

THE POETICS OF
NATIONAL AND RACIAL
IDENTITY IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY
AMERICAN LITERATURE

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CHAPTER ONE

"We are five-and-forty": meter and national identity in Sir Walter Scott

While composing the second of his *Letters of Malachi Malagrowther* (1826), Sir Walter Scott paused long enough to record the following remarks in his *Journal*:

Spent the morning and till dinner on *Malachi's Second Epistle to the Athenians*. It is difficult to steer betwixt the natural impulse of one's National feelings setting in one direction and the prudent regard to the interests of the empire and its internal peace and quiet recommending less vehement expression. I will endeavour to keep sight of both. But were my own interest alone concern[e]d, d – n me but I wa'd give it them hot.¹

The tension between "National feelings" and "the interests of the empire" points to a problem that, as we shall see, runs throughout the *Letters of Malachi Malagrowther*, the problem of sustaining Scotland's national integrity under the imperial jurisdiction of Great Britain, but in this *Journal* entry the immediate concern is somewhat different. Here Scott wonders whether he asserts Scottish autonomy too forcefully – whether his tone is too "hot."

Scott's concern was justified. The Scottish Lord Melville was moved to "condemning . . . the inflammatory tendency of his letters," arguing that "popular inflammation . . . is seldom resorted to by those who really wish well to their country." The imputation of disloyalty was made more explicit when John Croker, in the government's official response to Scott's *Letters*, asserted that "the *loyalty* which could be shaken, as yours seems to have been . . . was, like your plaids, loosely worn, and easily cast off." Croker's response was both invoked and reiterated in Parliament, with one member of the Commons noting, "if not rebellion, there was certainly a very marked seditious spirit manifested in the appeal," and if this language is deliberately hyperbolic, the hyperbole nevertheless registers genuine concern for the integrity of the Union.²

Such concern seems misplaced given Scott's commitment, in the above *Journal* entry, to a "prudent regard to the interests of the empire." I want to suggest that these respondents cast Scott's *Letters* as a source of separatist politics because they fail to see Scott's Unionist poetics. Viewed in terms of this poetics, what is important about the *Letters* is not their inflammatory language but their national meter, and meter is national, according to Scott, insofar as it functions as a "summons" to Scottish national identity: meter's formal effects assemble the Scottish people as a people and thereby demonstrate Scotland's ongoing integrity as an autonomous nation. While this poetics escaped the notice of Melville and Croker, I will show it to be present not only in these *Letters* but also in Scott's other writings of the period, writings in which poetic meter is Scott's vehicle for imagining an identity for Scotland that is neither hostile to Britain nor threatened by it, an identity that would allow him to "keep sight of both" his "National feelings" and "the interests of the empire." As he adapts meter to this account of nation, Scott appropriates to his cause the prosody of contemporary poets, including Wordsworth and Coleridge, projecting upon their works his own view of meter and thus recasting those works as illustrations of his claim that meter serves as a national summons.

As recent scholarship has shown, there is something implausible in treating the meter of a poem – whether it comes from Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Scott himself – as intrinsically national.³ Thus as I reconstruct the logic of Scott's metrical summons my aim is to emphasize not its suitability as a general account of poetics but its functionality as a vehicle for Scott's very particular politics – his defense of Scottish national autonomy within Britain. As we will see, Scott imagines national identity and national subjectivity in a manner that differs significantly from important accounts of national identity recently advanced by critics like Katie Trumpener, Homi Bhabha, and Benedict Anderson. Scott's account is more than merely idiosyncratic, however, for as I will show, in deviating from these critics' discussions, Scott exemplifies a pattern of thinking that will become quite prominent, the view that metrical form can serve as the foundation for the identity of a people.

NATIONAL IMPRESS

Scott was drawn into a public defense of Scottish national autonomy after the British Parliament responded to the 1825 financial panic with an 1826 currency reform: small bank notes would henceforth be replaced by specie throughout Great Britain.⁴ In Scotland, opponents of the reform

claimed that economic prosperity depended on these small bank notes, and while Scott's *Letters of Malachi Malagrowther* also spoke of them as "nearly indispensable to . . . carrying on business of almost any kind in Scotland," his contribution to the debate involved not so much an elucidation of currency theory as the creation of a persona, Malachi Malagrowther, the speaker in this series of three letters to the editor of the *Edinburgh Weekly Journal*.⁵ Occupying the position of antiquarian cultural nationalism (Scott's *Journal* describes him as "an uncompromising right forward Scot of the Old School" [J, 99]), Malagrowther condemns the currency reform as much for its blatant "national insult" (735) as for its flawed monetary policy. In the discussion that follows I will be concerned not with Scott's (admittedly substantial) role in defeating the currency reform,⁶ nor with his (frankly inconsequential) contribution to currency theory,⁷ but rather with the larger question of how his engagement with this issue led him to "keep sight of both" nation and empire by formulating their relation in an unusual way, one that draws its underlying logic from discussions of poetic meter.

