


Between Literary Idealisation and Historical Decline: A Study of the Highlander in Literature from the Year 1827

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Introduction

In the year 1827, Scotland is a nation within a nation, a nation divided in the Lowlands and the Highlands, between progress and rural past, between loyalty to the greater union and its own distinctive heritage. In this field of division, the historical Highlander of pre-1745 Scotland has fallen victim to a gradual assimilation and, in the words of sir Walter Scott, ‘the destruction of the patriarchal power of the Highland chiefs’ along with a ‘gradual influx of wealth, and extension commerce’ has left the Scottish people ‘a class of beings as different from their grandfathers as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth’s time’ (*Waverley* 492). Thus, by the early 19th century, the Highlander’s days of glory appears to be situated in a past rapidly disappearing from living memory. However, in 1827, the narrator of Scott’s *Chronicles of the Canongate* suggests that ‘kilted Highlanders are to be found as frequently, and nearly of as genuine descent, on the shelves of a circulating library, as at a Caledonian ball’ (123). In spite of the post-1745 assimilation of the old Highland way of life through various 18th century acts banning ‘the wearing of tartan’ (Gold 12) and causing the Highland Clearances (Ferris 83), this quote from *Chronicles* suggests not just a presence, but a pervasive presence of the Highlander as a literary figure in early 19th century fiction. Considered in the context of the assimilation of the traditional Highland way of life, the rise of the literary Highlander invites to reflection on the nature of this figure in terms of its relation to the historical Highlander and the effect of the fictional as a framework for portrayal of a formerly disputed figure. Juxtaposing different literary portrayals of the Highlander with the historical Highlander, it is not a single uniform figure that appears, but multiple figures positioned in a grey area between the fictional and the historical.

To form an understanding of the nature of the Highlander as a literary figure in the early 19th century, this study analyses examples of the Highlander portrayed in works of fiction as well as non-

fiction from the year 1827 identifying four major tendencies in the portrayals; romanticisation, patriotism, domestication and necessary sacrifice. This will be followed by a discussion of how the literary and cultural centrality of the Highlander in the 1820s is not exclusively celebrated but also criticised of ‘misleading readers through their romantic idealization’ (Shields 110). This will be followed by a discussion of selected passages from “Chrystal Croftangry’s Narrative” and “The Highland Widow” in Scott’s *Chronicles of the Canongate* in comparison to Robert Chambers’s outline of highland-character in “The Highlander” from *History of the Rebellion in Scotland, 1745, 1746*. The relationship between the historical and fictional portrayal of the Highlander will provide the framework for an analysis drawing attention to how both texts perform a hybridity between the historical and the literary. Finally, the fourth section of this study’s main body will provide a discussion of the Highlander’s elevation to national symbol suggesting a connection between the assimilation of the historical Highlander and the rise of the literary Highlander aiding the invention of a “new” Highland character ultimately becoming a contemporary symbol of not just the Highlands but Scotland as whole.

To sum up, this study argues that the Highlander of the year 1827 is a figure caught between the fictional and the historical; simultaneously idealised and problematised through an accentuation of its otherness. Furthermore, it is argued that the interplay between the historical decline of living Highland culture and increasing literary idealisation is central to the elevation of the Highland figure from disputed character to a national symbol of Scotland.

Dominant tendencies in portrayals of the Highland figure

The fictional Highlander of 1827 is a figure based on a continuous development in Scottish society, politics and literature. Although ‘Scotland and England’ by the 1820s ‘had been part of Great Britain for over a century (...) they had not merged into a united community’ (Brancaz-McCartan 2) and, accordingly, Scotland faces issues of how to exercise its ‘legitimate national identity while not appearing disloyal in the process’ (Forsyth 6). The Highlander, the image of an uncivilised rebel fighting for a Stuart king, could be considered a problematic figure to celebrate in a Hanoverian monarchy and politically it is a figure that divides the waters in the early 19th century. A simplified illustration of the contemporary political contrast in attitudes towards Highlanders and Scotland’s pre-union history can be drawn through a distinction between a Whig identity ‘painting a picture of wild savage Highlanders’ (Gold 13) and a Tory identity that ‘romanticised and celebrated Scottish history’ (Anderson 2). This twofold political division in the view of the Highlander as a figure of Scotland’s past is further nuanced in the literary depictions of the Highlander.

Julia Shields identifies three different discourses in late 18th and early 19th century Scottish literature: a romantic discourse idealizing ‘the Highlands as the primitive site of authentic and sublime feeling’, an improving discourse seeking ‘to bring the “backwards” Highlands in to enlightened British modernity’, and a patriotic discourse drawing on the ‘militarization of the Highlands following the defeat of Jacobite troops in 1746’ (Shields 116). Developing on Shields’s distinction, this study will through the employment of texts published in 1827 argue that there are four different tendencies dominating the depictions of the Highlander at this point: romanticisation, military patriotism, domestication and necessary sacrifice of the traditional Highland way of life.

