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VOLUME XXX

*Studies
in Scottish
Literature*



Edited by G. Ross Roy

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Columbia, South Carolina

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G. Ross Roy

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For

Lucie Roy

a brave little soldier

WR/38-817 28.10.1997

Daveni, Ullapool, Wester Ross
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Dear Ross, could you print the following somewhere within SSLXXX?

The cover designer, Alasdair Gray, realized too late that the motto Scotia

Redivivus on the truncated Scotch pine should be Scotia Rediviva, and begs the reader to attribute this to  STIRLING Gallery poet Latin rather than sexual misidentification.

ROSS ROY
460 Eastwood Drive
Columbia
South Carolina
USA



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Preface

The bicentenary of the death of very few people indeed has been commemorated by two major scholarly conferences and several hundred dinners, as well as books, radio and TV programs, and also a set of postage stamps. Such is the fame of Robert Burns, whose "Auld lang syne" is probably the best-known non-political song in the world. Not only are Burns's works readily available to the reading public, they have, in fact, never been out of print in the two centuries since his death, and there are now also numerous recordings of his poems and songs.

The first academic conference to honor the bicentenary was held at the University of Strathclyde in January 1996, as an expanded version of the annual Burns gathering at that university. It was organized by Dr. Kenneth Simpson, and a selection of the papers has since been published with the title *Love & Liberty: Robert Burns: A Bicentenary Celebration*. Because of the difficulty of holding a meeting at a university during the summer months, it was determined that a North American meeting should take place in the spring. Home of *Studies in Scottish Literature* and of a major Burns collection, the University of South Carolina, in Columbia, was felt to be the most appropriate location for the conference, which was held here at the end of March 1996. We had hosted a triennial gathering of the International Association for Medieval and Renaissance Scottish Language and Literature in 1990, and had subsequently published the Proceedings of that conference in *SSL*. When plans for a Burns conference were set afoot I agreed also to dedicate a volume of this publication to the papers which were presented in honor of the poet.

Studies in Scottish Literature is devoted to all aspects of the literature of Scotland, and has never designated an entire volume to essays on a single author, but it was felt that only by including most of the talks which made up the conference could readers get a feel for the wide-ranging and international make-up of those papers. Naturally, not everyone in attendance participated in that manner; many came to hear speakers whose work they already knew and to get fresh insights into the work of Robert Burns. Notable among those in attendance was a substantial delegation from the Atlanta Burns Club.

Had there been no conference this volume would not have come into being, and so it seems appropriate to acknowledge those who made the meeting possible. Generous assistance was received from Dr. George Terry, Dean of the Division of Libraries and Information Services; Dr. Lester Lefton, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts; Dr. Robert D. Newman, Chairman of the Department of English, all of these at the University of South Carolina. The South Carolina Humanities Council, a state-level agency of the National Endowment for the Humanities, made a substantial contribution in support of the confer-

ence, and the Atlanta Burns Club underwrote the cost of bringing a speaker from Scotland.

Beyond this a particular debt of gratitude is owed to the University of South Carolina Venture Fund for awarding a grant to help defray the costs of producing this volume. Without it this number of *Studies in Scottish Literature* would not have had the cover which Alasdair Gray has designed for it. The Venture Fund has made the difference.

Thanks go to the Burns Federation for a grant towards production of this volume, and also to Peter J. Westwood, Editor of the *Burns Chronicle*, for his assistance in distributing the volume.

When we first began planning the conference and the publication of the papers, my colleague Patrick G. Scott and I decided upon a division of labor: he was to have overall responsibility for the meeting, I for editing the papers. Participants have attested to the success of the conference, and this volume attests to the quality of the papers presented. While I take full responsibility for the editing of this book, Patrick Scott has been helpful well beyond his agreed duties. Jamie Hansen, Sej Harman, Jason Pierce, Paul Schultz and Aaron Shaheen have helped with the volume in various ways. Jean Goode, of Whitston Publishing, was most helpful working out the details of the colored illustration on the cover. As always my wife Lucie has been both inspiration and prod, and I owe her my thanks.

A word about editorial decisions. There are several excellent editions of both the poems and songs and the letters of Robert Burns, so it seemed evident that a single text should be used for quotations. I therefore determined that the editions chosen should be the recognized scholarly ones of today. Thus the poems and songs were standardized on James Kinsley's edition of 1968, and the letters on my edition of 1985. Spelling, punctuation and footnotes were edited to conform to house style.

A book such as this is only as good as the essays it contains. Scholars, Burns enthusiasts and the reading public at large may be grateful for the insights and interpretations they afford in better appreciating the work of one of the world's greatest poets.

G. R. R.

Tom Sutherland

Burns in Beirut

Introduction by Kenneth Simpson:

As we know, Burns means many things to many people. For our next speaker, he has a very particular significance. It gives me a great deal of pleasure, and it is an honor, to introduce Professor Tom Sutherland. Born in Scotland, and a graduate BSc. Agriculture, of Glasgow University, he was no mean footballer or perhaps we should say soccer. Tom Sutherland made the move which Burns contemplated, that is to say he crossed the Atlantic, he came West. At Iowa State University, he took master's and doctor's degrees, and subsequently became Professor of Animal Science at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado. In 1983, with his own Bonnie Jean, he moved to the American University of Beirut as Dean of Agricultural and Food Sciences. The rest I think we may say is a remarkable personal history of immense heroism. Burns celebrated heroism, Burns suffered adversity, not on the scale that Tom Sutherland did. Burns championed liberty, and Tom Sutherland more than anyone, must know what freedom really means. Perhaps one has to lose freedom to really know what it means. And for Burns, as for Tom Sutherland, the kinship of one's fellow beings was all important. Above all, Burns celebrated the human spirit. It is my privilege to introduce a man who represents the human spirit at its very finest.

Thank you Ken. I am so pleased to be here even if I don't bring you the Ayrshire accent like Ken's. My accent is Stirlingshire, corrupted by four years in Glasgow, followed by a year in Reading, four years in Iowa, twenty-five years in Colorado, and eight and a half years in Beirut. When I was in Glasgow we had fun with the Glasgow accent and I quoted some of it in

2 Tom Sutherland

Glaswegian to Jack Webster of the *Glasgow Herald* and he did not understand what I was saying! I told him “I’ll gie ye three we re head, twa wi re bannet oan and wan wi it aff!” which being interpreted means “I’ll give you three with the head, two with the bonnet on, and one with it off!” which to a Glaswegian represented different degrees of severity; whether it was more severe with it on or off, I am not sure, but that was a standard kind of threat in Glasgow! Then Stanley Baxter was in great vogue at that time, and his monologues had in them such great phrases as, “Ah bashed ma tae oan a knoat in the flerr,” or in other words “I bashed my toe on a knot in the floor” in the dance hall at the Barrowland where Stanley used to go and listen to all of those Glasgow accents. Or otherwise, being asked to dance, a young lady would reply to the man who was asking her, “Och, hey, dance wi ma sistur. Ah em swettin.” Then we used to tell the story about the Aberdonian who came down from Aberdeen, and tried to get on to a tram car in Sauchiehall Street to go to Charing Cross, with a big suitcase in tow. The conductress said, “Thatull be sixpince sur!” “NO, it’s no. It’s just thruppence to Charing Cross.” “Wi a suitcase like that sur, it’s sixpince.” “No, it’s thruppence.” “It’s sixpince!” “It’s thruppence,” “It’s sixpince,” until the tram car started to move and the conductress unceremoniously took the suitcase and threw it off. Along comes a bus, and barely missed the suitcase! Said the Aberdonian, “Is it no enough yer trying to overcharge me, but now you’re trying to kill ma wee boy!”

I stand before you here very humbly in the presence of such people as Ross Roy, Ken Simpson, Donald Low, Kathleen Kerrigan, Jim Mackay, Carol McGuirk, Bob Thornton, Esther Hovey...these are all giants in this field of Burns scholarship, while I’m an agricultural geneticist and really an amateur in this area, albeit an enthusiastic amateur. But if you will accept me on this basis, I have a little tale to tell you, and I am grateful to Dr. Ross Roy for inviting me here to tell it. I’ll start at the end, that is on November 20 of 1991, a day or so after I was released from captivity or, as I sometimes refer to it, my extended paid vacation with room and board thrown in and daily room service, all courtesy of Islamic Jihad. I had come together with my family in Wiesbaden and had agreed to do a press conference to the world’s TV cameras. Now other hostages had never been willing to talk much when they came out—they had been so nervous, and just said “Thanks to Syria and Iran, and thanks to everyone who prayed for me,” and zip they were gone. The world’s TV cameras had come half way and sometimes all the way around the world to get a little bit of a story, and said I to Terry Anderson, “I am a college prof and when I get out of here, I am going to tell them I’m used to fifty minutes and really give them a story!” “Don’t do that man,” said Terry, “They’ll eat you up. Those men are nasty. I know, I was one of them. Say the minimum, and get out of there.” No way. So there in Wiesbaden when we were going into the conference, I said to my wife Jean, “How should I open this?” And she said, “Well, how about a quotation from Burns?” So I did some “Tae a Mouse” with its “best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley...,” so ap-

ropos to my case. And many, many Scots heard it for it was literally going all over the world. I've had letters from South Africa, from Japan, from Australia...they all had heard me that day quote Burns. What a truly global language Burns is.

