and that of the stratum she represents) for social advancement.

However, in contrast to Richardson, Ross takes great pains to make the young nobleman's character appear as attractive as possible from the outset. When Olimund is first introduced, the poet adroitly alludes to, and reverses, the old motif of the seduction of a country girl by a man of superior social status. At Nory's first encounter with the young laird in the secluded mountains she

had her fears that ane sae gentle like
For nae gweed ends was making sick a fike (ll. 714-5).

²²Gladys Bryson's *Man and Society: The Scottish Inquiry of the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, 1945), pp. 36-8; 42.

But instead of taking unfair advantage of his social rank and the propitious situation he finds himself in, Olimund courteously woos the girl and eventually proposes marriage to her.

In view of the poem's claim to realism such a solution may seem rather glib, because it neglects some basic facts about eighteenth-century marriage arrangements. As Ross must have been well aware, members of the landed gentry, whose social importance largely depended on the preservation and increase of their estates, were almost exclusively guided by material interests in their choice of a marriage partner, a choice frequently made for them by their parents. This traditional practice was being challenged by the new middle-class attitude towards marriage, with its emphasis on love; it was made popular by the example of Richardson's *Clarissa*, who refuses to accept her father's candidate, a wealthy but ugly man, whom she detests. Olimund's father, too, has singled out a rich girl for his son, whose repulsiveness is described in unsavory detail; to avoid the impending marriage, the young laird flees from his home to seek refuge in the mountains where he finds Helenore, who is beautiful, but poor by comparison. Ross spares Olimund the decision between inclination and parental obedience, making the old laird die immediately afterwards.

In Ross as in Richardson, criticizing the materialistic marriage policy of the age is not meant to raise doubts about the fundamental right of the parents to choose a partner for their children. That the young man must obey his elders' decision goes without saying in *Lindy's* case. The justification of Olimund's rejection of his father's choice is therefore of great interest; and again it is Richardson who furnishes the relevant clue when he reminds his readers of a rule quoted by Jeremy Taylor that a father may not force his children to marry if the partner in question is so unbearably ugly, deformed or filthy that such an order would mean tyranny.²³ This is how Olimund describes the woman:

For had my father sought the world round
Till he the very dightings o't had found,
A filthier hag could not come in his way
Than for my truncher what he had laid by:
An ugly, hulgie-backed, canker'd wasp,
Syne like to die for breath at ilka gasp;
Her teeth betweesh a yellow an' a black,
Some out, some in, an' a' of different mack;
Black, hairy wrats, about an inch between,
Out-throw her fiz, where like mustaches seen;

²³Jeremy Taylor, *Ductor Dubitatum or The Rule of Conscience* (1660), ch. 5; Levin L. Schücking, *Die Familie im Puritanismus* (Leipzig/Berlin, 1929), pp. 174-6, discusses Richardson's indebtedness to Taylor.

Her head lay back, an' her syde chafts sat out,
 An' o'er her gab hang down a sneevling snout;
 An' take her a' together, rough an' right,
 She wad na been by far four feet of height (*ll.* 874-87).

Under these circumstances one understands the indignation Olimund as well as his aunt and his old nurse express over his father's orders (*ll.* 868-9, 1056-59, 2874-79). In light of the wider implications of *Henore* their protest becomes all the more comprehensible as it echoes the resentment of the lower social orders at the rich people's marriage-of-convenience policy, which deprives the poor of the prospect of rising socially. The old laird is reported to have died because he feared that his son had joined the army, where he would squander his money (*ll.* 839-69). Avarice as the cause of his sudden death—surely reality (and even probability) is here distorted by the psychological point of view of the disadvantaged. This also explains why Olimund's complete lack of remorse or even regret at his father's death is stated without the slightest reproach. The old laird embodies the wealth-oriented, caste-conscious gentry, whose demise causes no feeling of grief with lower-class readers; his son, on the other hand, is the product of their hopes and wishes, representing their sentiments and opinions, and also their ethical inconsistencies. The gentry are despised only when they act against the common people's interests; they are praised and courted when they promise advancement and participation in their wealth.

Since the poet asserts that Olimund's superiority is based primarily on his moral virtue, he gives him—as he does to Colin—the right to judge the conduct of others. Yet his public rebuke of the shepherd's breach of faith and the support he gives to Bydby's claim (*ll.* 3160-255) again reveal the discrepancy between his ethical pretension and his real motivation. For in assuming the part of an arbiter Olimund clearly aims to lower his rival in Nory's esteem and to achieve the final break-up of the shepherd couple:

For Nory's cause this sidlings cast he gae,
 To brak her piece an' piece her Lindy frae;
 An' gain'd his point, for she look't wond'rous dram,
 An' thought his shifting Bydby but a sham.
 This pleas'd the squire, an' made him think that he
 At least frae Lindy wad keep Nory free;
 An' for himsell to mak the plainer rode,
 Between them sae by casting of a clod (*ll.* 3276-83).

