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Ideology and Agrarian Ideal in Robert Burns❖

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ABSTRACT

This study examines, firstly, how Robert Burns dissolves monolithic systems that underpin both hegemonic tyranny and revolutionary fanaticism and, secondly, how he constructs an agrarian social vision based upon simple comfort and ample affection. The interconnected processes of dissolution and construction are elucidated through analysing the parallels between Burns and Adam Smith, whose ethical and economic treatises Burns perused, possessed, praised, and even versified. The first section looks at how Burns, broadening the semantic field of Mackenzie's condescending epithet "Heaven-taught," challenges monolithic values from a social and cultural marginal space. This section argues that Burns's distrust of monolithic ideologies is mirrored in his praise of Virgil's Georgics, in his criticism of the Eclogues, and in his disappointment in the Aeneid. The second section explores the affinities between the social visions of Burns and Smith, which demonstrate resilient tolerance and realistic complexity, as opposed to hegemonic tyranny and revolutionary excess. Instead of focusing on Burns's radicalism, this section examines "To a Mouse," "The Twa Dogs," and "The Cotter's Saturday Night," all of which uphold a social system based upon benevolent paternalism. The third section concentrates on the rural nature of Smith's and Burns's social visions and argues that both writers favour a humble agrarian tradition at odds with the mainstream agricultural discourse in contemporary Britain. This section analyses "The Brigs of Ayr" and contends that Burns, creating an all-embracing allegorical vision of seasonal flux, "eydent" labour, and rural virtue, gives agriculture the power of dissolving monolithic ideologies. This study thus moves from Burns's challenge of monolithic values to his construction of a

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nuanced agrarian vision that shares enlightening similarities with Smith's moral and economic theories.

KEYWORDS: Robert Burns, Adam Smith, ideology, identity, social vision, agrarian ideal

羅伯特・彭斯詩中的意識形態與農村願景

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摘　要

本文探討蘇格蘭詩人羅伯特・彭斯（Robert Burns）如何解構支撐霸權政治與革命狂熱的思想體系，同時解釋彭斯如何建構以農業為基石的理想社會觀。這個解構與建構的歷程，可以從彭斯與同時代蘇格蘭哲學家亞當・史密斯（Adam Smith）的思想交集看出端倪。彭斯曾經閱讀、收藏並讚美史密斯的道德哲學與政治經濟論著，甚至將其思想寫入詩文之中。本文第一部份解析彭斯特殊、難以定義的詩人身份。彭斯化用麥肯錫（Henry Mackenzie）給他的「天授的莊稼漢」（Heaven-taught Ploughman）稱號，從社會與文化的邊緣位置挑戰主流意識形態。彭斯對抽象意識形態的質疑，反映於他對羅馬詩人維吉爾（Virgil）《農詩》（Georgics）的讚賞，對《牧歌》（Eclogues）的批評，以及對《埃涅阿斯紀》（Aeneid）的失望。本文第二部份勾勒彭斯與史密斯社會觀的異同。相對於極端意識形態的閉鎖性與同質性，兩位作家皆主張一種具有延展性與異質性的理想社會觀。彭斯的〈致老鼠〉（“To a Mouse”）、〈兩隻狗〉（“The Twa Dogs”）以及〈佃農的周末夜〉（“The Cotter’s Saturday Night”）即展現這種社會觀，並呈現舊時代的家長社會（benevolent paternalism）觀念。本文第三部份聚焦於彭斯與史密斯社會觀中的農村特質。兩者所認同的農村傳統皆迥異於當時英國的主流農業論述。於〈艾爾的橋〉（“The Brigs of Ayr”）一詩中，彭斯創造出一個構築於季節流轉、辛勤勞動與農村美德之上的美好願景，並賦予這個願景解構極端意識形態的力量。藉由細論

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史密斯的哲學與經濟理論，以及彭斯的詩作及書信，本文從彭斯對政治思想的批判出發，並試圖描繪出彭斯農村理想的面貌。

關鍵字：彭斯、史密斯、意識形態、身份、社會願景、農村理想

I. Introduction: The People or the Rabble?

In 1786, Robert Burns sent a verse epistle—along with his copies of Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and Thomas Reid's *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*—to his Ochiltree miller friend James Tennant. To Burns, the "Twa sage Philosophers" gave an egalitarian direction to philosophical studies, for they

fought an' wrangled,
An' meikle Greek an' Latin mangled,
Till with their Logic-jargon tir'd,
An' in the depth of science mir'd,
To common sense they now appeal,
What wives an' wabsters see an' feel … (11-16) [1]

Smith's "sympathetic feeling" (9) and Reid's "common sense" (10) attracted Burns because, grounded in what was universally available, they were unfettered by the elitist tendency of "Greek an' Latin," "Logic-jargon," and "science." The privileged are placed on a par with the downtrodden, and wisdom, far from being restricted to the upper classes, is discoverable in the lower social echelons, in "wives" as well as "wabsters." Burns's military imagery—"fought," "wrangled," and "mangled"—is reminiscent of "Scots, wha hae," in which the egalitarian ideal is attainable only through martial struggles: "Tyrants fall in every foe! / LIBERTY'S in every blow!" (22-23). The theories of Reid and Smith are thus appropriated by Burns in order to mount a poetic fight against power and wealth and to foreground the inherent worth of humanity. Reid regards the "principles of common sense" shared by all "sober and reasonable" human beings as the foundation of thought and action; aligning these principles with the voice of commonality, Reid provides an egalitarian basis for philosophical judgment: "As there are words common to philosophers and to the vulgar, which need no explication, so there are principles common to both, which need no proof, and which do not admit of direct proof" (94). Reid's juxtaposition of "philosophers" and the "vulgar" not only chimes with Burns's egalitarian spirit but also echoes a well-known

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[1] All references to Burns's poems, identified by the line number, are taken from James Kinsley's 1968 edition.

passage in *The Wealth of Nations* (*WN*), in which Smith claims that the difference between "a philosopher and a common street porter" seems "to arise not so much from nature as from habit, custom, and education" (29). Smith's insistence upon the commonness of human nature—central to his claim in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (*TMS*) that moral judgment has "an immediate reference to the sentiments of others" (113)—appears to be a celebration of the voice of the People. From time to time, however, this democratic semblance gives way to a profound distrust of popular opinion, just as Burns's "man o' independent mind" despises "the censures & opinions of the unthinking rabble" (*L* 1: 14-15).[2] In a 1759 letter to Sir Gilbert Elliot, for instance, Smith locates moral authority not so much in the *vox populi* as in individual conscience: "real magnanimity and conscious virtue can support itselfe [*sic*] under the disapprobation of all mankind" (*Correspondence* 49). Regarding the "great mob of mankind" as "admirers and worshippers" of "wealth and greatness," rather than of virtue and wisdom (*TMS* 62), Smith comes close to Edmund Burke, who warned in 1790 that "learning" would be "trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude" (Burke 117). Burns's "unthinking rabble," Smith's "great mob," and Burke's "swinish multitude" all share a certain strain of anxiety peculiar to an age shaken by the clamour of vulgarity.

The distrust of the vulgar multitude, of course, escalated into a rhetorical battle between the radical and conservative camps in the 1790s, with radical reformers manipulating Burke's phrase in various publications. The titles of two contemporary radical journals demonstrate the popularity of Burke's "swinish multitude" amongst his political opponents: Daniel Isaac Eaton's *Politics for the People or a Salmagundy for Swine* and Thomas Spence's *Pig's Meat; Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*. Charles Pigott's satirical *Political Dictionary*, published posthumously in 1795, brings together several key terms under the head "*Rabble*":

> an assembly of low-bred, vulgar, and riotous people; otherwise the *Swinish Multitude*, so called by St. Edmund, because they dare to grunt their grievances even at the foot of the throne. The English rabble, when once roused, are very saucy and

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[2] All references to Burns's letters, identified by the volume number and then the page number, are taken from the 1985 Oxford edition of *The Letters of Robert Burns*.

> unmanageable, but they have the remarkable quality of the most passive forbearance, as it is not a little will disturb their slumbers. (109)

The same tension between the "vulgar" and the "throne" appears in a more succinct form in Pigott's definition of "*People*": "the commonality; the vulgar; the *Swinish Multitude*; or whatever the *ennobled race* may, in their *infinite goodness and mercy*, be pleased to term them" (103). Despite his radical sympathies, however, Pigott's renditions of "*Rabble*" and "*People*" acknowledge that the masses, as long as they are not "roused," are content with their political passivity ("passive forbearance"), with established class divisions, and thus with their swinishness. Placed in the passive position of being "roused" and "termed"—instead of acting on their own initiative and defining their own identity—the "English rabble" forfeit ultimate social and political agency. What Pigott calls "passive forbearance" in fact underpinned much of the radical appropriation of Burke's "swinish multitude" in the 1790s, for the term—whether employed scornfully by Burke or satirically by the radicals—entails an acceptance of the social distinction between pigs and swineherds. To the radicals, Burke's "swinish multitude" served as a convenient means of consolidating the collective identity of the "People," yet the phrase, with its inherent class assumptions, also became a barrier to their levelling projects. The ironic coexistence of clamourous discontent and "passive forebearance" in the "pig allegories" of the 1790s, as Olivia Smith has argued, is observable in "The Remonstrance, of the Swinish Multitude, to the Chief and Deputy Swineherds of Europe," which was published in Eaton's *Politics for the People* in 1794. Though opposing Burke's conservatism, the author of "The Remonstrance," as Olivia Smith states, "responds to the fear of revolution by accepting the paternalist relation of quiet obedience": "We [the swinish multitude] admire the good old way, let them [the upper classes] repair its defects and we wish no innovation" (qtd. in O. Smith 83).

As will become clear, Robert Burns and Adam Smith both had recourse to the "good old way," but they did not subsume their political ideas under systematic frameworks or draw upon such rigid labels as the swine image. Smith, as Douglas Long has pointed out, was a constructor of jurisprudential, moral, and economic systems, but he was at the same time critical of "the sort of reductive enthusiasm that enslaves thinkers to their systems" (288). Burns, in particular, made full use of his resilient identity—"Heaven-taught

ploughman"—which allowed him to evade the sense of class divisions in the radicals' identification with the "swinish multitude." In so doing, Burns avoided the predicament of those pamphleteers who, in deploying the phrase "swinish multitude," accepted what the "*ennobled race* may . . . be pleased to term them" and who thus failed to transcend the limitations of Burke's phrase. By refusing to yoke their political ideas to systematic metaphors, Burns and Smith were able to call into doubt and steer clear of the conservative and radical extremes in a more nuanced manner. Therefore, while they evinced their distrust of the irrational potential of the vulgar multitude in their remarks on the "unthinking rabble" and the "great mob," they did not—to borrow Pigott's word once more—seek to "term" the "low-bred" once and for all. Unlike Burke's vituperative attack on the "ignorant" classes, Burns and Smith both shed light on the essential equality of human nature, which can be acted upon, but not entirely warped, by social, cultural, and economic forces. Burns is convinced that, while wealth and rank are "but the guinea's stamp," the inherent worth of man has a resilient and solid quality comparable to gold: "The Man's the gowd for a' that" (7-8). Smith similarly rises above the material opulence of the British nation and eulogises the "magnanimity" that a poor "negro from the coast of Africa" possesses (*TMS* 209). The two writers thus embrace egalitarian principles without siding with the clamourous multitude, and distrust popular opinion without endorsing Burke's ultra-conservatism.