So how did my Burns in Beirut story really all begin? I was the Dean of Agriculture at the American University of Beirut, as Ken just told you. I enjoyed that job for two years and would have stayed on. But Islamic Jihad cut that short by kidnapping me on the 9th of June of 1985. I was sure at the time that it wouldn't be very long—just be a day or two or a week or a month at the most and the U.S. government or the Lebanese government or the Board of Trustees of the American University of Beirut would get me out of there—because they were very powerful people; I wasn't really terribly worried. If somebody had told me at that time "You'll be in there for 6½ years, chained to the wall and screamed at and cuffed and pushed around" I would have said, "No, I couldn't take that, I'd rather die." But it turned out to be that—2,354 days which translates into 77 months or 6½ years and any way you count it, it's a long time. I was in sixteen different locations, nine of them in Beirut, four of them in south Lebanon up the hill from the Biblical village of Tyre, and three of them in the Bekaa Valley right near the Roman ruins at Baalbek. I had always wanted to go to Baalbek to see those ruins. But in my time there I never saw them—in fact I never saw daylight all that time, let alone the ruins in Baalbek.

Ten of the cells were above ground but always the windows were blocked over with steel sheets that were riveted to the window frames. Six of the cells were underground, regular prisons built in the basement with cinder block walls and big steel doors. Relatively small cells, six feet by four feet by six feet high and fortunately I'm not six feet tall so my head didn't scrape the ceiling. We were chained most of the time to the wall, sometimes to the floor or a radiator depending on which kind of room we were in; blindfolded all the time that the guards were in the room. Rule number one was "Thou shalt not see the guards in any way, shape or form" because they were very paranoid about the CIA. We had forty-five different guards of whom thirty-five or so were reasonable young men who were doing it for money for Mr. Khomeini to try to get rid of the West, out of Lebanon and out of all the Middle East, so he could put a fundamentalist Islamic type government into power into the whole Middle East. I think he had aims to do the same in Germany and France and Britain and then into the U.S., and eventually take over the whole world with his Islamic government. Frankly, I don't see that that would work very well—it hasn't worked very well where they have Islamic forms of government. He was a little over-ambitious.

Of the other guards, half a dozen of them were really nasty and they gave us a lot of tough times. These tended to be the smallest of the guards—the biggest of them never touched us. The biggest of all was maybe six feet, strong, but not heavy for they were not very well fed from South Lebanon.

They took us to the toilet once a day, ten minutes at a time, to empty the bottle we urinated in, defecate, wash our hands, wash our face, brush our teeth, wash our underwear (if we dared) and then they were at the door, banging on it with their Kalashnikovs and saying “Yella, Yella” which means “Let’s go, get on with it.” They fed us pita bread and processed cheese and a rotten cup of tea every morning and evening, breakfast and supper; lunch was the hot meal of the day with rice and beans. Frankly, I never liked rice very much, beans even less. I’m a meat and potatoes man. Being an animal scientist, I like steak and pork chops and lamb chops and all, but we never got any pork chops for sure, Islamic fundamentalists not being very high on pork. We never even got any beef except for small bits in the beans once in a while to flavor it. But Ben Weir, the Presbyterian minister who had been for thirty years as a missionary to South Lebanon told us “For those young men, bread is food and food is bread”—that’s the equation and anything they give you in addition to bread is a luxury. So they thought they were feeding us well when they gave us cheese with our bread and rice and beans. Ben said, “They’re treating you very nicely in their view!” I said, “Ben, I’ve got news for them—I’ve got different ideas...”

Five of those 77 months I was in isolation but the rest of the time I was with Terry Anderson—70 of the 77 months. I got to know him very well—I told him I knew enough about him to get him convicted three times over and that he was no substitute for my wife and he said, “No, but I know you about as well as she does!” I was also with Ben Weir, the Presbyterian minister, Father Martin, the Catholic priest who came to hand out millions of Catholic dollars from Catholic Relief Services to South Lebanon and for that they kidnapped him. Ben Weir likewise. Terry Anderson was there trying to do objective reporting and for that they kidnapped him. Frank Reid we were with as well for a short time; John McCarthy, the young Englishman, and Brian Keenan the Irishman, Jean-Paul Kauffmann and Marcel Carton, the Frenchmen, I was with as well, and then finally Terry Waite, the English representative of the Church of England, though not an ordained priest of the church. I had never had too much respect for journalists, especially in contrast to a dean...but I lost every argument I had with Anderson and he didn’t even have a master’s degree; I thought that was unfair. Jean-Paul was very very bright also—he didn’t speak any English at all...“donc, je lui ai appris l’anglais et nous avons parlé en français tout le temps tout le temps parce que moi je sais parler un peu le français; donc c’était possible.”

I’m thankful for those people I was with for that was salvation.

Isolation—I think that is the worst thing you can do to a human being. Certainly for me it was the worst. Together we devised all sorts of things to keep ourselves alive and from going insane. I seemed to have succeeded because my daughters said to Jean when I got home—“Gee, Mom, he’s still the same old Dad, even the things we hoped would be different are still the same!” We did all kinds of things to keep our minds going. Terry Anderson grew up

in a family of six as I did and we argued and argued and argued and we taught each other all kinds of things. One of the things I gave them, willing or unwilling they got it, was Burns on the 25th of January every year. 1986 was the first one and at that time Ben Weir had gone home but we were still four together: Father Martin, David Jacobsen, Terry and I. I started telling them about Burns Suppers. They knew a little about Burns but not very much. So I described the Suppers and recited a little of "Tam o' Shanter" to Terry. When I came to the bit

We think na on the lang Scots miles,
The mosses, waters, slaps, and styles,
That lie between us and our hame,
Whare sits our sulky sullen dame,
Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

how that image appealed to Terry of the wife nursing her wrath and he roared with laughter and Father Martin and David Jacobsen got a big kick out of it. That lightened our spirits a little and we needed it, for just three weeks before on Christmas eve, we had had the news on the BBC world service from a radio we had very intermittently at that time, that Terry Waite had gone home. We had such high hopes that he would get us out and you can just imagine what that did for us. So here on January 25th we had Burns to perk us up.

The most interesting Burns Night of all was in 1988 a year or two later when I was with Jean-Paul. I wrote up that experience at their request for the *Sunday Times* in London for their Scottish edition and it says, "How Burns Got Me Through Beirut by Former Hostage Tom Sutherland." I describe the scene there up the hill from Tyre—a small two-room apartment in a small village in South Lebanon, three of us captives of Islamic Jihad lying on mattresses of foam rubber, chained by the wrist at that time to the wall separating us from the guardroom with the kind of chain you normally use to chain dogs. My two companions, Marcel Carton, the protocol officer from the French Embassy in Beirut, and Jean-Paul Kauffmann, the very distinguished French journalist. All of us were hostages for 32 months and I had just joined them a couple of months before. I was on the left side with my left shoulder right by the door which went back through into the guard room, Marcel lying right in the middle and Jean-Paul on the other side. Lunch had just gone off, cold in there in our ragtag pajamas and even with four blankets it was still pretty cold. A single 100 watt bulb in the ceiling with no shade, drab bare walls, cheaply constructed run-down apartment, not very inspiring. BUT it was the 25th of January. "Jean-Paul," I said, "tu connais le poète écossais Robert Burns?" ("Are you acquainted with the Scottish poet Robert Burns?") All our conversations were in French.) "Yes," he answered, "I've heard of him but I can't claim to know very much about him." "OK, let me introduce you to him," I said, "I know A LOT about him.... This is the 229th anniversary of his birth and we Scots al-

ways celebrate his birthday with a supper no matter where we are—all over the world. Main dish is Haggis, washed down with plenty of Scotch whiskey.” “Ah, I’ve heard of Haggis but haven’t tasted it,” said Jean-Paul, “but the Scotch whiskey—ooh, la, la! Ça je connais bien!” “Well now, there’s much more to the supper—toasts, music, Burns poetry, the main toast to the Immortal Memory. We celebrate his life and recite his poetry, how it is still relevant to us today two hundred years later....” Jean-Paul’s eyes lit up. Keenly intellectual, he had read most everything written it seems, except Burns, and had an absolutely incredible memory. I began to recount tales of Burns’s life and to describe his poetry all in French—must say it’s a truly formidable task to translate Burns into French—even the English have a hard time understanding him! But we had plenty of time—the only thing we had an abundance of in those cells was time. The more Jean-Paul heard, the more animated he became. Then came our evening meal—the Burns Supper of 1988. Bad tea and pita bread. Marcel Carton prayed but even he couldn’t transform pita bread into haggis or cold tea into wine let alone whiskey. But our supper flowed over his praying body and by now the chains no longer counted. Jean-Paul and I were roaming free through the fields of Ayrshire, hearing Tam yell out, “Weel done, Cutty-sark!” charging across the Brig o’ Doon where Tam’s mare lost her tail, plowing the field in November where the mouse’s nest was turned up, and watching Afton Water flowing by us. Later, into the drawing rooms of the Edinburgh literati and finally down to Dumfries where he had collected his songs and where Rheumatic Fever finally killed him two hundred years ago. Burns’s escapades with the lassies, both before and after his marriage to Jean Armour, particularly appealed to Jean-Paul’s French concept of the ideal lover. We laughed and giggled...and then were brought back to reality by the guards who were hissing at us so offensively, warning us to keep our voices down. No matter—years later, Jean-Paul would tell the world in Glasgow, “Though the captors could chain our bodies to the wall, they could not chain our spirits.”