Olimund's ambiguous moral attitude shows most clearly in regard to love and marriage. While for himself he claims the right to marry for love (*ll.* 1046-59), he denies this right to Lindy when he urges him to marry Bydby. There is an interesting mercenary ring about his argument:

“...frae what I can either see or hear
 About your case, ye're Bydby's *well-won gear*.
 Sae *pay your debt*, an' mak nae mair about it”
 (ll. 3296-8; italics added).

The idea of marriage as a business transaction, which his father's decision was based on, is plainly accepted by him too as soon as his own case is left aside.

All these inconsistencies seem to have escaped the poet's notice. Olimund's moral perfection is never seriously called into question, and even if Ross's readers recognized the ultimate aims of the laird's behavior, they were not likely to object, finding these aims to agree with their own. Olimund's glorification reaches its apex in the final scene: his noble character and bearing are now described in the brightest colors possible, making the shepherdess's rise appear more and more fantastic. The spruce huntsman of the initial episode has at the end become a mighty lord, whose warriors and domestics seem to increase in number and outfit each time they are mentioned. When the caterans advance for the second time on the frightened villagers, the task falls to him as the protector of the weak and the supreme moral judge to stop them and convince them of the unlawfulness of their raids (ll. 3817-54). The external details of this “cardboard pageantry” (Ross, p. xxx) may well imitate the tradition of aristocratic heroic poetry, but the spirit of this episode reflects a bourgeois tendency in mid-eighteenth-century British poetry: “The idea of the gentleman has replaced the idea of the heroic actor; the ideal of good judgment has taken the place of heroism; and conversation has replaced warfare as the means of gaining one's ends.”²⁴

Helenore's portrayal confirms the suspicion that the moral argument in this poem is advanced, whether consciously or not, to divert from the true motives of her own change of mind, and that Lindy's breach of faith comes in as a welcome excuse. To a great extent, the shepherdess's choice is made in view of the conveniences being married to a wealthy laird will bring. The thematic parallels with *Pamela*, noticed above, also show here, especially in the significance which both Richardson's and Ross's heroines attribute to fine clothes as an upper-class status symbol. With regard to the English novelist this aspect has been analyzed elsewhere;²⁵ it is no less noticeable in Ross. From the first moment the young laird appears on the scene, the poet makes us look at him through the young woman's eyes:

²⁴Earl Miner, “From Narrative to ‘Description’ and ‘Sense’ in Eighteenth-Century Poetry,” *Studies in English Literature*, 9 (1969), 476. Henceforth Miner.

²⁵Carey MacIntosh, “Pamela's Clothes,” *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Pamela*, ed. Rosemary Cowler (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1969), pp. 89-96.

...by odd chance a huntsman came about,
A gallant youth, an' O, sae finely clade! (*ll.* 601-2)

The laird's elegance is stressed throughout the poem, and naturally Helenore's wish to change her own humble dress for more sumptuous attire arises before long. When Olimund has offered shelter to the exhausted girl in his aunt's Highland home, she has a dream of an unsuccessful attempt to rescue a drowning youth (her vain search for Lindy), and of falling into the pond herself and being saved by an unknown gentleman (Olimund), of whom she says:

"Gryte was the care this stranger took o' me,
An' O! I thought him bony, blyth an' free.
Dry claise, I thought, he gae me to put on,
Better by far an' bra'er than my own" (*ll.* 1132-5).

In fact Olimund tries to make her stay in his aunt's home by promising her "some bra' claise" (*l.* 1042). The unwonted luxury does not fail to impress the shepherd girl. In the morning she admits:

"I never lay afore in sick a bed,
Sae saft an' warm, an' wi' sae bony claise" (*ll.* 1095-6).

Tellingly, her search for Lindy comes to an end when Olimund's aunt dons her with new costly garments:

"See, lass, there's for you a new pair o' stays;
An' there's a gown some longer nor your ain" (*ll.* 1151-2)

Ross interrupts the present strand of narrative at this point, leaving "Nory in her change of dress," which implies a change of her mind,²⁶ and proceeds to acquaint the reader of "poor Lindy's fate" (*ll.* 1154, 1156).

