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## Of Chora and the Taming of the Political Uncanny: Sir Walter Scott's *The Highland Widow* as a Nationalizing Tale

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## Of Chora and the Taming of the Political Uncanny: Sir Walter Scott's *The Highland Widow* as a Nationalizing Tale

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### Abstract:

The argument and conclusions of this study do not contradict the positions that have been taken with regard to Scott's Toryism and its endorsement of Britishization. The study, however, takes issue with critical approaches that sidestep the implicit connections of Scott's pro-Britishization and his approach to the problem of the Scottish antiszygy to key framing theoretical notions. Focusing on the underresearched *The Highland Widow*, the study explores two framing notions— chora and the political uncanny— that illuminate Scott's discourse on Britishization in a post-Culloden era. The study posits that the novella considers the immediate post-Culloden experiences of the Gael subject in terms of a dialectical interrelationship among the nationalizing tale, the uncanny (which should be rejected), and chora (which should be endorsed and trusted). To put succinctly this interrelationship, the nationalizing tale envisions an ideal egalitarian political structure. While the cultural taming of the political uncanny provides the Gael male subject with a focused rational mind that helps him acknowledge the demands for sociopolitical sobriety and the proper channeling of cultural values to fulfill lucrative pursuits, chora, a receptacle-like space that works affectively to install in the Gael a desire for assimilating into a newly emerging national collectivity, provides a structured space in which he reconstitutes himself within the abstract identity of Britishness. The novella emphasizes three processes that mark the future national state: the hegemony of Anglicization is bridled, Celticism is reformed, and Britishization configures as a guiding secular logos.

Keywords: Sir Walter Scott, Nationalism and Literature, Scotland in literature, The Uncanny in Literature, Chora.

## عن الوعاء و ترويض الغرائبي سياسياً: رواية سير والتر سكوت "أرملة مرتفعات اسكتلنده" كحكاية حول تكوين الوطن

زهرة أحمد حسين علي

### الملخص:

لا تناقض أطروحة هذا البحث ما ذهبت إليه دراسات سابقة حول تأثير فكر الحزب التوري المحافظ المساند للملكية البريطانية على أدب سكوت ومؤازرته لهيمنة الثقافة البريطانية على مناحى الحياة. بيد أن الدراسة تسائل المقاربات النقدية التي تتناسى العلاقات الضمنية بين تأييد سكوت لهذه الهيمنة وبين مفاهيم نظرية هامة توطر لها. وتحلل الدراسة مفهوميين يؤطران ويعززان خطاب سكوت الداعي لسيادة الثقافة البريطانية على تلك الاسكتلندية في رواية "أرملة مرتفعات اسكتلنده"، والمفهوم الأول هو "الوعاء"، وهو تصور يورده أفلاطون في محاوره (طيماسوس) ويريد به نوعاً من الوجود يختلف عن الثابت و يختلف عن المتغير أيضاً، و عبر الحركة يؤلد الوعاء أنساقاً من العلاقات و الروابط المتآلفة. أما المفهوم الثاني فهو "الغرائبي سياسياً".

تذهب هذه الدراسة إلى أن رواية سكوت تميل إلى معاضدة أنجلزة بريطانيا لكن دون اجتثاث كل جوانب الثقافة الاسكتلندية الغيلية. كما تذهب الدراسة إلى أن رواية سكوت تقارب تجربة الذات الاسكتلندية بعد معركة كلودين من منظور ديالكتيكي يستحضر علاقات ترابطية بين ثلاثة عناصر هي: أولاً، سرد حكاية مؤدلجة حول تكوين الوطن الأكبر (أي خلق بريطانيا متحدة تضم اسكتلنده الجبلية)؛ ثانياً، تجسيد مفهوم الغرائبي سياسياً (أي ما يخالف خطاب التاج البريطاني حول ايجابية خلق بريطانيا العظمى المتحدة) وضرورة رفض هذا الغرائبي؛ وثالثاً، الوثوق بفكرة الوعاء. ويؤكد خطاب الرواية على ثلاث عمليات تميز الدولة الوطنية البريطانية الوليدة: كبح جماح تيار الأنجلزة في تجلياته المتطرفة، شكم جنوح النزعة الغيلية وإصلاحها من نزقها، و تبني التحول إلى ما هو بريطاني والانضواء تحت مظلته باعتباره لوغوساً دنيوياً يُسترشد به.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأديب سير والتر سكوت، الوطنية والأدب، اسكتلنده في الادب، الغرائبي في الأدب، المفهوم الأفلاطوني للوعاء في الأدب.

## Introduction

Critics agree that the novelistic art of Sir Walter Scott has always had national politics as a thematic shadow. Under the pseudonym of Malachi Malagrowther, Scott provides what is perhaps his most candid political statement in his *Second Letter to the Editor of the Edinburgh Weekly Journal*:

For God's sake, sir, let us remain as Nature made us, Englishmen, Irishmen, and Scotchmen, with something to impress of our several countries upon each! We would not become better subjects, or more valuable members of the common empire if we all resembled each other like so many smooth shillings. (Scott, 1826:83)

Notwithstanding its assertiveness, Malagrowther's exhortation is anxiously mindful of the volatile forces that can render precarious the formation of the "common" British empire. But where might this volatility come from? And how can a centripetal gravitational pull toward the culture of Britishization be secured? Perhaps no text in Scott's oeuvre dramatizes more succinctly the answers to these questions than the under-researched novella *The Highland Widow* (published in 1827).

In refining the political-cultural perspectives on *The Highland Widow*, this study maintains that the novella represents two antithetical attitudes that shape post-Culloden British nationalism. The first is the rejection of the political uncanny, where the uncanny is, to quote Freud, "That class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (Freud, 1919:219). The second is the trust in chora, a concept that recalls Plato's cosmology in the *Timaeus* and can be best grasped as a receptacle that admits change and exchange, thereby generating positive transformative experiences that bolster the political universe of Britishization. These impulses exist in constant tension, with the rejection of the uncanny bringing about the ascent of faith in the chora. Together, the impulses reflect, metaphorically speaking, the two oppositional filaments of a dialectic germane to the constitution of a post-Culloden political ideal.

In *The Highland Widow*, both the political uncanny and chora appear as catalysts for judicious critical reflection; nevertheless, whereas the former gives a tangible perception of volatile anti-Britishization forces at work, the latter gives a speculative perception of taming these forces through cultural hybridity and Anglo-Gaelic male solidarity. To orchestrate these and sundry other elements, Scott, I argue, deploys what I term the "nationalizing tale"—a tale that seeks to

rewrite the Highlands as a subculture which mediates new links for the British empire and, therefore, a tale that endeavors to impress upon the reader a vision of a political architectonics that safeguards the emerging unity of the two poles—namely, England and Scotland—between which progressive Britishness is stretched.

Numerous studies have investigated the political significance of the Act of Union in the political/national imaginary of Scott's fiction. For instance, Caroline McCracken-Flesher argues that:

Walter Scott, in particular, suffered his period's national confusions. Indeed, so inscribed was he within nineteenth-century Scotland's economic expectations and cultural anxieties, he not only poured considerable effort into narrating a separate Scottish subjectivity and inserting that subjectivity within the English economic narrative, he set the terms, and the attendant problems, with which his successors wrestled through to Robert Louis Stevenson and even beyond." (McCracken-Flesher, 1991:298)

David Duff and Catherine Jones, too, suggest that Scott's approach to the Act of Union was suffused simultaneously with enthusiasm and anxiety:

Scotland and Ireland were, in Scott's view, equally vulnerable to the political, social and cultural incursions of their English neighbor, who justified her hegemonic ambitions within the United Kingdom—her desire to hold the rein of "the great national coach-and-six"—on dubious grounds of the benefits of uniformity. Scott by contrast, argues for a Union that respects national difference... it was precisely Scott's achievement in the Waverley Novels to forge a literary medium that could register this "impress" of region and nation—and of historical period—whilst still retaining the broad appeal of the mainstream British novel (Duff and Jones, 2007:21).