The bleakest supper of all was in January of 1987. I was alone for they had stuck us into isolation in a place we called The Prison with underground cells of concrete and hard tile floors. Our treatment at that time was about as bad as they could make it, probably I think in retaliation for Irangate, though we knew nothing at that time about Irangate. For me, that January 25th, no books, no Bible, no urine bottle even—they were even deciding when we could urinate—four times in twenty-four hours, and I invite you all to try that! —nothing save a thin foam rubber mattress, and my mind, and Burns was there filling my mind, for it was his birthday, and I simply had to acknowledge it in the best way I could. I began to recite his poems, all those that I had memorized over the years, the “To a Mouse,” “To a Louse,” “Holy Willie’s Prayer,” “Robert Bruce’s march to Bannockburn,” “John Anderson my Jo,” “A red red Rose,” “The Cotter’s Saturday Night,” “Afton Water” (Flow gently sweet Afton), what I could recall of “The Twa Dogs,” because I had never learned that one all the way, “Comin thro’ the rye,” “Rantin’ rovin’ Robin” (There was

a lad was born in Kyle), and on and on. “Tam o’ Shanter” took the longest, trying to fit all those couplets into place. I’d get down a ways, then I would say to myself, “no that’s not right” so I would start over again, and I have recited it many times to literature classes in college and high schools but had never completely learned it, but then I kept going and kept up the effort a long time in the blackness of that cell. I didn’t even have any light in there, my mind functioning with difficulty at this time of greatest hardship of all those six and a half years, (Terry Anderson agrees with that—he too says that was the toughest time) everything had to be done in my head. Then I thought of all the hardships that Burns had endured in his life and the kind of treatment that he had had at the hands of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland in his period, with its chastisement and humiliation for sought-out sinners—not too different from what I was going through at the hands of Islamic Jihad, a self-styled religious organization—it gave me comfort and strength. But Burns at least had his women, and I wondered how he would have fared without any contact with the fair sex for nearly twenty months as I had had up to that time!

Well, again and again in the blackness and isolation of that cell Burns brought me joy and comfort in my own time of trial and despair. Graphic in my mind was my first ever Burns Supper. The year was ’48, my fifth year (or junior year as they say in America) at Grangemouth High School. I was going on seventeen—our English teacher, Pearl McKeown, had organized it and asked me to be the master of ceremonies. I borrowed a kilt from a member of the Muirheads’s World Champion Pipe Band, cycled the five miles back to school with bare knees on a cold January night, and my good friend Frank Donnan, no athlete but an incredibly talented artist who went on to do great things in that field, recited “Tam o’ Shanter” from beginning to end from memory and I promptly forgave him all his failings in football and elevated him ten notches in my admiration scale. He was wonderful, and gave me forever a heightened appreciation of that marvelous poem.

It was amazing, too, that Jean told me afterwards of the celebrations each January 25th of that time that I was in captivity, when she had into our home on the campus of the American University of Beirut the English Department faculty and students and she told the students, “You can’t graduate without knowing something about Robert Burns.” Most of them were native Arabic speakers so it was about as difficult for them as it had been for Jean-Paul Kauffmann, but that last year she played a cassette tape of one of the toasts to the Immortal Memory that I had given to the Colorado St. Andrew Society years before, and she wrote to our daughters about how touching it was to have Tom present along with Robert Burns—you cannot believe—the students were visibly moved at this evidence of the living link between us. And each year too, Jean put messages in the *As-Safir*, the leftist newspaper read by my captors, every Valentine’s Day, birthday, wedding anniversary, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving and Christmas—I didn’t get them all, but on my 59th birthday (1990) the guards brought me her message, “I send you this day the best gift I

have, a red red rose of love..." and thus did Burns's poem link us that day in shared love and memory through our favorite poem, as she had known it would. It would be only a year and half later in January of 1992 that she and I would sit together among the gathered folk at the West Sound Burns Supper in Glasgow and receive the gift of a real red red rose, and hear Kenneth McKellar sing that song for us, the first time he had sung it since the death of his dear wife. Tears had to flow. Kenneth has always been special to us for bringing to our ears and to our hearts the glorious songs of Burns and of our beloved Scotland. Jean told me afterwards how she had listened through our tapes to choose two songs to send to me through the BBC's "Anything Goes" with Bob Holness—that last September before my release in November—there came Kenneth McKellar, his marvelous voice bringing her "My love is like a red red rose" and "Westering Home," ringing out: Jean had chosen her songs. Duly they came to me in that cell by the Roman ruins in Baalbek in the Bekaa valley of Lebanon, and I cried unashamedly with the absolute beauty of it. (I'm nearly crying now!) What a Scottish treasure, and what a Scottish loveliness the songs of Burns. And into my mind that day came the words of McNichol that I had quoted often in *Immortal Memories* that I had given in years gone by:

Let who will make the laws, Burns has made the songs which her emigrants recall, in which maidens are wooed, by which mothers lull their infants, which return through open casements unto dying ears, they are the links the watchwords, the Masonic symbols of the Sots race.

As an emigrant, as one of the Scots race, I cherish the songs as I do the poems. As I do Burns the man with his consummate genius who sees clearly into the nature of man, his weaknesses, his strengths, and his place in the nature of things. In freedom now, I celebrate this man who died two hundred years ago, but who lives so vibrantly in my mind and heart, as a lifeline to me in my darkest hours. And a continuing joy in the best days now in my life. It is true what Professor David Daiches told me as we made the film "Burns in Beirut," for January of 1993, as we talked about the power of Robert Burns to sustain a fellow human being. David said to me, "You proved it on the pulses."

*Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Emeritus*

R. D. S. Jack

Which Vernacular Revival? Burns and the Makars

When I was introduced to Burns at university, he was properly described as the senior member of a poetic trinity. With Ramsay and Fergusson, we were told, he initiated something called “The Vernacular Revival.” That is, in the eighteenth century these poets revived poetic use of Scots (“THE vernacular”) after a seventeenth century of treacherous anglicization caused by James VI and the Union of the Crowns. Sadly, as over a hundred years had elapsed, this worthy rescue effort might resuscitate but could never restore the national language to the versatility in fullness of Middle Scots.

This pattern and these words—national language, treachery, etc.—still dominate Scottish literary history. They are based on modern assumptions about language use within the United Kingdom. To see Burns’s revival of the Scots vernacular in primarily political terms conveniently makes him anticipate the linguistic position of that self-confessed twentieth-century Anglophobe, C. M. Grieve. Grieve found his own Borders dialect inadequate for the expression of his profounder thoughts. To counterbalance this, he set out on an ambitious verbal quest through John Jamieson’s *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*. Moving geographically sideways and historically backwards he exited in the persona of Hugh MacDiarmid with his own unique form of “Synthetic Scots.” As Norman MacCaig once remarked to me, that quest produced a unique and artificial language, brilliantly used by its creator, but constituting a medium to which later disciples took “as naturally as ducks to glue.”

I propose to approach Burns via his predecessors rather than his heirs, testing prospectively each of the three major premises behind this retrospective

paradigm. First, did the early and later makars think of Scots as their national tongue? Two, did they think of language use confrontationally, Scots against English? Three, did the later makars treacherously sell out Middle Scots to English justifying the excision of over a hundred years of Scottish literary history from most histories and anthologies?

The answer to the “language of the nation question” is given consistently by writers from Barbour in the late fourteenth century until Drummond and Ayton in the seventeenth. All of them deny the national adjective to their poetic language. When they do name the vernacular, they call it English. Here is James IV’s “maister poete,” William Dunbar, writing when Middle Scots was at its fullest.

O reverend Chaucere, rose of rethoris all,
 As in oure tong ane flour imperiall
 That raise in Britane, evir quho redis rycht,
 Thou beris of makaris the tryumph riall;
 Thy fresch anamalit termes celicall
 This mater coud illumynit have full brycht:
 Was thou noucht of our Inglisch all the lycht,
 Surmounting eviry tong terrestriall
 Alls fer as Mayes morow dois mydnycht?¹

Even in the golden age of Scots, it is linked to Middle English dialects and its most renowned courtly practitioner is proud to follow Chaucer.

Sir David Lindsay more than sixty years later, in the mid-1550s, within that patriotic morality play, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, still thinks of Scots as the “Inglische toung.”

Sanct Paull, that pillar of the Kirk,
 Sayis to the wretchis that will not wirk,
 And bene to vertews laith:
Qui non laborat non manducet.
 This is in Inglische toung or leit:
 Quha labouris nocht, he sall not eit.²

The Geneva Bible, here referred to, was just one of many sociolinguistic pressures which—long before the Union—was drawing later Middle Scots towards English. Printed in English but read throughout Scotland, its “treacherous” influence appears to be noticed later in Lindsay’s play, when a character cries out “In Englisch toung, and prentit in England!” (l. 1154) But

¹*The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford, 1979), p. 37.

²Sir David Lindsay, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, ed. Roderick Lyall (Edinburgh, 1989), ll. 2602-07.

that character proves to be a Vice, Flatterie, and concerned with its content. "Herisie, herisie! Fire, fire incontinent!" (l. 1155) The figure of Divine Veritie corrects him—that is no heresy but Christ's word." (l. 1158) The problem with English is not that it is a foreign medium, but that it is too effective—transmitting the word to all levels of society.

Two views of language, one rhetorical and one historical, are held consistently by all Scots writers prior to the eighteenth century. Neither sits easily with either the first "Scots alone" nor indeed the second "Scots v. English" premise. William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, who was one of James VI's Castalian band and so writes predominantly—though not exclusively—in English, sums up the rhetorical side of the argument in his critical treatise, *Anacrisis*, published in 1634. Language, following Aristotle, is only valued as a means to an end or, in his imagery, as a "Conduit." The more subtle the tongue, the more easily it permits the "several shapes" of cognition to move for the author's mind into the understanding of his audience.³

The makars' historical view of language is even more dramatically disturbing. Being closer to the historical origins of Scots, they knew that "Scottis" was "Inglis," having originated as a form of Northumbrian. Moreover, if any political treachery was involved in national linguistics, it was the ousting of Gaelic north beyond the highland line and south into Galloway by this foreign tongue. Malcolm Canmore in the 11th and David I in the 12th centuries began that process as part of a foreign policy designed at appeasing England.⁴ By the end of the thirteenth century it had succeeded.