Nory, then, has really made her decision in favor of the laird by the time she accepts to lead Bydby to her native valley to check on the truth of Lindy's alleged treachery. Taking her rival to the shepherd, she does not seriously try to win him back, even when she learns that his false marriage proposal was just a trick with which he had hoped to return to her. Also, during her stay with Olimund she cleverly concealed from the laird why she had run away from home so that the knowledge of her shepherd love might not discourage him from courting her (*ll.* 730-59; similarly *ll.* 2645-80). The poet's positive atti-

²⁶When later she is led away by Olimund to be his bride, she hardly recognizes herself for all "her silks and scarlets" (*l.* 3936), and when she meets Olimund's nurse again, she claims that "chang'd indeed...is baith my mind an' weed." (*ll.* 4079-80)

tude towards the shepherdess's conduct can be gathered from the subtitle of the verse narrative: Helenore is "fortunate" to have won a rich laird's love. The simple shepherd stands no chance. In contrast to Ramsay's pastoral comedy, where the discovery of the shepherd couple's true parentage changes their entire status, retrospectively reinterpreting their nobility of character as a consequence of their noble birth, no such revaluation takes place in *Helenore*. The heroine's unknown noble descent is revealed too late in the story to modify our view of her as an ambitious country girl, a social climber.

Bydby's portrait is much more complex. On the one hand, the plot requires her to appear less desirable than Helenore, and Lindy's marriage to her to be some kind of retribution for his breach of faith. Thus Colin rejects the young shepherd's claim to his daughter with the unflattering comparison (notice again the metaphors of dress):

"We now maun tak the warld as it waggis,
An' for hail claith be now content wi' raggs" (ll. 2846-7).

Although the Highland girl's physical appearance is only described in general terms, she is agreed to be less attractive than Helenore. Her brown hair (l. 3112) is compared unfavorably with the shepherdess's "yellow hair" that "Look'd i' the sun just like the threads of goud" (ll. 2896-7). Olimund's nurse concedes, however, that Bydby too is "a right setting lass" (l. 2900) and Olimund calls her "a strapping lass...that well may sair / The best mail-payer's son" (ll. 3246, 3248-9). But whereas the nurse praises Nory as "calm," she criticizes Bydby as "forthersome" (l. 2901); Nory and Lindy's father describe her as "snell" (ll. 2708, 2812); Olimund thinks "she's mettle to the teeth" (l. 3250); and Lindy repeatedly vents his indignation at Bydby's "scrimp of shame an' modesty" which shows, he says, in the fact that it is she, the woman, who woos the man (ll. 3152-9).²⁷ The young shepherd is eventually won over by the cateran girl's unabashed sensuality (a kiss from her works like a charm), which gives a slightly farcical ring to this part of the plot.²⁸

On the other hand, Bydby proves that she loves Lindy when she helps him and Colin escape from her brothers' place of confinement; and when she finds herself abandoned by the shepherd and strays alone through the unknown mountainous regions in quest of him, Ross tries to rouse the reader's sympathy

²⁷See also "Nae man o' ten likes women them to woo" (l. 2513). At first Colin too had sneered at Bydby's forwardness, quoting the proverb, "Breeks maun come speed, whan pettycoats do woo" (l. 1427). On the other hand, Olimund, understandably defends Bydby's wooing (ll. 3160-77).

²⁸Walker's criticism that "there is no attempt to mark [Bydby] by the characteristics of her race" (II, 32) is obviously not quite justified, though admittedly the description of the Highland girl is fairly biased.

for her just as much as he had done earlier in the parallel episode of Nory's lonesome search for Lindy. Physically agile and quick-witted, self-confident and persevering, Bydby develops in the course of the poem into a more convincing and fascinating young woman than the beautiful shepherdess. The comedy ending of a double wedding bears the promise of future happiness for both couples, albeit on different social levels.

As Walker has observed, the scene in *Helenore* "is laid on the border between Lowland civilisation and what was still Highland savagery."²⁹ Beattie finds a lot to praise in the depiction of each of these landscapes: "Many genuine strokes of nature and passion, and many beautiful touches of picturesque description, are to be seen in his work," he writes in the *Aberdeen Journal* (Ross, pp. xv-xvi); in a letter to Thomas Blacklock he remarks: "The author excels most in describing the solitary scenes of a mountainous country" (Ross, p. xvi). This is not the place to argue whether Ross's views of the Lowlands are to be classed as "beautiful" or "picturesque" in the eighteenth-century sense (the Highland scenes, as will be shown, have indeed some touch of the "sublime"),³⁰ but as they are imbedded in a Scottish pastoral, their Scottishness and their indebtedness to the pastoral tradition are of prime interest.