As he argues against the currency reform, Scott's Malagrowther asserts that "ministers see no reason why any law adopted on this subject [i.e. note issues] should not be imperative over all his Majesty's dominions, including Scotland, *for uniformity's sake*" (730). This pursuit of "uniformity" as an end in itself (728) overlooks the "three separate nations" that make up the "one empire" (749) of Britain, thus betraying the ministers' larger ambition to "assimilate" (726) Scotland within Britain's one "general system" (730). Such a goal threatens "to annul and dissolve all the distinctions and peculiarities" (748–49) that make Scotland Scotland. In response, Malagrowther asserts,

For God's sake, sir, let us remain as Nature made us, Englishmen, Irishmen, and Scotchmen, with something like the impress of our several countries upon each! We would not become better subjects, or more valuable members of the common empire, if we all resembled each other like so many smooth shillings. . . . The degree of national diversity between different countries is but an instance of that general variety which Nature seems to have adopted as a principle through all her works, as anxious, apparently, to avoid, as modern statesmen to enforce, any thing like an approach to absolute "uniformity." (749)

Here Malagrowther invokes currency not as a theoretical issue but as a rhetorical device, one that counters enforced uniformity by asserting a distinction between value, on the one hand, and identity on the other. Shillings are "not . . . more valuable" even when worn "smooth" since their

value to the empire stems from the quantity of silver they contain (1 / 20 £.) rather than the inscription they bear; smooth shillings, after all, continue to circulate throughout the “common empire” as silver bullion, a barter commodity that contributes to the empire’s vast material resources.⁸ What is true of shillings also applies to “subjects,” for according to Malagrowther, imperial subjects are “like” smooth shillings insofar as they all “resembled each other” – subjects are likewise a uniform natural resource contributing their value to the common empire. While resemblance among smooth shillings or uniform subjects does not diminish the value of each to the empire, it does have an effect on national identity: just as an “impress” gives an identity to silver bullion (making it into shillings), so “Nature” adds its own mint mark to subjects, imparting the “distinctions and peculiarities” that, far from “empty forms,”⁹ are the basis of a particular national identity as “Englishmen, Irishmen, and Scotchmen.” According to Malagrowther, part of the impress that marks Scotsmen as Scotsmen is the long-standing practice of issuing small bank bills; the plan to end that practice, then, brings Scottish national identity that much closer to smooth imperial uniformity, a change that will not affect the *value* of British subjects (any more than the smoothness of a shilling affects its value as silver bullion), but that undermines the *identity* of Scotland itself, placing at risk “the well-being, nay, the very being, of our ancient kingdom” (737).¹⁰

Protecting the national “variety” of Scotland, then, requires protecting its national impress, and one of Malagrowther’s strategies for such protection is to argue that Parliament can no more legislate circulation of specie over paper than it can legislate crops of wheat over oats (730), but this appeal to Scottish soil is undermined when Malagrowther goes on to embrace shared banking practices among Scotland, Ireland, and England (739, 726).¹¹ As an alternative protection of Scotland’s national impress, Malagrowther argues that if civic institutions like banking *can* transfer to a different national soil, then whether they *may* do so is, according to the Treaty of Union, a decision for Scotsmen alone to make (731). Again, however, Malagrowther acknowledges that this is so only if England, the stronger party to the treaty, agrees to be bound by it, and this caveat places Scottish national identity at the mercy of “the national honour of Old England” (732).¹² Finally, Malagrowther seeks to protect Scotland’s national impress by suggesting that ministers’ aim of “*uniformity* of civil institutions” is “descended from . . . Conformity in religious doctrine” (734). The English become “Rabbies” and “Law Monks” who “are devoted to their own Rule, and admit of no question of its infallibility” (726), so

conformity involves not a dispute within Christianity (i.e. disagreements between Scottish Presbyterians and English Episcopalians) but a fear that the English will “treat us as the Spaniards treated the Indians, whom they massacred for worshipping the image of the sun, while they themselves bowed down to that of the Virgin Mary. . .” (727).

By rewriting civil uniformity as religious conformity Malagrowther does not so much protect Scotland’s national impress as re-describe its peril: the impress will be worn smooth as a result of conversion.¹³ The problem, then, is not that the English are “devoted to their own religion” but that, as with the Spanish treatment of the Indians, such devotion is “monopoliz[ed]” (726): “these English Monks will not tolerate in their lay-brethren of the North the slightest pretence to a similar feeling” (726) – the English mistake, that is, is a “proselytism” (726) that is blind to “the feelings of dissenters” (726), of the Scots who feel a similar “devotion” to their own “ancient jurisdiction” (727). For Malagrowther, moreover, the danger is less that Scots will (like the Indians) resist such proselytism and be “massacred” but that the same result, the end of a distinct people, is already underway as Scots greet imperial uniformity with “submissive acquiescence” (735). After decades of commercial prosperity, a state of “repletion” (735) is causing national sentiment to wane. Rare exceptions include Malagrowther’s grandfather who, after reading the clause in the Treaty of Union that guarantees Scottish autonomy, then (as Malagrowther relates) “exclaimed, ‘*Nemo me impune lacesset!*’”¹⁴ which I presume, are words belonging to the black art, since there is no one in the Modern Athens conjuror enough to understand their meaning, or at least to comprehend the spirit of the sentiment which my grandfather thought they conveyed” (731). Under this “Modern” condition of widespread indifference to Scotland’s national autonomy the national motto is virtually unrecognized, and Malagrowther expects that the Treaty of Union itself will soon be “voted obsolete,” with only “the old parchment . . . preserved . . . in the Museum of the Antiquaries, where, with . . . other antiquated documents once held in reverence, it might silently contract dust, yet remain to bear witness that such things had been” (732). As the “sentiment” for independence dies out and national documents gather “dust,” Scotland’s national impress starts to look like it needs protection as much from present-day Scots as from the imperial Parliament in England.