There are only two instances prior to Burns where the adjective "Scottis" is coupled with the noun "language." In each case, the author claims to be, atypically, descending from poetry's distinctive disciplinary realm of imagination and potentiality to the lower ground of politician and historian. King James VI, awkwardly for those who wish him to be a villain, is the first example of this form of political correctness. Even he, however, in the *Reulis and Cautelis* of 1585 admits that Scots and English overlap, stemming as they do from the same linguistic root—"English, quhilk is lykest to our language."⁵ I have elsewhere argued the case for a decorous, mixed use of language, focus-

³William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, *Anacrisis in English Literary Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Joel Spingarn (Oxford, 1908), p. 182.

⁴See Janet M. Templeton, "Scots: An Outline History," in *Lowland Scots*, ed. A. J. Aitken (Aberdeen, 1973), pp. 4-5. Association for Scottish Literary Studies, Occasional Papers No. 2.

⁵*A Choice of Scottish Prose 1550-1700*, ed. R. D. S. Jack (London, 1971), p. 109.

ing on later Renaissance practice.⁶ I shall assume that plea to be proven and move backwards to Gavin Douglas, whose advocacy of “Scottis...braid and plane” as his “awin langage” in 1513 is more widely known.

Writtin in the langage of Scottis natioun,
 And thus I mak my protestatioun:
 Fyrst I protest, beaw schirris, be your leif,
 Beis weill avisit my wark or yhe reпреif,
 Consider it warly, reid oftar than anys;
 Weill at a blenk sle poetry nocht tain is,
 And yit forsuyth I set my bissy pane
 As that I couth to mak it braid and plane
 Kepand na sudron bot our awyn langage,
 And spekis as I lernyt quhen I was page.
 Nor yit sa cleyn all sudron I refus,
 Bot sum word I pronounce as nyghtbouris doys:
 Lyke as in Latyn beyn grew termys sum
 So me behufyt quhilum or than be dum
 Sum bastard Latyn, French or Inglys oys
 Quhar scant was Scottis—I had nane other choys.
 Nocht for our tong is in the selvyn skant
 Bot for that I the fowth of langage want
 Quhar as the cullour of his properte
 To kepe the sentens tharto constrenyt me,
 Or than to mak my sayng schort, sum tyme
 Main compendys or to lykly my ryme.

(*Eneados*, I, Prologue, ll. 103-24)⁷

In his *Eneados* of 1513, Bishop Douglas—a known anglophile—does claim to compose in “the langage of Scottis natioun.” He also vilifies his English rival as translator, Caxton. Ergo, say some critics, Scots is now the national language and political linguistics rule.

What *does* Douglas say? The mode is, in this instance, crucial. The *Eneados* is a translation. As Matthiessen explains, Renaissance translations were more closely associated with national pride than any other form of writing.⁸ Just as adventurers colonized foreign countries, so the translator coined foreign words, to strengthen his land’s vernacular. Douglas, an avid reader of

⁶See “‘Castalia’s Stank’: Burns and Rhetoric,” in *Love and Liberty: Robert Burns: A Bicentenary Celebration*, ed. Kenneth Simpson (Edinburgh, 1997), pp. 111-18.

⁷*Selections from Gavin Douglas*, ed. David F. C. Coldwell (Oxford, 1964), p. 4.

⁸F. O. Matthiessen, *Translation: An Elizabethan Art* (Cambridge, MA, 1931), p. 3.

Horace, saw it as decorous to adopt a nationalist view of language for this mode alone.

Only the most superficial reading allows one to derive from the above the triple claim that Scots is his national tongue so he will use it—"braid and plane" (*l.* 110)—throughout, defying all "sudron" forms (*l.* 113). As sociolinguistic pressures were moving Scots closer to English even in his day, what he offers, anticipating Wordsworth in the Lyrical ballads, is an artificial imitation of plain Scots. It will be based on the language of his pageboy youth (*l.* 114). That is—the days of full Middle Scots, of Dunbar and Henryson. Moreover, as Vergil writes more skillfully than he does in a subtler tongue on topics high and low (*ll.* 121-4) that artificial form of Scots can only be his normal or middle style. In using coinages from Latin, English or French (*l.* 117) he will patriotically boost Scots. That is why the language of his *Eneados*, far from being uniformly plain, abounds in complex diction and rhetorical tropes.⁹

What he is claiming, with the same especial emphasis on the high style, is to imitate the Chaucer praised by Dunbar, in "The Goldyn Targe." That is, decorously to expand the home vernacular via foreign graftings throughout the full range of stylistic registers. It is this rhetorical view of language which permits Douglas to claim a patriotic purpose yet obey the classical-medieval tenets of decorum. The complex high style, drawing its coinages mainly from Latin and French, is used for the topics you hold to be the most serious and noble; the middle constitutes the normal style and draws mainly from Scots and Inglis, while the staccato, low style, supplemented mainly by Scandinavian and Germanic loanwords, is used for low subjects, vituperation and farce.

Scottish poets in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries inherited these historical and rhetorical views of language plus intensified sociolinguistic pressures towards anglicization. To superimpose nationalist images of linguistic confrontation on an age whose own literary critics do not accept the nationalist premise, preferring to assess on comprehensive rhetorical criteria and explain a mutually supportive inter-relationship between dialects using organic images—the tree and its branches for example—is anachronistic. James's *Reulis* is a rhetorical treatise with long sections on decorum; Ben Jonson in his conversations with William Drummond finds the Scot too heavily influenced by this type of thinking in his *Conversations* with Ben Jonson. Alexander's *Anacrisis* invites us to consider poetry organically as a garden "the diversity of whose flowers" is "kept" under the control of decorum.

This is why, as I have argued elsewhere,¹⁰ at the highest decorous level of all, in the *Delitiae Poetarum Scotorum*, Renaissance Scotland is not at all de-

⁹See Bruce Dearing, "Gavin Douglas' *Eneados*, a Re-interpretation," *PMLA*, 67 (1951), 845; Priscilla Bawcutt, *Gavin Douglas: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh, 1976), pp. 45-9.

¹⁰"Of Lion and of Unicorn: Literary Traditions at War," in *Of Lion and of Unicorn*, ed. R. D. S. Jack and Kevin McGinley (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 93-4.

fensive about accommodating its wealth of linguistic traditions—English, Scots and Latin—a little, through partial anglicization, to benefit its southern neighbors. The brightness of King James Apollo will lighten their darkness. After all, as Alexander puts it in *Anacrisis*, “Language is but the apparel of Poesy”¹¹—its strength lies in the message and in moving your defined audience as effectively as possible. Thinking in these strategic and oratorical terms of the *causa finalis*, having no firmly established national tongue to betray, believing they possessed deeper truths and a wider linguistic range, James and his disciples did not see a movement towards English which retained crucial Scottish words as any threat.

Indeed, it was not paranoia but overconfidence that betrayed them. James’s optimism was partly misplaced; partly overtaken by events. As the printing presses made silent reading more common and as the Scots writers lived from day to day in the larger London court at the time of Shakespeare and Jonson, their confidence and the *Scots register* began to dwindle away. By the end of the seventeenth century, the wider range of stylistic levels which had, hitherto, been the Scottish poet’s birthright was really threatened.

To replace the discontinuous history which seeks to construct a huge bridge from Dunbar to Burns with rhetorical continuity is my aim in now turning to Burns and the so-called “Vernacular Revival.” Comparative criticism has to pay attention to differences as well as similarities. The major difference between the “revivers” and the later makars is focused on the first of the issues I defined. For obvious historical reasons, writers after the Union of the Parliaments do think of Scots diction as a sign of patriotic intent. The Burns who boasted that Blind Hary’s *Wallace* “poured a tide of Scottish prejudice in my veins”¹² is simply enacting Barbour’s belief in Book 1 of *The Bruce* that only those who lose national liberty truly value it.

If this provides continuity beside necessary differentiation, elsewhere similarities abound. The first group’s confident assumption that they enjoy a more varied linguistic and poetic heritage is echoed by Ramsay, when he claims two pen names to signify that he is at once an English neoclassical (Isaac Bickerstaff) and a Scots makar (Gavin Douglas). Burns, whose rhetorical and neoclassical credentials are thoroughly spelled out in his letter to Dr. John Moore and confirmed critically by Carlyle, has the same optimistic linguistic vision. To become “an excellent English scholar”¹³ in a Scottish school, for Burns in the mid-eighteenth century as for myself in the 1960s, involved founding yourself first firmly on the Trivium of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic. Nor does he eschew English literature. Indeed, it is from the English neoclassical

¹¹William Alexander, *op. cit.* p. 182.

¹²*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985) I, 136.

¹³*Ibid.*, I, 135.

poets, Pope and Shenstone, he learns his poetic craft. Put these two together and we find Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns re-translating the decorous practices of the makars to suit a new linguistic and political situation.

Dunbar, James VI and Drummond of Hawthornden, then, thought of language decorously—that is, according to the medieval system of hierarchically arranged and linguistically distinguished styles. These styles governed all levels of writing—not only aureate complexity as so many critics seem to suppose. All was artifice—even imitation of the colloquial middle style. It is this tradition, which Burns inherits, as tests of his various styles and register transitions will economically underline.

At the highest stylistic level, if a nationalist view of Scots decorously pertains, that diction should predominate when topic and mode are at their most rarefied. Yet, in his patriotic allegory “The Vision” Burns introduces the muse of Scotland as follows:

With musing-deep, astonish'd stare,
I view'd the heavenly-seeming *Fair*;
A whisp'ring *throb* did witness bear
Of kindred sweet,¹⁴

and has her talk like this:

'Mong swelling floods of reeking gore,
'They ardent, kindling spirits pour;
'Or, mid the venal Senate's roar,
'They, sightless, stand,
'To mend the honest *Patriot-lore*,
'And grace the hand (*Poems*, I, 110).