The contrast between the two stereotypical kinds of landscape largely excludes the Highlands from harboring any pastoral scenes. But in general, there is very little of the conventional pastoral setting in *Helenore*. The only example approximating the pastoral *locus amoenus* is the shepherds' valley of Flavinia, quoted by Sir Walter Scott in *The Heart of Midlothian* (Scott, VII, 454):

The water fecklie on a level slede,
 Wi' little dinn, but couthy, what it made.
 On ilka side the trees grew thick an' strang,
 An' a' the boughs wi' birds were in a sang;
 On every side, a full bowshot an' mair,
 The green was even, gowany an' fair;
 With easy sklent, on every side the braes
 To a good height, wi' scatter'd busses raise;
 Wi' goats an' sheep aboon, an' cows below,
 These bony braes all in a swarm did go (ll. 410-9).

²⁹Walker, II, 31. Most critics agree that the landscape is modelled on Glenesk in north-eastern Angus, where Ross lived from 1732 to his death in 1784.

³⁰For a distinction between these aesthetic categories see the classical study by Walter John Hipple, Jr., *The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale, 1957). The special meaning of "picturesque" developed only in the seventeen-eighties and can therefore be neglected here.

These ten lines are the longest consecutive description of pastoral scenery in the entire poem. Earlier on Ross had contented himself with simply evoking "the heights an' hows" (l. 141) through which Nory and Lindy used to ramble in their childhood.³¹ The home of Olimund's aunt, situated in a similarly attractive spot, is also only summarily referred to as "a bra' gentle place" (l. 796).

Critics such as G. Gregory Smith, David Daiches or Kurt Wittig have stated that the love of detail, the minute description of specific features of an object, are an important characteristic of the Scottish tradition in literature. However, one of the most striking aspects of the landscape descriptions in *Helonore* is rather their lack of detail. In this respect, Ross obviously follows the British aesthetic precepts of his age more closely than the example of his native tradition. Reynolds, Johnson, Gerard and Beattie agreed that in landscape descriptions it was not the specific, but the general, not wealth of detail, but an overview that produced the most sustained effect on the reader (Miner, p. 483). As the landscape in the middle section of *Helonore*³² serves mainly as a backdrop for the depiction of the girls' loneliness, fatigue and despair during their search for Lindy, the poet concentrates on a few significant aspects and sketches the scenery in outline only. Formulaic expressions maintain the idea of a mountainous region, and the vocabulary evokes a general Scottish aura: "[she ran] to the glens" (l. 463; l. 1259); "she clamb up the brae" (l. 531; ll. 1272, 1546); "down the hill they scour" (l. 2211; ll. 1278, 1681); "O'er monie heights an' hows she dreels" (l. 1588; ll. 1583, 2165). Particular emphasis is laid on the wearying steepness and roughness of the hillsides:

On ilka hand the hills were stay an' steep,
An' shou'd she tak them, she behov'd to creep (ll. 520-1).

Up thro' the cleughs, where bink on bink was set,
Scrambling wi' hands and feet she taks the gate (ll. 528-9).³³

The dreary vastness of the hills and moors is referred to repeatedly:

³¹The violent death of a lamb that had fled from a fox and fell down a hillock, almost taking Lindy with it when she tried to save it (ll. 144-59), qualifies the idyllic nature of even this place.

³²The description of the two girls' roaming in the Highlands covers more than twenty per cent of the verse narrative.

³³Similar examples are easily found: "rough an' steep the brae" (l. 1789); "rough, rough was the brae" (l. 2280); "thir rugged hills" (l. 1265).

...nae cuinray in her sight appears
But dens an' burns an' bare an' langsome moors (ll. 1682-3)

...naething yet but hills an' muirs in view (l. 2216).

Over and over again we find the same landscape elements: "birns, an' pits, an' scrabs, an' heather lang" (l. 569); "stanes or scrabs or pools" (l. 1655); "scrabs an' craigs" (l. 1783); "craigs an' scrabs" (l. 2281). Few adjectives are employed, and those that are, hardly make the description more specific; rather, their use tends to be tautological, almost ballad-like, as in the sentence: "Clear was the burnie, an' the busses green" (l. 1788). Accordingly, the berries that the girls eat are as "black as onie slae" (l. 1661; l. 1800); Nory rests in a "coolriff shade" (l. 597); Bydby drinks from a "cauld stream" (l. 1798).

Walker's criticism that "the wilder Highland scenery...is not dwelt upon with affection... but is accepted as a disagreeable fact" (II, 31-2) neglects the context of the plot, the observer's weariness and despair. When Nory has crept up a steep hill, she "spies about" and is indeed struck by the beauty of the scene (for once depicted in some detail):

An' lo! beneath, a bony burnie lies,
Out-throw the mist atweesh her an' the sun,
That shin'd an' glanc'd in ilka pool an' lyn (ll. 565-7).