As a way of countering this threat – both internal and external – to Scotland’s national impress, Malagrowther invokes a somewhat different motto from his grandfather’s Latin phrase, a “verse from an old song” (739) that serves as a “motto” for the second of his *Letters*:

When the pipes begin to play
Tutti taattie to the drum,
 Out claymore, and down wi' gun,
 And to the rogues again.

(739 n.)¹⁵

Describing himself as “desirous, by every effort in my power, to awaken [my countrymen] to a sense of their national danger” (739), Malagrowther sees this song verse as one means to that end, for it is “the summons which my countrymen have been best accustomed to obey” (739). As a “summons” addressed to “my countrymen,” the motto is intended to awaken the Scottish people to vigilant protection of their national impress. But even as it seems to protect the national impress of Scots, it seems also to endanger neighboring Englishmen, the “rogues” under attack. Aware of this potential reading of the motto, Malagrowther hopes to allay any concerns: “The motto of my epistle may sound a little warlike. . . . But it is not a hostile signal towards you [i.e. England] . . . To my countrymen I speak in the language of many recollections, certain they are not likely to be excited beyond the bounds of temperate and constitutional remonstrance” (739). Despite these assurances, the song verse generated such alarm among English readers that a later edition relegated it to a footnote, “some cautious friends,” the note explains, “thinking it liable to misinterpretation” (739n.).

To interpret the song as “hostile” and “warlike” seems almost inevitable given the military circumstance it depicts. But such a literal reading of the song envisions victory for only one side, so it fails to “keep sight of both” nation and empire. If this warlike reading amounts to a *mis*interpretation, then what manner of interpretation would permit the motto to function, as Malagrowther imagines, as a gesture that both protects Scotland’s national impress and avoids hostility toward England? One possibility is to read the story the song tells not as a literal call for violence but as an allegory for the currency reform. In such an interpretation the Highlanders’ preference for claymores over guns (“Out claymore, and down wi’ gun”) might correspond to contemporary Scotsmen’s preference for old banking methods over English reforms: out small notes and down with coins. This allegorical interpretation moves on the terrain of economics, where the aim is not a “warlike” revolt but a continuity of effective monetary policy, and this continuity of banknotes – Scotland’s national impress – protects Scottish identity while avoiding “warlike” hostility toward England.

Such a reading may avoid misinterpreting the song as “warlike,” but it nevertheless does not seem to be the reading Malagrowther has in mind.

Far from imagining that Scotsmen will have to interpret the motto as an allegory of their historical present, Malagrowther is confident that they will respond to it immediately and directly:

The motto of my epistle may sound a little warlike; but, in using it, I have only employed the summons which my countrymen have been best accustomed to obey. . . . The drums beat to *arms* and the trumpets sound *Heraus*, as well when the soldiers are called out for a peaceful as for a military object. And, which is more to the purpose, the last time the celebrated Fiery Cross was circulated in the Highlands . . . the clansmen were called forth not to fight an enemy, but to stop the progress of a dreadful conflagration. (739)

Scotsmen are “called forth” by the summons first and foremost to be a people, and only then to designate and carry out their common “object,” whether it be “peaceful” or “military.” By separating these various objects (i.e. charging with claymores, fighting a fire, paying with banknotes) from the summons that calls forth a group who might perform them, Malagrowther is not so much drawing an *analogy* among a sequence of distinct “objects” as asserting an *identity* among those who perform them: what directly identifies Scotsmen of 1745 with those of 1826 is their common response to the summons, regardless of what the assembled group is subsequently asked to do (and indeed whether they actually do it). So instead of urging Scotsmen to draw lessons from historical analogies – a history, after all, whose lessons would be available to Scots and non-Scots alike – Malagrowther urges them to identify directly with that past, and such direct identification is possible only if analogous but distinct aims (i.e. fighting with claymores or paying with banknotes) are subsumed under a common Scottish identity shared across time. The motto, by this account, is neither a literal incitement to violence nor an allegorical lesson from history; rather, it is a “summons” by which the Scottish people – whether of 1745 or 1826 – can be “called forth.”

Treating the motto as a summons distinguishes it not only from its thematic account of “warlike” claymores but also from another thematic element of the song, the bagpipe signal. In the song, the sound of the bagpipes, or “*Tutti taittie*,” is designated as the signal to charge. As with signals generally, this sound is stipulated as a cue for action. But since this cue can be stipulated to a group only after that group has been assembled, the summoning of that group must occur at an earlier moment. It is this earlier summons that matters to Malagrowther: his concern is not that an assembled group might be taught to interpret the bagpipe as a signal to charge but that such a group – a Scottish people – could be assembled in the first place. Thus for the purposes of the summons, the bagpipe

and the action it cues are just as incidental as the claymore. Indeed, as a summons, the song is reducible to none of its thematic elements: since, as we have seen, it does not require an “enemy,” even the “rogues” (i.e. the English) are irrelevant to its function as a summons. The summoning the motto accomplishes is ultimately distinct from the story the motto tells.

Once these thematic elements are set aside, the remaining feature of the motto that plausibly accounts for its summoning function is its formal status as a song, a metered set of lines. But if it is this form, and not the motto’s content, that accounts for its function as a summons, then how does form alone accomplish this? That is, how can mere sound effects, as distinct from the meanings they convey, have this effect of summoning forth Scots as a people?