Here, in full cry, is the English of the high style with its self-consciously poetic diction, its archaisms and compound words. It is given to the bard decorously, as a sign of her high standing.

Of course, Burns does not follow these rules rigorously. But a simple nationalist view of language cannot adequately define a writer who, so regularly, equates English with the higher rhetorical levels of style and so can, with no sense of incongruity, make his patriot bard talk like Milton's Satan on a heavy day.

On the low side of the decorous coin—if Scots is per se “good” and English per se “bad,” why does Willie Wastle not describe his wife as follows:

My cat sits at the fair fireside
With her paw, her face a-washing

¹⁴“The Vision,” Duan Second. *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 109. Henceforth *Poems*.

But William's wife is not so nice
 She cleanses her countenance with a stocking

preferring:

Auld baudrans by the ingle sits,
 An wi' her loof her face a washin;
 But Willie's wife is nae sae trig,
 She dights her grunzie wi' a hushian:¹⁵

It is not that Burns is any the less a patriot because he regularly uses aureate English for his highest topics and thick Scots for his lowest—he thinks decorously and profits from Ramsay's confident re-introduction of that dialect into poetic play after the unique period of linguistic attrition endured in the later seventeenth century.

Finally, let us look briefly at two examples of rhetorical transition. I have not chosen extreme ones. I do not need to, for there can be little doubt that alterations from a Scots-dominated level of diction to an English dominated one, are a major strength of Burns's work as of Dunbar's, Lindsay's, Drummond's, Ramsay's and Fergusson's.

Ye high, exalted, virtuous Dames,
 Ty'd up in godly laces,
 Before ye gie poor *Frailty* names,
 Suppose a change o' cases;
 A dear-lov'd lad, convenience snug,
 A treacherous inclination—
 But, let me whisper i' your lug,
 Ye're aiblins nae temptation.

* * *

Who made the heart, 'tis *He* alone
 Decidedly can try us,
 He knows each chord its various tone,
 Each spring its various bias:
 Then at the balance let's be mute,
 We never can adjust it;
 What's *done* we partly may compute,
 But know not what's *resisted*.¹⁶

In this example, the narrator may plead the case of the “no sae guid at all” in

¹⁵“Song—Sic a wife as Willie's wife,” *Poems*, II, 641.

¹⁶“Address to the Unco Guid, or the Rigidly Righteous,” *Poems*, I, 53, 54.

the middle style of Anglo-Scots, but he moves very close to “Inglis alane” for his divinely ethical conclusion.

More subtly, the voice of Holy Willie changes from the self-deluding Scots of confession—“Surely, God you cannot blame me for lechery when I was drunk?”—

Besides, I farther maun avow,
Wi' Leezie's lass, three times—I trow—
But L--d, that friday I was fou
 When I cam near her;
Or else, thou kens, thy servant true
 Wad never steer her.—

to the equally self-deluding English voice of petition—“Beatitude for me, please; hellfire for almost everyone else!”—

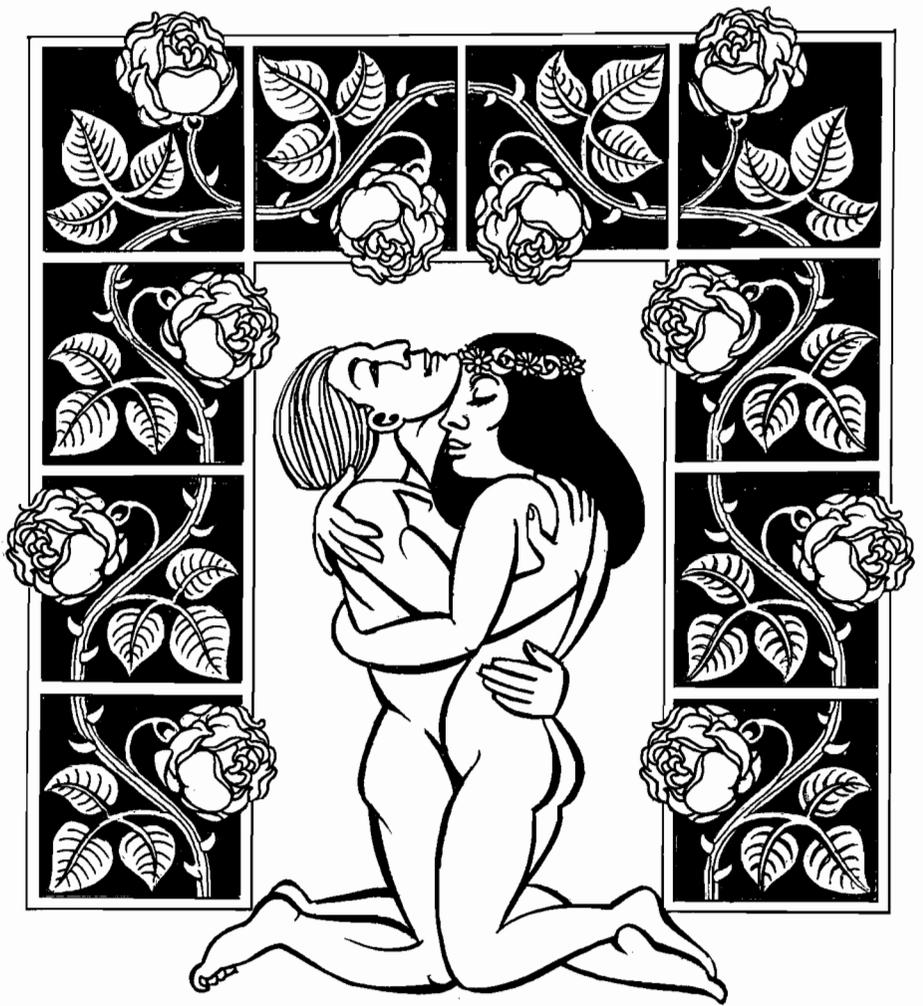
L--d, bless thy Chosen in this place,
For here thou has a chosen race:
But G-d, confound their stubborn face,
 And blast their name,
Wha bring thy rulers to disgrace
 And open shame.¹⁷

Burns and his predecessors did revive something but it was not THE vernacular. English is a vernacular as well as Scots. Nor was literary Scots revived at the expense of English, in a defensive spirit of linguistic nationalism. The eighteenth century poets accepted the makars' view that the two dialects had always been intertwined. What they did revive, *on rhetorical criteria*, was the full and varied range of styles by returning Scots diction to interlace as complement and supplement to English within all registers. Like William Alexander they wished to broaden “Language as a conduit,” the more efficiently to “deliver... the several Shapes [of] adorned Truth.”¹⁸

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¹⁷“Holy Willie's Prayer,” *Poems*, I, 76, 77.

¹⁸*Anacrisis*, *op. cit.* p. 182.



My love is like a red red rose —
A Gray 1996

Harriet Harvey Wood

Burns and Watson's *Choice Collection*

I feel on somewhat weak ground, writing about James Watson in a volume devoted to Robert Burns. Watson died more than thirty-five years before Burns was born. There is no evidence to indicate with any certainty that Burns ever saw Watson's *Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Songs*. Yet the line of descent which links Watson's *Collection* with Burns's work is the chief justification today for claiming attention for what, without it, would, I have no doubt at all, be regarded as an ill-edited rag-bag of poems, many of them second-rate, unworthy the attention of a serious scholar. I should like, however, to consider what there is in it to justify its reputation as one of the most influential works in the history of Scottish poetry and, if possible, what influence, direct or indirect, it may have had on Burns.

Before looking more closely at the contents of the *Collection*, and what influence it may have had on later writers, it is necessary to look at what was going on at the time it was produced, and indeed at the man who produced it. This latter task is not easy, mainly because the materials for constructing a biography of Watson are extremely scanty. His date and place of birth are unknown (Aberdeen in 1664 have been guessed). There are no letters, no personal papers of any kind; there is no portrait. There are scrappy mentions of him in official records, and there is a mountain of paper connected with his continual law cases. This is of considerable interest to printing and bibliographical history but in personal terms proves only that Watson was litigation-happy, and was seldom without a guid ganging plea.

He is anonymous even beyond what one might expect in these circumstances. For example, he was clearly closely interested in and, we deduce,

sympathetic to the Darien Venture, and, in common with many of his compatriots, he deeply resented its failure, freely ascribed in Scotland to English jealousy of Scottish competition in the trade with the Americas. He published a number of poems and pamphlets on the subject, one of them seditious to the extent of getting him locked up in the Tolbooth, from which he was released by a sympathetic mob; but his name does not appear on the list of subscribers to the venture, although this list includes names ranging from the Duke of Queensberry to servants and apprentices, and one might certainly expect to find Watson's among them. Again, the Easy Club, of which Ramsay was a founding member, was started in 1712 to promote the general patriotic and cultural ideas and principles which Watson appears to have spent his life supporting; the fact that some members initially adopted sobriquets from *The Tatler* cannot, in the restricted Edinburgh of the day, be totally unconnected with the fact that Watson had reprinted it in 1710, nor is it possible to suppose that Watson, living just round the corner from Ramsay, did not know of the club's foundation; here again there is no evidence that he had any connection with a society which would appear to have been designed specifically to interest him. There was one member of the club who was a printer and operated under the alias of Andro Hart, but there is no evidence that this was Watson. The publications for which he is now mainly remembered—the *Choice Collection*, his preface to Jean La Caille's *History of Printing*—are so anonymously presented that his claim to their authorship has been disputed in favor of John Spottiswoode, Keeper of the Advocates Library, though the Spottiswoode theory is now largely discredited. We know when he died (1722), and we have his will and that is about all we do have.