In a similar vein, Katie Trumpener argues that considering the scope of Scott's oeuvre, it becomes evident that he "underlines the ideological capaciousness of empire, emphasizes the analogies between nation formation and empire building, and argues for the continued centrality of national identity as a component of imperial identity" (Trumpener, 1997: xiii). Nevertheless, these readings have not gone unchallenged. For instance, Tom Nairn contends that:

The purpose of his [Scott's] unmatched evocation of a national [i.e., Scottish] past is never to revive it: that is, never to resuscitate it as part of political or social

mobilization in the present, by a mythical emphasis upon the continuity between (heroic) past and present. On the contrary, his essential point is always that the past really is gone . . . The heart may regret it, but never the head (Nairn, 2003: 102).

I argue that the critical latitude of Nairn's remark blurs the nuances of Scott's political stance. As Tara Ghoshal Wallace puts it, "Some ideological gymnastics were required to construct and perpetuate this [i.e., Scott's] notion of a unified imperial unity" (Wallace, 2010:31). One of the objectives of this study is to explore aspects of this "gymnastics" in *The Highland Widow*.

Broadly, this study is divided into three sections. The first section defines what I term the nationalizing tale, a hybrid narrative form that seems to accommodate the ideological tension inherent in Scott's works. The second section explicates the way the tale throws into relief the political uncanny, and by extension its inverse, the political canny (i.e., a civil society administered by a central government, and committed to urbanization, biculturalism and interracial solidarity of the collectivities comprising Britain), which suggests the importance of historical consciousness in relation to self-cultivation. The third section explicates how chora appears in the text in the form of a receptacle-like site for cultural syncretism and a consensual model of political power within the national state.

### The Nationalizing Tale

The story is originally an oral tale, told by the postilion Donald MacLeish to Mrs. Bethune Baliol, a wealthy and highly educated Lowlander, during a tour she takes in the Highlands. Baliol writes the story down and sends it as a "memorandum" (Scott, 1827/2003:68) to Chrystal Croftangry who then publishes it as a part of *Chronicles of the Canongate*. Set in 1747, one year after the battle of Culloden, *The Highland Widow* concerns the outlawed Highland clan chief, MacTavish Mohr, who is shot by the English army as a Jacobite and a cattle thief. Full of hatred toward both Saxons and Lowlanders, his widow, Elspat, hopes that their only son, Hamish, will follow in the footsteps of his father. Resisting the dictates of her wish, Hamish enlists in a British regiment destined to fight the French in America. Elspat urges him to desert. Hamish, however, views his act as an opportunity to amend their miserable conditions and declines his mother's request. Faced with resistance, Elspat cunningly drugs her son to

force him to overstay his furlough; the punishment of flogging, she assumes, will compel him to desert the regiment. Instead of fleeing to the distant glens of Skooroora, Hamish waits to be arrested. However, on his arrest and under his mother's incitement, Hamish fires his arms and kills Sergeant Allan Cameron. After Hamish's execution, Elspat lives a solitary life, plagued by guilt and poverty, her dwelling place considered "not canny" (Scott, 1827/2003:73).

Given the novella's historical milieu, its rich depiction of the experiences of a Gaelic family, and its engagements with the hard facts of post-Culloden British dominion, readers might be tempted to consider it either a national tale or an historical novel, which Davis Daiches defines as "an attempt to use a historical situation to illustrate some aspect of man's fate which has importance and meaning quite apart from that historical situation" (Daiches, 1957:90). Nevertheless, the national tale and the historical novel are related genres; as Evan Gottlieb suggests, both are forms "stemming from an inevitable synthesis of historiography and fiction" (Gottlieb, n.d., para:4), with the former the "generic predecessor" (Gottlieb, n.d., para:4) of the latter, but there are distinctions between the two forms. By and large, the national tale "tend[s] to be freer in form—although certain patterns, such as the tour through a foreign country and the marriage plot, are generally recognizable—and somewhat narrower in scope" (Gottlieb, n.d., para:6). Katie Trumpener explicates another aspect that differentiates the two genres; while "the early national tale evokes an organic national society, its history rooted in place; the historical novel describes the way historical forces break into and break up this idyll—and yet, through the very upheaval they cause, shape a new national community in place of the old" (Trumpener, 1997:xii-xiii). Juliet Shields asserts that "[t]o a greater extent than . . . historical novels, national tales position domesticity as central to Britain's national and imperial interests: they explore the conflicted relationships between metropolitan England, its Celtic peripheries, and an expanding British empire through marriage plots and family histories" (Shields, 2005:919-20). In Scott's delineation of the overarching juxtapositions of Scottish and English cultures, which lie at the heart of his narrative poetics, Murray Pittock explains that: Scott himself began by largely adopting the national tale as a mode of sympathetic reconciliation, whereby the historiography of Hume or Robertson . . . was implanted into a reading of the past which

emphasized “the beneficial necessity of change . . . the inadequacy of Scottish patriotism . . . and the incompetence of Scots in ruling themselves (due to their historic division) (Pittock, 2008:187).

While I acknowledge the strength of these arguments about the nature of the historical novel and the tenets of the national tale in nineteenth-century English literature, I want to suggest a different vantage point from which to consider *The Highland Widow* whose plot and themes seem to partake covertly of both genres as defined by the aforementioned critics. I argue that Scott’s novella is nationalizing rather than national or historical, predicated on a vision that seeks to subvert what it conceives as parochial nationalism<sup>1</sup>. Scott’s nationalizing tale is about Scotland (and the Highlanders as a minority) becoming an integral constituent of a larger collectivity. It, therefore, has a double pull; while it demonstrates the harsh dynamics of the partial cultural undoing of a minority, it alludes to the means of the reconfiguration of this minority’s culture. In the nationalizing tale, epistemological channels lead positively-depicted characters (as well as implied readers) to a single definition of the functional modern state, and the text reassesses established sociological structures that confuse this definition. Consequently, Scott’s nationalizing tale involves a process of devaluation of cultural mores. Not surprisingly, at its core is the subversion of logics that defeat the commended directionality of the characters’ epistemological channels. In a parallel thematic thrust, the tale remaps what dissenting minorities (i.e., characters representing minorities) perceive as cultural capital. In a cogent remark that can shed light on Scott’s approach to the nationalizing tale, Cairns Craig (2001) argues that, “Scott understood that the dramatization of the nation was not about its fictionality or its truth, but about the values which its imaginings tested and which they projected as the path of action for the future. Imagination is not simply a value in itself: it is the medium through which, like the nation, our ultimate values are debated” (Craig, 2001:27). In so approaching the construction of the nationalizing tale, I argue that in *The Highland Widow*, Scotland is represented as a vital subsidiary in the construction of a British culture; and the Gael/ Highlander is integrated into the opportune times of empire building.

#### Elspat and the Political Uncanny

In this novella, patterns of character juxtaposition betoken certain geocultural divisions; however,

the depiction of a highly unconventional female character—Elspat— constitutes a major textual strategy that dramatizes the uncanny and measures the Highland culture not against other European cultural norms but against a political ideal. Elspat is the opposite of Baliol, Hamish, and almost all the assimilated Highlanders, including the kinsfolk of Allan Cameron. From the perspective of the domestic sphere, she personifies the pre-urban, pre-Culloden conditions of the Highlands, as well as the decadent aspects of Gaelic clan culture, particularly its lack of “the moral principle which so naturally and so justly occurs to the mind of those who have been educated under a settled government of laws that protect the property of the weak against the incursions of the strong” (Scott, 1827/2003:83). To phrase it differently, Elspat symbolizes dysfunctional tribalism, with its obsolete and disruptive constellation of norms and values that obstruct nation building. Neither conjuring up in the reader’s mind, as a female dissident warrior, the image of Judith, nor evoking the example of Joan of Arc, Elspat’s example is dangerous because it will turn Scotland into a place of impotent myth that only undermines progress and bolster the uncanny. By contrast, Hamish stands for the emerging Scotland, the Scotland of liminal, transformatory spaces and biculturalism. From the perspective of the colonial public sphere, Bethune Baliol (a Lowlander), Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine (a Highlander), and Green Colin (a Lowlander) are Anglicized native elites who can lead a change against monoculturalism and purist nativist attitudes. The presence of these characters seems to postulate that Britishization and urbanization have a mutually reinforcing relationship.