One way of answering this question is by reference to the motto’s second line, which features the phrase “*Tutti taittie*.” Now from one perspective, this phrase is simultaneously a sound effect and a semantic sign – indeed, by embodying what it represents (the sound of the bagpipe), it is an onomatopoetic sign.¹⁶ As with all instances of onomatopoeia, the medium is not merely transparent but also opaque, so it asserts itself in a manner that accentuates the meaning being conveyed – here, even as it *represents* the sound of the bagpipe, “*Tutti taittie*” also *embodies* that sound. Only the phrase “*Tutti taittie*” functions in this way; while all the lines of the motto share the metrical regularity of this phrase, only here are those metrical effects brought to the fore to work in partnership with the semantic content. But as we have seen, in imagining the motto as a summons, Malagrowther views its form as *distinct from* its content, not in *partnership with* its content: while the words are representing warlike conflict, the form is summoning Scots as Scots. Setting content aside in this way has two consequences for the discussion of “*Tutti taittie*.” First, in losing its partnership with thematic content, “*Tutti taittie*” loses the context that had identified what sound its sounds embody: if the phrase “*Tutti taittie*” is no longer *representing* the sound of the bagpipe, there is no longer any reason to think of its sounds as *embodying* the sound of the bagpipe.¹⁷ Instead of being bagpipe sounds, it would seem to be nothing more than metered syllables. Second, without a thematic partner, these few syllables look no different from the metrical form in the remainder of the line and, indeed, the rest of the motto. From this perspective, the assertion of sound effects that had seemed to occur only locally – only within the onomatopoetic phrase “*Tutti taittie*” – reveals itself to be a pervasive feature of the motto. It is this pervasive metrical form – as distinct from the semantic content of “claymore,” “rogues,”

and even "*Tutti taittie*," – that Malagrowther wishes to assert as the basis for his summons.

But if "*Tutti taittie*" and the rest of the motto's meter are not the sound of bagpipes, what are they the sound of such that they can assemble Scots as a people? Malagrowther's implicit answer comes by way of analogy to onomatopoeia: just as the sounds of "*Tutti taittie*" could embody the sound of the bagpipe, so the sounds of the motto as a whole are more than mere metrical effects – they embody Scottishness. Implicit here, this notion is explicit in Scott's later account of popular poetry in Scotland. There he observes that "the language of Scotland, most commonly spoken, began to be that of their neighbors, the English," but "the music continued to be Celtic in its general measure," so if "the Scottish people . . . adopted . . . the Saxon language" (542), they nevertheless remained true to the "aboriginal race, – a race passionately addicted to music, . . . preserving . . . to this day a style and character of music peculiar to their own country" (541).¹⁸ The peculiarity of Scottish musical measure is embodied in the metrical features of the motto (itself a song verse), so just as Scottish music can remain distinct from English words, so too the motto's Scottish meter can remain distinct from its English language content. While the words may have meaning in English, the meter embodies Scottishness. This suggests a new way of thinking about "*Tutti taittie*": instead of bagpipe sounds working in partnership with the semantic meaning, it is an eruption of Scottish meter amidst English words. While this is most conspicuous in "*Tutti taittie*" (where sound effects are foregrounded), the motto as a whole is pervaded by these Scottish sounds. Two nationalities exist side-by-side, sorted according to form and theme.

But if this analysis helps clarify what is at stake for Malagrowther as he isolates the motto's form from its thematic content, our earlier question remains unanswered: once separated from the meanings they convey, how do these Scottish sounds summon Scots? As we saw, the English "misinterpretation" stems from reading the song's warlike words and ignoring the effect of its sound, a national sound that, according to Malagrowther, is recognizably Scottish. Stripped of thematic content and reduced to a peculiarly Scottish metrical form, the song does not have a semantic meaning so much as a national identity – it is not read so much as recognized. Recognizing the Scottishness of the motto's meter concerns a point prior to consent, when those "called forth" have not yet been told what they will be asked to do and thus have not been given a chance to comply or refuse. Instead of inviting listeners to make a choice, the summons induces them to assemble, and it does so by triggering shared experience of shared memories:

"To my countrymen I speak in the language of many recollections" (739). Those who are summoned both perceive the song and experience their recollections of it, the perception immediately triggering the recollection. Since this experience of the summons involves not choosing but remembering, it circumvents deliberation.¹⁹ This is why the summons is something "which my countrymen have been best accustomed to *obey*" (739; emphasis added), and while the very notion of obedience would seem to imply the possibility of disobedience, Malagrowther rewrites a failure to obey as a failure to be: "If there is . . . a mean-spirited Scotsman, who prefers the orders of the [English] minister to the unanimous voice of his country . . . , let England keep him to herself . . . he cannot be a Scottish man in spirit . . . he is not of us" (737). Those who experience the summons as a summons – who, upon hearing it, also recollect it – confirm the presence within them of those memories, of that Scottish spirit. Just as viewing the motto as a summons brings to the fore its national meter, subordinating its meaningful words to its Scottish sounds, so summoned Scotsmen bring to the fore their national recollections, subordinating their status as deliberating imperial subjects to their underlying national memory and, thus, national identity. Scotland's national impress, then, consists not in Scotsmen's devotion to their own laws (a devotion that can be rubbed smooth by conversion) but in their more durable ability to be summoned forth, as a people, by "the language of many recollections," the metrical form of a poem. It is this status as the language of many recollections that allows meter to become more than a *figure* for nation and to function, more forcefully, as an *agency* of national continuity.