Elaborating on Shields’s definition of the romantic discourse, attention can be drawn to two distinct features distinguishing the romantic Highlander: a close connection to the sublime Highland landscape and the Highlander as a survivor of ‘an older chivalrous order’ (Gold 15). English poet Robert Bloomfield demonstrates the close connection between the landscape of the Highlands and its people in “Song for a Highland Drover Returning from England”. The speaker of the poem, a Highland drover, signifies a pronounced connection between himself and the Highland landscape. By the sight of his native lands, he exclaims: ‘There Scotland, my darling, lies full in my view, / With bare-footed Lassies and Mountains so blue;’ (Bloomfield lines 15-16). In these two lines, the speaker emphasises his strong feelings for his native land by personifying Scotland as ‘my darling’, thus, formulating a sense of Scotland not just as a piece of land but something the drover has a deeper connection with. The drover’s Highlands is an idyllic land where the ‘bare-footed lasses’ are aligned with the awe-inspiring example of nature described as the ‘Mountains so blue’. The ‘mountains’ run like a recurrent symbol of the sublime Highland landscape throughout the poem; a sight that induces not just awe but a physical reaction making the speaker’s ‘heart bound like the hind’ (Bloomfield 17), hence, further emphasising the strong link between the drover and the Highland landscape.

Similar to Bloomfield’s Highland idyll, Robert Chambers draws a picture of the Highlander’s ‘primitive manners with almost unmixed purity’ emphasising how ‘the Highlanders of Scotland’ offer ‘a distinct picture of those early shepherd days’ (“Highlander” 24). This description taken from a non-fiction text casts the Highlanders in a romantic framework of ‘primitive manners’ and ‘unmixed purity’, consequently, describing the pre-1745 Highlander as a figure distinct from the modern people of Britain; a romantic figure untainted by modernity. However, Chambers refrains from creating a complete idyll by drawing attention to the warrior quality of the Highlanders who due to ‘a perpetual state of war with the neighbours’ made ‘arms a sort of profession’ (“Highlander” 25). The warrior quality to Highland character is not as explicitly addressed in Bloomfield’s poem, yet, exclamations

such as ‘For the glory of Scotland reigns warm in my breast’ (27) enhances a notion of the romantic as patriotically linked to the Scottish nation in particular, accordingly, reflecting the tendency in Scottish Romanticism to consider ‘the nation’ an ‘excluded category that bears Romantic value’ (Duncan et al. 6).

The Highlander’s patriotic quality, as implied by Bloomfield, is further accentuated in a second mode of discourse related to what Shields terms the ‘militarization of the Highlands’ (116). Following the defeat at Culloden in 1746, ‘kilted battalions’ of Highland regiments fought in British service instigating a transformation of the tartan-dressed Highlander from Jacobite traitor to imperial hero (Devine 239-241). One of these regiments was The Black Watch which gives name to a poem published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1827. “The Black Watch” conjures a sense of patriotism evident in the third stanza:

Old Scotland’s spear shall never turn,
 When Faith and Honour lead ‘em;
 At Roslin and at Bannockburn,
 Our Fathers drew for freedom;
 And that their sons are valiant too,
 Let history on her pages
 Write Egypt, Spain and Waterloo,
 In blood, to coming ages. (“Black” 399)

In this stanza, reference to 14th century victories at ‘Roslin’ and Bannockburn’ in the First War of Scottish Independence is juxtaposed with the Battle of Waterloo from 1815. This juxtaposition can be argued to articulate a coherence across history between the fight for independence fought by the Highlanders’ ‘Fathers’ and the later military achievements of the Highland regiments in British service. Thus, the poem suggests the warrior spirit to be an integral part of Highland character which has been adapted to not compromise with the union. In the poem, the warrior spirit of the Highlanders is, furthermore, characterised by a sense of ‘Faith and Honour’ and a pride in the Scottish nation where ‘O’er gallant hearts and broadswords red / Our Unicorn still flying!’ (“Black 399). Here the poem presents the Highland warrior not as savage but as gallant-hearted and valiant, fighting with an unflinching loyalty to Scotland, to the ‘Unicorn still flying’.

However valiant, the warrior steps back in favour of a domesticated version of the Highlander in a third line of discourse. Shields analyses the domestication of the Highlands through the genre of the national tale (114-115). The genre sought to endow ‘Highlanders with familial affections’ (Shields 119) in an ‘implicit call for empathy’ (115). The emphasis on familial affections is reflected in Bloomfield. Although ‘the glory of Scotland reigns warm in [his] breast (Bloomfield 27), the drover of Bloomfield’s poem is predominantly portrayed as a family man with each stanza ending with a reference to his wife Maggy. Maggy is portrayed as the embodiment of the home he longs for and an ideal of the good wife. She is described as ‘kind’ (Bloomfield 18), ‘steady and true’ (24) and nothing can tempt the drover to remain in England ‘For my Maggy’s at Home, and my Children at play!’ (4). The drover appears neither a savage nor valiant warrior, but a domesticated figure whose sole concern is to be with his wife and children in the land of his affections. Accordingly, the Highland figure emerges as a sympathetic ideal embodying family virtue.