But her sorrow is such that she cannot really enjoy the view, nor can nature comfort her:

Amo' the bushes birdies made their mang,
Till a' the cloughs about with musick rang.
They seem'd to do their best to ease the fair,
But she for that was o'er far gane in care (ll. 574-7).

"It is not enough that poems be beautiful, let them also be affecting," Beattie wrote in his *Essay on Poetry and Music as They Affect the Mind* (1776).³⁴ Poetic descriptions should not only serve the reader's private aesthetic pleasure but also (in fact, mainly) arouse intense "social" emotions—pity, sympathy and benevolence. Hugh Blair claimed that while the pastoral landscape with its smiling, "beautiful" scenery had great power to please, it was less suited to this higher ethical purpose than "the rude scenes of nature" with its "rocks and torrents and whirlwinds."³⁵ With *Ossian* the Scottish High-

³⁴3rd edn., (London, 1779), p. 47.

³⁵Qtd. in Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIIIth-Century England* (Ann Arbor, 1960), p. 122. Henceforth Monk. See Beattie's "Illustrations on Sub-

lands had become the prototype of sublime scenery. William Smith (1739) and Edmund Burke (1757)³⁶ had added the element of horror to this concept: the themes of frightening darkness, awesome natural forces, solitude and deprivation mark this new stage of the sublime.³⁷

At first sight, the description of both Nory's and Bydby's lonely wanderings in *Helenore* seems primarily to serve the reader's "pleasurable astonishment" which Beattie attributes to "sublime horror" (Beattie, pp. 612, 615): the craggy mountains give off some emanation of the uncanny and threatening, which is intensified during the night.³⁸ This is how Nory encounters this new experience:

The night grew merk, the mist began to fa',
The howlet screekt, an' that was warst of a';
For ilka time the onbeast gae the yell,
In spite of grief, it gae her heart a knell.

* * *

It's yet pit merk, the yerd a' black about,
An' the night fowl began again to shout.
Thro' ilka limb an' lith the terror thirl'd
At ilka time the dowie monster skirl'd (*ll.* 486-9; 504-7).³⁹

But clearly the creation of "sublime horror" is not the only function of this episode. The night, the mist, the owl's screech are just the gothic frame of a picture at the center of which we find human grief: pangs of love, hunger, physical exhaustion, fear of bodily harm, panic at having lost her way are described in far greater detail, and always there is an appeal to the reader's sympathy. Thus the poet interrupts the description of "poor Nory" (*ll.* 460, 470, 484) on her search for Lindy with the exclamation, "judge gin her heart

limity" in his *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (London, 1783), p. 615. Henceforth Beattie. See also Kinghorn's chapter "Scots Criticism of Pastoral Poetry," p. 158.

³⁶William Smith (trans.), Dionysius Longinus, *On the Sublime*, with notes and observations, and some account of the life, writings and character of the author (London, 1739); Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, 1757).

³⁷Monk, pp. 55, 61, 68-9, 71, 93 and *passim*.

³⁸In the Bydby episode, Ross stresses how a "Couthy an' warm an' gow'ny" spot may become "eery" after sunset: "grim an' ghastly an' pick black, wi' fright, / A' things appear'd upo' the dead of night" (*ll.* 1792; 1804; 1806-7).

³⁹On the influence of this and similar scenes on Burns's poem *Tam o' Shanter* see below.

was sair" (l. 471); Ross dwells on her waning physical strength ("Her limbs they faicked under her an' fell," l. 501); he depicts Nory on the verge of insanity ("She ran an' skream'd, an' roove out at her hair," l. 462). The thought that Lindy may have had a fatal accident makes Nory wish for her own death:

"O Lindy! Lindy!" was her dowie sang;
 "Well Lindy, bony Lindy, art thou dead?
 I's never frae this hillock lift my head.
 O dead, come also an' be kind to me,
 An' frae this sad back-birn of sorrow free!" (ll. 475-9)

Bydby's lonely Highland expedition is described in a similar fashion, but covers more ground (in the 1778 version it is three times as long as Nory's) and focuses even more on the dangers and horrors awaiting the girl in the wilderness. The parallels between the two episodes are intentional and include several descriptive details. Both girls satisfy their hunger by eating wild berries (ll. 547-52; 1588-1605), and in both cases the poet uses stylistic repetition to emphasize the effect they produce: "Sick, sick she grows (l. 552); "Sick, sick she was" (l. 1598). Nory is described as being "Like water weak, an' dwebell like a bent" (l. 525); of Bydby we learn that she is "as weak as very water grown" (l. 1752) and "as dweble as a windlestra" (l. 1605). The cateran girl shows the same signs of despair as the shepherdess:

Whan she had cry'd, and grat, an' cry'd again,
 An' fand that a' her crying was in vain,
 She e'en lay down aneth her load o' care,
 An' wisht that she were dead, an' dead just there.
 A mournfu' ditty till her sell she sang,
 Roove out her hair in flaughts, her hands she wrang (ll. 1554-9).