THE "LANGUAGE OF MANY RECOLLECTIONS"

Once Malagrowther relocates Scotland's national impress from civil institutions like currency to the "language of many recollections," it makes sense to ask how Scots of 1826 could have had these recollections impressed upon them. Given the decades of commercial prosperity that, as Malagrowther observes, have largely aligned the experiences of Scots with those of Englishmen, how could Scots of 1826, those younger than Malagrowther's grandfather, have experienced national difference in a way that would permit such "recollections"? According to Malagrowther, these recollections do not in fact stem from actual experience, and in trying to account for such non-experiential recollections among Scots, he draws an analogy between Scots and aristocrats: a vote against the currency reform is something

Scotland demands . . . from the small, but honourable portion of the Upper House, who draw their honours from her ancient domains. Their ancestors have led her armies, concluded her treaties, managed her government, served her with hand and heart, sword and pen; and by such honourable merit with their country, have obtained the titles and distinctions which they have transmitted to the present race, by whom, we are well assured, they will be maintained with untarnished honour. (737)

This appeal rehearses the paradoxical logic of aristocratic standing, a standing that is both absolute and subject to maintenance: the “ancestors” of today’s “peers” performed acts of “honourable merit” by which they “obtained titles and distinctions,” and those titles have in turn been “transmitted to the present race” along lines of descent.²⁰ But if these titles have devolved intact, it is nevertheless hoped that they will be “maintained” through “the present race[’s]” similar acts of “honourable merit” on behalf of “her ancient domains”; it is hoped, more particularly, that peers will live up to the standing conferred upon them and resist the national affront of the currency reform: “whom among them could we suspect of deserting the Parent of his Honours, at the very moment when she is calling upon him for his filial aid?” (737). Such an act of maintenance wouldn’t *earn* a title (since ancestors did that) and it wouldn’t *confer* one (since “Scotland” initially did that, and descent or ancestry subsequently does so); rather, it *confirms* the inheritance of the title, serving as a representation of the otherwise invisible standing. The act of maintenance, then, is not only a political action but also a gesture of self-representation, and an act can have this double status only when there is an inherited title to represent; otherwise the deed would just be an isolated act, aid and not “filial aid,” a gesture of patriotic sentiment rather than a representation of honourable (i.e. aristocratic) standing.²¹

Malagrowther not only makes this appeal to Scotland’s peers, hoping to prompt votes against the reform, he also broadens the scope of his appeal to include the entire Scottish nation. Personifying Scotland as “Saunders” (just as England is “John Bull” and Ireland is “Paddy”), Malagrowther links his logic of aristocratic standing to his account of summoning: “in using it [the motto], I have only employed the summons which my countrymen have been best accustomed to obey. Saunders, if it please your honours [i.e. England], has been so long unused to stand erect in your honours’ presence, that, if I would have him behave like a man, I must . . . slap him on the shoulder, and throw a word in every now and then about his *honour*” (739). Much as peers were challenged to maintain their aristocratic honor, so Saunders – who functions here both as a peer and as “my countrymen” – is

challenged to respond to the summons, so the implication of Saunders (i.e. a Scottish peer) in the logic of aristocratic standing is just like the implication of Saunders (i.e. “my countrymen”) in the logic of the summons: if peers have inherited titles (i.e. credit for ancestors’ political actions), then “my countrymen” have inherited recollections (i.e. memories of ancestors’ cultural practices). Thus while peers represent their inherited standing through actions that confirm a title, “my countrymen” represent their inherited recollection through recognition that confirms recollections – through, that is, obedience to the summons. In this analogy, inherited *merit* for ancestral service to the nation-as-state is aligned with inherited *memory* of ancestral participation in the nation-as-culture, and the need, in the first case, for *political actions* that confirm aristocratic standing matches a need, in the second case, for *cultural recollections* that confirm national identity. Scotland becomes a “birthright” (735) in and of itself, and *all* Scots – “a Scotsman, and especially a Scottish nobleman” (737) – can recognize “the unanimous voice of his country, imploring the protection of her children” (737) because they are all included among that nation’s “children,” the inheritors of its national memory. Class difference (between peers and commoners) is replaced by national identity, and filial aid to the “Parent of his Honours” (by aristocrats) becomes filial aid to the Parent of his Memories (by Scotsmen generally), the transmission of aristocratic titles giving way to the transmission of the language of many recollections.

This notion of inherited recollections lies behind Malagrowther’s next example of the summons, an example in which he specifies how he would voice a rejoinder to English encroachments:

England – were it mine to prescribe the forms, my native country ought to address nearly in the words of her own Mason, mangled, I fear, in my recollection –

“Sister, to thee no ruder spell
Will Scotland use, than those that dwell
In soft Persuasion’s notes, and lie
Twined with the links of *Harmony*.”

Let us, therefore, my countrymen, make a proper and liberal allowance for the motives of the Ministers and their friends on this occasion. (739)

In this passage the poem occupies a space of apostrophe, for the first prose section describes the poem as an “address” to England and the second one suggests that it also speaks to “my countrymen,” or Scotsmen. Viewed from the first perspective, this poem’s words reflect the desired posture toward England: the notions of “*Harmony*” and “soft Persuasion” point to the “proper and liberal allowance” Malagrowther wishes to make for the Ministers’ good motives. But if these conciliatory words are directed

at England, the metrical form itself is drawn from and refers to the more reliable collective memory of Scotland: the native country speaks the verse form of William Mason, one of "her own" native sons. Thus the metrical form of the poem acts as a summons to "my countrymen" even as the words act as an address to "England." Such a split between form and content is itself thematized in the poem, where the "spell" is said to "dwell / in" or be "Twined with" "*Harmony*" and "soft Persuasion's notes." The "spell," then, figures the metrical summons to "my countrymen" that coexists with these words. English words might be a uniform institution across the British empire, but they are accompanied by a Scottish form that is irreducible to this institutional practice and that announces Scottishness even in the midst of that imperial sway. Indeed, once meter is invested with the force of a national summons, the words that accompany it become merely incidental: they can be "mangled" in one's recollection without affecting the underlying national form.²²