Scott’s overarching view of Scotland is that it is a region which is changing from an uncanny, non-civil, semi-feudal society to a canny, civic society where all pluralities and collectivities intersect. To remain penetrated by forms and residues of feudalist clanship is not only cultural limbo but also the enactment of Scotland’s political death drives. Comparing Scott’s handling of characterization and thematics to other writers of historical fiction, Georg Lukács perceptively points out a key technique of Scott’s novelistic art: For Scott the historical characterization of time and place, the historical “here and now” is something much deeper. To him it means that certain crises in the personal destinies of a number of human beings coincide and interweave within the determining context of a historical crisis. It is precisely for this reason that his manner of portraying the historical



crisis is never abstract, the split of the nation into warring parties always runs through the centre of the closest human relationships. Parents and children, lover and beloved, old friends etc. confront one another as opponents, or the inevitability of this confrontation carries the collision deep into their personal lives (Lukács, 1962/1983:41).

The leitmotif of the ever-simmering confrontation between the canny and the uncanny punctuates *The Highland Widow* throughout. An ambiguous and capacious concept, the uncanny (*unheimlich*) as Freud explicates it in his 1919 essay, stems basically from what is strange, threatening, or “what arouses dread and horror” (Freud, 1919:218). Therefore, “the uncanny would always, as it were, be something one does not know one’s way about it” (Freud, 1919:220). Nonetheless, the uncanny can stem, as Freud remarks, from “something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it . . . through the process of repression” (Freud, 1919:240). Though it has inexhaustive examples, Freud’s essay explains that the “highest degree” of the uncanny is represented by things that relate to “death, dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts” (Freud, 1919:240). Freud laboriously traces the etymology of the word “unheimlich” in his essay in order to suggest that its meaning approaches “heimlich”; on the etymology of the word in English, Nicholas Royle writes:

The “uncanny” comes from Scotland, from that “auld country” that has so often been represented as “beyond the border, liminal, an English foreign body. The “uncanny” comes out of a language which is neither purely English (as if there could be such a thing) nor foreign. The poetic roots of the modern sense of this word in Scots present a vignette of the uncanny: uncertainties *at the origin* concerning colonization and the foreign body, and a mixing of what is at once old and long-familiar with what is strangely “fresh” and new (Royle, 2010:12; emphasis in the original).

The opening section of the novella proceeds by a basic mapping of the canny and the uncanny. The canny is signified by kale-yards, picturesque huts, the mores of the gregarious inhabitants in “regaling the passenger” (Scott, 1827/2003:70), and the character of Donald MacLeish—that “faithful attendant and steady servant . . . a sensible and intelligent” guide (Scott, 1827/2003:69-70). By contrast, the uncanny is signified by “wildernesses” (Scott, 1827/2003:72), hidden glens, the sites of the “principal clan battles”

(Scott, 1827/2003:69), the “great numbers of cairns yet visible” (Scott, 1827/2003:71) that show the extent of vengeance against enemies, and a curious familial value system that holds that it is better for a husband to die with his “hand on the basket-hilt of the red claymore” than to die “on a bed of rotten straw, like an over-worn hound, or a bullock which died of disease” (Scott, 1827/2003:84). Taken together, these contrasting elements appearing across untrodden landscapes may be seen as a holistic view of the binary canny/uncanny, an overture which prepares us for the paradigmatic locality of Elspat’s uncanny “bothy” (Scott, 1827/2003:104) and the heart of the pedagogical tale cast in the explicit terms of a family tragedy. However, before the reader reaches the novella’s central episode, and as Donald MacLeish, the exemplary bicultural and affable guide leads the way into the recesses of the Highlands, Bethune Baliol draws attention to what she posits as a major tangible hallmark of the canny: General Wade’s roads and their eventual civilizing effects. Baliol insinuates that these military highways are not only emblematic of imperial planning but are also instruments of positive changes because they prove that “the traces of war are sometimes happily accommodated to the purposes of peace” (Scott, 1827/2003:72). By undermining clan power, General Wade’s roads purge Gaelic culture from the unregenerate violence of the broad sword and impart exemplary order to Highland chaos. Moreover, by connecting together the accessible and the inaccessible spaces of the Highlands to England, these roads facilitate travel and trade and the influx of new cultural formulations that allow for biculturalism out of which the empire’s wellbeing is assured and a greater British nation is realized.

Nonetheless, the text makes it clear that one’s definition of canny and the uncanny is always a matter of response, of perception, and, therefore, is a matter of experience; that, quoting Freud, “people vary greatly in their sensitivity to this [uncanny] quality of feeling” (Freud, 1919:219). Just as the text, in the voice of Baliol, asserts that these roads have consolidated the canny, to Elspat the uncanny is effected by the self-same military road system that has facilitated the advent of the other/redcoats imposing on the Highlands new paradigms, and banishing local customs. To Elspat, “the long-skirted Lowland coat” which has replaced “the belted plaid and short hose” (Scott, 1827/2003:79) is a major sign of cultural annihilation. As shall become clear, the tale suggests that Elspat’s reaction to the effects of these roads,

i.e., her insistence on living in “the wildest recesses of the mountains” (Scott, 1827/2003:78) is monologic and pathological. Given the reactions of the two major characters (Elspat and Baliol), the sense of the uncanny in *The Highland Widow* is both psychological and the political. I will explicate first the uncanny as it is psychologized (Elspat’s sense of the uncanny) and then as politicized (Baliol’s/authorial voice’s sense of the uncanny).

To Elspat, the uncanny involves mnemonic underpinnings and is associated with the traumatic. Focused on the past, she is a testimonial voice that recalls the atrocities of the Glencoe massacre (which took place in February 1692) and the brutalities of the battle of Culloden (which took place in April 1746). Elspat’s anxiety stems from her fear of the total hegemony of the Saxon, “the Sidier Roy” (Scott, 1827/2003:78), who ambushed and killed MacTavish Mohr and now wills the cultural cleansing of the Highlands, in the sense of imposing a monolithic center which engulfs all micro centers, thus sweeping clan pluralities into one synthesized, hypothetical identity. The decline of clan life not only entails the diminishing of her social status as the widow of a clan chieftain but also expunges the cultural kernel that nourishes authentic being and the collective (i.e., tribal) historical memory. More than a physical threat, the hegemony of the Saxon race in Elspat’s point of view is a semiotic menace to her Gaelic world. It is not surprising that Elspat’s narration of her cateran days reflects her ethnic and cultural resistance.

Nevertheless, though a testimonial voice that represents the indigenous anti-colonial subject, the text divests Elspat of the unconditional sympathy a marginalized subaltern deserves. Her refusal of the political canny, her unconditional hatred of all Saxons, Lowlanders, and rival Highland clans and her love of score-settling, circumscribe her image as a traumatized victim:

She had been taught to consider those whom they call Saxons, as a race with whom the Gael were constantly at war, and she regarded every settlement of theirs within the reach of Highland incursion, as affording a legitimate object of attack and plunder. . . . Other Highland clans, too, she regarded as the fair objects of plunder when that was possible, upon the score of ancient enmities and deadly feuds (Scott, 1827/2003:83).

Because her hatred extends to her fellow Scots, Elspat, the text suggests, cannot serve as an official or communal spokesperson for Scottish traumatic

experiences. Her narrative discourse co-opts collective traumatic memory (of the clan of MacDonald to which she belongs) as a pretext for personal revenge and as a means to alienate Hamish from political agency. Furthermore, her shrieking and overreaction, when she recalls the events of Glencoe—the killing of the MacDonalds by the Campbells, not witnessed by her but communicated by her mother—reduce her authority as an irrefutable historian because she does not situate herself outside the event. So, neither generalized nor broadly collective, Elspat’s existential *angst* (now that MacTavish’s cateran ways are obsolete) is destined for cultural irrelevance. While the psychologized uncanny in *The Highland Widow* is couched in terms of the advent of cultural transference and the inevitableness of cultural hybridity, the political uncanny, paradoxically, stems from the subversion of the positivities of this transference and hybridity.