In this study I will argue that Burns, parallel to Smith, evades the extremes of hegemonic tyranny and revolutionary excess and creates a rural vision based upon realistic complexity and tolerant inclusivity. Tyrants and revolutionary fanatics are dangerous to the general public, for they mistake the "imaginary beauty" of their political systems for reality (*TMS* 232). Burns, who identifies with beasties and cotters, and Smith, who delves into the moral motives of human nature, both distrust monolithic ideologies in favour of a humble and nuanced view of society. The term "ideology," of course, was not coined before 1796—the year of Burns's death—and its first appearance in post-Thermidorean France inevitably imbues "ideology" with a reactionary energy. Destutt de Tracy's recommendation of "*idéologie*" as a new philosophy of ideas to the Institut National des Sciences et des Arts was during a time when "philosophy and education were to remedy the 'barbaric anarchy' of the Terror" (Kennedy 40). Yet this reactionary character was

obscured by Napoleon's frequently cited response to the State Consul in 1812, in which Napoleon aligns "l'idéologie" with revolutionary excess and accuses the "ténébreuse métaphysique" of the Ideologues of causing bloodshed ("amené le régime des hommes de sang") and subverting order ("proclamé le principe d'insurrection comme un devoir") (Napoleon 343). Be it reactionary or revolutionary in origin, nevertheless, the term "ideology," as Raymond Williams claims, has come to assume the pejorative meaning of "abstract and false thought," though Williams also acknowledges the existence of a "neutral sense of ideology, which usually needs to be qualified by an adjective describing the class or social group which it represents or serves" (128-29). Since it is anachronistic to claim that Smith and Burns knew "ideology" along with its complex late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century ramifications, I adopt Williams's "neutral" definition and regard "ideology" as capable of describing both the tyrannical and the revolutionary extremes.[3] By claiming that Burns and Smith adopt a middle course between extreme political ideologies, I do not mean to eliminate the important difference between Burns's radical temperament and Smith's more moderate philosophy. Thanks to recent scholarship, it is now clear that "Burns the radical" was influenced by the Calvinist traditions of "popular libertarianism and resistance to tyrannical rule" (McIlvanney 136), that he had connections with English radicals including "Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, William Roscoe, [and] Dr Wolcot," that he attempted to publish in "radical newspapers," and that his poetry had a "signal influence on the dissenting Ulster radical poets" (Noble, Introduction xxii). While Burns sought to give cultural authority to the provincial and the downtrodden, Smith at times turned a blind eye to his Scottish cultural roots. In his lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, Smith acknowledges English as the proper language of polite society and places a high premium on pure linguistic models. In the wake of the 1707 Union, Smith, writing from Scotland, attempted to assimilate Britain's dominant English culture and relegate "the poeticall [*sic*] works in the old Scots Language" to an uncultivated past.[4] Nevertheless, at bottom,

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[3] This "neutral" sense is in the *OED*'s fourth definition of "ideology": "A systematic scheme of ideas, usually relating to politics, economics, or society and forming the basis of action or policy" ("Ideology," def. 4).

[4] In his 1763 Rhetoric and Belles Lettres lecture on the "Language of Business," Smith connects prose with modern improvement and commerce and links poetry with "the most Rude and Barbarous nations," claiming that, while "We have also severall poeticall works in the old Scots Language,"

Smith and Burns nourished similar social ideals, which, in contrast to hegemonic antagonism, exhibit benevolent inclusivity and which, as opposed to monolithic homogeneity, value complex individuality. In the first section, "Liminal Identity," I will elucidate how Burns, forging a resilient poetic persona, challenges political hegemony from a marginal space. In the second section, "Social Visions," I will focus upon the affinities between Smith's and Burns's ideal visions, which are pitted against monolithic ideologies. In the third and last section, "Agrarian Ideals," I will argue that the distinctly rural character of Smith's and Burns's social visions calls into question the discourse of abstraction.

II. Liminal Identity

Shortly before riding into Edinburgh on 28 November 1786, Burns penned a proclamation "In the Name of the NINE," dubbed himself "POET-LAUREAT and BARD IN CHIEF," and usurped the throne of the British monarch by signing off in an extravagant way, "GOD SAVE THE BARD" (*L* 1: 65-66). In July 1786, Burns had published the Kilmarnock edition, the preface to which, far from self-flattering, expresses humility by denying "the advantages of learned art" and embracing the "sentiments and manners" of his "rustic compeers" (iii). The modest gesture in the preface, nevertheless, is rendered dubious by Burns's erudite allusions in the same volume to Virgil, Theocritus, Ramsay, Fergusson, Shakespeare, Goldsmith, Milton, Ossian, Shenstone, Young, and Taylor. Manipulating self-coronation, self-abasement and literary showing-off, Burns forged a resilient identity of social and cultural in-betweeness, with a view to challenging monolithic hegemony. Such a strategy can be traced through Burns's deployment of the term "Heaven-taught ploughman," which was created by Henry Mackenzie in a review of Burns published in the *Lounger* on 9 December 1786. Mackenzie's praise was not unmixed with condescension because, while admiring the "*Original Genius*" of the "rustic bard," he claimed that Burns's "provincial dialect" "greatly damps the pleasure of the reader" (67-70). Burns himself adopted Mackenzie's phrase and contributed to the myth of the "Heaven-taught ploughman" by deliberately maintaining his image as an unlettered

not "one bit of tollerable prose" has appeared in Scotland (*Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* 136-37).

farmer inspired by Nature. Robert Anderson, recollecting a 1787 conversation in Edinburgh, observed that Burns's "pretensions to pure inspiration" were "part of the machinery . . . of his poetical character to pass for an illiterate ploughman," especially when this "might be supposed to affect the success of the subscription of his poems." Penetrating the guise of the "illiterate ploughman," Anderson not only recognised Burns's erudition but also noticed his "*copia verborum*, the command of phraseology, the knowledge and use of the English and Scottish dialects."[5] Burns's financial calculation, however, does not fully account for his fascination with the title "Heaven-taught ploughman." Rather, the mythic identity, like the protean quality of his "*copia verborum*," affords him a middle ground between the polite and the provincial, allowing him to challenge hegemonic ideologies without claiming adherence to any existent systems.

Burns's manipulation of the epithet "Heaven-taught" displays remarkable resilience, signifying a wide range of meanings encompassing social and natural idealism, moral and poetic integrity, and patriotic fervour. In his verses "Written with a Pencil over the Chimney-piece, in the Parlour of the Inn at Kenmore, Taymouth," Burns presents a series of picturesque landscapes on his "savage journey" (5) to the "northern scenes" (2). Surrounded with "hanging woods" and "tumbling floods," he marvels at Nature's inspiring power: "Here Poesy might wake her heaven taught lyre, / And look through Nature with creative fire" (19-22). With the "palace" (12) and the "village" (16) blended into a Gilpinesque prospect, social discontent is irrelevant to this ideal world, where "injured Worth [might] forget and pardon Man" (28). Nevertheless, although the poem celebrates aesthetic harmony, Poesy's "heaven taught lyre" also takes on a degree of patriotic ardour, for Burns was on his way to "re-collect Scotland as a literary nation" (Crawford, *The Bard* 266). Composed in Kenmore in 1787, the poem represents the fruition of Burns's wish to make "leisurely pilgrimages through Caledonia; to sit on the fields of her battles; to wander on the romantic banks of her rivers; and to muse by the stately tower or venerable ruins, once the honoured abodes of her heroes" (*L* 1: 101). Piecing together fragments of cultural memory, Burns projects onto picturesque Scotland his hope of a future in which the "palace," the "village," and the "hermit's mossy cell" (18) coexist

[5] Quoted in J. Kinsley's edition of *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns* 3: 1538.

symbiotically. Burns's "heaven taught lyre," however, does not always seek to assemble the "venerable ruins" of the past into a rosy vision; nor does it remain indifferent to the undersides of reality. In his lines "[On Fergusson]," despite Fergusson's college education at St Andrews and urban career in Edinburgh, Burns declares camaraderie by sharing his own epithet with ill-fated "Heaven-taught Fergusson" (1). On the one hand, this gesture of alignment borders on self-praise, for it implies that "the truest Worth and Genius" (5) of "Heaven-taught Fergusson" are also observable in the "Heaven-taught ploughman." On the other hand, the adjective "Heaven-taught" marks a morally upright poetic community, which, albeit beneath "the iron grasp of Want and Wo" (6), unites against "titled knaves and idiot greatness" (7). Whereas wealth and power are clothed in "all the splendour" of "Fortune" (8), the "Heaven-taught" poets enjoy a more visceral source of splendour—"Life's sun" (3)—which, but for Fergusson's early death, would have "shed its influence on [his] bright career" (4). Always poised against its antitheses—"titles," "rank," "wealth," "books," and "Lear"—the concept of "Heaven-taught" brotherhood also appears in Burns's "Epistle to Davie, A Brother Poet," in which Burns and Sillar both belong to the "Commoners of air" amongst "*Nature's* charms" (43-46). Worldly pursuits, like the extrinsic "splendour" of fortune, may render a person "*wise*, or *rich*, or *great*" but do not derive energy from a visceral source of happiness:

> If Happiness hae not her seat
>   And center in the breast,
> We may be *wise*, or *rich*, or *great*,
>   But never can be *blest* (63-66)

Having coloured Mackenzie's "Heaven-taught ploughman" with optimistic idealism in the verses written in Kenmore and with poetic righteousness in the lines on Fergusson, Burns transformed the epithet into a patriotic concept of poetry in his "Ode [for General Washington's Birthday]." Regarding "Caledonia" as "Famed for the martial deed, the heaven-taught song" (45), Burns places "martial" and "heaven-taught" on a par and argues that local poetry can measure up to, if not surpass, the heroic deeds of Wallace. "Heaven-taught" poetry incarnates Scotland's "soul of Freedom" (47) and, comparable to martial prowess, has the potential for "Blasting the Despot's proudest bearing" (57) and "Brav[ing] Usurpation's boldest daring" (59).

Although Wallace's spirit is "immingled with the mighty Dead" (48), Burns implies that the "heaven-taught song" continues to articulate the hope of reviving Scotland's tradition of freedom. Equipped with a resilient power to withstand hegemonic oppression even when martial bravery bows down to the Hanoverian "iron rod" (20), the "Heaven-taught ploughman" is granted an exalted status in the national sphere. Refashioning the ploughman-poet as a tenacious patriot, Burns purges Mackenzie's term of its condescending connotation and insists that his poetic identity is at once humble and splendid.

The "Heaven-taught ploughman"—who can eulogise the future, establish poetic brotherhood, and resist hegemonic control—has a protean quality incapable of being categorised into existent systems. Burns's poetic resilience points to a liminal identity that allows him to call into question monolithic values by weaving nimbly in and out of extremities. Burns, an improving tenant farmer, belonged to "the middle rung on the social hierarchy of the rural Lowlands," higher in rank than "cotters and labourers" and lower than "freehold farmers" and the "landed gentry" (Leask 17-20). Owing to this social liminality, Burns was able to avoid the narrow interests of the labouring masses and the landed classes and to poise a lower-class rural perspective against upper-class political and religious rigidity. Identifying himself with "those who are elated enough in life, to reason & reflect; & yet low enough to keep clear of the venal contagion of a Court," Burns explicitly attributes "a Nation's strength" to the middle social rung between the "uninformed mob" and the "titled, tinsel Courtly throng" (*L* 2: 209-10). Burns's confidence that his liminal social identity constitutes "a Nation's strength" accords with his view that the "heaven-taught song" can match martial glory and withstand hegemonic tyranny even when the heroic spirit has been abandoned. If, in the social sphere, Burns's liminal status endowed him with a clear knowledge of the corrupt manoeuvres of the landed classes and the realistic conditions of the agrarian poor; in the cultural sphere, Burns inhabited the nebulous borders between parochial mediocrity and Enlightenment refinement. Robert Crawford has argued that Burns subtly manipulated his bardic identity in order to forge a resilient persona "between the plough and Hugh Blair":

> Burns's invention of the mockingly inflated "bardship," his deployment of the self-deprecating diminutive "bardie," and his adoption and celebration of the term "a Scotch bard" show him well able to cope with the values of the metropolitan world of

> literature, and able to avoid being trapped in the potentially patronizing or embalming bardolatry of being simply a bard. (*Devolving English Literature* 89, 95)

Parallel to his deployment of the epithet "Heaven-taught," Burns's linguistic play demonstrates a characteristic *mélange* of imaginative confidence and earthbound humility. Juggling with the grandiose "bardship" and the parochial "bardie," Burns must have relished a sense of self-mockery, yet, opting for the title of "a Scotch bard," he, a self-dubbed "POET-LAUREAT," took on poetic responsibilities for Scotland. Just as the "Heaven-taught ploughman" patriotically hymns the "soul of Freedom," or as the "middle-rung" farmer consolidates "a Nation's strength," so the bard oscillating between "inflated 'bardship'" and "diminutive 'bardie'" speaks for his country. Burns's wavering between the grand and the local, nevertheless, does not render his poetic voice ambiguously unstable, for, as a "man o' independent mind," he knows his place in the social and cultural territory of contemporary Scotland. In "A Dream," for instance, although Burns alternates between a "humble Bardie" (4) and "My Bardship" (5), he draws a line between himself and those poets who are ready to fawn on the monarch: "a venal gang, / Wi' rhymes weel-turn'd an' ready, / Wad gar you trow ye ne'er do wrang" (114-16). Burns, independent-minded, knows the ground he occupies when addressing George III, the sovereign of hegemonic Britain, for he almost prides himself on making an "uncouth sight" amidst "Birth-day dresses / Sae fine" (8-9). Between boorish provincialism and Enlightenment decorum, therefore, Burns strikes a fine balance and grounds his voice upon the sturdy basis of "Facts," which "winna ding / And canna be disputed" (30-31). Shifting between "Bardie," "Bardship" and "Scotch Bard," Burns not only refuses to be circumscribed by rigid definitions but also creates a resilient, though firm, anti-hegemonic voice.