What is known of him, therefore, must be deduced from his work and fortunately we can glean a certain amount from this. The Preface to the La Caille *History of Printing* is particularly informative on the subject of the Watson family (one reason why it seems perverse to attribute it to Spottiswoode, who could have little reason to devote so disproportionate an amount of space to one printer's family out of the many mentioned in it), and from it we learn that the Watson family had strong connections with Aberdeen, where his father was a merchant with a particular interest in printing, that his mother was a Dutchwoman, and that he himself was "design'd to be bred a Printer."¹ Aberdeenshire, indeed all the North-East corner of Scotland after the Reformation was traditionally Episcopalian (and indeed Catholicism lingered longer there than in many other places), and retained a particularly strong heritage of humanism and Latinity; it was notorious for its strong support for the house of Stewart; and it was one of the main centers of popular song in Scotland.

¹Watson's Preface to "The History of Printing, 1713," ed. W. J. Couper (Edinburgh, 1913), p. 16.

All these factors clearly influenced Watson's career. At what stage in his life his father abandoned trading for printing is not certain but in 1685 (when Watson must have been about twenty-one), he purchased a printing house in Edinburgh and obtained from Charles II, in repayment of a financial debt incurred during Charles's exile, the gift of being the King's Printer after the expiry of the current Anderson monopoly. Since this still had some years to run, he was presumably thinking as much of his son's printing future as his own when he asked for this gift. The following year his premises were invaded by an Edinburgh mob, and James II, who by then had succeeded his brother, installed him in the precincts of Holyrood House for his protection. Whether it was this fact or his own religious convictions that caused him to be known as "the Popish printer" is not certain; it may have been both. The taint of Catholicism was to cling to him and to his son throughout both their lives, though it is fairly certain that, whatever he was at the beginning of his life, his son spent most of it as a Protestant, probably an Episcopalian. Whether, as in the case of Charles II, this was for reasons of policy is not known. Certainly, as a professed Catholic, he could hardly have printed Bibles and other publications with the authority of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, as he did, especially after 1688.

Our Watson set up his own printing house in 1694, seven years after his father's death, and for the next five years pursued an uneventful career, printing journals and pamphlets as well as legal, medical and other learned books. The names of Dr. Alexander Pitcairne and John Spottiswoode appear among his earliest customers. They, together with the names of other known acquaintances such as Robert Freebairn and Thomas Ruddiman, suggest his membership of a circle of professionals and scholars, men of Latinist, Jacobite and Episcopalian sympathies, many of them connected, as he was himself, with Aberdeenshire and the North-East. As the century drew to a close, his output changed character slightly. He printed Fletcher of Saltoun's *Defence of the Scots Settlement at Darien* three times in 1699, as well as other items related to that ill-fated venture. In the same year he printed Sir Robert Sibbald's *Provision for the Poor in time of Dearth and Scarcity*, a reminder that by this time Scotland was in the middle of what are known as "the seven ill years," when harvests failed and poverty, famine and pestilence were endemic throughout the country. As news of the failure of the Darien venture trickled back, his acknowledged publications took on a more controversial aspect. His unacknowledged ones (and no doubt many pamphlets came from his press which prudently did not carry his imprint) appear to have been even more questionable. The pamphlets which caused him and his collaborator, Hugh Paterson, to be imprisoned in the Tolbooth do not appear in the bibliography of his press. He and Paterson, after their liberation by the Edinburgh mob, returned to stand trial (Watson was defended by Spottiswoode though, as he pleaded guilty, his advocate could do little for him) and were exiled from Edinburgh for a year and a day. Watson went to Glasgow, where he carried on printing in the

Gorbals, returned to Edinburgh in 1701 and resumed his career. By this time the debate over the Union with England was starting. A joint commission started discussions on a treaty of union in 1702; the last independent Scottish parliament met in May 1703, and in 1705 passed the Act for a Treaty with England; and in February 1706 Queen Anne nominated the thirty-one commissioners who were to represent Scotland in the negotiations at Westminster, which began in April and ended in July. The Articles of Union were published later in the year. In the first week of August, Part I of Watson's *Choice Collection* appeared on the bookstall of John Vallange. Subsequent parts appeared in 1709 and 1711, the third part concluding with the words "The End of the First Volume." There was to be no second volume.

Throughout the Union debate, as during the Darien disaster, Watson's other publications had hinted which way his sympathies lay. His publication of pamphlets such as *Scotland reduced by Force of Arms and made a Province of England* and *A Pil for Porkeaters or a Scots Lancet for an English Swelling together with The Englishman's Address to his Pock-pudding* do not suggest enthusiasm for the proposed union. It has to be remembered that Scotland had had fairly recent experience of Union with England under Cromwell's protectorate, and had not found it an encouraging experience—"as when the poor bird is embodied into the hawk that hath eaten it up," as one contemporary observer had put it. Given the political context in which it appeared, it is not difficult to see the *Choice Collection* as a rather more subtle piece of anti-union (or perhaps rather pro-Scottish) propaganda. In 1705 and 1706, anti-union feeling in Edinburgh ran so high that at times the city was virtually under mob rule and known union supporters were threatened in the streets. The publisher's Preface to the collection, advertising the book as "the first of its Nature which has been publish'd in our own Native Scots Dialect"² reinforces the idea that Watson intended it as an overtly patriotic and nationalistic enterprise—or at least as a reminder to his countrymen of a part of their national heritage which seemed in danger of being forgotten, or drowned by the flood of "Collections of Miscellaneous Poems in our Neighbouring Kingdoms and States" (*Choice Collection*, I, iii), as he puts it in his Preface. It also suggests that Watson, realizing that political resistance was unlikely to be effective, was turning to a more literary form of nationalism.

It should not be forgotten just how revolutionary such an undertaking was at that time. No printed collection of miscellaneous poems had previously been published in Scotland, with the possible exception of Arthur Johnson's *Delitiae Poetarum Scotorum* (Amsterdam, 1637, but perhaps printed in Scotland) which consisted entirely of poetry in Latin, and John Forbes, Elder's, *Cantus, Songs and Fancies* (Aberdeen, 1662), which was primarily a song-

²James Watson's *Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems*, ed. Harriet Harvey Wood. 2 vols. STS, 4th Series, 10, 26 (1976, 1991), I, iii. Henceforth *Choice Collection*.

book. And Watson was proposing to produce a collection, not just of Scottish poems, but of Scottish poems *in Scots*. It is important to remember here not just the increasing dominance of the English language in seventeenth-century Scottish poetry (which indeed Watson's own collection was to demonstrate), but also the place of Latin in literature of the time. For many of Watson's contemporaries (e.g., one of the best known, Dr. Archibald Pitcairne), the choice of literary medium was not English or Scots but English or Latin; and for those of Watson's circle, of patriotic, Jacobite, Episcopalian leanings, the choice would most frequently be Latin. As Ruddiman's biographer has written of Pitcairne's *Selecta Poemata*, "Once again it had been shown that a Scottish poet writing in Latin could achieve a linguistic assurance and sophistication not available to him in English or Scots."³ Ramsay, in his 1721 Preface to the *Tea-Table Miscellany*, written shortly before Watson's death, in effect excuses his own use of the vernacular by pleading his ignorance of Latin and Greek, implying that for Scottish patriots who wished to avoid English, Latin was a natural first choice.

The late seventeenth century has been unkindly regarded as one of the periods of least activity and thus of least interest to historians in the pre-Union stretch of Scottish history, and there is much to support this point of view. But it is not wholly deserved, and there were movements in the undergrowth which point ahead to the flowering of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and provide a context for Watson's own activity. The development between the Restoration and the Union of a professional middle class in Scotland has been commented on by a number of critics. To quote one of them,

In 1660 Scotland lacked, and by 1707 had developed, an intelligentsia—made up largely of lawyers, doctors, academics and ministers. The emergence of such a group of thinkers, and the institutional and intellectual developments associated with them, was the most significant development of late 17th century Scottish culture.⁴

And he ascribes this evolution to a period of comparative domestic peace, increase in wealth and the security of a property-based social structure. Certainly the record of the time supports the view: the period between 1660 and 1707 saw the foundation of the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal Botanical Garden, the Royal College of Surgeons, new chairs in mathematics, botany and medicine at the University of Edinburgh (which itself received a Royal Charter), the Library of the Faculty of Advocates, now the National Library of Scotland, and many other comparable organizations. A period which saw an

³Douglas Duncan, *Thomas Ruddiman: A Study in Scottish Scholarship of the Early Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1965), p. 19.

⁴Hugh Ouston, "Cultural Life from the Restoration to the Union," *History of Scottish Literature*, Vol. II, ed. Andrew Hook (Aberdeen, 1987), p. 12. Henceforth Ouston.

interest in and expansion of learning on this scale cannot have been as devoid of intellectual excitement as has sometimes been supposed. And there is ample evidence that the motive force behind most of these developments was, in large part, and in the words of Sir Robert Sibbald, himself one of the chief movers in this professional evolution, “a mutual desire of benefitting and adorning [our] country by the preservation of its historical and literary treasures” (Ouston, p. 14). The names and work of the men who were foremost in this movement—Sibbald himself, Pitcairne, James and David Gregory, Sir George Mackenzie and others—occur regularly in the bibliography of Watson’s press, and it is not difficult to see Watson’s own career as yet another manifestation of ideals described by Sibbald. Both his introduction to the *History of Printing* and his *Choice Collection* were, in their more humble way, his contributions to the preservation of Scotland’s historical and literary treasures as much as Viscount Stair’s *Institutes of the Laws of Scotland* or Sibbald’s *Scotia Illustrata*. Watson’s Introduction to the *History of Printing*, like the Preface to the *Choice Collection*, states his object quite clearly:

I entertain a settled well grounded Hope, that the Perusal of this [treatise] will inspire us all with a noble and generous Emulation of equalling, nay, exceeding, if we can, the best Performances of our laudable Ancestors in the employment. That since our Native Country has at present as many good Spirits, and Abundance of more Authors than in any former Age; we may make it our Ambition, as well as it is our Interest and Honour, to furnish them with Printers that can serve them so well, that they need not, as many of our former Authors have been forc’d to do, go to other Countries to publish their Writings, lest a learn’d Book should be spoiled by an ignorant or careless Printer.