Though no exclusive definition of the political uncanny is universally endorsed, nonetheless in *The Highland Widow* it has traceable contours. Conveyed prismatically from Bethune Baliol’s point of view, the political uncanny is that alarming process during which extremism moves from conviction to practice. Since, broadly speaking, Britishization and the enactment of civil processes for Scott and the Scottish Enlightenment, have a symbiotic relationship, the political uncanny lies in the severed links between empire, bicultural subjectivity, and Christianity, in individual bodies not seeking productive agency when conditions of growth and prosperity prevail. Most alarmingly, the uncanny is the hostility to progress, the oxymoronic fear that progress will structure the fluidity of anarchistic masculinist cateran culture, impose boundaries, and destroy the pleasure principle prompted by raids and the belief “which esteemed it shame to want anything that could be had for the taking” (Scott, 1827/2003: 77). In brief, the uncanny takes place when history decelerates the process of modernity, stamping its apt purposes as objectionable. Nicholas Royle perceptively remarks that the “uncanny is a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper. . . . It is a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was ‘part of nature’ . . . the nature of the reality and the world” (Royle, 2003:1).

The tale approaches the political uncanny as a spectrum: at one end is Elspat’s tenacious radicalism, and at the opposite end is the extremism of the ruthless nameless veteran General (half a Lowlander, half an Englishman) who commands at Dunbarton and orders the immediate execution of Hamish. While

Elspat has no sense of the Celtic future, this General has no understanding of the Celtic past. This spectrum indicates that the political uncanny resides in the liminal spaces between the eclipse of one paradigm and the ascendancy of another. The danger of the political uncanny is that its ideas do not reconstruct the communal (i.e., pan-national) world anew. Another danger is that it jeopardizes the possible cultural syncretism of the British Isles' regions.

As a mother, Elspat represents the tension between the private domestic sphere of Gaelic culture and the public sphere of Anglicization. The absence of MacTavish Mohr (husband/father) consolidates her position of power. Elspat is a boastful female Gaelic zealot who "know[s] a hundred-fold more of swords and guns" (Scott, 1827/2003: 81) than ever her son will, and who joyously stands in the way of biculturalism, urban transformations, and the political canny, willing to hurl her son into the political void. Though outnumbered, she encourages Hamish to fight, telling him: "Thou shalt see if thy mother is an useless encumbrance in the day of strife. Thy hand, practised as it is, cannot fire these arms so fast as I can load them" (Scott, 1827/2003:107-8). A monologic consciousness, she neither negotiates, nor deciphers the discourse of the other, nor advocates the necessity of discipline. Because to her fundamentalist mind, Highland habits and bandit culture have transcendence, the threat which inheres in Britishization is precisely the undermining of such transcendence. It is worth noting that the belief in transcendence and aversion to corrective empirical observation are familiar traits of fundamentalist thought.

The political uncanny is inscribed in Elspat's bothy which deviates from all architectural norms and does not stand for even domestic architecture. Baliol describes it elaborately:

The walls of sod, or *divot*, as the Scotch call it, were not four feet high—the roof was of turf, repaired with reeds and sedges... and the whole walls, roof and chimney, were alike covered with the vegetation of house-leek, rye-grass, and moss, common to decayed cottages formed of such materials (Scott, 1827/2003:74).

Besides its iconic status as a perturbing object, several associations cast a macabre perspective on Elspat's bothy. It is the site of the "soporific" potion and the fatal "accursed cup" (Scott, 1827/2003:107) which destroy the fortunes of Elspat's ideal son, and the place where we hear the elegiac "coronach"

(Scott, 1827/2003:110) sung by female mourners for the admirable Allan Cameron, whom Hamish describes as "wise," "kind," and "comes of a good stem" (Scott, 1827 /2003: 108). Because the hut is linked to flawed binarisms that Elspat espouses (for example, Gael against Saxon, oppressed against oppressor, losers against winners), it is the potential place not only for political turbulence but also the impediment to a post-Culloden Gaelic political discourse to remap outdated paradigms of geocultural allocations. As a dilapidated place with no architecture, and surrounded by the labyrinthine spaces of Ben Cruachan and wild forests, the hut, the text implies, is symbolic of perilous, anarchic and primitive impulses as well as dysfunctional epistemes that negate the very concept of a cultured civic citizenry. Low-ceilinged and small, the hut is metaphorically indicative of the very limited ground under Elspat's feet. Through the engagement of religious master images, Scott jostles the political canny and uncanny against each other. While the text invests Hamish with a positive messianic-like mission, it divests Elspat of all positive Christian virtues. In order to establish this juxtaposition on which the plot turns, I will first analyze the text's portrayal of Hamish as the evolving political canny and then come back to the manner in which Scott sets Elspat up to signify the uncanny.

Hardy, disciplined, responsible, and rational, the young Hamish signifies a positive psychological and moral evolution of the tribal Gaelic subject. Willing to empty his self from xenophobia and the residues of ceteran values, and let his identity be mediated by the ethos and mores of the Saxon/other, Hamish is a new bicultural self that strives for political grace by two mediating acts: his endeavor to belong to an emerging reality and his obedience to the commandments offered by imperial England as the vital basis of self's political conversion. Mark Netzloff characterizes Hamish's attitude as indicative of a prevalent political assumption: that "[t]he intercultural relations of the colonial environment serve to dissipate Anglo-Scottish tensions and rivalries, securely rendering Scots as industrious, friendly, and decidedly subordinate partners in cooperative 'British' colonial ventures" (Netzloff, 2002:2). By willing to unleash what Tara Ghoshal Wallace (2010) aptly terms his "Scottish imperial energy" (Wallace, 2010:30), Hamish does not dwell long on the atrocities of Culloden; nor does he imagine the possibility of the Clearances.

As a redeemer of Gaelic culture, his action of joining



the British regiment, as the ghost story suggests, is simultaneously his own and MacTavish Mohr's. Because contractual, Hamish's commitment to the regiment is projected as if it were a political covenant, as if the state of his soul depends on how well he partakes of empire building: "[t]his act of self-devotion he conceived to be due to his own honour, and that of his countrymen. Which of his comrades would in future be trusted, if he should be considered as having broken his word, and betrayed the confidence of his officers" (Scott, 1827/2003: 108). In brief, Hamish is a Gaelic voice/hero, filtered through Christian virtues. By contrast, the text paganizes Elspat's mind: it "had lost the Roman Catholic faith without gaining any other" (Scott, 1827/2003:119) and is "indifferent to all religion" (Scott, 1827/2003:101). Yet despite her paganism, her discourse rests on the salvatory (in a secular sense of the word). She believes that when the resurrected old clan culture comes to destroy the hegemony of the Saxons, it will concomitantly restore the authentically Celtic to life, in a universe of heroism, glory, and unbridled action. Hamish, thus, will save his "broken clan" that currently has no "chief to lead it to battle" (Scott, 1827/2003:114-15). Elspat assumes that "her son had only to proclaim himself his father's successor in adventure and enterprise, and that a force of men as gallant as those who had followed his father's banner, would crowd around to support it when again displayed" (Scott, 1827/2003:83). It is from this perspective that Elspat (like the authorial voice) endows Hamish with a messianic-like responsibility. The text helps the reader gauge Elspat against certain biblical archetypes, and some of her acts can be read as revisions on the bible stories. Although she is a female warrior, she is the opposite of Judith, who was an exemplary political subject, and conventionally stands for ideal female citizenry. Moreover, Elspat appears as a counter female Abraham; her unchristian nature lies in the fact that she really and unnecessarily sacrifices her ideal son to an impossible selfish dream, what the text calls "her egotistical demands" (Scott, 1827/2003:80). More saliently, Elspat's uncanny motherhood is conveyed through her image as a female Judas Iscariot, who betrayed and immolated Hamish, the redeemer who would rehabilitate Scottish culture by making it part of the British ambit through his cultural hybridity and anglicized ethos. It is possible to view Elspat's potion as a mock Eucharistic gesture, given to Hamish as part of a last supper ritual before his departure to the imperial zones of the American colonies.

Scott stigmatizes Elspat and her isolationist attitude as political sinfulness, almost as something oriental<sup>2</sup>. As a bereaved female, Elspat's public image is akin to the image of Judah on Syrian medals (Scott, 1827/2003:74). The text underscores the iconic affinity of both images which pivots on that of a solitary sitting female, deprived of the agency of the protective male (as both son and husband), symbolic of a defeated tribalistic Scotland. Elspat as personification of the uncanny is obliquely associated with Jewishness. Like the stereotypical nineteenth-century trope of the Jew, she is the internal stranger, who in the words of Susan Shapiro, becomes the "unwelcome" guest and alien "wandering into and within people's homes, disrupting and haunting" their vicinities because his/her creed had become unnecessary and archaic (Shapiro, 1997:65). Understanding how Elspat undermines the canny reveals further how Walter Scott associates the political uncanny with unproductive agency.