Viewed along with the motto, Mason's poem and its metrical summoning force reveals a shift that has occurred in Malagrowther's approach to representing the persistence of national "variety" against pressures toward imperial "uniformity": abandoning coins as his figure for the nation's relation to empire, he no longer needs to protect a "national impress" from being worn smooth. Focusing instead on poems, he can now conduct literary analyses that reveal, lurking alongside uniform imperial words, the ongoing presence of a peculiar national meter, and he can expect that Scots (those who have inherited "the language of many recollections") will experience this meter as a summons. Embodied in metrical form and recollected by all Scots, such a national impress is in no danger of falling prey to imperial uniformity. Unlike the national slogan "*Nemo me impune lacesset*," which, when spoken by Malagrowther's grandfather, was mistaken for "the black art" because the sounds of its Latin words left contemporary Scots unable to "understand their meaning" (731), the motto avoids this problem by abandoning all meaning, its rhythmic sounds alone functioning as a summons to Scottish national identity.

Malagrowther's notion that Scotland's national "variety" could be embodied in metrical variety runs counter to the influential metrical principles set out in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), which had called for uniformity of both words and prosody.²³ But as critics have often noted, the close of the eighteenth century saw a general retreat from Johnson's metrical principles as many poets, including Scott himself, cultivated a greater variety in their prosody. Doing so led to a tension between the uniformity demanded of word usage, on the one hand, and the variety embraced in metrical practice, on the other.²⁴ In his *Letters of Malachi*

Malagrowther, I am arguing, Scott is not only aware of this tension within poetry, but he also invests that tension with the political conflicts of imperial dominion: for Scott, the tension between uniform words and varying prosody comes to serve as a figure for the tension between the uniformity of the empire and the variety of its constituent nations, so English words are not just uniform but also imperial while meter – for instance, the meter of the motto or of Mason’s poem – not only figures variety, but the variety it figures is, Scott claims, distinctly national – in this case, Scottish.²⁵ By perpetuating national identity in tandem with the institutions of empire, the metrical summons advances Scott’s goal to “keep sight of both.” More than just a figure for national variety, however, we have seen that meter – as the “language of many recollections” – is also the *agency* for asserting this national variety. As we will see, this metrical summons provides a referent for Malagrowther’s notion that the “Parent of his Honours” is calling upon Scots for their “filial aid.”

MALAGROWTHER’S NATION AND WORDSWORTH’S EMPIRE

Just before he quotes the Mason poem, Malagrowther asserts the tense co-existence of imperial words and national meter by way of a more familiar poetic reference, in this case invoking “the sweet little rustic girl in a poem which it is almost a sin to parody” (736), the girl in Wordsworth’s “We are Seven” (1798). Wordsworth is an apt choice for exploring the relation between word and meter, for exploiting possible tensions between words and “superadded” meter is a prominent aspect of his poetry.²⁶ This particular poem exploits such a tension to an unusual degree, for even though its typical line is made up of seven iambic feet (four followed by three in the split-up septenarius), the poem’s first line is missing two feet (“A simple child, – / That lightly draws its breath”²⁷), so scanning it raises the question whether it consists of five or seven metrical feet. This formal choice between five and seven feet corresponds, of course, to the thematic debate between the poem’s two main figures, the rustic girl and the traveler: counting according to the metrical form (in spite of the missing words) is consistent with the rustic girl, who counts seven siblings even though two have died; counting only the ostensible words is consistent with the traveler, who insists, “If two are in the church-yard laid,/ Then ye are only five” (84).²⁸

Malagrowther adapts this debate about fives and sevens, words and meter, to his own agenda of defending Scottish national autonomy: this relation of traveler (words) to rustic girl (meter) repeats the relation of words to meter

that we saw in Mason's poem, so for Malagrowther, the traveler stands in for the English Ministers and the rustic girl speaks for Scotland (736). Scottish national autonomy has, like the rustic girl's siblings, receded into the remote past, and the tendency of a "preemptory Minister" to act as if Scotland had "altogether los[t] consideration" (735) matches the traveler's impulse to give diminished consideration to the rustic girl's family – to count five instead of seven siblings. But if Scottish representatives would only treat their national past the way the rustic girl treats her deceased siblings and the way scansion treats the meter of the poem's first line, as a felt presence despite physical absence, then they could continue to assert their autonomous nationhood:

our representatives must stand firm. I would advise that, to all such intimations as are usually circulated, bearing, "That your presence is earnestly requested on such an evening of the debate, as such or such a public measure is coming on," the concise answer should be returned, "*We are five-and-forty*;" and that no Scottish members do on such occasions attend. (737)

Instead of obeying an imperial summons, the forty-five Scottish Ministers should obey this national one. The refrain "*We are five-and-forty*" replaces the rustic girl's "*We are seven*," but the point remains the same: one must insist that an aspect of the remote past, Scottish national autonomy, still has bearing in the present. In this case, as with the rustic girl, meter marks the absence of, and thereby enables the persistence of, a superseded point of history, a point when words filled out a metered line, when siblings were still living, when the nation enjoyed independence. In appropriating the rustic girl's voice, Malagrowther urges that her persistent attachment to deceased siblings serve as a model for Scotsmen's persistent attachment to national autonomy, and like Wordsworth, he makes this point by subordinating traveler to rustic girl and words to metrical form.²⁹

If Wordsworth's poem lends itself well to Malagrowther's project, a project of using the formal features of poems to imagine how the Scottish people might sustain their autonomy within Britain, this use of it nevertheless deviates considerably from Wordsworth's own poetic aims. In associating meter with the rustic girl's memories of deceased siblings, Wordsworth seeks to show how the girl fondly remembers habitual features of her personal past, and not, as Malagrowther would have it, how she is imperiously summoned to obedient recognition of her national past. Scott's deviation from Wordsworth's aims becomes apparent when we examine the context in which "*We are Seven*" first appeared, the 1798 collection of *Lyrical Ballads*.