In light of these parallels it is important to note what additional facets have been included in the Bydby episode. The moments of anguish and thus the poem's emotional potential are increased by two daytime incidents, in which Bydby has to defend herself against attempts of sexual assault and murder (ll. 1606-53; 1708-47); at night, she even faces the danger of metaphysical annihilation. It is this last aspect that adds a new quality to the poem. In his "Illustrations on Sublimity" of 1783, Beattie makes special mention of "the objects of superstition, as ghosts and enchantments" (Beattie, p. 615); and this is what, five years earlier, we get in a long passage added to the 1778 edition (ll. 1814-97). At the end of the second day of her lonely roaming, the cateran girl has just lain down for the night underneath a birch tree when, "hauf sleeping and hauf waking" (l. 1814), she finds herself amid a dance of "little foukies, clad in green and blue" (l. 1818).

In many a reel they scamper'd here and there,
Whiles on the yerd, and whiles up in the air.
The pipers play'd like ony touting horn;
Sic sight she never saw since she was born (ll. 1820-3).

The mischievous elfin people want to pull her up in the air; they invite her to a banquet, but "The mair she ate, the mair her hunger grew" (l. 1846); they frighten her with their talk of the various pranks they have lately played on mortals; but most importantly, they discuss carrying her off to Fairyland, from which, as balladry teaches us, no human being has returned unharmed. Bydby awakes and realizes that a pleasant morning has begun, but even if her superstitious fear has proved unfounded, her real grief and hardship remain, and so the rising sun and the warbling birds cannot sow any content in her breast (ll. 1898-1919).⁴⁰

G. Gregory Smith defined the character of Scottish literature by the juxtaposition of two moods, grip of fact and realism on the one hand, and confusion of the senses, "the horns of elfland" on the other ("Caledonian antiszygy").⁴¹ He quotes *Tam o' Shanter* as an illustration of this; and it is not a coincidence that Burns's famous poem bears traces of inspiration from these scenes in *Helenore*. Surely the witches' dance in Alloway's auld haunted kirk, "whare ghaists and houlets nightly cry," combines elements of Nory's and Bydby's perception of the horrors of nocturnal solitude in the open air of the wild mountains.⁴² Burns's couplet "He screw'd the pipes and gart them skirl,/ Till roof and rafters a' did dirl" (ll. 123-4; referring to Auld Nick accompanying the dancers) echoes the "thirl'd / skirl'd" rhyme of the Nory passage quoted above (ll. 506-7). And Burns's lines

O *Tam!* had'st thou but been sae wise,
As ta'en thy ain wife *Kate's* advice! (ll. 17-18)

have just as unmistakably been formed on the model of Bydby's

"Had I but been sae wysse
As hae laid up auld mummy's gueed advice" (ll. 1778-9).

⁴⁰Again, there is a close parallel here with the Nory scene; see ll. 508 ff.

⁴¹*Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London, 1919), ch. 1.—Margaret Elphinstone sees a continuation of the Scottish fantasy tradition up to the present day, but says it is now "contemporary, urban and realistic." Paper given at the ASLS Conference on The Writing of a New Scotland, Strathclyde University, May 13-14, 2000. Internet version: www.strath.ac.uk/ecloga/elphinstone.pdf.

⁴²Of course, some of the aspects mentioned here had become stereotypical in poems of the night and graveyard school.

But Burns creates an ironic distance from the element of superstition (and, at the same time, from the enlightened stance that bluntly refuses to believe in what Tam witnessed at the hour of midnight), whereas in *Helenore* there is no irony. Ross introduces Bydby's dream mainly for its sublime effect, and this is also true of the description of the thunderstorm, which nearly kills the two girls on their way back to Flavinia:

The sun he dips, an' clouds grew dusk around;
A' in a clap the fireflaught blinds their eyn;
The thunder roars, an' nae a breath between,
Hurle upon hurle, an' just aboon their head,
That o' their weams they fa' as they were dead (*ll.* 2189-93).