If patriotic fervor was his motivation for publishing his *Collection*, however, it has to be admitted that his efforts were only partially successful. The contents of the *Choice Collection* are a mess—and so is the arrangement of them. Watson was no editor, not just by present-day standards but even by the best eighteenth-century standards, such as those of Lord Hailes. The best editorial fact that we know about him is that he was, as far as can be deduced, a very faithful transcriber of his sources. He set out, largely, I believe, for political reasons, to produce a collection of Scots poems in Scots; he ended up with a mish-mash of material, part Scots, part English, partly in Scots, partly (even the Scots poems) in English. He clearly worked in a hurry, and used whatever sources came most easily to hand, and they were very often (though not always) extremely corrupt. There is no evidence that he undertook anything in the way of scholarly research. In the Preface to Part I, he acknowledges his indebtedness to “the Researches of some Curious and Ingenious Gentlemen, who take pleasure in keeping several comic and Diverting Poems by them” (*Choice Collection*, I, iv); and it is likely that he was helped by long-standing acquaintances, such as Pitcairne, Spottiswoode and Ruddiman. For Parts II and III he advertised for copy and there is every reason to suppose that he simply

accepted anything he was offered from private song-books and commonplace books and set it up in print as he received it. The fact that many such offerings were not only English but *in* English does not seem to have perturbed him, notwithstanding his advertised intention of publishing poems, "in our own Native Scots Dialect." It is only Part I of the *Choice Collection* which comes anywhere near fulfilling his original intentions, though there are items of interest in parts II and III also.

Taking the three parts together, most of what he actually printed can be split up into four categories:

1. Older poems in Scots: in this section he included poems such as "Christ's Kirk" and "The Country Wedding" (this last in a late and very corrupt form), Montgomerie's "Cherrie and the Slae" and some other shorter Montgomerie poems as well as his splendid "Flying" with Patrick Hume of Polwarth, two long and tedious poems by Montgomerie's contemporary, John Burel, and the anonymous "Robert III's Answer to Henry IV of England." Despite his undertaking in the Preface to copy from the most correct manuscripts, all of these have been taken from late and very corrupt printings.

2. Later, mainly seventeenth-century, poems in Scots, such as Sir Robert Sempill's "Piper of Kilbarchan" and his son Francis's "The Blythsome Wedding," Hamilton of Gilbertfield's "Last Dying Words of Bonny Heck, a Greyhound in the Shire of Fife," and two anonymous poems, "The Mare of Collingtoun" and "Speech of a Fife Laird," together with even later derivatives such as the epitaphs on Sanny Briggs and William Lithgow. Most of the sources of these can be found on contemporary broadsides.

3. Seventeenth-century Scots poems in English—those of Aytoun, Drummond and Montrose. For the Aytoun and Montrose poems particularly he has provided good texts not available elsewhere. We have Francis Sempill appearing again with "The Banishment of Poverty" and an early version of "Old Lang Syne" (in two parts and 80 lines) which may also be by him. Here we also have Sir George Mackenzie's "Celia's Country House and Closet," English translations of George Buchanan's "Epithalamium" on the marriage of Queen Mary to the French Dauphin and his "The Poor Client's Complaint" (if that can be called a translation which is enlarged from the twelve lines of the original Latin to over one hundred), "Hallow my Fancie," ascribed here to William Cleland, and a Latin-English poem on "The King and Queen of Fairy," translated by Archibald Pitcairne under his pen-name Walter Dennestone but not by him. Here too, for lack of anywhere better to put it, we might include, as well as Drummond's "Forth Feasting," his macaronic "Polem-Middinia." There are also conventional funerary tributes on John, Earl of Errol, Sir Charles Maitland of Pittrichie and Lady Callendar.

4. Poems in English, some of which are unattributable and most of which are probably English—and it should be said here that there is often considerable difficulty in distinguishing between poems which should come into this category and those which should be in the previous one. Here we have a

ribald poem on Charles II's mistress, Lady Castlemaine, found in almost every English commonplace book of the period, a paraphractical translation of one of Ovid's "Amores," almost certainly by an English poet, possibly Sedley or Oldham, "A Disswasive from Women," "A Lover's Lamentation," "The Constant Lover," "The Indifferent Lover," "The Careless Lover," "The Tunnice-Court," which has been ascribed to Montrose and thus perhaps should be in the previous category, and a number of other items of varying degrees of merit. There is one particularly charming poem, "The Election," the syntax of which particularly suggests a Scottish origin and demonstrates the difficulty of categorization in this peculiar collection:

Some loves a Woman for her Wit
 Some Beauty does admire,
 Some loves a handsome Leg or Foot
 Some upwards does aspire;
 Some loves a Mistress nice and coy,
 Some Freedom does approve;
 Some like their Persons to enjoy,
 Some for Platonick Love.
 Some loves a Widow, some a Maid,
 Some loves the Old, some young;
 Some love until they be betray'd,
 Some till they be undone:
 Some love for Money, some for Worth,
 Some love the Proud and High;
 Some love for Fancy, some for Birth,
 Some love, and knows not why.
 Some love the Little, Plump and Fat,
 Some love the Long and Small:
 Some loves for Kindness, and 'tis that
 Moves me beyond them all. (*Choice Collection*, III, 71)

This is perhaps a forerunner of Leporello's catalogue aria in *Don Giovanni*.

One of the interesting things about a survey of Watson's contents is not what he did include but what he didn't. We have already noted his omission of most of the really distinguished early Scottish poetry, and given the scarcity of prints and manuscripts of much of it in his day, this is not very surprising, though his omission of Barbour and Blind Harry, not to mention Sir David Lyndsay and Gavin Douglas, all frequently printed during the seventeenth century, is a little odd. He might well have left them out for this very reason, though his inclusion of Montgomerie, reprinted even more frequently, indicates that this was probably not the case. He did not include any street or folk ballad material, which is even more surprising. Equally, and more fortunately, he did not include any of the topical and political ephemera which occupy so much space in the contemporary English collections to which he refers in his Preface, and for this we can be grateful.

I propose here to ignore all the last category and concentrate on the rest, because although some of what Watson printed appears at first sight to fulfill; his original nationalistic intentions, more careful examination reveals a different situation, and I do not only refer to the fact that much of it was in English. The really interesting thing about the *Choice Collection* is the extent to which it supports the idea of a common British song culture, in which poems, songs and song-settings traveled freely back and forth between England and Scotland long before the Union took place. Thomas Crawford has commented on the popularity of English ballads and songs in Aberdeenshire as early as 1775; given Watson's Aberdonian origins, it seems probable that they were popular there 100 years earlier than that, and Crawford himself points to the inclusion of English songs in Forbes' song-book, *Cantus, Songs and Fancies* (an Aberdonian production, incidentally) as early as 1662. Many of Watson's poems provide further support. Take, for example, from Part I, "Hallow my Fancie," attributed by Watson in part to William Cleland, the young Cameronian Colonel who died at the battle of Dunkeld. Watson prints a version consisting of seventeen stanzas. The earliest recorded version of it was registered in England under the title, "Ha, Ha my Fancy" in 1639. The earliest surviving version of it, also in England, is in Bishop Percy's Folio MS, generally regarded as having been compiled c. 1650, and consists of six stanzas only. A slightly later version, in which Percy's text had already begun to gather accretions, survives in the Douce Collection and was probably printed between 1663 and 1674. By 1641, a broadside in the Roxburghe Collection indicates that it had already begun to be parodied, notably by Robert Wild. All these appear to be indubitably English productions. Another Roxburghe broadside, titled *The Bedlam Schoolman*, also English, and dated c. 1700 by the STC, gives the seventeen-stanza version printed by Watson though without any acknowledgment to Cleland. Watson took his version from the collection of Cleland's poems printed in Edinburgh in 1697 by Cleland's friends after his death. The fact that the poem had achieved popularity in Scotland is further indicated by the appearance of a setting for it in the Balcarres Lute Book (c. 1690). The point at issue here is not whether Cleland wrote the nine stanzas attributed to him; he probably wrote eight of them. It is that Watson, when he included it, may not have been aware of its English origins, although the text he printed is indubitably English, even the Cleland part.

A poem with a similar history is "Lady Anne Bothwell's Balow" in Part III. Since a version of a Lutheran hymn in *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis* is set to the tune of "Baw lula low," the refrain of the poem, as early as 1567, it is reasonable to suppose that the tune and words to go with it were current in Scotland by then, though the words may have been, probably were, quite unlike Watson's. Like "Hallow my Fancie," a version of it appears in the Percy Folio; versions or extracts from it appear in another five English sources at various points in the seventeenth century. What is certain is that, by 1650 and probably earlier, it was also well enough known in Scotland for there to be two inde-

pendent versions of it with slightly different meters in a Laing MS in Edinburgh University Library (1625-49), indicating that there were originally two independent poems on closely similar themes. There is another Scottish text, with musical setting, of one of them in the Alexander MacAlman Music Book (c. 1656). A confused conflation of the two Laing MS texts was printed in a late seventeenth-century English broadside of which there is a copy in the Roxburghe Collection; this gives seventeen stanzas, as opposed to Watson's thirteen; but it was no doubt from a conflated print of this nature that he took his text. Again, this, like "Hallow my Fancy," is essentially an English text.