In Wordsworth's "Preface" (1802) to this collection he describes the poet's aim as one not of enforcing obedience to a national metrical summons but of displaying the pleasurable relation people bear to the habits they have gradually acquired through their regular interactions with the surrounding empirical world, a world in which meter is just one of many sources of sensation:

We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone. . . . What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions which by habit become of the nature of intuitions; he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding every where objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment. To this knowledge which all men carry about with them, and to these sympathies in which without any other discipline than that of our daily life we are fitted to take delight, the Poet principally directs his attention. He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other . . . (605–06)

The burden of this passage is to explain how it is that "objects . . . immediately excite . . . sympathies." They do so not because people obey a summons but because in the "ordinary" course of their "daily life" people interact with the objects that surround them, eventually becoming so "adapted" or "fitted" to those objects that experiencing them prompts an accompanying "enjoyment." This is not the pleasure of sensory stimulation from the object itself but, rather, an acquired and persistent *disposition* to take pleasure, so it stems from within, from the "habits" that sensation has gradually established, the "built up" "knowledge which all men carry about with them."³⁰ Once one's interactions with the empirical world have "by habit become of the nature of intuition," this enjoyment then becomes one of "the necessities of his nature" – i.e. it becomes second nature.³¹ And if people have this pleasurable, habit-based relation to objects, the poet in turn has a relation to this relation: the poet "considers man . . . as contemplating . . ." or "he considers him as looking . . ." – "He considers," that is, the "essentially adapted" relation of sensory habituation that can develop between "man and nature."

Bearing in mind these statements from the "Preface," we can better understand Wordsworth's aim in "We are Seven." In counting to seven the rustic girl registers the presence not of siblings but of her habit-based

attachment to them, an attachment that developed as they lived and persists (as her second nature) after their death, thus disposing her to continue to enjoy her habitual relation to them – eating and singing with them – even in their absence. It is not the siblings' summoning jurisdiction over her but her own "built up," pleasurable knowledge of them that the girl displays in her conversation with the traveler. Himself a stranger in the region, the traveler has not interacted with the objects that consistently surround the girl, so he cannot share her intuitive pleasure in them. For his part, Wordsworth takes the poet's role: he considers the little girl as contemplating her siblings in this intuitive or habit-based way, and his object is her habitual (and thus pleasurable) relation to these objects. We see, then, that the debate Wordsworth stages is not between nation and empire but between a person who carries around with her this empirically derived disposition to take pleasure in (now absent) objects and a person who, in the absence of these objects, cannot experience them at all.

If Wordsworth here treats siblings as objects which one can learn to delight in, he takes the same view toward poetic meter. When he speaks of the "feelings of pleasure which the Reader has been accustomed to connect with meter in general" (610), he attributes to readers an acquired delight in meter much like the rustic girl's acquired delight in her siblings.³² If they are "essentially adapted" to take pleasure in meter, readers should be able to count out the missing metrical feet in the same way that the girl counts her absent siblings; they should have acquired an intuitive sense of how to complete the split-up septanarius just as she has acquired an intuitive sense of how to think of her siblings as ever present. When Wordsworth worries that readers might, like the traveler, not possess this intuitive disposition to take pleasure, he suggests an education program through which they can gradually develop it: "an *accurate* taste in poetry . . . is an *acquired* talent, which can only be produced by thought, and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition" (614). This acquired (or at least acquirable) delight in poetic meter is not specific to any one group of people, for his notion of the "general power of numbers" (609) suggests that anyone could attain it.

One can attain such a relation to more than siblings and meter, for Wordsworth asserts this as an available relation to all objects of sense, even the new ones that science might disclose: "The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective Sciences

shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings" (607). Across this diversity of sense objects, what is common is "the relations under which they are contemplated," and it is the poet's attention to these relations, to these habits, that permits him to look beyond the habit of cherishing a particular object and toward this general disposition to have such pleasurable knowledge:

In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. The objects of the Poet's thoughts are every where; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favorite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. (606)

The notions of "soil," "manners," "language," and "laws" often served contemporaries (including, as we have seen, Scott's Malagrowther) as arguments for national distinctiveness, so Wordsworth's notion that "the Poet binds together . . . human society" despite such differences points to an explicitly anti-national stance. Instead of underwriting national particularity, Wordsworth seeks to put on display a human-wide "empire" of "passion and knowledge," finding "every where" habit-objects sufficient to inspire it. The "charm" he associates with meter, then, is not Scott's nationally specific summons but an international habit, "the charm which, by the consent of all nations, is acknowledged to exist in metrical language" (609). If Scott uses meter to secure a bounded national identity, Wordsworth uses it to anticipate an ever-expanding human empire of pleasurable knowledge. If Scott treats meter as an imperious summons that commands obedience from Scotsmen, Wordsworth sees it as an object of sense which "long continued intercourse" has rendered a source of delight. And if Scott suggests that a prior generation's habit of recognizing the metrical summons can be transmitted intact to subsequent Scotsmen (thus enabling "recollection" of the summons even among those "unused" to it), Wordsworth localizes habits within the empirical life of the individual – this habitual recognition, for Wordsworth, is acquired by empirical experience, not descent. Scott's invocation of the rustic girl as a spokesperson for national identity, then, obscures the difference between Scott's and Wordsworth's treatments of meter, a difference between habitual delight and obedient recognition, between built-up knowledge (second nature) and transmitted experience, between personal memory and national memory, between personal identity and national identity.