Natural and supernatural forces combine to present a spectacle of awesome grandeur. As mentioned before, the aesthetic thrill is not an end in itself but a means of rousing sympathy in the reader, which, in turn, is to intensify our sense of moral justice. Beattie's *Essay on Poetry* contains a passage that almost reads like a theoretical guideline to *Helenore*. Dwelling on the didactic function of poetry, Beattie widens the sense of the term "instruction": as well as the communication of fresh knowledge, he claims, it also covers that

which awakens our pity for the sufferings of our fellow creatures; promotes a taste for the beauties of nature; makes vice appear the object of indignation and ridicule; inculcates a sense of our dependence upon Heaven; fortifies our minds against the evils of life; or promotes the love of virtue and wisdom, either by delineating their native charms, or by setting before us in suitable colours, the dreadful consequences of imprudent and immoral conduct.⁴³

We have sufficiently elaborated on Lindy's transgression; and, indeed, his involvement in the love triangle makes him a focal point of the Highland episode. But what about the Sevitiens, whose raids and abductions have triggered off all the misery described in the poem? Bydby's brothers are given only a few lines and do not appear as individualized characters. As "Three fallows bauld, like very lions strong" (*l.* 434) they are summarily described in the beginning, and when they capture Lindy for the second time, they are referred to as "Three lusty fellows" (*l.* 1283). Their brutality is only hinted at, but its consequences are all the more palpable. Still, their scanty appearance in the poem provides no appropriate basis for an emotional reader response comparable to that of Lindy's demeanor.

Within the fictitious world of the poem, "instruction" mainly operates as communication of fresh knowledge. The key to an appreciation of the Sevi-

⁴³*Essay on Poetry*, p. 20; qtd. in Kinghorn, p. 104.

tians' guilt is given towards the end of the poem, when Olimund makes them face the lawlessness of their raids. Surprised, they reply:

"We never thought it wrang to ca' a prey.
Our auld forbears practis'd it a' their days,
An' ne'er the worse for that did sett their claise;
But we ne'er heard that e'er they steal'd a cow,
Sick nesty tricks they wad hae scorn'd to do;
But tooming faulds, or ca'ing of a glen,
Was ever deem'd the deed of protty men;
So we for that need not cast down our brow,
But is a thing that we may well avow." (ll. 3830-8)

In view of this complete lack of awareness of their wrongdoing, the laird decides to make use of pragmatic arguments. How would they react, he asks, if someone stole their property? The answer is as simple as it is stunning: they would, if necessary, yield to a superior force:

"The strongest side has ay the strongest right;
If we our side unable are to guard,
Let them the booty have for their reward." (ll. 3850-2)

Olimund counters this primitive view with his own conception of legality, which is based on a central ethical rule of the literati:

The squire reply'd: "My lads, ye judge amiss,
For of the weak the law protector is." (ll. 3853-4)

David Hume used this argument in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739)⁴⁴ to illustrate the necessity of organized society: the safeguard of property, one of its fundamental tasks, required a habitual recognition of the others' right of property, a "convention of abstinence" protecting it from illegal acquisition. Man "in his rude and more natural condition" had to learn this demeanor as part of the civilizing process. This is illustrated by the Sevitiens' change of attitude: after Olimund's explanations they are willing to return the stolen cattle to their rightful owners. Whereas before they had, "Like baited bears, or like blood-thirsty hounds" (l. 3820), organized their social intercourse solely on the principle of physical inferiority or superiority, they now recognize the ethical rules of civilized society as the guiding maxim of their actions. Again this shows Ross in the role of a popularizer of issues that were in the air in his days, even if his handling of them is rudimentary and not entirely convincing. The theme of the advance of man from his savage state to a member of civi-

⁴⁴Book II: "Of Justice and Injustice."

lized society received its classic treatment in Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* in the year before the publication of *Helenore*.⁴⁵

There are many indications, then, that Ross was familiar with the main aesthetic tendencies of his time and that he adapted his long poem, especially its non-pastoral parts and later additions, to these. Again and again, however, we realize that *Helenore*, with its long time of composition, is a work of transition that has taken up clues from a wide range of traditions which were shaped in different decades of the eighteenth century reflecting different views of literature and different social attitudes. Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* is the only model overtly acknowledged, but although Ross succeeds in presenting a vivid picture of the rural society of northeastern Scotland, and was no doubt encouraged by Ramsay to use the Scots vernacular in this poem, he does not instill new life to the pastoral genre. In fact the realistic interpretation of the bucolic world, which makes the shepherd and the laird contrasting figures, has turned the basic idea of traditional pastoral upside down. Consequently the search for perfection does not lead to the world of the shepherds but away from it. The nobleman no longer comes to the country because he has made "a moral decision in favor of pastoral life,"⁴⁶ nor does he make the slightest attempt at "pastorauling"—"that self-conscious dressing up as shepherds and shepherdesses we find throughout Western culture."⁴⁷ As a hunter and a warrior, Olimund visibly represents the status of the non-shepherd, whose real world remains Bony-Ha', a place of splendor and luxury outside the pastoral realm. We still find, in a way, "a beautiful relation between rich and poor," which William Empson saw as the basis of traditional pastoral poetry;⁴⁸ but while formerly it was the aristocrat who hoped to find in the idealized world of the shepherds those values he missed in his own, it is now the discontented country folk who project their dreams and wishes into an idealized picture of upper-class life. The parallels between the shepherdess's view of a perfect life in *Helenore* and the middle-class attitudes expressed in Richardson's *Pamela*