Forming a contrast to both the romantic, the patriotic and the domesticated Highlander, Scott represents a fourth discourse in “The Highland Widow” from *Chronicles of the Canongate*: the necessary sacrifice of traditional Highland morals. According to Georg Lukács, Scott’s literature has a recurrent tendency to acknowledge the Highlanders’ ‘outstanding qualities’ whilst emphasising ‘the historical necessity of their decline’ (59); a necessity emphasised by the fatal outcome for the Highlanders of “The Highland Widow”. The tale takes place in the second half of the 18th century where Highland culture has more or less been ‘melted down into the great mass of civilization’ (Scott, *Chronicles* 65). The tale’s central characters can be divided into two categories: those who accept and adapt to the societal change and those who deny giving into the norms of modern civilisation. The first category is embodied in young Hamish trying to convince his mother, Elspat, that she lives ‘in this land of our fathers, as if our fathers were yet living’ and concluding that ‘We may mourn for [the change], but we cannot help it’ (Scott, *Chronicles* 89). Thus, Hamish aligns with the conviction of necessary decline of the old Highland way of life in favour of progress; Elspat cannot do this and it is in the clash between these two convictions the tragedy of the tale arises. To Elspat, Hamish’s decision to sign up for the British army is an act of treachery disowning ‘the royal Stuart, for whom your father, and his fathers, and your mother’s fathers, have crimsoned many a field with their blood’ (Scott, *Chronicles* 90). The reference to the Stuarts and previous generations in Elspat’s accusation accentuates how her mindset is set in a past of a now lost Highland way of life. Hamish’s death as a result of his mother’s actions to prevent him from joining the modern Scotland makes the story a tragedy not just of the death of a young man, but of a Highland mother who is ‘able neither to find a foothold in the new world nor

retain one in the old,' all she can do is 'die in grief and anonymity' (Lamont xviii). Following Lamont's argument, it can then be suggested that the fate of Hamish and Elspat serves as an example of how the old Highland way of life has no place in a modern civilisation. That trying to enforce old Highland values will only lead to a tragic end.

The four portrayals of the Highlander here discussed are in spite of their differences interrelated by the common feature of evoking a sense of otherness of the Highland figure. In the most basic way, this is done in Bloomfield, Chambers and Scott through the recurrent use of the word "Highlander". According to Anthony Smith, there is a 'quality to a name' that establishes 'a sure sign and emblem of ethnic communities' (23). Hence, through the recurrent use of the name "Highlander" in the texts instead of for instance "Scotsman", the Highland figure is separated as an ethnic community distinct from Scotland and Britain as a whole. In addition, both Chambers and Scott manifest a characteristic of otherness making the Highlander a figure belonging to the past. In Chambers's romantic discourse, the Highlanders are depicted as a primitive people connected to nature and untainted by modernity. In contrast, Scott accentuates the incompatibility between the old Highland way of life and the norms and laws of modern Scottish civilisation, thus, problematising the "otherness" of the Highlander. Where Scott and Chambers apply the "otherness" as a distinct trait of Highland character, the otherness evident in Bloomfield and "Black" can be argued to take the character of a distinctive Scottishness. It may be suggested that Bloomfield's domestication of the Highlander as a figure embodying family virtue can be interpreted as making the Highland figure more compatible with broader British values, hence, not enhancing a sense of otherness but likeness. Nevertheless, to Bloomfield's domesticated Highlander it is 'the glory of Scotland' that 'reigns warm in [his] breast' (27). Scotland is his 'darling' (Bloomfield 25), Scotland – not the United Kingdom - is his home. Furthermore, the patriotism in the "The Black Watch" may align past battles for independence with battles fought for the union with equal honour, however, the insistent employment of specifically Scottish symbolism, for instance the 'Unicorn', maintains an insistence of distinctiveness of the Scottish within the union ("Black" 399).

The literary centrality of the Highlander problematised

By the 1820s, the centrality of the Highlander as a literary figure is evident in the 'ubiquity of novels about Scotland' (Shields 110) and the fact that 'songs with a Jacobite theme were second only to love songs in number and quality in the popular Scottish canon' (Devine 244), however, not all reactions to this rise of Highlandism were positive. The literary and cultural presence of the Highlander –

whether romanticised, domesticated, sacrificed or militarised - is in the early 19th century a disputed presence. In a Scottish context, the Royal visit of King George IV in Edinburgh in 1822 stirs debate of the Highlander and not least tartan dress. The visit is by large orchestrated by Scott who in his summon of Highland chiefs on the occasion of the royal visit writes that 'Highlanders are what he [George IV] would like most to see' (quoted in Prebble 105). In this statement, it is implied that Scott considers the display of Highlanders essential to the royal visit, hence, the Highlanders are considered essential when Scotland is to present itself at its best. Scott's orchestration of the visit leads to what a critical voice in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* terms 'tartan mania', a display 'unworthy of Scotland', a mere 'humbug and masquerade' ("Letter" 354). This unambiguous critique of the centrality of tartan as part of the royal visit is echoed in *Chronicles of the Canongate*, where Scott is giving the critics of the pervasive presence of the Highlanders voice through Croftangry's friend Mr. Fairscribe. Discussing the tales collected by Croftangry, Fairscribe criticises his friend for bringing 'in Highlanders into every story' (Scott, *Chronicles* 154). Thus, it can be suggested that there is a divided attitude to the prominence of the Highlander as a literary presence and as a national symbol in Scotland in the 1820s.