Elspat's deviant form of femininity is seen in her resuscitation of the masculinist discourse of the pre-Culloden MacTavish Mohr as well as her love of a vagrant life; she tells Hamish: "Think you that I am like a bush, that is rooted to the soil where it grows, and must die if carried elsewhere?" (Scott, 1827/2003:88). More significantly, however, Elspat is the antithesis of what I call the patriotic mother, i.e., the mediatrix between the domestic and the public/national sphere, who teaches political virtues to the male subject, who becomes the protector of the empire against revolutionary hostile France. For women to play the role of cultural and social harbingers who patronize the Empire's interests is in tune with Scott's concept of progress<sup>3</sup>. Scott's text insinuates that this is an indispensable new position for Gaelic women because it bolsters the possibility of their public agency in a society shifting from the semi-feudal and non-civic to the civic. From this perspective, the political uncanny jeopardizes the domestic (i.e., relating to the family and the household) foundation of the imperial project, putting it at the risk of dysfunctionality.

Elspat's discourse has no rehabilitating effects on memory or psyche through which the Gael subject would be ushered into cultural hybridity and assimilation, thus releasing him from Anglophobia and inspiring him/her with a new self-definition. When considered in this light, Scott's portrayal of Elspat is an inquiry into the problematic workings of anti-colonial cultural memory, and into how it shapes the subject's cognition of the world, of civic structures, and one's own subjectivity in relation to Britishization. To put

this statement within a sharp analytical frame, few words that construe the text's outlook on historical consciousness are helpful.

*The Highland Widow* seems to define historical consciousness as a mental modality which concerns remembering the collective past and pondering how to utilize it to address situations from the vantage points of the present and the future. To better understand Scott's implied notion of historical consciousness, I will draw on Jörn Rüsen's theory of historical consciousness which specifies a four-mode typology<sup>4</sup>. The first mode is "traditional historical consciousness," which perceives remembered/commemorated past narratives/events as static, incontestable, harboring obligatory values, and identity is in close emulation of past times. The second mode is "exemplary historical consciousness," which perceives past narratives/events as containing universal rules that continue to be valid despite changes of temporal situations and experiences. This past proffers instructive examples. The third is "critical historical consciousness," which contests the assumptions of the first two types. Thus, past narratives/events are neither exemplary nor undebatable. Aspects of the past must be assessed and relativized, and the self must seek new understandings. The fourth is "genetical historical consciousness," which bypasses the above three modes and focuses on the imperatives of change, transformation as well as the temporality of all cultural aspects. Identity is adjustable and dynamic because it is in negotiation with otherness. As to values, a temporal perspective dictates their validity and worth. As Peter Lee explains, although Rüsen's four-mode typology "suggests an ontogeny for the development of historical consciousness" (Lee, 2004:4), he asserts that these modes "may co-exist in any particular encounter with the past" (Lee, 2004:5). Lee convincingly argues that although the modes do not indicate "a ladder-like progression in which we move from one stage to the next, leaving the first behind," they, nevertheless, seem to indicate that an evolutionary "dialectic [is] at work" (Lee, 2004:5). Historical consciousness, *The Highland Widow* suggests, has a double vector. Whereas the first vector is conducive to remembering in a manner that resembles Rüsen's first two modes, the second (like Rüsen's third mode) is conducive to a calculus—how to utilize collective memory as a departure point that would help the self to navigate timely transitions and surmount dead-end socio-political discourses/praxes. Only the second vector offers agency.

Elspat's memory is dysfunctional because it is rudimentarily historical, neither cognitive nor progressively communal. It can be argued that, since her songs and tales of bygone ceteran days are always sung in isolation, the text portrays them as a form of cultural narcissism. The text insinuates that Culloden and Glencoe, disgraceful as they are, should not be considered major historical catalysts of the political future. While Elspat relies on memory as a resource for cultural resistance, Hamish, by contrast, relies on forgetting as a resource for mobility. He tells his mother "[y]esterday was yesterday . . . and to-day is to-day. When the clans are crushed and confounded together, it is well and wise that their hatreds and their feuds should not survive their independence and their power. He that cannot execute vengeance like a man, should not harbor useless enmity like a craven" (Scott, 1827/2003:90). Like her memory, the text implies that Elspat's enmities and her nostalgia are pathologies, both moral and cognitive, because they allow the enactment of her death drives which are signified by her desire to retreat to the subterranean world of banditry and aggression. It is no surprise that Elspat's discourse is deprived of all chance to circulate. At its close, the text does not allow her to travel or even leave the vicinity of her hut, and she is muted.

Clearly, Scott's sense of the uncanny is articulated not only in the political terms of clanism and Jacobite rebellions but also in gendered terms: his critique of anti-assimilationist tendencies is merged with misogynist leanings. To invalidate the premodern clanistic patriarchal form and Jacobitism and relegate them to political insignificance, Scott in *The Highland Widow* feminizes them and associates them with Elspat's hubristic regrets. He implies that clanism is akin to female volatility and impulsiveness, not telos-oriented, and detrimental—a political travesty. The pre-modern episteme is what can be called a maternal disengagement that threatens with uncertainty and fragmentation the new forms of at-homeness created by the process of Britishization. While motherhood is the transmitter of the racial sense, fatherhood is the transmitter of interraciality and sublimation. To put Scott's androcentric vision of the political future of Britain into sharp relief, a comparison between the old and the new Gaelic epistemes is in order. To be clear at the outset, I am not stating that Scott's view of ancient Gaelic culture is correct; I am stating that in *The Highland Widow* his critique is saliently prejudiced.

Equivalent to femininity, the old Gaelic culture, as Scott presents it through the character of Elspat, is commensurate with primitivism and unreflective impulses; because it fuels sectarian hatred and Anglophobia, it is harmful to nation formation and can only engender political futility<sup>5</sup>. One of its traits is the inadequacy of its account of the collective/national. By contrast, the new Gaelic culture is equivalent to masculinity and rationality; it is able to orient the self toward discipline and, hence, toward combat that advances national power. Thus, it opposes monoculturalism as well as racial exclusion within the British Isles. A more robust paradigm, the new reconstructed patriarchy provides better opportunities for unencumbered progress because it connects political centrality to economic enterprise. Put differently, it rests on a partnership between pragmatism and the concept of a collective male agency. In short, in the light of Britishization, Hamish's new paradigm structures life; Elspat's fractures it. Needless to say, this division suggests the naturalness of Hamish's values and their sagacity and the unnaturalness of Elspat's and their indiscretion. In creating the non-normative character of Elspat MacTavish and endowing her with a paradigmatic status of Scotland of the past, Scott has mapped the cultural impediments that pose difficulties to empire building. Elspat's death signifies that these difficulties are surmountable. The covert political message of the tale is that Scotland must steer away from its death drives towards the life drives of England, the Lowlands, and the British empire.

Nevertheless, while Elspat is symbolically what ails the old Highland culture, there is an analogous malady that ails Saxon culture: its belief in its self-proclaimed superiority. At the heart of the uncanny, as personified by the General, is the way the immediate execution of Hamish does not commend itself to the moral consciousness. In the court marshalling of Hamish, "[The] General . . . had determined to make a severe example of the first [Gaelic] deserter who should fall into his power" (Scott, 1827/2003:113). The trial is troubling to the reader, just as it was troubling to Alexander Campbell and Green Colin, because it conjures up the subtext of the General's discourse—justice is perversely commensurate with the latent ideology of cultural effacement, and discipline is first and foremost a process of total cultural homogenization. Ironically, although the General is tasked to reformulate the concept of nation, citizenship, and the British Home (in its political

sense), he continues to bear an exclusive conception of home, and seems to doubt the legitimacy of the Gael's full-fledged political agency.