Burns's espousal of liminality is at one with his unwillingness to serve as a consistent mouthpiece for any political causes that tend to degenerate into monolithic ideologies. In his 1787 "Epistle to Mr Tytler of Woodhouselee," Burns follows his 'Fathers' (9)—Scottish Jacobites who supported the deposed James Stuart and his descendants—in praising "Stuart" as a "Name which to love was the mark of a true heart" (2-3). Yet he immediately qualifies his rebellious Jacobitism by denying disloyalty to the Hanoverians: "Let no man misdeem me disloyal" (6). Burns's love of "beauteous Stuart" (1)

reveals not so much his support for the Stuart regime as his compassion for the downtrodden monarch: “A poor, friendless wand’rer may well claim a sigh, still more if that Wand’rer were royal” (7-8). Burns typically sides with oppressed rebels: “the lives of Hannibal, and Sir William Wallace” were the “first books” he “perused with pleasure” (*L* 1: 62); Milton’s Satan to him was a “great Personage” (*L* 1: 123). Correspondingly, Burns in the “Epistle” stresses that his Jacobite sympathies spring from his compassion for the oppressed, rather than from political principles, for “Politics” are dangerously unreliable: “The doctrines today that are loyalty sound, / Tomorrow may bring us a halter” (23-24). Aligning Burns with particular political factions, therefore, is neglecting that the Bard values complexity over monolithic abstraction. In November 1788, when Britain was celebrating the centenary of the Glorious Revolution, which paved the way for the House of Hanover, Burns, writing to the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, described himself as “educated in the [1688] revolution principles.” At the same time, however, he implied that, despite the vaunted “rights and liberties” under the Hanoverian reign, the Hanoverians were no less oppressive. Burns relativised political loyalty by adopting a perspective from across the Atlantic: the Americans complained “against our whole [Hanoverian] legislative body, of the very same imposition and oppression, the Romish religion not excepted, and almost in the very same terms as our forefathers did against the family of Stuart” (*L* 1: 333-35).

Three years later, in 1792, when Britain, confronted with France, was plunged into reactionary fears, Burns reasserted his faith in the political regime established by the 1688 Revolution: “To the British Constitution, on Revolution principles, next after my God, I am most devoutly attached” (*L* 2: 168-69). Considering the fact that, in late 1792, Burns continued to express his republican sympathies in such poems as “[Why should na poor folk mowe],” his protestations of loyalty to the Hanoverians, serving to deflect the dangers of political disaffection, seem disingenuous. Writing again to his Excise superior Robert Graham in January 1793, Burns, denying disloyalty, further insisted that, though he had been an “enthusiastic votary” in the immediate wake of the storming of the Bastille, he “altered [his] sentiments” when France “came to shew her old avidity for conquest” (*L* 2: 176). This remark, though serving the same protective purpose as the loyalist references to the “Revolution principles” in the 1788 and 1792 letters cited above, does

take on a degree of truth, for the 1792 September Massacres, executed in the name of revolution, correspond to the hegemonic rule of the Hanoverians, who, in Burns's view, practised tyranny under the pretext of dispensing "rights and liberties." For Burns, revolutionary excess and hegemonic tyranny both disregard social complexity; thus, in "The Dumfries Volunteers," he opts for a middle course between the "wretch that would a Tyrant own" and the "wretch, his true sworn brother, / Who would set the Mob above the throne" (25-27). Critics tend to emphasise that Burns juxtaposes the "PEOPLE" and the "KING" at the close of the poem to undermine the loyalist note in "Who will not sing, God save the king, / Shall hang as high's the steeple": "But while we sing, GOD SAVE THE KING, / We'll ne'er forget THE PEOPLE!" (29-32).[6] Burns indeed seeks to dissolve hegemonic tyranny, even at the height of British conservatism, by allowing the voice of the People to measure up to the British anthem. Yet equally important is that Burns, who disdains "the unthinking rabble," distrusts the monolithic ideologies of both the "Tyrant" and the revolutionaries who attempt to gain control over the irrational "Mob."

Burns's distrust of monolithic ideologies is mirrored in his praise and criticism of Virgil's *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid*, which he did not read in "their original language" (*Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* iii). By the time Burns hinted at his familiarity with "Theocrites [*sic*]" and "Virgil" in the preface to the Kilmarnock edition (iii), he had written in "Sketch" that Virgil's *Eclogues* fell short of Theocritus's pastoral realism: "But thee, Theocritus, wha matches? / They're no' Herd's ballats, Maro's [Virgil's] catches" (19-20). Writing to Mrs. Dunlop in 1788, Burns further displayed his knowledge of the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*, claiming that "the Georgics are to me by far the best of Virgil" and that "I am disappointed in the Æneid" (*L* 1: 278-79). Steve McKenna has speculated that Burns "finds the *Aeneid* less than satisfying" because Aeneas represents "such hegemonic imperial forces as embodied in Milton's heaven, England vis-à-vis Scotland, and quite literally in Rome vis-à-vis Hannibal and Carthage" (148-49). Although Burns attributes his disappointment in the *Aeneid* to Virgil's "servile" imitation of

[6] Following the sedition and treason trials from 1792 to 1794, Burns endeavoured to smuggle his regard for the people into a poem apparently brimming with British nationalist sentiments. Marilyn Butler has argued that, given the context, "it seems inappropriate to conclude of poems such as 'Does haughty Gaul' [The Dumfries Volunteers] that they display uncertain loyalties" (97).

Homer (*L* 1: 279), McKenna's conjecture does accord with Burns's suspicion of monolithic hegemony. The 1788 letter to Mrs. Dunlop does not offer any specific reasons why the *Georgics* is "by far the best of Virgil," yet the *Georgics* attracts Burns probably because it averts the grand mytho-historical narrative in the *Aeneid* and the aristocratic *otium* in the *Eclogues*. In the *Georgics*, Virgil delineates a rural vision in which the innocent peasant in his fruitful diligence "adores the Rural Pow'rs: / Whose mind, unmov'd, the Bribes of Courts can see, / Their glitt'ring Baits, and Purple Slavery" (2: 702-05). Virgil looks upon rural life as a solid base of virtue, for the country bears the footprints of the Goddess of Justice, even though she abandoned the earth at the end of the Golden Age: "From hence *Astrea* took her Flight, and here / The prints of her Departing Steps appear" (2: 671-72). Cemented by virtue, Virgil's agrarian vision is spared from hegemonic oppression: "Without Concern [the peasant] hears / but hears from afar, / Of Tumults and Descents, and distant War" (2: 709-10).

However, albeit untouched by political vicissitudes, Virgil's vision, like Burns's "heaven-taught song," possesses a tint of patriotism, for Virgil associates rural life with the national past: "Such was the life the frugal *Sabines* led; / So *Remus* and his Brother God were bred" (2: 777-78). In Book IV, the rural vision seems embodied in an apian community, which, with its unity, diligence and patriotism, appears to stand for "an ideal Roman society" (Lyne xxviii). Christine Perkell has pointed out that Book IV is often "felt to resolve the tensions of the poem and to portend a positive future" that follows Octavian's rise to political prominence (211). Nevertheless, as Eva Stehle has argued, "the bees' style of life is inadequate," for their labour "is not the conscious act of experience and understanding," and they "are subject to the inroads of decline about which they can do nothing" (360). More significantly, the lives of the bees pivot upon an "Idol King," whom they worship with more "servile Awe" than the subservient subjects of "*Egypt*, *India*, *Media*":

> While he survives, in Concord and Content
> The Commons live, by no Divisions rent;
> But the great Monarch's Death dissolves the Government.
> All goes to Ruin; they themselves contrive
> To rob the Honey, and subvert the Hive. (306-12)

Revealing the social and moral collapse following the demise of "the great Monarch," Virgil might have had in mind the civil wars following Caesar's assassination in 44 BC, the *Georgics* being composed from around 36 to 29 BC. The essential instability of the monarchical apian community, in this respect, contradicts Virgil's agrarian vision in Book II, in which the peasant, in his serenity, remains "unmov'd" when "contending Kindred tear the Crown" (707). Virgil's apian society, therefore, with its "common Cities," "common Sons," and "common Stock" sustained by "one Law" (225-27), comes dangerously close to "hegemonic imperial forces" and hardly conforms to Virgil's rural ideal, according to which monarchy constitutes "purple slavery." Virgil's contrast between independent rural felicity and monarchic apian order must have titillated the Bard, who admired agrarian mirth and satirised regulatory figures. The intricate dialectic between imperial hegemony and rural bliss in the *Georgics* differs from the progressive nationalist framework in the *Aeneid* and from the *locus amoenus* in the *Eclogues*.

However, as Nigel Leask has argued, the "traditional theme of exile and dispossession central to Virgil's *Eclogues*" anticipates Burns's "crisis of threatened dispossession and exile, around the time of his publication of the Kilmarnock volume" (61, 49). Virgil's first eclogue, for instance, already intimates social injustice under Octavian's centralised rule by juxtaposing Tityrus, who still has his "Farm" (64), with Meliboeus, who and his kind "must beg our Bread in Climes unknown / Beneath the scorching or the freezing Zone" (85-86). Towards the close of the eclogue, nevertheless, Meliboeus's mournful voice is drowned by Tityrus's cordial invitation to savour his "Chestnuts and Curds and Cream" and to "forget your Care" in a peaceful landscape: "For see yon sunny Hill the Shade extends; / And curling Smoke from Cottages ascends" (113-18). The theme of impermanence epitomised by Meliboeus's "Banishment" becomes insignificant in comparison with the Arcadian ease of Tityrus, who serenades his "Silvan Muse" beneath the "Shade which Beechen Boughs diffuse" (1-3). Burns, in contrast, always seeks to amplify the voice of the oppressed in order to challenge hegemonic powers and monolithic ideologies from a marginal space. In the next section, I will argue that, instead of satisfying himself with social indictment, Burns creates an ideal vision that shares affinities with Smith both in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and in *The Wealth of Nations*.