In a wider British context, a critical evaluation of the extensive presence of the literary Highlander is articulated by Irish-English novelist Sarah Green in her 1824 novel *Scotch Novel Reading; or Modern Quackery*. An attack on both writers and readers of Scotch novels, Green's novel 'charges Scottish novelists with misleading readers through their romantic idealization of a region and a people both of which were in fact poor and uncivilized' (Shields 110). Green exemplifies this alleged deception through the portrayal of a young English woman, Alice Fennel. Emphasising her innocence, her 'chastity and pureness of heart', the novel casts Alice as a gullible victim to the "quackery" of Scotch novels (Green 16). The notion of "quackery" is articulated by Mr. Fennel and the young Robert Butler who considers the idealised setting of the Highlands nothing more than the 'bleak, uncomfortable, and, to many, uninteresting Scotland' (Green 48). Statements as this position Robert in stark contrast to Alice who is infatuated with everything Scottish; dressing in tartan, imitating the Scotch dialect and claiming that 'she never reads any other novels than *Walter Scott's*' (Green 5). The satirical portrayal of Alice's infatuation with everything Scottish may be exaggerated, nevertheless, Alice is not singular in her interest in Scottish fiction as the increasing popularity of Scottish literature is evident in the fact that the 'proportion of Scottish fiction titles published in Great Britain increased threefold in the decade following the appearance of *Waverley* in 1814' (Duncan 2).

As suggested by Shields, a key argument of the critique of the popularity of Scottish novels formulated in *Scotch Novel Reading* is that the Scottish novels deceive their readers through an

idealisation of an uncivilised people (110). Accordingly, encountering her first actual Scot, the Highlander Lady MacBane, Alice faces not the embodiment of one of her literary heroines, but a woman with ‘her face unwashed, her hands begrimed with dirt, and her upper lip plentifully besprinkled with snuff’ (Green 181). Drawing a comparison between Lady MacBane and Bloomfield’s domestic Highland ideal of the good wife Maggy, a contrast arises that may support the notion of deception in “romantic” portrayals of Highlanders. On the other hand, the ill-flattering depiction of Lady MacBane may be suggested to echo the prejudices addressed by Chambers as ‘a common notion among Lowlanders, that their northern neighbours (...) were all alike barbarians’ (“Highlander” 35) and the ‘long tradition of anti-Highland satire’ (Devine 232). Lady MacBane is not portrayed as a ‘barbarian’ but uncivilised to a degree that suggests a fifth line of discourse in the portrayals of Highlanders casting the Highlander not as an idealised embodiment of simpler times but quite simply an uncultivated character. An uncultivated character positioned in contrast to the civilised English women who are in turn idealised by Mr. Fennell as ‘the most charming females in the whole world’ (Green 178). An idealisation that accentuates the notion of an incompatibility between Highlanders and modern civilisation.

Keeping the notion of incompatibility in mind, Green’s novel also formulates a criticism that goes beyond an attack on the Scottish novelists when addressing how Alice’s ‘mania after Scotch novels and Scotch bards’ extended even to ‘Scotch reviewers’ (Green 36). The Scotch reviewers are in a narrative comment accused of being ‘chiefly filled with puffing off the writings of their own countrymen’ (Green 36). If not exactly a ‘puffing off’ of Scott’s work, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine’s* review of *Chronicles of the Canongate* is strikingly positive. Discussing “The Highland Widow”, the reviewer claims that the ‘midnight urgency of Lady Macbeth forcing her husband to kill his King as he is sleeping beneath their own castle roof, is not to our minds more terrible than Elspat MacTavish’s sorcery over her son’ (Wilson *564). Comparing Elspat to Lady Macbeth, the reviewer aligns Scott’s work with one of the most famous plays of William Shakespeare, accordingly, implying an equal quality of the work. An implication which by critics could be interpreted as a ‘puffing’. Furthermore, the reviewer’s comment on the opening of “The Highland Widow” as the finest possible opening of ‘a Tale of Pity and Terror. The young, beautiful, high-born, and highbred Lowland Lady, under the guidance of an old superstitious Highlander, brought suddenly, in a scene of wild solitary grandeur’ (Wilson 559-560) suggests a reading of the tale as a romance. A romance taking place in the romantic setting of ‘wild solitary grandeur’ and a set of type characters; the ‘highbred Lady’ and ‘the old superstitious Highlander’. Considered in the context of Green’s critique of Scotch novels, this reading

of “The Highland Widow” as a romantic tale may be considered an expression of ‘misleading’ idealisations. Misleading or not, however, the critique raises a central question about the relationship between literature and “truth”; a question of whether literary depictions must necessarily be realistic and historically accurate and how this affects the Highland figure.

The Highland figure caught between history and fiction

Considering Green’s critique of the Highlander as depicted in a discrepancy between “truth” and idealisation, one can expand the discussion to the relationship between the fictional and the historical Highlander and how they might be suggested to merge over time. Juxtaposing the fictional portrayal of Highlanders in *Chronicles of the Canongate* (Scott) with the non-fictional account of “The Highlander” in *History of the Rebellion in Scotland 1745. 1746* (Chambers), the two texts appear to perform a hybridity between the non-fictional and the fictional. This hybridity is addressed as intentional by Chambers in his preface where he states an aim to unite ‘the solid information of an historical narrative with the amusement and extensive popularity of a historical novel’ (Chambers vii). Among the aspects of this quote, it is interesting how Chambers on one hand links the notion of history with ‘truth’ as a contrast to the fictional linked with ‘amusement’, whilst simultaneously suggesting that the two things are not mutually exclusive. It is Chambers’s claim that the two genres can supplement each other in a work ‘comprehending the merits of both’ (“Preface” vii).