The ideological affinities between the pagan Elspat and the utterly secular veteran General are at the heart of the tale. For both characters, the cultural cleavage between Highlanders and Saxons is transcendent and incontestable. Moreover, like Elspat's, the General's world view seems to pivot on the idea that humankind is merely separate constellations of races existing geoculturally in a parallel manner. Both are dangerous monadic selves who envision a Manichean world where Gael and the Saxon can only occupy polar positions.

In Hamish's discourse, the text fully focalizes the canny. As mentioned earlier, the text grounds Hamish's political canny in the commonsense belief in progress and nationhood. Because he conceives reality through empirical observation and rationality, Hamish fathoms the asymmetrical Gael-Saxon post-Culloden power relationships. In response to this political reality, he is willing to negotiate his place and the transformation of his subjectivity, not as a mere passive "docile body" (in Foucault's sense of the term) but as a Gael with a new political agency. Significantly, Hamish has no problem of origins; his problem is that of belonging. His conscious quest is how to reconcile the old Gaelic norms to new political realities and the prevailing Anglo-Saxon values. He perceives that "The trade of the cateran was now alike dangerous and discreditable, and that if he were to emulate his father's prowess, it must be in some other line of warfare, more consonant to the opinions of the present day" (Scott, 1827/2003:79). Symbolic of the desire to escape clan history and an impeding dysfunctional memory, the text projects Hamish as the gratifying combination of masculine energy (like his father) and the commitment to nation building (like the new Scottish generation of Cameron). In a perceptive study, Joachim Schwend remarks that in Scott's works, "Anglicization and to be pro-British is not necessarily to have an anti-Scottish attitude" (Schwend, 2000:31), and that Scott "tries to link a strongly Scottish identity with a British mentality" (Schwend, 2000:32).

Evidently, the political canny in *The Highland Widow* is a closed vision and it speaks the language of pragmatism and monetary considerations, not the high-flying poetic language of Elspat's nostalgia. It rests on the language of future opportune circumstances underwritten by an imperial government, not

the subversive practices of cateran culture and uncollapsible binaries. By going to America, Hamish “will mend” his “state in the world” (Scott, 1827/2003:88). Aware of the futility of her political aberration and female governance—neurotic, anti-intellectual/anti-empirical and anarchistic—his male semi-Anglicized, unassuming self-governance (he is content to join the lower echelons of the military) pivots on a world of public order and an individuality that is mindful of collective responses and risk-taking for the greater good of a central power. The perspective of Hamish, and by extension that of the Gaelic new generation, discredits the idea of kin and blood ties to that of intersubjective/interracial reliance/alliance, thus legitimating cultural symbiosis with the other/Saxon. The epitome of the political uncanny is that which impedes the uniting of the two nations of England and Scotland.

Yet this definition of the political canny risks its own undoing. Scott is aware that Gaelic bodies that were ravaged from tortures inflicted by the Hanoverian army lay at the center of the political theory which commends the civilizing mission of Britishization; that the inclusion of the references to excessive moments in colonial history—“the barbarous and violent conduct of the victors after the battle of Culloden” (Scott, 1827/2003:83)—threatens the conjugation of Anglicization, peace, and invincible national unity inscribed in the culminating Act of Union in 1707. Addressing similar problematics, Lars Engle aptly broadens the definition of the uncanny; he maintains that “Any strong explanatory system *creates* uncanny pockets at its edges, areas of threat whose power to disturb will be proportional to the emotional allegiance given to the system by persons holding it” (Engle, 1989:113; original italics). Lars concludes that: The uncanny locates itself at moments of crisis in our theories of ourselves, specifically when we encounter an enclosure of secret purpose . . . whose investigation is both invited and discouraged by the probability that it may force revision of the theory that distinguished it in the first place. . . . *The unheimlich* [i.e., uncanny] lives at the juncture of the will to interpret and the fear of what will be revealed (Engle, 1989:113).

How, then, does Scott guard his master antithesis of canny/uncanny against the coalescence of its two poles, and how does he resolve the tension between nation formation and what can be perceived as the historically criminal origins of the state?

To these ends, Scott deflects political critique away from Culloden by several strategies. Rather than stressing

an incontestable form of the canny authority, Scott, on the one hand, references Culloden (projected as a Hanoverian-Jacobite conflict), albeit barely disclosing its horrifying details, and, on the other, foregrounds Glencoe (projected as the dead-locks of inter-clan wanton wars) and connects it with Elspat’s traumatic memories of carnage that “The race of Dermid [Clan Campbell]” (Scott, 1827/2003:90) has committed against the Clan Macdonald<sup>6</sup>. So while Culloden is the outcome of the dynamics of rival royal powers not without legitimacy<sup>7</sup>. Glencoe is the outcome of primitivist human nature and the apparatus of primordial inclinations: the origins of Glencoe are reduced to the avaricious appetite for plunder. Accordingly, Glencoe may be seen as symptomatic of the deleteriousness of certain aspects of clan-culture: its cult of aggression and the absence of a civic sensibility. The text ascribes more sociopolitical destructive impact to Glencoe as a factor that, more than Culloden, has fractured the collectivity of the Highlands. Since it is Elspat’s allusion to Glencoe that recalls the pre-modern political conditions of the Highlands, Culloden becomes the point from which the process of cultural and political evolution has proceeded and the gap between the two opposite cultures began to bridge.

The text suggests that unlike Glencoe, Culloden was not simply a manifestation of the narrow interests of a monarchical family. In the first allusion to it, Culloden’s aftermath is praised for “the great change which had taken place in the country . . . the substitution of civil order for military violence, and the strength gained by law and its adherents over those who were called in Gaelic song, ‘the stormy sons of the sword’” (Scott, 1827/2003:78). Significantly, when Hamish reflects on Culloden, he mentions the battle/massacre by its Jacobite name: “Drummossie-Muir” (Scott, 1827/2003:89). Referencing it in Gaelic betokens that he divides the event along the oxymoronic lines of cultural defeat and political gain (because it sets up the normative civic foundation of Britishization in the Highlands). Not surprisingly, Hamish does not describe the atrocities of Culloden; he only mentions that “[b]onnet, broad-sword and sporran—power, strength, and wealth, were all lost” (Scott, 1827/2003:89). Though these things signify loss of cultural attachments, they do not denote a harrowing colonization, because the post-Culloden era has effected the Highland’s transition to a modernized market economy, with Gaels entering it as newcomers in the race for wealth and prosperity. If



these Gaelic cultural objects and mode of dress were to be introduced again, they should be integrated into the expanding spaces of the empire and its markets. In effect, the text invites an explicit comparison between the two events: Culloden has introduced a new order and a new political semantic; Glencoe has repeated the futile clanistic order, and a negative, political/racial semantic which is encapsulated in Elspat's utter contempt and detestation for "the race of Dermid" (Scott, 1827/2003:90). The importance of Culloden is that it spurred economic development and helped bring about a homogenous Scottish society, through affective bonds among Gaels. Glencoe instigated neither of these two after-effects. Without Culloden, Glencoe would have perpetuated itself without alternatives. In short, the favorable developments Culloden has brought about—namely, the future optimal combination and deployment of cultural resources of the two nations—should override any concern for uncanny brutalities, and should convince the reader of the instrumentality of forgetting them.

#### Chora and post-Culloden Nationalism

As argued in the introduction of the study, the nationalizing tale of *The Highland Widow* animates the coveted dialectic of a post-Culloden nationalism by a second filament—chora. Tantamount to Plato's concept in the *Timaeus*, chora appears in the novella as a seminal structured place, a medium, as well as a generating socio-economic principle that enables the Gaelic self at self-re-creation, facilitating a becoming, whose rationale is a conversion of agency into a means of collectivistic as well as individualistic good. As I have suggested, one can sum up the novella as the story of a Gaelic hero who must seek his own becoming by defying old Gaelic cultural norms and re-cultivating a self in terms of the politically canny in spaces that are at the new frontiers of the British empire; these spaces are receptacle-like and help develop his conscious political life. Enlisting as a fighter for the British empire who plans to embark on a military ship and go to America to fight the French along with Scottish shipmates, Hamish "leave[s] a desert, for a land where . . . [he] may gather fame" and "return . . . an officer, and with half a dollar a-day" (Scott, 1827/2003:89).