⁴⁵Ed. Duncan Forbes (Edinburgh, 1967). For a detailed analysis of the ethical program of the literati, in which several of the issues mentioned in my paper are treated (in German), see Sebastian Bott, "*Friends and Lovers of Virtue*": *Tugendethische Handlungsorientierungen im Kontext der Schottischen Aufklärung 1750-1800* (Frankfurt/Main, New York, 1999). Henceforth Bott. Bryson's *Man and Society* is still a valuable introduction to this topic.

⁴⁶Gerd Stratmann, *Englische Aristokratie und klassizistische Dichtung* (Nürnberg, 1965), p. 232.

⁴⁷William Herbert's term; see his "The Pastorauling Parole: Scottish Pastoral," *Triquarterly*, 116 (June 2003); found in *Literature Online* <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>. Henceforth Herbert.

⁴⁸*Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1935), p. 11.

show how far the estrangement from the original idea of pastoral has progressed. Small wonder, then, that Fergusson found little in Ross to model his own pastorals on, which are either more traditional than Ross's or Ramsay's, or place "pastoral at the heart of urban experience."⁴⁹ Burns, as we have seen, is less impressed by the bucolic content of *Helenore* than the element of superstition included in the poem, of which he makes ironic use.

If the realistic view of the pastoral world turned pastoral poetry into documents of humble life, perverting its former aristocratic basis, Ross carries the realistic interpretation one step further, playing on the cultural contrast between the Lowlands and the Highlands as perceived by the literati. Especially after Culloden, the Highlanders were considered a low, uncultured, morally corrupt race, "monsters in the human shape," as Alexander Carlyle put it in the notes of his Highland tours of 1765 and 1775: "The language and manners, as well as the face of the country demonstrate what nation they belong to."⁵⁰ Their Catholicism and Gaelic language made them particularly odious; it is interesting to note that Ross's Highlanders do not seem to have these defects, compared with which marauding was only a minor fault. According to Smout, programs to make the social structure of rural society in the Highlands resemble that of the Lowlands were carried through successfully in the Northeast at that time (Smout, p. 347). The conversion of the Sevitians to the moral code of the "civilized" part of Scotland and the marriage of the Lowland shepherd and the Highland girl are therefore highly political issues.

As has been shown, the depiction of nature in *Helenore* is not only, and not even primarily, a question of aesthetics but primarily serves the aim of teaching virtue via the chain of description – emotion – knowledge. The truth of Walker's criticism that Ross's Highland scenery "is not dwelt upon with affection or with that stirring of the spirit which indicates that the sense of sublimity is awakened" (Walker, II, 31-2) is borne out when we compare *Helenore* with Beattie's poem *The Minstrel* (1771-4), where Edwin's delight in "Rocks, torrents, gulfs, and shapes of giant size" (stanza 53)⁵¹ contrasts sharply with Nory's and Bydby's aversion to these natural phenomena; nor did the girls ever scan "with curious and romantic eye"

whate'er of beautiful, or new,
Sublime, or dreadful, in earth, sea, or sky,
By chance, or search, was offer'd to [their] view. (stanza 58)

⁴⁹Herbert, *op.cit.*

⁵⁰Qtd. in Bott, pp. 223; 225. Similar opinions are quoted by T. C. Smout in his *History of the Scottish People 1560-1830* (New York, 1969), p. 347. Henceforth Smout.

⁵¹*The Poetical Works* (London, 1831), pp. 29, 31.

But Ross's contemporaries found many praiseworthy aspects in his Scottish scenery, and his intermingling of landscape description with images of suffering and terror only show that he adhered to an earlier concept of the sublime.

To dismiss *Helenore* from the Scottish canon because of some minor flaws the poem undoubtedly has means leaving the picture of eighteenth-century Scottish literature and culture incomplete. It is a popular work both in the sense that it was originally written for the common people (although it also earned the praise of the higher ranks of society), and in that it absorbed and popularized a wide range of ideas that were current in its time. *Helenore* is unique in Scottish poetry, and it raises the question whether the strict division, still commonly found in literary histories, between the works of the North British writers and the vernacular tradition, and between high and low literature, is really justified.

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