Where Chambers in his preface aims to merge the historical with the literary, it is suggested by Ferris that the narrator of Scott’s frame narrative, Chrystal Croftangry, is an ‘exemplary historian’; a ‘Romantic historian’ attuned to ‘what is passing away’ and considering history ‘a mode of connection in the present’ (84). Foundation for this argument can be found in Croftangry’s reflections regarding his own capabilities as a writer. In these reflections, Croftangry emphasises how he is ‘a borderer also between two generations,’ who ‘can point out more perhaps than others of those fading traces of antiquity which are daily vanishing’ (Scott, *Chronicles* 50). This reflection casts Croftangry as an ideal historian providing a ‘mode of connection’ between the past and the present as a result of him being a ‘borderer’ familiar with both. Furthermore, Croftangry’s statement reflects Ferris’s suggestion of the Romantic historian’s concern of preserving ‘what is passing away’ (84) when accentuating how he is capable of pointing out ‘those fading traces of antiquity which are daily vanishing’ (Scott, *Chronicles* 50). Similarly, the urge to preserve ‘what is passing away’ is echoed in Chambers’s preface where he emphasises the importance of his task as a historian to enlighten ‘the present generation, now so entirely removed by distance of time from that of ear and eye-witnesses’ of the risings of 1745 (vi).

Hence, one can suggest that the respectively fictional and actual historian in the two works share the ambition of the Romantic historian, as defined by Ferris, to preserve a past vanishing from living memory (84).

Returning to Chambers's ambition of merging historical truth with the amusing quality of fiction, it can be argued that his outline of Highland characteristics displays features of literariness. The literariness is manifested in a combination of notable use of imagery, intertextual literary references and anecdotes employing literary modes of expression. Chambers employs imagery in his description of the Highlanders as 'the children of the mountains' ("Highlander" 28) who fought with 'a bravery which nothing could withstand, and at the details of which the blood even yet boils and shudders' (28) and who were not 'content to dwell, each under his own vine' (25). The imagery here employed expresses three characteristics of the Highlanders of the pre-1745. The first example of imagery describing the Highlanders as the 'children of the mountains' attaches a romantic innocence to the Highland-people by calling them 'children'. Further accentuating a romantic quality to the metaphor is how it links the Highland people to the land they inhabit, almost suggesting a fusion between the people and 'the mountains' – echoing the linking of the Highland drover and the mountains in Bloomfield. The significance of the second example of imagery lies in the undertones to the phrasing 'the blood even yet boils and shudders'. Commenting on the Highlander's bravery in this way attaches a sense of drama and thrill to the phrasing that goes beyond the objectivity typically aspired to in academic historical writing. The third example of imagery concerning the Highlanders' discontent 'to dwell each under his own vine' has the double function of presenting the Highlanders as a people who are not content to keep to themselves and being an intertextual reference to the Bible (Mic. 4.4). Finally, the incorporated anecdotes stand out in the text as particularly literary in their employment of direct speech and internal focalisation. The first anecdote is an account from 'the victory of Kilsyth (1645)' where Chambers renders 'a remark of an old Highlander' exclaiming "'Ah! It was a braw day, Kilsyth! (...) at every stroke I gave with my broadsword, I cut an ell o' breeks!'" ("Highlander" 26-27). Theoretically, this could be an actual remark from an actual 'old Highlander' fighting in 1645. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that an oral remark from an unnamed 'old Highlander' should survive through almost two hundred years to be written down by Chambers in 1827; accordingly, the quote may be suggested to be Chambers imagining what might have been said. Less ambiguous is the literary quality to the final anecdote of a Highland gentleman 'of the very noblest order' (Chambers, "Highlander" 37). The anecdote offers an internal focalisation to the concerned gentleman's mind describing how his 'mind was further exalted, if possible, by a devoted attachment to his chief'

(Chambers, “Highlander” 37). The sense of loyalty expressed in the quote may have been a general trait of the Highlander, yet, phrasing this loyalty in the framework of an insight to a character’s mind gives it a mark of fictionalisation.

Though an historical account, Chambers’s “The Highlander” is in many ways a romantic version of the Highlanders as warriors ‘of the very noblest order’ (37), ‘children of the mountains’ (25) inspired by ‘notions of the most exalted heroism’ (36); an image of the Highlander that can be suggested to contrast with the fictional account of Highland character presented in “The Highland Widow”. In *Blackwood’s* review of *Chronicles of the Canongate*, the tale is read as a romantic ‘Tale of Pity and Terror’ (Wilson 559), however, this study’s interpretation of “The Highland Widow” suggests that the tale may be a tragedy, but not a full romantic idealisation. This study argues in line with the argument of Lukács who states that it is ‘wrong to see Scott as a Romantic writer’ (34). It is a central argument of Lukács that Scott distances himself from the romantic by preserving ‘in his portrayal the great historical objectivity’ (34). Where Chambers explicitly argues that ‘[n]othing could be farther from the truth’ than to call the noble Highlanders ‘barbarians’ (35-36), the narrator of “The Highland Widow” abstains from unequivocal judgements of the characters figuring in the tale. Taking the main character, Elspat, as an example, she is portrayed neither as a domestic ideal like Bloomfield’s Maggy nor unequivocally uncivilised as Green’s Lady MacBane, but as a far more complex character inspiring ‘a mixture of horror and sympathy’ (Scott, *Chronicles* 75). This mixture of the opposites of ‘horror and sympathy’ is achieved in the portrayal of Elspat in the field of tension between her Highland morals leading to the death of her son Hamish and the motivation for her actions being motherly love.