III. Social Visions

When Burns travelled to Scotland's capital in November 1786 to oversee the publication of the second edition of his *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, Mrs. Dunlop endeavoured to bring Burns and Smith together. They seem never to have met because Smith, ill during the winter of 1786-1787, left Edinburgh for London shortly before Burns could pay a visit in April 1787. We do know, however, that Burns's fascination with Smith was not unrequited, for Smith subscribed for four copies of the Edinburgh edition and was "one of those [who] first held forth [Burns's] name forcibly to the public at Edr." (Wallace 17). Throughout his poetic career, Burns remained attracted to Smith's theories, alluded to Smith in his notes, poems, and letters, and probably perused different editions of Smith's works. An entry dated September 1783 in Burns's first commonplace book testifies to his early knowledge of Smith's moral philosophy: "I entirely agree with that judicious philosopher Mr Smith in his excellent Theory of Moral Sentiments, that Remorse is the most painful sentiment that can embitter the human bosom" (*Common Place Book* 7). Around two years later, Smith's theory of the Impartial Spectator finds resonance in "To a Louse," in which Burns appropriates Smithian sympathy to make a case for his own levelling spirit: "O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us / *To see oursels as others see us!*" (43-44). Juxtaposing the high and the low, Burns exposes the vanity of a bonneted "Lady" through a louse, which is traditionally associated with the "poor body" (10-12). Just as Smithian sympathy draws the philosopher closer to "wives an' wabsters" in the 1786 epistle to Tennant, so, in "To a Louse," it shortens the distance between a lady and a beastie. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was first published in 1759 and the sixth, much revised and expanded edition was brought out in 1790 just before Smith's death. A copy of the sixth edition now owned by Glasgow University once belonged to Burns and bears the following inscription on the fly-leaf: "From Mr. Wm. N. Burns to his much respected Mr. Wm Maxwell this book, which belonged to his Father Robert Burns" (*Special Collections*). The fact that Burns had read *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* by 1783, that he versified Smith's ethics in "To a Louse" in 1785, that he lent his own copy to Tennant in 1786, and that he also possessed the 1790 sixth edition proves Burns's long-standing interest in Smith.

Burns mentioned *The Wealth of Nations* less frequently, but he owned a copy of the 1786 fourth edition, which is also in the care of Glasgow

University. In a letter to Robert Graham, Burns dubs "Smith, in his Wealth of Nations," an "extraordinary man," making clear his fascination with Smith's economic theory: "I would covet much to have his ideas respecting the present state of some quarters of the world that are or have been the scenes of considerable revolutions since his book was written" (*L* 1: 410). As the letter was dated 13 May 1789, the "considerable revolutions" could not have encompassed the impending revolution in France; rather, as Robert Crawford states, Burns's remark is "clearly a reference to the American Revolution" (*The Bard* 315). In all likelihood, however, Burns came to know Smith's attitude towards both the American and French revolutions through his reading of the sixth edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The newly added Part VI of the 1790 edition, written around the outset of the French Revolution (Ross 385), contains Smith's caution against revolutionaries who refuse "all palliatives, all temperaments, all reasonable accommodations" (*TMS* 233). Moreover, certain assertions in Part VI—e.g. "The love of our country seems not to be derived from love of mankind" (229)—even appear, as Ian Ross points out, "at some odds with revolutionary idealism" (391). This, nonetheless, does not mean that Smith objected to all forms of "idealism," for he acknowledged the necessity of some "general, and even systematical, idea of the perfection of policy and law" (*TMS* 234). On the other hand, as Iain McLean has argued, Smith, who was "no friend of the *ancien régime*," was "wise to be cautious" in reactionary Britain, where his doctrine of "Free Trade," according to Dugald Stewart, "was itself represented as of a revolutionary tendency" (McLean 115). Smith did not live to witness the trials for treason and sedition from 1792 to 1794, but his warning against revolutionary enthusiasm at a time of political hypertension curiously parallels Burns's protestations of loyalty in the early 1790s. In 1794, Burns wrote to George Thomson that the victory over the French would "shew the swinish multitude that they are but beasts, & like beasts must be led by the nose & goaded in the backside" (*L* 2: 132). Writing to Mrs. Dunlop in 1796, Burns once again borrowed Burke's notorious phrase: "How long the *Swinish Multitude* will be quiet, I cannot tell: they threaten daily" (*L* 2: 375). Such Burkean loyalism, however, is at least partly disingenuous, for Burns, in one of his 1794 Dumfries epigrams, lampoons the dagger-brandishing Burke as a "poisonous Reptile." Burns and Smith could not have favoured the course undertaken by Robespierre, yet, though they both attempted to muffle their

radical voice, anti-hegemonic concerns saturate their writings even during the French Revolution. Thus, concordant with Burns's tongue-in-cheek strategy, Smith, after warning against revolutionary excess, subtly veers towards anti-imperialism: "of all political speculators, sovereign princes are by far the most dangerous" (234).

If it appears ironic that Burns, the arch-spokesman for "honest poverty," and Smith, the arch-defender of "opulence and improvement," should have found each other congenial, this is due to a deep-seated misunderstanding of both writers. Recent scholarship has effectively debunked the "myth of 'the Heaven-taught ploughman'" and revealed Burns's participation in the Enlightenment milieu of agricultural improvement and linguistic refinement (Leask 35). A close reading, on the other hand, proves that Smith, like Burns, upheld a social vision based upon heterogeneous individuality, despite his enduring fame as a defender of "homogeneous liberal principles" (Jonsson 1357). The "stability and permanency" of Smith's ideal society are maintained by "the established balance among the different orders and societies into which the state is divided" (*TMS* 231). Smith's concept of organised plurality—as opposed to hegemonic centralisation—is fleshed out in his image of the "great chess-board of human society." According to Smith, hegemonic powers attempt to manipulate society from above and assume "that the pieces upon the chess-board have no other principle of motion besides that which the hand impresses upon them." In contrast, an ideal state preserves variety from below and believes that "every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might chuse to impress upon it" (*TMS* 234). Smith's ideal society, in addition, is an organic conglomeration morally cemented by the "agreeable bands of love and affection," where "assistance is reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem" (*TMS* 85).[7] Where "mutual love and affection" fail to prevail, society "will not necessarily be dissolved," as long as "justice"—along with the "mercenary exchange of good offices"—is not entirely flouted (86). Smith therefore posits two versions of society to varying degrees buttressed by morality: one elevated by "beneficence" into an ideal vision, the other saved by "justice" from collapse. Beneficence is the

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[7] Smith's liberal economics is inseparable from moral sentiments: as Athol Fitzgibbons has contended, in Smith's writings "the same moral principles that would preserve cultural viability would also give the most encouragement to trade and economic growth" (16).

"ornament which embellishes" the social fabric, while justice forms the "foundation" which ensures the existence of society (86). Thus, when Smith claims that it "is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest" (*WN* 26-27), he is only delineating a less-desired, but still well-functioning, social formation founded upon "mercenary exchange." Smith's ideal society, in short, dissolves monolithic hegemony by granting power to the diverse "orders and societies into which the state is divided" and consolidates social relations by demanding not only justice but also beneficence. Within this ideal social framework, "remorse" is "the most dreadful sentiment" because, involving the violation of social mores, it resembles the tormenting feeling of excommunication.[8] That Burns in his first commonplace book embraces Smith's definition of "Remorse" points at the possibility that the Bard endorses the philosopher's social vision and dreads the breakdown of the ideal community.

Burns's social vision is not as systematically defined as Smith's is, yet its contours can be observed in "To a Mouse," in which the narrator sketches an ideal vision of "Nature's social union" unfortunately "broken" by "Man's dominion" (7-8). The poem juxtaposes two rival social systems at work in the late eighteenth century, as post-Union Scotland, on its way towards industrial and colonial wealth, underwent a drastic social transformation. One, like Smith's lesser kind of social formation, is dominated by commutative justice, according to which property constitutes a perfect right whose infringement leads to punishment. In a community founded upon "mercenary exchange" rather than "beneficence," the "murd'ring *pattle*" (6) and the "cruel *coulter*" (29) serve as a lawful rod of punishment for the Mouse's breach of property rights. In contrast, the other system, akin to Smith's ideal vision, observes not only commutative justice but also distributive justice, which concerns the allocation of goods in proportion to need and desert. In conformity with distributive justice, though the narrator justly claims the product of his own labour, the Mouse in its dire need also has a right to a "*daimen-icker* in a *thrave*" (15). The distinction between commutative justice and distributive

[8] "[Remorse] is made up of shame from the sense of the impropriety of past conduct; of grief for the effects of it; of pity for those who suffer by it; and of the dread and terror of punishment from the consciousness of the justly provoked resentment of all rational creatures" (*TMS* 85).

justice in "To a Mouse" receives sustained treatment in Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence*:

> A beggar is an object of our charity and may be said to have a right to demand it; but when we use the word right in this way it is not in a proper but in a metaphorical sense. The common way in which we understand the word right, is the same as what we have called a perfect right, and is that which relates to commutative justice. Imperfect rights, again, refer to distributive justice. The former are the rights which we are to consider, the latter not belonging properly to jurisprudence, but rather to a system of morals as they do not fall under the jurisdiction of the laws. (9)

Here, commutative justice refers to the kind of justice that constitutes the "foundation" of society, while distributive justice, dispensing charity to the poor, relates to beneficence, which forms the "ornament" of Smith's social vision. If, in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, Smith associates commutative justice with "perfect rights" and jurisprudence, and distributive justice with "imperfect rights" and ethics, he seeks to avoid such rigid compartmentalisation elsewhere. For instance, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, although Smith distinguishes between "justice" and "beneficence," he warns that in reality it is not possible to dissociate beneficence from jurisprudence, for both "justice" and "benevolence" find their way into the "laws of all civilized nations." The civil magistrate "may prescribe rules" which "not only prohibit injuries among fellow-citizens, but command mutual good offices to a certain degree" (81). Smith, nonetheless, adds that pushing beneficence too far in law "is destructive of all liberty, security, and justice," just as neglecting altogether the "duties of beneficence" exposes a commonwealth "to many gross disorders and shocking enormities" (81). The "shocking enormities" arising from the neglect of beneficence in the legal sphere conjure up the image of the threatening "Swinish Multitude" in Burns's 1796 letter to Mrs. Dunlop. The same air of social unrest is encapsulated in the Mouse's "bickering brattle" (4), the only phrase in "To a Mouse" that carries, with its alliterative sonority, a hint of radical discontent. One may argue that, in "Nature's social union," the balance is achieved

between "neglect[ing] it altogether" and "push[ing] it too far," so that commutative justice is properly conjoined with distributive justice.

However, just as the radical potential of the "bickering brattle" dissipates before "bleak *December's winds*" (23), so "Nature's social union" seems irrevocably "broken" by "Man's Dominion." The ideal social system, supported by justice and embellished by beneficence, forms a contrast with the desolate landscape of rural Scotland—"the fields laid bare an' wast" (25). Traditionally, the system of benevolent paternalism was maintained in Scotland by laws that dealt out poor relief through kirk sessions and heritors of individual parishes. In the course of the eighteenth century, nevertheless, the church-based system of benevolent paternalism was gradually destabilised by "enclosure and the lowland clearance spurred by rack-renting" (Pittock 153). What replaced the older social order was a commercial ethos based upon "vulgar prudence," which, inseparable from self-interest, can at best produce "cold esteem" in an impartial spectator (*TMS* 263). That the Mouse's "sma' request" of a "*daimen-icker*" is an outmoded expression, which smacks of southwest Scottish regionalism, suggests that the old spirit of benevolent paternalism was on the wane.[9] The selfishness of commercial society encroaches upon Smith's "superior prudence," which is combined "with valour, with extensive and strong benevolence, with a sacred regard to the rules of justice" (*TMS* 216). Aligned with altruistic virtues, the "rules of justice" upheld by "superior prudence" refer not so much to commutative as to distributive justice. Burns, like Smith, contemns the self-regarding tendency of "vulgar prudence" and favours a society founded upon "superior prudence," "valour," "benevolence," and commutative justice. However, as the declaration "I'm truly sorry" (7) suggests, remorse—"the most dreadful sentiment" for both Burns and Smith—lurks behind the lines. Remorse, a feeling of excommunication, appropriately accompanies the collapse of Burns's social vision, the broken "social union" of Nature, and the ruined "wee-bit housie" of the poor beastie (19). What Wordsworth half a century later was to praise as the "Christian government, standing *in loco parentis* towards all its subjects" (*Yarrow Revisited and Other Poems* 325) had already been relegated to the past in late eighteenth-century Scotland.

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[9] As Thomas Crawford has pointed out, the word "*daimen-icker*" (an ear of corn) is a rare southwest Scottish expression (xi-xii).