Scott's abstract taxonomy of the post-Jacobite world of nationhood is predicated on an intellection that conjures up Plato's theoretic formulations. We do not know how familiar Scott was with Plato's *Timaeus*,

though of course we can assume that he was aware of Plato's philosophy since he studied classics at the University of Edinburgh. Before I engage in a closer consideration of chora as it appears in the *Timaeus* and *The Highland Widow*, I should note here that whenever I use the term in its Platonic sense it appears capitalized.

As critics have often noted, chora is a highly ambiguous concept and it would be impossible to review all the interpretations of it since they are too complex and numerous; however, sketching a general exegesis should provide adequate background to my analysis. In the *Timaeus*, Chora is described as an "eternal space" between "being" (realm of abstract Ideals) and "generation" (realm of Becoming and material bodies); the *Timaeus* postulates that "these three, existed in their three ways before the heaven" (Plato, 1961:1179). As "the nurse of generation" (Plato, 1961:1179) and "the mother and receptacle of all created and visible forms" (Plato, 1961:1178) she "admits not of destruction and provides a home for all created things" (Plato, 1961:1178-79). Labile and plastic like "soft substances" she "is the natural recipient of all impressions, and is stirred and informed by them, and appears different from time to time by reason of them" (Plato, 1961:1177); yet despite this plasticity, she is constant for "she never departs at all from her own nature" (Plato, 1961:1177). The *Timaeus* likens Chora to a "receiving vessel" (Plato, 1961:1179) which moves "like a winnowing machine" (Plato, 1961:1179). Full of dissimilar "powers," "a strange variety of appearances" and elements (Plato, 1961:1179), she is never in "a state of equipoise but swaying unevenly hither and thither, [is] shaken by them, and by its motion again [shakes] them, and the elements when moved [are] separated and carried continually, some one way, some another" (Plato, 1961:1179).

*Chora* is cognized only through a "dreamlike sense," by a "kind of spurious reason" (Plato, 1961:1197). Commenting on Plato's spatial conceptualization in the *Timaeus*, Mimi Yiu explains that by its mediating nature Chora "provides a series of personalized envelopes that aspire to capture the essence of a specific Ideal within a material casting, to render legible something purely abstract" (Yiu, 2007:75). In a thorough close reading of the spatial nuances of Chora in the *Timaeus*, Emanuela Bianchi remarks that Chora "means space, place, position, . . . a land, territory, or country, and especially the country opposed to the town" (Bianchi, 2006:130). As a term rife with indeterminacies, Chora



“Denotes rather an exteriority, an opening out, giving room, dimension, depth, and magnitude—spacing—but also, as indicated by the related verb *chōrizō*, separating, dividing, differentiating, and severing. *Chōra* thus provides the possibility of distinguishing up and down, here and there, an originary separation and dispersal of Being into beings with position with respect to one another” (Bianchi, 2006:131).

Like the *Timaeus*, Scott’s text reflects upon the issues of chaos and order and the structure of a world that accommodates continuity and change as well as stability and mobility. To make this structure operative, the text, as in the *Timaeus*, entertains a tripartite spatial cosmology. Midway in the tension between the realm of the Ideal Empire (tantamount to Plato’s Being) and the current status of “King George’s dominions” (Scott, 1827/2003:68) where the Gaelic component of the British nation is not yet fully integrated, urbanized, and gentrified (tantamount to Plato’s Becoming), there exists the realm of chora. Not that what I designate as chora in the novella is completely synonymous to what Plato designated as Chora in the *Timaeus*. Absent from the novella’s subtext are Chora’s categorical maternal inclinations and the assertions of its infinity and total ubiquity; in Scott’s novella, chora pertains to the specific world of the imperial project, and it only raises speculations about this particular domain. In the following section, I will attempt to throw into relief Scott’s possible subtextual engagement with Chora and will trace the concept against its philosophical origin in Plato’s *Timaeus*.

Broadly speaking, chora in *The Highland Widow* is the potential spaces for the British empire and the ever-potential productions of imperial political culture; as the spaces of a looming political futurity, chora enables the empire to perform its custodial duties as the preserver of functional nationhood. In *The Highland Widow* chora unfolds as a brief narrativized possibility, communicated as a generational belief (held by Cameron, Hamish, and presumably other recruits, i.e., the forerunners of a generation of Gael-warriors with a sense of vocation) facilitated by receptacles such as military ships and regimental units, implementing the imperial agenda of geographical expansion, mediating between Ideal empire and its actual material conditions. With certitude, Hamish tells Elspat, “We are to find our good in it also . . . a shieling . . . grass for your goats, and a cow, when you please to have one, . . . and my own pay . . . with all else you can want” (Scott, 1827/2003:89).

Obviously, chora is framed from the perspective of the conquering nation, not the conquered. In this respect, it operates on the individual as well as the collective level. Had Hamish’s plan succeeded, his experience in choric spaces would be comparable to other Gael recruits and he would be the exemplary of the many. Also, the conception of chora in the tale is androcentric; not only is it associated with the military, but in its sense as facilitator of exemplary cases, it is associated with the admirable Green Colin, Alexander, Cameron, and MacLeish, the latter of whom is “almost equal to Greatheart in the Pilgrim’s Progress” (Scott, 1827/2003:68). Hamish, too, could have been an exemplary embodiment of this ideal of a Greatheart bent on progress.

Because it is linked to growth (on the national level) and regeneration (on the individual, personal level), numerous advantages inhere in the concept of chora as engaged in *The Highland Widow*. The logic operative in chora can be understood through the receptacular kinetics of the military vessel, its primary motor. This receptacle functions by motion and it causes motion/mobility, in the sense that it is wherein political mobility as metaphorical/symbolic motion and positive change coexist. The ship evokes the images of reciprocal control and direction. The ship moves the Gaels and is moved by them; the physical and the psychogeographical itineraries align; chora prints itself on the subject, yet it lends itself to effects. Barcaldine, who implements the agenda of King George, will lead “an hundred of the bravest of the sons of the Gael in their native dress, and with their fathers’ arms—heart to heart—shoulder to shoulder” (Scott, 1827/2003:91) to expand the empire. Within the receptacular spaces of ships and regiments, the micro-pluralities of the Highlands become a communal malleable mass.

Yet the novella depicts another essential characteristic of chora: its reliance upon the double process of entering and exiting. The Gael subject’s temporary journey on board the military vessel is a progressive centripetal movement from the paradigmatic glens and clans toward undiscovered and distant choric spatialities of America (and by implication other to-be-colonized spaces), yet the ship’s vector of motion is reversible because it is also a centrifugal force with a constructive and corrective value in the double sense of bringing back the male Gael physically to his home and integrating him into a social unit larger than his clan.

Thus engaged, chora might be described as a world

of junctures, not one of parallel categorization as projected in Elspat's and the General's vision of race relationships within the British Isles. It is the belief in chora and not the fear of the Saxon that gives Hamish the impetus to denounce Elspat's indigenous referential world. The spheres of chora are spaces of transformations; new cultural matrices take precedence over old originary elements, and the male identity is molded anew. The unreachable glens and the recesses of the Highlands are the topos of the old originary elements of Gaelic/cateran culture. But these elements are either weakening human remnants: the "old Gael, whose broadsword had blazed at Falkirk or Preston, and who seemed the *frail* yet faithful *record of times* which had passed away" (Scott, 1827/2003:70; italics mine), or as deteriorating architectural ruins: "The now *mouldering* towers of Kilchurn" (Scott, 1827/2003:71; italics mine), or as brief folkloric anecdotes: the "*hundred legends* of stern chiefs of Loch Awe, Duncan with the thrum bonnet, and the other lords" (Scott, 1827/2003:71; italics mine). Narrated to entertain travelers, these "legends" do not denote truthful histories that serve as crucibles for judicious policy-making and their accuracy can easily be contested. It is well to remember that Elspat, herself, ends up a narrativised remnant that has no grave.

Thus conceived, chora can be defined as synonymous to the spaces of new experiences, not only in the sense that it is founded on experience but that it harbors processual experiences: the process of constructing an empire, of changing one's status, of hybridizing one's identity. Between the double process of withdrawing into choric colonial spaces and emerging from them, political turbulence is aborted and separatist, revolutionary inclinations are contained. By implication, chora sets the stage for the new continuities of cultural-political reformulations, for the transmissibility of cultural values, without having to assume that such reformulations will work to the detriment of one regional British culture or the other. To phrase it differently, these transformations are not discontinuities, because discontinuities breed monisms. Only a continuity underwritten by chora breeds interdependence and hybrid pluralisms.