Considering Elspat’s decision to use poison ‘to prevent her son from keeping his word with his commanding officer’, it would be easy to deem her a character of bad morals, however, the narrator complicates the ground for such a denouncement (Scott, *Chronicles* 94). The narrator does not condemn Elspat for her Highland morals but reflects on how the justice of the modern world was ‘to poor Elspat a book sealed and a fountain closed’ (83). Attaching the epithet ‘poor’ to Elspat implies a sense of pity from the narrator towards Elspat and as suggested by Cooney the readers ‘are invited to share some pity and sympathy for “poor Elspat”’, however, a ‘more completely romantic writer than Scott would have gone wholly over to Elspat’s side’ (14). Sympathy for Elspat is stimulated in the descriptions of her regret of her actions and plea to young Hamish to understand ‘that the heart of a mother only lives in the bosom of her child’ (Scott, *Chronicles* 105). The appeal to tender feelings of motherly love may inspire some understanding of her actions, yet, the tale does not cast Elspat as a tragic victim of a system, but a victim of a tragic end which Cooney suggests was ‘inevitable, given her

character' (14). In Elspat's own words she is the one who 'has murdered her own child' (Scott, *Chronicles* 120).

The fate of Elspat accentuates the sense of 'otherness' attached to Highland character in the texts discussed in this study in the sense of emphasising the incompatibility of old Highland morals in a modern civilisation. Accordingly, the narrative of Elspat and young Hamish is elevated beyond a personal to a greater political tragedy. Elaborating on this notion, it is argued by Lukács that 'Scott's greatness lies in his capacity to give living human embodiment to historical-social types (...) in which great historical trends become tangible' (Lukács 34-35). In the context of "The Highland Widow", Lukács notion is supported by Lamont arguing that "the individuals in the tale represent more than themselves in that their tragedy is produced by the circumstances of that time (some years after the Jacobite rising 1745-6) and place (the Highlands)' (xv). Considering the relationship between history and fiction, the arguments of Lukács and Lamont do not just situate the fictional Highlanders, Elspat and Hamish, in a historical context but makes them representatives of two sides of wider political tensions in the Highland transition 'from tribalism to capitalism' (Devine 110). Elspat as a representative of the 'spirit of the Gael' which is now 'sunk and broken by the severe perhaps necessary laws' of modern civilisation (Scott, *Chronicles* 86). Hamish as an embodiment of the Highlanders who tried to adapt to the new post-1745 order in Scotland. Thus, the literary Highlanders, Elspat and Hamish, can be argued to embody historical tensions making these more 'tangible'.

The Highlander's position between the historical and the fictional is complicated by the hybridity displayed by Scott and Chambers in the texts here discussed. Scott situates his fictional Highlanders in a historical context making them embodiments of complex tensions in the discussion of Highland character after the 1746 defeat, hence, transferring them from an exclusively fictional to a partly historical sphere. With the sign reversed, Chambers employs literariness to optimise the entertaining quality of his historical account of Highland character. Consequently, it can be suggested that neither Scott nor Chambers produce a completely literary or completely historical depiction of the Highlander in their writings. Both create a portrayal of the Highlander that combines the literary and the historical, accordingly, positioning the Highland figure somewhere in between.

The Highlander elevated to national symbol

Having now discussed the literary Highlander of the early 19th century as a figure moving between the historical and the fictional, the idealised and the uncivilised, the question of how this figure is elevated to a symbol of not just the Highlands but Scotland as a whole remains. In 2019, the Highland figure

that survives is not the uncivilised Lady MacBane ‘with her upper lip plentifully besprinkled with snuff’ (Green 181) nor are the Highlanders considered an ‘unimportant part of the Scottish population’ (Lockhart quoted in Devine 235). On the contrary, the Highlander is a figure at the heart of ‘the package of “tartan nostalgia” routinely used to promote Scotland’ (Gold 10). In Edinburgh, the annual Edinburgh Military Tattoo ‘delivers a packaged vision of Scottishness’ which ‘reiterates a Highland vision of the nation’ (Ramert 133), hence, exemplifying the present-day prominence of the Highland figure in the promotion of Scottish identity. A Highland figure which by *Visit Scotland* is presented as ‘noble clansmen’ and the Highlands as a land where ‘fierce battles’ and ‘bloody risings were won and lost’ (“About”) and a land of ‘majestic mountains and mysterious lochs’ (“Destinations”). In speaking of ‘noble clansmen’, *Visit Scotland* corresponds with Chambers’s depiction from 1827 of the Highland gentleman as a figure ‘of the very noblest order’ (“Highlander” 37). In addition, the description of the Highlands’ ‘majestic mountains’ echoes the romantic description of Bloomfield’s ‘Mountains so blue’ (16) and in the reference to ‘fierce battles’ and ‘bloody risings’ the epithets ‘fierce’ and ‘bloody’ resonates with the encouragement of the speaker in “The Black Watch” to ‘[l]et History on her pages’ write ‘[i]n blood, to coming ages’ (399). In short, *Visit Scotland* casts the Highlands as a land of legend, a land once inhabited by noble Highlanders, thus, it does not reflect the critique of the figure formulated in the 1820s but resonates with the more positive literary depictions discussed in this study. The scope of this study does not allow a complete chronological analysis of the decline of the critical portrayals of the Highlander in favour of the positive but will focus on how developments in the late 18th and early 19th centuries render a rise of Highlandism possible. A rise of Highlandism eventually leading to the Highlander being elevated to a symbol used to promote Scotland as a whole. Part of the explanation of this development will be argued to lie in a combination of the assimilation of living Highland culture and the rise of the literary Highlander.