Although "To a Mouse" foregrounds desolation, Burns's transient glance at "Nature's social union" implies that hope, however faint, consists in reviving a vision buttressed by Smith's "agreeable bands of love and affection." The poem, albeit tinged with remorse, demonstrates that sympathy has the potential for mending social ties in an age propelled by the ethos of "vulgar prudence." Burns attempts to reconstruct the vanished social vision by sympathetically imagining the motives of the Mouse and by morally condemning the rod of justice as "murd'ring" and "cruel." Vicariously suffering the expulsion of the Mouse, the intruder merges into the community of the intruded and becomes a sympathetic "companion" and "*fellow-mortal*" (11-12). With "Mice an' Men" (39) placed upon an equal footing, Burns's ideal vision displays a resilient capacity to assimilate outsiders, as opposed to the "corporation spirit"—the "jealousy of strangers"—that pervades commercial modernity (*WN* 142). Smith denounces "the corporation spirit" among the "trades carried on in towns" in that it hinders free competition and reduces "the whole manufacture into a sort of slavery" (*WN* 143). The word "slavery," which was particularly sensitive after the Somersett ruling of 1772, sheds light on a humanitarian strain underlying Smith's economic view that monopoly retards progress. As slavery conceals the "magnanimity" of a "negro" and justifies the "sordid master" (*TMS* 206), so monopolistic corporations ignore moral qualities in favour of monolithic manipulation. Seeking to engross interests, the spirit of corporation, like hegemonic powers, operates along rigid self-other guidelines by sanctifying its actions and stigmatising the "strangers." By contrast, hegemonic antagonism and monolithic homogeneity are absent from "Nature's social union" in "To a Mouse," which not only exhibits sympathetic inclusiveness but also preserves complex individuality. Thus, at the same time as he draws upon sympathetic imagination to efface social boundaries, Burns accords a degree of independence both to himself and to his "poor, earth-born companion" (11). Parallel to Keats, whose eventual dissociation from the "light-wingèd Dryad of the trees" (7) in his "Ode to a Nightingale" hints at the independence of both, Burns wraps up his poem with a memorable contrast: "Still, thou art blest, compared wi' *me!*" (49). As Carol McGuirk contends, the Mouse in the poem does not forfeit "independence" under the poet's "sentimental scrutiny" but "receives a realistic description along with a sentimental amplification" (7).

Burns's reconstruction of "Nature's social union" is as much a nostalgic gesture as a radical expression tinctured with the Masonic ideal of universal brotherhood and the revolutionary concept of *fraternité*. Though shadowed by dark remorse, "To a Mouse" at once harks back to benevolent paternalism and implies the revival, through sympathy, of the broken vision. Already present in "To a Mouse," nostalgia and anticipation constitute two threads that weave in and out of Burns's discontent with Hanoverian Britain in his "Ode [for General Washington's Birthday]." Columbia in the "Ode," a harbinger of liberty, stands for the hope of reinstating the "soul of Freedom" (47) characteristic of King Alfred's reign and Wallace's era. Burns's idealisation of the past and enthusiasm for the future, prompted by his intense dissatisfaction with the present, lead him to integrate the bygone glory of Alfred's England and Wallace's Caledonia with Washington's Columbia. Ancient England, mediaeval Scotland, and contemporary America, albeit constitutionally disparate, are subsumed under an all-embracing social vision. Reverberating through the three ages and regimes is the song of the bard: while reminiscing about the "patriot lyre" in ancient England (31) and the "heaven-taught song" in mediaeval Caledonia (45), Burns believes that "Liberty's bold note" (3) in Columbia may help restore the "Royalty of Man" (28). J. G. A. Pocock has pointed out that the Georgian democrats often located in "pre-Conquest England" the "realisation of 'the original principles of the constitution' and erect[ed] the figure of Alfred into that of the English legislator who had established them" (251). Such a "strategy of return," as we have seen in the Introduction, is employed by the author of "The Remonstrance" in Eaton's *Politics for the People*, who insists upon the "good old way." Pocock has argued that it was common amongst radicals to oppose the rhetoric of traditionalism, which was wielded by conservatives who sought to defend the present government by amplifying its role as a transmitter of immemorial traditions. The "strategist of return" challenged the conservative concept of transmission and invested a certain historical period or figure with a "charismatic or rational authority," which subsequent generations have lost and which therefore warranted a drastic political reform in order to return to the ideal past (Pocock 252). Burns's apostrophe to "Alfred, on thy starry throne" (29) shares obvious affinities with the Georgian "strategy of return," and his allusion to Wallace at once pays tribute to Scottish collective identity and forges a "charismatic" past from which the

present age has been severed. The reference to the hope that Columbia promises, likewise, has its counterpart in the radical culture of contemporary Britain, for millennialism is a familiar theme in the essays and poems of radical writers as different as John Thelwall, Thomas Spence, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth.

At several points, nevertheless, the "Ode" registers a mood even more desolate than "bleak *December's winds*" in "To a Mouse": "Dark-quenched as yonder sinking star, / No more that glance lightens afar" (61-62). While the "bickering brattle" in "To a Mouse" hints at rebellion, Burns in the "Ode" displays despair in the face of the "caitiff, servile, base, / That tremblest at a Despot's nod" (18-19). Similarly, whereas "To a Mouse" exhibits Burns's attempt at reconstructing "Nature's social union" by siding with the beastie, the "Ode" can only locate hope in the remote past and in the nascent nation across the Atlantic.[10] This tonal shift may be attributed to the tumultuous events in the decade between November 1785, when "To a Mouse" was composed, and June 1794, when Burns wrote to Mrs. Dunlop that he was designing "an irregular Ode" (*L* 2: 297). Though continually articulating radical sympathies in the wake of 1789, Burns was aware that political reform was increasingly impossible in reactionary Britain. The sedition and treason trials from 1792 to 1794 witnessed the transportation of Thomas Muir amongst others to Botany Bay, and Burns himself was more than once in danger of being suspected of disaffection.[11] The predominance of conservatism in the late 1780s and the early 1790s must have contributed to the profound air of disappointment in the "Ode," which echoes Burns's 1792 farewell "to a' our Scottish fame" (1) in "Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation." Despite the subtle tonal difference, however, the social vision in "To a Mouse" still undergirds Columbia's "flaming' spirit" (27), Alfred's

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[10] As Andrew Noble has contended, Burns's "Ode" was written in a period when "the defiance present in 1792 and 1793"—and in "Scots, wha hae" in early 1794—was lost due to his "utter pessimism about the state of Scotland" ("Burns" 46). Given Burns's hope of restoring the social ideal of Alfred's reign and Wallace's age and of following in the footsteps of "Columbia," "utter pessimism" might appear too strong for Burns's state of mind in 1794. However, Noble rightly sheds light on the link between Burns's disappointment and the political context.

[11] Burns continued to take risks and express his republican sympathies, sometimes blatant, other times veiled. In a 1795 letter to Mrs. Dunlop, for instance, Burns referred to the French King and Queen as "a perjured Blockhead & an unprincipled Prostitute" (*L* 2: 334). In historical guise, such sentiments appear in Burns's Jacobite songs and poems celebrating Scottish history, such as "Scots, wha hae." Burns, however, feared being charged with Jacobinism: "the report of certain Political opinions being mine, has already once before brought me to the brink of destruction" (*L* 2: 301).

"generous English name" (42) and Wallace's "ancient Caledonian form" (54) in the "Ode"—a Smithian vision supported by justice, embellished by beneficence, and contrasted with slavery, monopoly, and hegemony.

In defence of his vision, Burns can appeal to remorse in "To a Mouse" to highlight the anguish of excommunication; to agitation in "Scots, wha hae" to urge the pursuit of his cause; or to disappointment in "Ode [for General Washington's Birthday]" to intensify his discontent with Hanoverian Britain. Burns can also adopt an affectionately conservative voice—in "The Twa Dogs" and "The Cotter's Saturday Night"—more akin to the moderate philosophy of Smith, who, distrusting the "often dangerous spirit of innovation," sometimes reveals a submissive attitude towards the established social order (*TMS* 232). Indeed, Smith denounces tyrants like "Alexander" and "Caesar," whose "excessive self-estimation" betrayed them "into a vanity that approached almost to insanity and folly" (*TMS* 250). Nonetheless, he also asseverates that "the peace and order of society" are "in a great measure, founded upon the respect which we naturally conceive" for the "rich and the powerful" (*TMS* 114). Smith condemns both hegemonic tyranny and the revolutionary enthusiasm of the "man of system," who cannot "suffer the smallest deviation" from the "supposed beauty of his own ideal plan of government" (*TMS* 233-34). Whereas the "spirit of system" often inflames people to the "madness of fanaticism," "public spirit" holds in esteem "the established powers and privileges even of individuals, and still more those of the great orders and societies, into which the state is divided" (233). Since the "peace and order" of the complex social formation outweigh dangerous political innovation, Smith admires the "man of public spirit," who "will content himself with moderating, what he often cannot annihilate with great violence" (233). The emphasis on the "peace and order of society" over revolutionary zeal takes on a shade of conservatism apparently at odds with the impassioned call to action in "Scots, wha hae" and with the ferocious outbreak in the "Ode"—"Show me that eye which shot immortal hate, / Blasting the Despot's proudest bearing" (56-57). The conservative character of Smith's social vision, however, hardly conceals his egalitarian distrust of the "insolent tyrant" (*TMS* 323) and his humanitarian attention to "the poor and the wretched" (*TMS* 226). At once conservative, egalitarian and humanitarian, Smith's social vision finds its way into the first poem of the

Kilmarnock edition, "The Twa Dogs," which espouses a traditional community but calls into doubt hegemonic domination.

Through two Scots-speaking dogs, "The Twa Dogs" proposes a social ideal for Britain, echoing Virgil's serene rural community in the *Georgics*, recreating Smith's vision of justice and beneficence, and anticipating Wordsworth's government, "standing *in loco parentis* towards all its subjects." The rival social systems in "To a Mouse" are reproduced in the dialogue between Cæsar, "the *gentleman* an' *scholar*" (14), and Luath, "a *ploughman's collie*" (23). The foreign appellation and exotic pedigree of Cæsar imply social deracination in late eighteenth-century Britain, where the gentry became increasingly alienated from their ancestral roots and conventional duties. With landlords exacting "racked rents" (51) and tenants enduring "a *factor's* snash" (96), Smith's lesser kind of society, which functions through "mercenary exchange," has already supplanted the older system of benevolent paternalism. The gentry pursue what Smith dismissively calls "baubles and trinkets" (*TMS* 184) in "HAGUE or CALAIS," "VIENNA or VERSAILLES," "MADRID," and other fashionable places (156-70), neglecting the labouring poor upon their home estates: "They gang as saucy by poor folk, / As I wad by a stinkan brock" (91-92). Cæsar insists that one "wad ne'er envy" the "*gentles*" because, despite all "their Colledges an' Schools," they are "sic fools" that "when nae *real* ills perplex them, / They *mak* enow themsels to vex them" (189-200). Cæsar's derision of the "ills" of the rich echoes Smith's story of "the poor man's son," who, having spent all his life in pursuit of "a certain artificial and elegant repose," realises that "wealth and greatness" are not "for procuring ease of body or tranquillity of mind" (*TMS* 181). Condemning power and wealth as "enormous operose machines," Smith, perhaps at his most egalitarian, contends that "the beggar, who suns himself by the side of the highway, possesses that security which kings are fighting for" (*TMS* 185). This blatant egalitarianism, however, is counterpoised against a conservative view that the desire for "wealth and greatness" enhances the "industry of mankind," which, in turn, obliges the earth to "redouble her natural fertility" (184). The agricultural surplus owing to the redoubled fertility benefits the rich and the poor alike, for landlords, "in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity," divide with the poor "the produce of all their improvements" (184). Thus, though he claims that in "ease of body and peace of mind, all the different ranks of life are nearly upon

a level," Smith goes so far as to attribute social hierarchy to providence: "When Providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters, it neither forgot nor abandoned those who seemed to have been left out in the partition" (185). Like Smith, Burns in "The Twa Dogs" does not seek to annihilate rank and wealth, but proposes an ideal vision in which different social positions, bound by reciprocal duties, coexist in harmony, just as Cæsar, though of "high degree," associates with Luath and "a Tinkler-gipsey's *messan*" (15-18). Instead of fulminating against Britain's hierarchical monarchy, Luath paints a vision in which the gentry, abstaining from corruption, mend their ties with the toiling poor:

> O would they stay aback frae courts,
> An' please themselves wi' countra sports,
> It wad for ev'ry ane be better,
> The *Laird*, the *Tenant*, an' the *Cotter*! (175-78)

As Macpherson's Ossianic poems belong to a misty past rendered remote by the ruthless repressions following the 1745 Jacobite Rising, so the vision of the Ossianically named Luath is a tribute to a lost world of benevolent paternalism, where the "*Laird*, the *Tenant*, an' the *Cotter*" were interconnected by Smith's "agreeable bands of love and affection." Burns's acerbic diatribes against religious and political inequalities in "Holly Willie's Prayer" and "Address to Beelzebub" are tamed into a "calmer and sedater" lyricism in "The Twa Dogs" (Cunningham 132). In contrast to the "Swinish Multitude," the common folk in the poem, though "on poortith's brink" (104), are "maistly wonderfu' contented" (84), enjoying the "dearest comfort o' their lives": "their grushie weans" and "faithful wives" (111-12). Nevertheless, Luath's vision of "social Mirth" (127) is on the verge of collapse, for the "*Laird*," crucial to the wellbeing of the "*Tenant*" and the "*Cotter*," defaults on his paternalistic duties. Due to rack-renting, "monie a creditable *stock* / O' decent, honest, fawsont folk" are "riven out baith root an' branch" (141-42), and the resulting rural desolation approaches the bleak landscape in "To a Mouse." Despite Smith's optimistic claim that the surplus arising from agricultural improvement benefits the poor by an "invisible hand" (*TMS* 184), Burns underscores the tragic outcome of the gentry's moral decline. Though Burns, similar to Smith, refrains from advocating the abolition of social stratification, he modifies Smith's rosy vision by contending that the

"selfishness and rapacity" of the landed classes can indeed undermine his social vision. Those who demand commutative justice at the sacrifice of distributive justice, or who pursue "vulgar prudence" at the cost of "superior prudence," when further corrupted by wealth and power, become those who, far from acting for "Britain's guid," contribute to "her destruction' / Wi' dissipation, feud an' faction" (169-70). Whereas "To a Mouse," as a social allegory, is shorn of explicit topical references, "The Twa Dogs" criticises contemporary corruption and sounds a patriotic note by calling for amelioration in the post-1707 Kingdom of Great Britain. Burns was to protest British loyalty in "The Dumfries Volunteers" when Britain faced the threat of French invasion in 1795: "Be Britain still to Britain true, / Amang oursels united" (15-16). Yet, as early as 1786, connecting local attachment with patriotic fervour, Burns already proposes, for "Britain's guid," a social vision founded upon rural felicity and social stability.

If Burns, who signs himself "A BRITON" in a 1788 letter for the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, can hold up an ideal vision for "Britain's guid" in "The Twa Dogs," he can also create a social paradigm for his native "SCOTIA." In "The Cotter's Saturday Night," Burns panegyrises "in simple Scottish lays" the "*lowly train* in life's sequester'd scene" (5-6) and presents a patriotic image of agricultural felicity from which "old SCOTIA'S grandeur springs" (163). Although the poem, focused upon a Scottish family, adopts a more microscopic viewpoint than "The Twa Dogs," its social vision is comparable to Luath's close-knit structure comprising the "*Laird*, the *Tenant*, an' the *Cotter*." The Cotter's family epitomises a society carefully maintained by paternalistic figures: "Their Master's and their Mistress's command, / The *youngkers* a' are warned to obey" (46-47). In contrast to hegemonic powers, however, which demand absolute obedience at the sacrifice of individual judgment, Burns's ideal community relies upon the harmony of its diverse members: the "toil-worn COTTER" (14), the "expectant *wee-things*" (21), the "thrifty *Wifie*" (24), the "*lisping infant*" (25), the "*elder bairns*" (28) and the family's "eldest hope, their *Jenny*" (32). In this regard, "The Cotter's Saturday Night" epitomises Smith's claim in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that society is a great "chess-board" upon which each piece has a "principle of motion" and that the "man of public spirit" guides but also respects the "individuals," "orders," and "societies, into which the state is divided." Rather than assuming a *laissez-faire* attitude, government authorities, like the

"Master" and the "Mistress" of the Cotter's family, should attend to the wellbeing of individuals. Instead of entertaining the public with the "golden dream" of "a great empire" (*WN* 947), the government ought to dissipate "superstition and enthusiasm" by encouraging "the study of science and philosophy" and by enhancing "the frequency and gaiety of publick diversions" (*WN* 796). Integrating paternalistic care and social complexity, Burns, as in "To a Mouse" and "The Twa Dogs," at once suffuses his social vision with a nostalgic aura and provides a glimmer of hope. As a farmer of the middling sort, Burns must have known that eighteenth-century Scotland witnessed the "removal of sub-tenants and cottars and even small tenants holding direct of the landlord"; the social power of wealthy tenants and lairds was gradually reinforced as they opted for large-scale improvements and as "sub-tenancies were being swept away" throughout the Lowlands, except in the North East (Gray 59, 62). As a result, the traditional rural order eulogised in "The Cotter's Saturday Night" was reorganised, and redundant labourers were driven from the land their fathers had tilled, like the beastie in "To a Mouse" and the "*stock* / O' decent, honest, fawsont folk" in "The Twa Dogs." Significantly, nevertheless, in his sentimental picture of the Cotter, Burns plays down the tone of accusation lurking behind "To a Mouse" and "The Twa Dogs" in order to internalise the source of happiness, which alone survives social changes. Based upon Robert Fergusson's "The Farmer's Ingle," "The Cotter's Saturday Night" also resembles Wordsworth's "Michael: A Pastoral Poem" (in *Lyrical Ballads*) in combining "eydent" labour (48) with humble piety and familial affection. Yet, while the "straggling heap of unhewn stones" (17), into which Michael's sheepfold eventually falls, symbolises the collapse of Wordsworth's agrarian ideal, Burns insists that the Cotter's cottage stands secure in the shelter of "an aged tree" (20). The sentimental vision in "The Cotter's Saturday Night," firm and resilient as tree roots, is symbiotic with Nature's perennial life-force.

It may stretch the imagination too far to argue that the "aged tree" anticipates "The Tree of Liberty," but a comparison between the two arboreal images serves to highlight the intensity of local attachment in "The Cotter's Saturday Night." [12] In "The Tree of Liberty," Burns envisions the

[12] The authorship of "The Tree of Liberty" has long been disputed. I follow James Kinsley (1968), Andrew Noble and Patrick Hogg (2003), Robert Crawford and Christopher MacLachlan (2009), amongst others, in attributing the poem to Burns.

transplantation of the Tree from republican America, through revolutionary France, to the world at large: "Wi plenty o' sic trees, I trow, / The warld would live in peace" (73-74). In "The Cotter's Saturday Night," on the other hand, Burns resorts to "aged" tradition, which, rather than riding on the inexorable tide of revolutionary enthusiasm, reaches far down into his "native soil" (172). The transplantable nature of the Tree of Liberty points to the infinitely inclusive quality of Burns's social vision, which is tinted with Pope's masonic view that happiness consists "not in the good of one, but all" (Pope 531). Fully articulated in "For a' that & a' that"—"Man to Man, the warld o'er, / Shall brothers be for a' that" (39-40)—the inclusive spirit characterises the ideal vision in "To a Mouse," for sympathy allows the narrator to become a "companion" with the poor beastie. The emphasis upon permeable boundaries also occurs in "The Twa Dogs," for Cæsar, though belonging to the polite world, speaks Scots and associates with "tawted *tyke*[s], though e'er sae duddie" (20). Since the Cotter's family welcomes Jenny's friend, who merges into the familial circle with his "artless heart" (68), the "aged tree" also possesses the inclusive quality of the Tree of Liberty. "The Cotter's Saturday Night," however, displays a centripetal pattern in attributing national grandeur to familial bliss, as opposed to the centrifugal growth of the Tree of Liberty from "yont the western waves" (28) to France and the larger world. Accordingly, Burns moves from the cosmopolitan ideal in "The Tree of Liberty" to celebrate "old SCOTIA" as the proper seat of simple comfort and ample affection. Drawing upon the metaphor of local identification rather than horizontal transplantation, Burns savours "SCOTIA'S food" (92), values "SCOTIA'S holy lays" (114), and locates providence in the earthbound and the homegrown: "the *raven's* clam'rous nest" and "the *lily* fair in flow'ry pride" (158-59). Manifestly Scottish, "The Cotter's Saturday Night" traces patriotic love in local attachment and fêtes the "hardy sons of *rustic toil*" as a "*virtuous Populace*," who, in contrast to the effete possessors of "*crowns* and *coronets*," "stand a wall of fire around their much-lov'd ISLE" (173-80). Glossing over harsh rural reality and harking back to an outdated mode of benevolent paternalism, Burns risks becoming a "man of system" who, as Smith warns, is "intoxicated with the imaginary beauty" of an "ideal system, of which [he has] no experience" (*TMS* 232). Nonetheless, by giving voice to the elementary units of his ideal vision—beasties, dogs, and cotters—Burns

casts a sceptical light on hegemonic leaders who forfeit their local attachment and wield the discourse of abstraction.

In "To a Mouse," "The Twa Dogs," and "The Cotter's Saturday Night," all of which were first published in 1786, Burns creates an affectionate vision underpinned by egalitarian and humanitarian values. Parochial as his vision may appear, Burns's notion of social inclusivity evades the rigid self-other guidelines that define hegemonic regimes, and his idea of social complexity avoids the monolithic "ideal system" that intoxicates fanatic revolutionaries. Burns's social vision shares significant affinities with Smith's arguments in ethics and economics, which, in contrast to the binary logic—material opulence and moral sentiments—that informs the well-known "Adam Smith Problem," are subtly incorporated in Smith's writings. Thus, in *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith apparently worships opulence but morally denounces the "principles" behind colonialism: "the folly of hunting after gold and silver mines" and "the injustice of coveting the possession of a country whose harmless natives . . . had received the first adventurers with every mark of kindness and hospitality" (588). The "chimerical project" (589) of colonial exploitation and the "golden dream" of imperial expansion are at the centre of Smith's attack on slavery, monopoly, imperialism, colonialism and, underlying all these, modern mercantilism. Contrary to the petty-mindedness of these monolithic institutions, which sacrifice human worth in favour of mercenary gains, Smith proposes a universal vision akin to the grand ideals of fraternity and equality in "The Tree of Liberty" and "For a' that & a' that":

> By uniting, in some measure, the most distant parts of the world, by enabling them to relieve one another's wants, to increase one another's enjoyments, and to encourage one another's industry, their general tendency [the discovery of the New World and the passage to the East Indies] would seem to be beneficial. (*WN* 626)

This all-embracing vision in *The Wealth of Nations*, foregrounding the benevolent duties of "relieving," "increasing" and "encouraging," almost seamlessly accords with Smith's ideal society in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where "assistance is reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem." Like Burns's social vision, which often includes topical references to the revolutions in America and France and

to the changes in Scottish agriculture, Smith's universal vision can take on contemporary significance. Indeed, as a pioneer of the imperial subject of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, Smith can deploy the Unionist rhetoric: by "a union with Great Britain," "Ireland would gain," as Scotland has done, "besides the freedom of trade, other advantages much more important, and which would much more than compensate any increase of taxes that might accompany that union" (*WN* 944). Though at variance with Burns's condemnation of the mercenary ends behind the 1707 Union,[13] Smith's insistence on the "advantages" of union reaches beyond economic considerations and displays a profoundly humanitarian aspect. Similar to Burns's tongue-in-cheek claim, "But while we sing, GOD SAVE THE KING, / We'll ne'er forget THE PEOPLE!", Smith's vision of union, far from drowning the voice of "THE PEOPLE," is intended to abolish the "oppressive aristocracy" in Ireland, prevent the "open violence and bloodshed" in America, and lighten the "burden of those unfortunate [East Indian] countries" (*WN* 945). In this manner, even when Smith is at his most unionist and when Burns is at his most loyalist, they both remain true to the humanitarian and egalitarian basis upon which they ground their anti-hegemonic and anti-monolithic perspectives. Essentially, the social visions of Burns and Smith manifest resilient inclusiveness, which dismantles the "savage patriotism of a strong but coarse mind" (*TMS* 228), and harmonious complexity, which debunks the imperial attempts at creating deceptively homogenous "golden dreams" and "chimerical projects." Against the backdrop of the British Empire, Smith's and Burns's social visions may assume a dangerously revolutionary tincture, to the extent that Burns's sympathies with the Jacobites and the Republicans were interpreted as disloyal by the Dumfries Loyal Natives and others, and Smith's doctrine of free trade was regarded, as Dugald Stewart testified, as possessing "a revolutionary tendency." However, equally important is that both writers not only glimpsed beyond the dubious fervour that fuelled contemporary revolutions but also created social visions that can be at the same time stratified, egalitarian and humanitarian.