Scott's attitude is that geographic borders should not be tantamount to cultural borders, because cultures are dynamic entities and can only have adjustable parameters that should be restructured according to economic and political realities. The overarching vision which the text seems to conjure up is that of

Britishization as a multicultural repertoire from which all citizens can draw new conciliatory perspectives and which will provide a broad, heterogeneous yet firm orienting focus. For Scott, unlike Elspat, what is real and true are not the cultural norms one cherishes but to what use these norms are put.

*The Highland Widow* registers, in a general manner, the different forms of social power (for example, the cultural, the economic and the familial); nevertheless, it particularly gravitates toward the nature of political power. One way of explaining the conjunction of the canny and chora in the text is to view this conjunction as a precondition to the perpetuation of a consensual model of power. So, rather than focusing on the source of political power, the authorial voice focuses on the beneficial effects of this model of political power. Drawing upon the Scottish Enlightenment, the novella suggests that the spread of civilization is tantamount to the spread of the consensual model.

The vitality of the consensual model of political power, as the political theorist Hannah Pitkin makes clear, resides in its double thrust, in its two axes of "power-over" and "power-to" (as cited in Wartenberg, 1990:18). Within this duality, there is often a developing terrain which points to the source of power and its expanding urban/enculturing fields, yet this terrain harbors a distinction between the public and the private spheres thus bolstering the ability of the subject to retain some distance from the center's ideology. The consensual model accommodates the category of a pan-national identity as well as the category of difference (Gael). By contrast, in clan culture, the discourse of power identifies itself completely with domination; the locus of power and the locus of the law are not separated; they conflate in the single figure of the impetuous chief. As the narrator tells us, the life of the paradigmatic MacTavish Mohr "was turbulent and dangerous, his habits being of the old Highland stamp" (Scott, 1827/2003:77-78). He terrorized the Lowlanders "who lay near him, and desired to enjoy their lives and property in quiet"; to avoid his mischief or evil acts they "were contented to pay him a small composition, in name of protection money, and comforted themselves with the old proverb, that it was better to "fleech [sic] the deil [sic] than fight him" (Scott, 1827/2003:77). While Scott foregrounds clan power as the epitome of the non-consensual model of power, he seems to define political wisdom as that striving for a well-regulated bond between power-over and power-to.

Scott's narrative discourse conceives political life as a

network of the practices of power-over and power-to. Unlike domination, power-over proceeds in light of the disalienation of the ethnic other. Power-over produces the disciplinary, yet at the same time, it perpetuates the collective state of affairs and increases capitalistic stability. As the voices of minor characters—MacPhadraick (Scott, 1827/2003:88) and Captain Campbell of Barcaldine (Scott, 1827/2003:114)—seem to imply, institutions of Saxon political power offer Hamish the legitimate means to escape the limitations of his social existence. It could be argued that Hamish's waiting to be arrested is a sign of over-identification with the state/central power, not a sign of cowardice; to him the abandonment of the regiment is also self-abandonment as well as the abandonment of a positive emerging collective and exemplary identity.

Nevertheless, to assume that the consensual model holds a completely antithetical position with respect to violence is an illusionary idea and Scott does not mask the coercive mechanisms of the model (albeit always in a frame of controlled violence). To explain, Hamish's punishment is not without a certain validity. Politically considered, the weight of the sad yet unproblematic ending rests on the basic imperative of purging the consensual model from the uncanny excessive disciplinary measures so that it both anticipates the ideal egalitarian empire and discloses the means of achieving it through legislative achievements<sup>8</sup>. On the one hand, the text seems to temporalize these coercive mechanisms, and on the other, suggests that the trial could have been outside this model had the uncanny not put these coercive apparatuses in motion. Since Hamish's execution does not signify a shattering failure of the consensual model, the political climate of the tale remains one of pan-national progress.

#### Conclusion:

To conclude, as a nationalizing tale *The Highland Widow* provides a rich account of the suffering of the Gael subject, the shifts in recent history, and a looming Britishization. This account is directed toward what one can call symbolically a political eschatology, i.e., an epoch to come that marks the triumph of a secular capitalist British empire. Although suffused with grim details and extreme attitudes of a chauvinistic ethnicism, practiced by Gael as well as Saxon subjects, the novella envisions an idealistic dialectic which seems to declare Britishization an inevitable (and implicitly benevolent and capacious) post-Culloden

logos, which encourages self to seek the dollar and the shilling but discourages it to resemble "so many smooth shillings" (Scott, 1826:83). Not only does this logos lift the Gael subject outside sundry bankrupt cultural customs, but it seems capable of regulating a future, harmonious, and stable political cosmos where the centripetal dynamics of the canny, chora, and modern civic law bridle the forces of the politically uncanny that may subvert the timely formation of the British empire. *The Highland Widow* is a nationalizing tale that manages to evoke the dilemmas and ironies that underpin both the dreams of pan-nationalism, as well as the fate of the cultural independence of minorities. It is this nuanced narrative complexity, dramatized in compendious form, that makes the novella so exemplary of Scott's literary achievement and, at the same time, such a teachable text.

#### Endnotes:

1. Needless to point out that it is not my purpose to devise a categorical definition and I do not here lay claim to a universal form of the nationalizing tale.
2. It is plausible to argue that in orientalizing Elspat, Scott is also orientalizing Old Scotland. James Watt observes that "[i]n a *Quarterly Review* essay of 1816, Walter Scott drew attention to the similarities between 'the purely patriarchal' manners of Scottish Highland clans and Afghan or Persian mountain tribes; such 'curious points of parallelism,' he claimed, serves 'to show how the same state of society and civilization produces similar manners, laws, and customs, even at the most remote periods of time, and in the most distant quarters of the world'" (Watt, 2004:94).
3. Scott's depiction of Jeanie Deans in *The Heart of Midlothian* is exemplary of enlightened female Gael.
4. In my explication of Rüsén's theory of historical consciousness, I am greatly indebted to Peter Lee's "Walking Backward into Tomorrow: Historical Consciousness and Understanding History," particularly page 5, and Arthur Chapman's and Jane Facey's "Placing History: territory, Story, Identity—and Historical Consciousness," particularly page 40.
5. On this ideological stance of Scott, the observation of Murray Pittock is worth quoting: "[i]n making Jacobitism both a synecdoche for old Scottish patriotism and also emasculating its politics through association with 'childlike . . . loyalties, resentment, and violence' with no rational goal, Scott adopts Jacobite rhetoric as a flavour of old romance while divorcing that rhetoric very firmly from reality. Jacobitism is a childhood story, Britishness is a matter

of adult responsibility" (Pittock, 2008:187).

6. Scott's eclipsing of the brutalities of Culloden are in keeping with his silence on the devastations of the Clearances. Bethune Baliol's "memorandum," which she sends to Chrystal Croftangry, about her "short Highland tour" (Scott, 1827/2003: 68) coincides with a time that, although unspecified, falls between 1782 to 1787. This period witnessed the first phase of the Clearances. As in the *Waverley*, in *The Highland Widow*, to repeat the observation of Saree Makdisi, Scott "does not so much re-order the various historical 'narratives' surrounding the Clearances as suppress them, partly by using a discourse of nationalism to describe a colonial process . . . and partly by writing over the Clearances in drawing blank its imaginary map of the Highland present" (Makdisi, 1998:80). Notwithstanding the force of Makdisi's argument, Scott's narrative handling of Culloden and the Clearances in *The Highland Widow* accommodates itself to the nationalizing tale's insistence on moving toward a pragmatically-oriented historical consciousness that serves as an instrument in establishing a canny, growing, pan-national modern Britain.

7. Here I am in debt to Thomas Mockaitis's analysis of Scott's attitude to rebellions and the Highland's risings. I benefited especially from his remarks on pages 421 and 422.

8. A general look at Scott's opus reveals that the consensual model is associated with internal colonization only; Scott does not reject domination over non-British races on strategic as well as economic grounds.

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