The final defeat of the Jacobite rebels in 1746 instigates a period of rapid societal change in the Highlands that will here be argued to fuel a rise of nostalgia around the Highland figure. After the Jacobite defeat, ‘the British Government instituted a policy forcibly pacifying the Highlands’ instigating a period marked by suppression of Highland culture, a transformation of Highland economy and the Highland Clearances leading to a depopulation of the Highlands (Gold 12). In the words of Ferris, the Highlands stands ‘as the most dramatic instance in the period of forms of life eradicated by modernizing policies and processes’ (82). In the course of such rapid change, Smith argues that a common reaction is an ‘appeal to the past’ characterised by an idealisation of the ‘simpler ways of a golden age (...) which has been irretrievably lost’ (174-175). The nostalgic conception of ‘a golden

age' is reflected in the idealisation of the Highland people characterising both Bloomfield and Chambers who cast the Highlanders as 'a distinct picture of those early shepherd days' (Chambers 24). Casting the Highlanders as a people 'of those early shepherd days', Chambers situates the Highland figure in 'a golden age' that has been lost, hence, it can be suggested that Chambers positions his depiction of the Highlander in a framework of nostalgia.

Situating the Highlander in a past that has been lost, Chambers exemplifies how the pre-1745 order in the Highlands by 1827 is steadily vanishing from living memory. The traditional Highland way of life has by large transferred from living culture to a presence in literature and cultural memory. According to Aleida Assman, cultural memory differs from the individual memory of experienced events in the notion that cultural memories 'are mediated' (215). Mediated in the sense that it is a 'combination of remembering and forgetting' in which 'a society consciously selects' what is considered 'salient and vital' to remember (Assman 220-221). Similarly, it is argued by Morris and Morton that history 'is a value loaded interpretation of the past for the benefit of the present' (91). Thus, to understand the elevation of the Highlander from uncivilised mountaineer to national symbol, one must understand the context of this elevation.

The elevation was a gradual process spanning over several years, but in the beginning of the 19th century, the Highlanders are, predominantly, 'no longer seen as a backward, violent and feckless people' but are instead 'recast as the survivors of an older chivalrous order' (Gold 15). Choosing the word 'recast' to describe the development in the public opinion of the Highlanders, Gold echoes Assman and Morris in the notion that cultural memory and history are adapted versions of the past. In addition, this re-casting of the Highland figure is reflected in the period in how '(mostly) imagined and false Highland "traditions" were absorbed freely by Lowland élites', thus, in many ways suggesting Highlandism to be an 'invention of tradition' (Devine 233). Considering the assimilation of Highlanders in connection with the centrality of literature portraying the Highland figure, the literary depictions can be considered a central source for this 'invention' among Lowlanders and others from the generations born after the assimilation of living Highland culture. Serving as an example of how literature could aim to adapt the memory of the Highland figure, Chambers explicitly formulates an objective of correcting a 'common notion among the Lowlanders' that the Highlanders were 'all alike barbarians'; Chambers claims that '[n]othing could be farther from the truth' ("Highlander" 35-36). Hence, Chambers is attempting to adapt a negative notion of Highland character to a more positive one through the means of literature.

The positive adaptation of the view on Highland character, as exemplified in Chambers, can be connected with three interrelated developments in Scottish society. The first lies in the passage of time. By the 1820s ‘the threat of rebellion had long since been extinguished and enough time had lapsed for men such as Walter Scott to feel confident in their use of tartan and Highland dress to represent what they felt should be a Scottish national identity’ (Tuckett 145). The Jacobite movement has been suppressed and is no longer a political threat; a fact which provides scope for the development of a ‘romantic Jacobitism’ (Gold 14). In literature, this is reflected in the fact that ‘[b]y the 1820s, songs with a Jacobite theme were second only to love songs in number and quality in the popular Scottish canon’ (Devine 238). Supporting this study’s argument of literature as central for formulating a memory of the Highland figure, Davis argues that in the early 19th century ‘Scottish songs assert Scottish identity’ (193), accordingly, the popularity of songs displaying a ‘romantic Jacobitism’ can be argued to add to the positive adaptation of the public opinion on Highland character.

The development of ‘romantic Jacobitism’ can be connected with the second development: the Highland Clearances which was ‘an ongoing and visible process in the early nineteenth century’ (Ferris 83). A process where Highlanders were ‘brutally forced from their homes’ (Shields 115-116). Being ‘brutally forced from their homes’, it can be suggested that the Highland Clearances recasts the Highlanders as victims as well as former rebels, consequently, making the Highlander a character amenable to sympathy in Scotland as a whole. In addition, the third development is reflected in the literary tendency of militarisation as exemplified in “The Black Watch” and “The Highland Widow”. When young Hamish declares that he has ‘enlisted in one of the new regiments’ (Scott, *Chronicles* 88), Hamish stands as an example of one of many Highlanders who fought in British service after the Jacobite risings. The positive reputation of the Highland regiments ‘especially during the Napoleonic Wars, lent a new prestige and glamour to the wearing of tartan’ and ‘the kilt came to be associated with heroic deeds of the Scottish soldier’ (Devine 234). The significance of the Highland dress as associated with not just the Highlander, but the Scottish soldier can be argued central for the Highlander’s elevation to national symbol as ‘battle myths’ are ‘crucial for maintaining ethnic sentiments in later generations’ (Smith 74). Therefore, the linking of Highland dress with the heroic deeds of Scottish soldiers in general may have contributed to creating ‘ethnic sentiments’ not exclusive to Highlanders but eventually shared by Highlanders and Lowlanders alike.