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[13] "But English gold has been our bane, / Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation" (15-16).

IV. Agrarian Ideals

Kathryn Sutherland has rightly pointed out that, in *The Wealth of Nations*, there are two "models of production"—"the one 'natural,' the other virtuous"—and that "[i]f natural man is a merchant, virtuous man is a farmer" (xxix). Just as Burns prefers the "Heaven-taught ploughman" to the "mercenary Bard,"[14] so Smith relegates the "mercenary exchange of good offices" to an order morally inferior to "mutual love and affection"—sentiments prevalent in agrarian society. For all his emphasis upon the division of labour as a primary factor of "general opulence," Smith foresees the stultifying effect—the "torpor" of the mind (*WN* 782)—of the Industrial Revolution and reserves his praise for the rural worker. In an age that witnessed the gradual replacement of rural contentment by "vulgar prudence," Smith's admiration for virtuous rural life, like Burns's panegyric to the loving Cotter, was as much a nostalgic gesture as an ardent wish to counteract the detrimental impacts of industrialisation and commercialisation. In the sociopolitical arena of late eighteenth-century Britain, agriculture became institutionalised on a national scale and began to assume vital public significance with Sir John Sinclair's establishment of the Board of Agriculture in 1793. From the monarch "Farmer George" to such agriculturists as Jethro Tull, Adam Dickinson, Thomas Hitt, William Marshall, and James Small, whose treatises Burns perused, agriculture became an ideological issue that cut across a wide social spectrum, attracting the ruling classes as well as rural labourers. Furthermore, agriculture, as Nigel Leask has argued, "represented a species of moral rearmament against the luxury and effeminacy that seemed responsible for the humiliating defeat of British forces by American farmers and backwoodsmen, inspirited by patriotic zeal and republican virtue"; additionally, Sinclair's patriotic agricultural enterprise, *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, published from 1791 to 1799, was intended to "pre-empt the sort of 'visionary theory' that had brought down the French *ancien régime*" (Leask 38, 40). Closely associated with patriotic fervour, moral goodness and mental wholesomeness, agriculture ideologically consolidated

[14] "The Cotter's Saturday Night" begins with Burns drawing a line between himself and the "mercenary Bard" (2) who pays homage to wealthy patrons, but who neglects "a friend's esteem and praise" (4). Burns states that his aim is not to flatter the intelligentsia by depicting exquisite scenes in beautiful terms, but to imagine his noble dedicatee Robert Aiken amongst the "lowly train in life's sequester'd scene," so as to emphasise the "native feelings strong, the guileless ways, / What A[iken] in a Cottage would have been" (6-8).

the British Isles against the threats from beyond the Atlantic and from the Continent. Smith and Burns, familiar with the complex landscape of agrarian discourse, both grounded their social visions upon a distinctly rural foundation. However, whereas Sinclair's *Statistical Account,* like other government-funded projects of ecological research, contributed to what Fredrik Jonsson calls the "environmental foundation of imperialism" (1346), Burns's and Smith's agrarian ideals were pitted against monolithic hegemony.

In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith balances his account of industrial specialisation with a poetic portrait of the "common ploughman," who, with his superior wisdom, morality, and patriotism, echoes the ideal farmer in the *Georgics*. Claiming that husbandry requires a great "variety of knowledge and experience," Smith exalts the farmer above the stultified industrial worker and even above the "very contemptible authors" of agricultural treatises: "from all those volumes we shall in vain attempt to collect that knowledge of its various and complicated operations, which is commonly possessed even by the common farmer" (143). The farmer, unmatched by imperial agriculturalists, resembles the "wives an' wabsters" in Burns's 1786 verse epistle, whose "common sense" reveals greater wisdom than classical philosophy. The "understanding" of the "common ploughman" is "generally much superior to that of [the factory hand], whose whole attention from morning till night is commonly occupied in performing one or two very simple operations" (144). The country labourer's intellectual superiority is coupled with his moral integrity: whereas a factory worker, for lack of moral restraints, can "abandon himself to every sort of low profligacy and vice," his conduct, in a "country village," "may be attended to, and he may be obliged to attend to it himself" (38). Smith's encomium to the farmer's mental power and moral wellbeing finds resonance in the multivolume *Georgical Essays* (1770-1772) edited by the Scottish physician Alexander Hunter. The phrase "profligacy and vice" appears in one of the *Georgical Essays*, in which agriculture, regarded as conducive to "bodily health," "vigour," "innocency," and "simplicity of manners," shelters farmers from the "contagion of bad example" in "the crowded city" and also from "scenes of profligacy and vice" (II 16-17). Another entry in the *Georgical Essays*, echoing Burns's view that farmers "stand a wall of fire around their much-lov'd ISLE," argues that "a nation, whose youth consists mostly of manufacturers, will never be so secure or independent, as it would be with the same population employed in the

cultivation of land" (I 256). The patriotic spirit of the common peasant, at the heart of Burns's belief that tenant farmers constitute "a Nation's strength," also underlies Smith's agrarian ideal: "among those nations of husbandmen who have little foreign commerce and no other manufactures but those coarse and household ones . . . , every man, in the same manner, either is a warrior, or easily becomes such" (*WN* 692). Agriculture, with its concomitant mental agility, moral virtue and patriotic vigour, appeals to Smith in two ways: economically, the capital of the landlord, "which is fixed in the improvement of his land, seems to be as well secured as the nature of human affairs can admit of"; emotionally, the "beauty of the country," "the pleasures of a country life, the tranquillity of mind which it promises, and wherever the injustice of human laws does not disturb it, the independency which it really affords, have charms that more or less attract everybody" (378). Both the economic and the affective perspectives are derived from the intensely local nature of agriculture, which, like the "aged tree" in "The Cotter's Saturday Night," renders financial investment secure and strengthens rural attachments. By contrast, the merchant—parallel to the deracinated and commercialised gentry in "The Twa Dogs"—abandons his economic and emotional roots and frequently commits his capital and fortune "to the winds and the waves" (378). Smith regards merchants as bound by no patriotic ties, and landowners as intimately connected with a nation's welfare: whereas a merchant "is not necessarily the citizen of any particular country" (426), the "proprietor of land is necessarily a citizen of the particular country in which his estate lies" (848).

Smith, however, distinguishes between landlords, who, due to the "ease and security of their situation," are incapable of the "application of mind" (265), and small proprietors, who, like the "Laird" in Luath's vision, are attached to their land:

> A small proprietor, however, who knows every part of his little territory, who views it with all the affection which property, especially small property, naturally inspires, and who upon that account takes the pleasure not only in cultivating but in adorning it, is generally of all improvers the most industrious, the most intelligent, and the most successful. (*WN* 423)

As Emma Rothschild and Amartya Sen have argued, though the "central figure" of *The Wealth of Nations* is the "restless, wandering proprietor of

stock," the "closest approximation to a hero is the proprietor of local agricultural land, the improver of the small estate, the tranquil man of civility and cultivation" (364). Concordant with his support for social complexity and his objection to the "corporation spirit" of monopoly, to the "golden dreams" of imperial expansion, and to the "chimerical projects" of colonial control, Smith values "small proprietors," "small property," and "little territory" over large-scale agriculture and condemns "primogeniture" and "entails," which hinder lands from being "broken into small parcels," as "founded upon the most absurd of all suppositions" (*WN* 384). Smith's rural ideal, therefore, is more akin to "The Cotter's Saturday Night," in which the country labourers, spared from the enclosure of common land and the consolidation of small farms, still plough their limited tracts of land "wi' an eydent hand" (48). Smith's proposal for small farming not only departs from the mainstream discourse of large-scale agriculture in Arthur Young's *Annals of Agriculture* (1784-1815), to which George III contributed under the *nom de plume* "Ralph Robinson," but also differs from the vogue for physiocracy in contemporary France. Although both Smith and the French physiocrats advocate a liberal system of exchange, according to which rural products can flow without political hindrance from market to market, the pioneering French physiocrat François Quesnay, with whom Smith was acquainted, claims in one of his "*maximes générales*" that small lands should be consolidated into large farms managed by rich proprietors: "*Que les terres employées à la culture des grains soient réunies, autant qu'il est possible, en grandes fermes exploitées par de riches laboureurs*" (Quesnay 114). Kenneth MacLean has cogently contended that "[p]hysiocratic thought was altogether suitable to the purposes of the improvers and enclosers," while "the humbler agrarian tradition, represented in the *Wealth of Nations*, cooperated with the spirit of poetry in behalf of England's declining peasantry" (86)—the same can be said for Burns's poetic spirit and Scotland's declining peasantry. Smith indeed embraces "opulence and improvement" in *The Wealth of Nations*, yet his humble agrarian vision, together with his admiration for the mental power, virtuous life and patriotic zeal of the "common peasant," is at one with his challenge of such monolithic ideologies as underlie contemporary agricultural discourse.

Burns the "Heaven-taught ploughman" certainly espoused the humble agrarian tradition in *The Wealth of Nations*, for he personally experienced the

devastating repercussions of large-scale agriculture on less-advantaged farmers and cotters. This by no means implies that Burns, who perused "farming books" (*L* 1: 143) and undertook, at the age of seventeen, a course in "Mensuration, Surveying, Dialling, &c" in Kirkoswald (*L* 1: 140), was opposed to agricultural improvement, but, similar to Smith, he adopted a more nuanced perspective and distrusted large-scale institutions. Writing to Mrs. Dunlop in 1792, Burns draws attention to the breakdown of his rural ideal in contemporary Scotland: while a "Farmer" leads a "cursed life" paying "dear, unconscionable rent," a "LAIRD farming his own property; sowing corn in hope, & reaping it, in spite of brittle weather, in gladness" lives a "heavenly life" (*L* 2: 152). Burns thus demonstrates profound sympathies with suffering country workers and calls into doubt Quesnay's optimistic emphasis upon the positive role of "*riches laboureurs*"—a concept formulated in the extravagant court of Louis XV. The "*grandes fermes*" of the improved Lowlands are ideologically dissolved into small landscapes inhabited by a complex plurality of farmers, whose struggles for life debunk the callous indifference of the "LAIRD farming his own property."