THE HIGHLAND WIDOW

A few months after appropriating Wordsworth's meter to the national aims of his *Letters of Malachi Malagrowther*, Scott continues to project the force of a national summons on the poetry of his contemporaries, this time the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This becomes apparent in the fiction Scott wrote immediately following the currency crisis, fiction in which Coleridge's *Christabel* plays a prominent role. Coleridge wrote *Christabel* at a time when he was himself directing sustained attention to the topic of poetic meter,³³ and this disposition to experiment helps explain why, as Coleridge puts it, "the meter of *Christabel* is . . . founded on a new principle."³⁴ Coleridge's metrical innovations initially inspired Scott's own best-selling verse romances,³⁵ and some twenty years later, immediately following the 1826 currency crisis, *Christabel* was again on Scott's mind, for it supplies a (misquoted) epigraph to *The Highland Widow*, one of several stories collected in Scott's *Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827):

It wound^o as near as near could[†] be, ^omoaned, [†]can
But what it is she cannot tell;
On the other side it seemed to be,
Of the huge broad-breasted old oak-tree.³⁶

In Coleridge's poem these lines introduce the uncanny Geraldine, and Scott folds them into his own prose when he introduces his own "not canny" (98) character, Elspat MacTavish, who is discovered (paraphrasing Coleridge) "by the side of the great broad-breasted oak, in the direction opposed to that in which we had hitherto seen it" (99). Appropriating Geraldine for his own story gives Scott a model who not only has a magical power to coerce obedience, or "forced unconscious sympathy" (l. 609) – "In the touch of [Geraldine's] bosom there worketh a spell, / Which is lord of thy utterance, *Christabel*!" (ll. 267–68) – but who also, in Scott's view, functions as a figure for metrical form.³⁷ Thus not only does Elspat have "an unusual acquaintance with the songs of ancient bards" (125), but the "style of her rhetoric was poetical" (138), and she employs "the words of a Gaelic poet" as her own speech (143). Furthermore, she is seen "speaking to herself in a language which will endure no translation" (139), a description Scott elsewhere associates with poetic form.³⁸ Indeed, Scott's misquotation of Coleridge moves the epigraph further in the direction of an allegory for meter: substituting "wound" for "moaned" envisions Geraldine "wound as near as near could be" about *Christabel* (a circumstance that in fact occurs in the poem³⁹), and we can see how "wound" parallels meter's "superadded"

relation to words: the two are intensely proximate, but the one always remains irreducible to the other.⁴⁰

If Scott invokes Geraldine as a basis for his own allegory of meter, he also deviates from Coleridge's example in ways that endow Elspat MacTavish with distinctly national features absent from Geraldine. While Geraldine's magic had involved serpentine evil, Scott removes Elspat's magic from the Christian context, aligning it instead with indigenous Druidical sacrifice (159–60). Moreover, if Geraldine's role in *Christabel* is to exploit a rift between Sir Leoline and Lord Roland, Elspat exploits a gap between Scotland and the empire: she is "seated by the stem of the oak, with her head drooping, her hands clasped, and a dark-colored mantle drawn over her head, exactly as Judah is represented in the Syrian medals as seated under her palm-tree" (99). This is a reference, John Barrell notes, to "a Roman coin which . . . depicts Judaea – the Roman province – in the form of a veiled woman, sitting under a palm-tree, weeping."⁴¹ Malagrowther had warned that imperial encroachments threatened to reduce Scotland to "provincial" status (725), and Elspat, "the Woman of the Tree" (100), allegorically figures this once-autonomous entity – the Scottish nation.⁴² Thus while Coleridge had asserted that "the meter of Christabel is . . . founded on a new principle," Scott's allegory of meter associates it with the much older principle of Scottish national independence. Bringing together the metrical power of Coleridge's Geraldine and the national independence of Scotland, Elspat MacTavish is thus poised to operate, like meter, as a metrical summons to national identity.

Elspat's exertion of this summoning force provides the main action of *The Highland Widow*. The object of her summons is her son, Hamish, who, just an infant at the time of his father's death in the 1745 uprising, has now joined the British army to fight for imperial conquest "against the French in America" (118). His mother, still loyal to her husband's anti-British stance, violently objects to Hamish's enlistment (120–21). The story's climactic scene underscores these tensions with the spatial orientation of the characters: Elspat stands within her hut, just behind Hamish, who stands on the "threshold" (149) with a gun leveled at his approaching military companions. Although clad in Highland tartans, these companions have been effectively assimilated within the British imperial structure,⁴³ for they "marched regularly and in files, according to the rules of military discipline" (146), something that authentic Highlanders were generally described as unwilling or unable to do.⁴⁴ Poised, then, between the metrical-national figure of Elspat MacTavish and the uniform and assimilating (indeed, converting) force of the British empire, Hamish's position