Finally, the elevation of the Highlander to national symbol must also be understood in the context of the union with England. Being ‘a much more powerful neighbour’, England is argued by Devine to have posed a threat to Scotland of ‘cultural conquest’ (245). McCracken-Flesher suggests

that this ‘cultural conquest’ is a reality in the early nineteenth century which makes Scots wonder whether they are ‘declining into a cultural colony of England’ (70). In the early 19th century, Scotland has, modelled after England, undergone an extensive process of urbanisation and are, consequently, a nation utterly changed (Devine 110). A change leading not just to nostalgia in the Highlands but, as suggested by McCracken-Flesher, an identity crisis in Scotland. The rise of Highlandism can, hence, be argued to have ‘answered the emotional need for the maintenance of a distinctive Scottish identity without in any way compromising the union’ (Devine 244). In line with this argument, the Highland figures presented in the four main texts discussed in this study all succeed in formulating versions of the Highlander that do not compromise the union. Bloomfield’s drover and his wife Maggy are presented as domestic ideals, the morals of the stubborn Highlander Elspat is deemed incompatible with a just and modern society, “The Black Watch” aligns former battles of independence with more recent battles for the union and Chambers casts the Highlanders as noble heroes solidly situated in the past. Balancing between the literary and the historical, the literary Highlander stands as an adapted version of the Highlander offering a symbol of Scottish identity independent of, but not compromising the union.

Conclusion

In summary, this study has identified the Highlander of the early 19th century as a figure moving between assimilation and literary idealisation, popularity and critique, the historical and the fictional, contested and favoured candidate for becoming a national symbol of Scotland. The multifaceted nature of the Highland figure in the early 19th century has been argued to be reflected in four dominating discourses in the literary portrayal of the Highlander as exemplified in four texts published in 1827: “The Highlander” (Chambers) and “Song for a Highland Drover Returning from England” (Bloomfield) exemplify a romantic discourse casting the Highlanders as a simple, noble people with deep connections to the mountain landscape. Bloomfield is, furthermore, providing an example of the domestication discourse in his portrayal of the drover and his wife Maggy as ideals embodying family virtues. “The Black Watch” offers a militarised image of the Highlander and in “The Highland Widow”, Scott emphasises the necessity of a sacrifice of traditional Highland morals. All four discourses have been argued to share the feature of exhibiting a quality of otherness in Highland character. In a positive mode, the Highlander is distinguished by Chambers as a figure distinct from modern civilisation and subject to a romantic idealisation. However, where Chambers attaches the sense of otherness specifically to Highland character, Bloomfield and “Black” emphasise a distinctive

Scottishness in Highland character that has been suggested to align the Highlander with a broader Scottish identity. In a negative mode, Scott emphasises the incompatibility between Highland morals and modern civilisation. A negative quality of otherness is further accentuated in Green's satirical portrayal of the uncivilised Lady MacBane in *Scotch Novel Reading; Or Modern Quackery*. Following the argument of Shields, the critique expressed in Green's novel has been identified as an attack on Scottish fiction which is criticised for deceiving its readers by idealising an uncivilised people. This critique has been suggested to raise a central question of the relationship between "truth" and fiction leading to a discussion of Chambers's non-fictional study of Highland character and selected passages from Scott's *Chronicles of the Canongate*. It has been argued that neither Scott nor Chambers produce a completely literary or completely historical depiction of the Highlander in their writings. Situated in a historical context, Scott's fictional Highlanders are made embodiments of the complex tensions in the discussion of Highland character after the 1746 Jacobite defeat, hence, transferring them from an exclusively fictional to a partly historical sphere. Correspondingly, Chambers employs the literary tools of imagery and internal focalisation in his historical account. Consequently, the Highland figure has been suggested to become a borderer between the fictional and the historical.

In itself, the year 1827 is not a year of a ground-breaking event changing the public opinion on the Highland figure. Yet, the year occupies a central place in a continuous development in the notion of Highlanders from uncivilised to idealised. Held up against critique of the Highland figure in the 1820s, the literature from 1827 discussed in this study has been presented as serving as an example from the post-1745 transition period in the public opinion on the Highlander. A period where the combination of the assimilation of the actual Highlanders, the centrality of the Highlander as a military hero and the rise of the Highlander as an increasingly idealised literary figure has been argued to render the elevation of the Highlander to national symbol possible. In addition, it has been argued that the Highland figure – whether romanticised, domesticated, sacrificed or even militarised – was adapted to answer the need for a distinct Scottish identity in the early 19th century that did not compromise the union. In 2019, Scotland is still a nation within a nation and the Highlander survives as a figure to promote Scotland. Thus, the Highlander has been suggested to have been transferred from contested, uncivilised figure, to idealised literary figure and eventually a selling point of Scottish legend. However, only time can tell what the future holds for the Highland figure in a Scotland once again trying to manifest its identity as separate from England; this time around compromising the union by calling for a second referendum on independence (Carrell and Brooks).

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