Paradigmatically, in "The Brigs of Ayr," Burns seeks to relativise monolithic *grandeur* and to orchestrate distinct elements into an agrarian vision, which, hymned by "soul-ennobling Bards" (201), manifests diversity and inclusivity. Burns dramatises the ideological rivalry between the "Sprites that owre the *Brigs of Ayr* preside" (72), both of whom exhibit monolithic recalcitrance. While the Auld Brig scorns his young companion's "modish mien" (89), reminisces about his "dear-remember'd, ancient yealings" (150), and mourns over the "melancholy alteration" (163) of the local community, the New Brig adores the "bonie *Brigs* of modern time" (102), dismisses the "ugly, Gothic hulk" (106) of his aged neighbour as "some bedlam Statuary's dream" (137), and denounces ancient government as blind to "Knowledge" (188) and "Common-sense" (190). Framing the ideological tension of the poem is Burns's own voice—a "simple Bard" (47), or a "warlock Rhymer" (71), roaming by the "tide-swoln Firth" (59)—whose liminal status arbitrates between the Auld and New extremes. Burns's "hardy Independence" (8) enables him to adopt a middle course, to reconcile the Auld Brig's nostalgic reminiscence with the New Brig's progressive confidence, and to incorporate both into a serene rural vision at the poem's coda. Deconstructing the monolithic ideologies of the Brigs from a liminal perspective, Burns also

highlights their respective virtues: the Auld Brig's respect for tradition—"Nae langer Rev'rend Men, their country's glory, / In plain, braid Scots hold forth a plain, braid story" (66-67)—dovetails with Burns's own fascination with Hamilton of Gilbertfield's 1722 modernisation of Blind Hary's *Wallace*, which "poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins" (*L* 1: 136); the New Brig's enlightened modernity—"Nae mair the Council waddles down the street, / In all the pomp of ignorant conceit" (184-85)—corresponds to Burns's remark, "What is a lordling's pomp? a cumbrous load" (169), in "The Cotter's Saturday Night." Bringing to light both the follies and the virtues of the Auld and the New extremes, Burns eventually allows the Brigs to discard their monolithic prejudices, retain their strengths, forget "their kindling wrath" (234), and merge into a vision of rural felicity.

The allegorical vision comprises a beautiful dance, in which the seasons are coupled with their incarnated rural significance: "Spring" with "Sweet Female Beauty," "Summer" with "Rural Joy," "Autumn" with "Plenty," and "Winter" with "Hospitality" (218-24). Contrary to Arcadia's eternal spring, Burns's rural community, parallel to the Iron Age in the *Georgics*, is intertwined with seasonal flux and the corresponding shifts in human emotions. The "Genius of the Stream" (213)—who, as a "venerable Chief advanc'd in years" (214), embodies patriarchal benevolence—not only temporally connects the Auld and New ages but also spatially links the Auld and New bridges, embracing their ideological discrepancies. Following the seasonal dance are the virtues that Burns attributes to the ideal rural community: "Courage," "Benevolence," "Learning," "Worth" and, finally, "Peace," who bequeaths the "broken, iron instruments of Death" to "rustic Agriculture" (225-33), all of which accord with Smith's praise of the "common ploughman." With war and "Death" vanquished by "Peace" and with "rustic Agriculture" enjoying the final triumph, Burns declares that his ideal social vision, based upon the marriage of natural forces and rural labour, ultimately achieves permanence. The vision, however, is not frozen in time like Keats's Grecian urn, for the Auld and the New, although reconciled, remain distinct: "At sight of whom [Peace] our Sprites forgat their kindling wrath" (234).

Rural peace, resolving the ideological rivalry of the Sprites, testifies to the inclusive character of Burns's agrarian ideal; in the meanwhile, the distinctness of the Auld and the New Brigs renders the rural vision

realistically complex. Whereas monolithic systems sanctify their own actions and demonise those of their rivals in order to forge a self-righteous national identity, "The Brigs of Ayr" rises above such "Manichean dichotomies" (Meusburger 62) and suggests that rural labour, together with its temporal and spatial dynamics, can demystify abstract ideological contentions, or what Smith dismisses as "the spirit of system." Such abstract systems underpin the feudal regime, which the Auld Brig idealises and ironically tinges with the revolutionary concept of citizenship: "Nae langer thrifty Citizens, an' douce, / Meet owre a pint, or in the Council-house" (168-69). The same abstract ideological discourse also figures in the "enlightened" modern state, which, as the New Brig optimistically claims, has grown "wise prigging owre hops an' raisins, / Or gather'd lib'ral views in Bonds and Seisins" (186-87). To the Auld Brig, his young rival embodies what Smith terms the dangerous "spirit of innovation," which threatens to subvert tradition, while the New Brig regards his aged predecessor as an emblem of the "sullen gloom" (147) of mediaeval tyranny. Burns relativises the abstract systems by pitting one against the other, but he also prepares for the final reconciliation by implying that the boundaries between the Auld and the New are permeable: i.e. the Auld Brig tacitly endorses the ideal of "Citizens" in revolutionary modernity. We have seen how Burns and Smith, fashioning social visions at once stratified, egalitarian and humanitarian, adopt a liminal perspective to undermine both hegemonic tyranny and revolutionary fanaticism. Burns in "The Brigs of Ayr" further contends that the natural rhythms of "eydent" labour and seasonal cycles have the potential for dissolving the imaginary boundaries by which abstract ideologies justify themselves and stigmatise others. Concordant with Smith, who values agriculture over political "golden dreams," small proprietorship over large-scale farming, and the "common ploughman" over imperial agriculturalists, Burns claims that rural life, in an age that witnesses the ideological clashes between tradition and innovation, can shape a resilient, rather than "savage," national identity by incorporating the Auld and the New. Burns's sublime rural ideal recurs in the apocalyptic vision that concludes "The Tree of Liberty": a "new-born race" (53) will inhabit a world where "high and low" are made "guid friends" (22) and where the "sword would help to mak a plough" (75). Furthermore, contrary to the hegemonic practice of smothering individuality, Burns insists upon the harmonious coexistence, instead of total assimilation, of the two bridges, just

as the ideal community in "The Tree of Liberty," far from resting upon delusions of homogeneity, strives to preserve complexity and diversity: "It raises man aboon the brute, / It maks him ken himsel" (11-12).

Indeed, Burns's ideal social vision—integrating the Auld and the New in "The Brigs of Ayr" and embracing the entire "warld" in "The Tree of Liberty"—does not manifest Manichean rigidity, yet the vision, being rural, is distinctly localised. Fiona Stafford has argued that Burns's local attachment prompts him to "present rural, Scottish material in conjunction with elements drawn from other cultures, while still maintaining the inherent value of the homegrown" (202-03). For instance, in "To W. S.," Burns coopts "Willie" in a poetic attempt to make "our streams an' burnies shine / Up wi' the best," in order to rival "Th' *Illissus*, *Tiber*, *Thames* an' *Seine*," which "Glide sweet in monie a tunefu' line" (50-54). Foreignness thus defines localness and encourages Burns to eulogise the rivers not only of Scotland in general but also of Ayrshire in particular. In his first commonplace book, Burns similarly laments that while "other places of Scotland" have been "immortalized" in poetry,

> we have never had one Scotch Poet of any eminence, to make the fertile banks of Irvine, the romantic woodlands & sequestered scenes on Aire, and the heathy, mountainous source, & winding sweep of Doon emulate Tay, Forth, Ettrick, Tweed, &c. (46-47)

Burns's poetic destiny is profoundly local, for, in "The Vision," his muse Coila is "bounded to a district-space" (193) and wears a mantle displaying a "*well-known* Land" (72), with the familiar scenes of the "DOON," "IRWINE," and "AIRE" (79-81). In "The Brigs of Ayr," accordingly, the "Genius of the Stream," at the symbolic centre of seasonal flux and the conjuncture of the Auld and the New, is located in Ayrshire, with the "fairy train" (195) striking "old Scotia's melting airs" (205). Burns grounds his vision upon a rural, and hence local, basis, aligning himself with the "cottage" rather than the "palace" in "The Cotter's Saturday Night," with the "lowly Daisy" which "blows" beneath the "unrivall'd Rose," and with the "juicy Hawthorn" which "grows" under the "forest's Monarch" in "The Vision" (253-58). Parallel to Smith, Burns's agrarian ideal provides a foundation for his lifelong enterprise to pull down the high walls of monolithic ideologies

and hegemonic powers, while his sympathetic attention to beasties, dogs and cotters draws him closer to the earthbound humility in the *Georgics* and distances him from the eternal spring in the *Eclogues* and from the inexorable progress towards imperial grandeur in the *Aeneid*.

V. Conclusion

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith maintains that well-channelled "fellow-feeling" leads to a just society, in which every person, conscious that he is "but one of the multitude," must "humble the arrogance of his self-love" (83). Wrenching morality from elitist monopoly, Smith diffuses moral authority to the "multitude," emphasises man's place in the larger community, and even argues that in "ease of body and peace of mind, all the different ranks of life are nearly upon a level." This egalitarian gesture not only chimes with the demotic spirit of Burns—who appropriates Smith to defend his sympathies with wives, wabsters, lice, mice, and cotters—but also fuels other Scottish literary outputs with which Burns was familiar. For instance, Tobias Smollett, one of Burns's favourite novelists, praises Smithian sympathy for overcoming bias in a review of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* published in his London-based magazine, *The Critical Review*, in May 1759. Formulating a "sympathetic Britishness," Smollett taps into Smith's philosophy in *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) and displays how the Welsh protagonists surmount cultural prejudices on their journey through Britain (R. Crawford, *Scotland's Books* 317). For all its power to eliminate monolithic prejudices, sympathy by no means leads Smith and Burns to support unqualified egalitarianism, for, like Burke, they distrust the clamourous discontent of the "unthinking rabble" and the "great mob of mankind." Unlike Burke, however, they both express their faith in the essential equality of mankind and articulate their concern for "the poor and the wretched" even when they seek to muffle their radical disdain for tyranny at the height of British conservatism. Sympathy, with its resilient potential for dissolving monolithic systems, is deployed by Burns, who adopts and manipulates his liminal identity as the "Heaven-taught ploughman" to challenge received values from a social and cultural marginal space. Pitted against monolithic homogeneity and hegemonic antagonism, Smith's sympathetic social vision, embodied in the intricate "chess-board" of mankind and the benevolent society of "mutual love and affection," shares subtle affinities with Burns.

"To a Mouse" dramatises the conflict between a social system founded upon mercenary "vulgar prudence" and supported by "commutative justice" and a social vision embellished by "superior prudence," "beneficence," and "distributive justice." The tone of remorse and the bleak rural landscape dissipate the rebellious potential of the Mouse's "bickering brattle," yet Burns implies that amelioration is possible through sympathetically reconstructing the "broken" ideal "social union." "The Twa Dogs" presents a vision for "Britain's guid," in which the laird, the tenant, and the cotter form a community based upon local attachment, and displays the reality of Britain's "destruction," in which the gentry are commercialised and deracinated. Burns's contempt for the rich dovetails with Smith's view that wealth and power constitute "enormous operose machines"; however, although he, like Smith, embraces the moderate "public spirit," he takes issue with Smith's providential view of established social hierarchy and highlights the damage caused by the corrupt gentry. The humble Scottish family in "The Cotter's Saturday Night" epitomises Luath's paternalistic social vision, which, albeit stratified, values the inherent worth of its diverse members and which, albeit localised, embraces sympathetic outsiders. Underscoring the stabilising power of local attachment, Burns attenuates the air of discontent in "To a Mouse" and "The Twa Dogs" and grounds his rural vision around an "aged tree," whose sturdiness nourishes the patriotic love of a "*virtuous Populace*." Burns's social vision, accordingly, is distinctly localised, and even though he attempts to broaden his poetic horizons to the vast entirety of Britain in "The Twa Dogs," he deliberately articulates his social vision by means of two Scots-speaking country dogs. The social visions of Burns and Smith are essentially agrarian, for both writers, like Virgil in the *Georgics*, praise the "common ploughman" and value local attachment, challenging and dissolving imperial "golden dreams" from an earthbound perspective. "The Brigs of Ayr" conjoins seasonal flux, eydent labour, and rural virtue and reveals Burns's conviction that agrarian life, based upon inclusivity and complexity, has the sublime potential for reconciling monolithic ideologies—a vision that Smith also espouses in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as well as in *The Wealth of Nations*. Just as Smith argues that a philosopher and a street porter are more akin to each other than we imagine, so the arch-spokesman for "honest poverty" and the arch-defender of "opulence" are subtly connected by their social visions and agrarian ideals.

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