There are many other examples in Watson of this kind of pan-British ancestry. Montrose's famous poem, "My Dear and Only Love," has a similar line of descent. In some cases it is the words which have traveled, in other cases the settings or the meters. Francis Sempill's "The Banishment of Poverty" is indubitably his; but the tune to which it was intended to be sung, "The Last Good Night," is English. Nothing could be more authentically Scottish than Alexander Montgomerie's "The Cherrie and the Slae"; but the complicated meter in which it is written appeared first in England in a song, "The Nine Muses," dating probably from 1565. The most obvious example of this kind of cultural commerce (and the most interesting, in the context of a Burns Conference) is Watson's most famous stanza form of all, the Burns stanza or Standard Habbie, so named from its use by Robert Sempill for his famous poem, "The Life and Death of the Piper of Kilbarchan," better known as the "Epitaph on Habbie Simson." Its antecedents in Provençal and medieval English poetry are now a matter of common knowledge, as is its use in much earlier Scots poetry. But Watson did not know this, and it is arguable that his inclusion of "The Piper of Kilbarchan" in his collection, and his legacy of the stanza form in which it is written was one of his most important and significant services to Scottish literature.

So where does this get us—or, rather, where did Watson's rather miscellaneous rag-bag get Scottish poetry? Further perhaps than this rather disparaging account might seem to imply. Whatever the weaknesses of the collection, it is probable that Watson produced a fairly accurate snapshot of what was available and read in the way of Scots poetry in the Edinburgh of his time. If one turns away from what Watson did not include (the work of the most distinguished writers of earlier centuries), and considers only what he did print, it becomes clear that he shaped the course which Scottish poetry was to take for the rest of the century. We may not know whether Burns ever saw the *Choice Collection*, but it is perfectly clear that Ramsay knew it, and leaned heavily on it in the compilation of his own *Tea-Table Miscellany*. It is debatable whether Ramsay, with his editorial tamperings and his rewritings of old songs, taken from Watson's pages or elsewhere, contributed more or less to the development of Scottish poetry than Watson did with his accurate transcriptions of corrupt texts. Less, in my view. Ramsay had an advantage that Watson did not have, in his access to the treasure-house of early Scottish poetry in the Ban-

natyne MS; but it is also to be noted that *The Ever Green*, the collection which he based on Bannatyne, had little success in his own lifetime, compared with the *Tea-Table Miscellany*, which was so heavily influenced by Watson, and which was so frequently reprinted. Watson took what was blowing around the streets of Edinburgh and perpetuated it in a more permanent form; and it is the cumulative effect of the collection which has proved durable, more so than the effect any individual poem could have had on its own. He contrived to select (probably more by chance than good management) precisely those poems which best illustrated the continuity of the Scottish poetic tradition; the fact that few of them were great poetry is in this context unimportant.

"The history of Scottish poetry is different from that of English," wrote W. P. Ker. "It is the history of forms establishing themselves and being followed closely by writers of poetry."⁵ The forms perpetuated by Watson were to shape decisively the work of Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns, to whom he passed on models which were to influence their best work. In his pages, his successors were to find poems of popular revelry and conviviality, such as "Christ's Kirk" and "The Blythsome Wedding," poems which on the one hand go back to folk tradition of the Middle Ages and on the other look forward to Fergusson's "Leith Races," Burns's "Holy Fair" and, in the further future, Tennant's *Anster Fair* and Robert Garioch's "Embroider the Ploy." They found the Habbie Simson epitaph tradition, which led forward to the epitaphs on Maggie Johnson and Lucky Spence; in "The Mare of Collingtoun" and "Bonny Heck," they found the tradition of the death and dying words of animals which also looks back to the medieval fabliau tradition and to poems such as Lyndsay's *Testament and Complaynt of the Papyngo* and indeed further back, to late Latin exemplars such as the *Testamentum Porcelli* and forward to poems like "The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie." They found the "Christ's Kirk" meter, and *The Cherrie and the Slae* meter, and it should be noted that it was Watson's version of the "Christ's Kirk" stanza, corrupt as it was, with the mutilated bob-wheel ending, that survived. Ramsay's additional cantos to *Christ's Kirk on the Green*, published in 1718, used this shortened version, though after he found the original form in the Bannatyne MS, he printed this in *The Ever Green*. But the form used by Fergusson and Burns is Watson's. Most valuable of all, they found Standard Habbie which gave us "Holy Willie's Prayer" and "Braid Claith" and "The Daft Days." And in most cases it was the legacy of Watson that seemed to inspire the most important work in those who followed him. The metrical ingenuity of the verse epistles in Standard Habbie which passed between Ramsay and Hamilton of Gilbertfield must rank among the best of what Ramsay ever wrote, and the short career of Robert Fergusson indicates what might have been made of the vernacular tradition which Watson handed down if he had had longer to develop it. There can have

⁵*Form and Style in Poetry* (London, 1966), p. 201.

been no greater tragedy for Scottish vernacular poetry than Fergusson's death at the age of twenty-four. But Standard Habbie had a late flowering in the hands of Stevenson who showed in the Scots poems of *Underwoods* what it was still capable of one hundred years ago and pronounced, in "The Maker to Posterity," the final epitaph on Watson's endeavor to perpetuate poetry "in our native Scots Dialect":

Few spak it then, an' noo there's nane.
My puir auld sangs lie a' their lane,
Their sense, that aince was braw an' plain.
 Tint a' thegither,
Like runes upon a standin' stane
 Amang the heather.

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Kenneth Simpson

Poetic Genre and National Identity:
Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns

One of the distinctions of Scottish literature is that it has given the world the elegy in which the elegist is sick—not sick with grief, as might just be permissible in respectable elegies, but sick from an excess of alcohol. The poem in question is Allan Ramsay's "Elegy on Maggy Johnston." In conventional pastoral elegy one of the ways the speaker mourns is by offering personal testimony to the dead person's qualities and achievements. So it is with Ramsay's mourner:

Ae simmer night I was sae fou,
Amang the riggs I geed to spew;
Syne down on a green bawk, I trow
 I took a nap,
And soucht a' night balillilow
 As sound's a tap.

And whan the dawn begoud to glow,
I hirsl'd up my dizzy pow,
Frae 'mang the corn like wirricow,
 Wi' bains sae sair,
And ken' nae mair than if a ew
 How I came there.¹

¹*Poems by Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson*, ed. Alexander Manson Kinghorn and Alexander Law (Edinburgh and London, 1974), p. 5. Henceforth Ramsay-Fergusson.

What greater tribute can he pay to the dead woman than by testifying to the strength of her brew and its subsequent effects?

Outsiders may be forgiven for wondering what the problem is with the Scots. Why the apparent compulsion to be reductive? Why the tendency of Scottish writers to reproduce the patois of the street? Do they do so deliberately to shock? Is there a tradition of gratuitous coarseness in Scottish writing?

Maggy Johnston died 1711. Ramsay was writing in 1711/12. What was the literary climate? The critical war between the Ancients and the Moderns had intensified in France in the sixteen-eighties and rumbled on into the eighteenth century in Britain. Paradoxically, the Moderns were in general more rigorous than the Ancients in their application of the rules of writing. The central issue was that of correctness, focusing in particular on the conventions of genre and decorum. For the neoclassic critics there was a hierarchy of literary types, or genres; there should be no mixing of genres, e.g., tragedy and comedy; there were rules to designate the subject-matter, style, structure, and emotional effect appropriate to each genre; and the hierarchical ranking of the genres related to the ranking of social classes from royalty and the nobility to peasantry. The principle of decorum demanded a consonance of subject-matter, characters, action, and style. Here is George Granville in his *Essay upon Unnatural Flights in Poetry* (1701):

Roscommon first, then Mulgrave rose, like light,
To clear our darkness and to guide our flight;
With steady judgment, and in lofty sounds,
They gave us patterns, and they set us bounds²

In his *Laws of Poetry* (1721) Charles Gildon observed that rules are “more essential to Poetry than to any other Art or Science.”³ The expression of individual inspiration is to be strictly regulated. The poem is good or bad according to the degree of conformity to the rules of the particular genre. It is scarcely decorous to be sick in an elegy.

The mock-elegy was of course not a new or an exclusively Scottish literary phenomenon. Under the rules of rhetoric styles were used as signing means across all levels.⁴ Inversion of signs was permissible within the rules as consciously understood; hence elegy accommodates mock-elegy. The mock-elegiac mode found particular favor with the poets of the vernacular revival for

²Cited in W. Jackson Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York, 1961), p. 34.

³*Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴I am indebted to Professor R. D. S. Jack for advising me on this point.

whom Robert Sempill of Beltrees, with "The Life and Death of Habbie Simson," formed an inspirational precedent.

Authority is perhaps inimical to the Scottish character. From the Makars onwards one of the characteristics of Scottish poetry is the juxtaposition of vernacular Scots and formal English; the former undermines the latter, the effect of such reduction generally being realism of representation and realism of assessment. The opening stanzas of "Elegy on Maggy Johnston" typify the mode with their interplay of vernacular Scots and stock pastoral diction:

Auld Reeky! Mourn in sable hue,
Let fouth of tears dreep like May dew,
To braw Tippony bid adieu,
Which we with greed,
Bended as fast as she cou'd brew.
But ah! she's dead.

To tell the truth now Maggy dang,
Of customers she had a bang;
For lairds and souters a' did gang
To drink bedeen,
The barn and yard was aft sae thrang,
We took the green. (Ramsay-Fergusson, p. 3)

Ramsay and, later, Fergusson and Burns intensify the realistic effect by juxtaposing the implicit conventions of the genre and the actual subject-matter of their poems. In doing so they are not exemplifying mock-heroic in the manner of their English contemporaries (e. g., Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, or—later—Gray, "On a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of gold Fishes"), where the principal interest is stylistic and the basis from which the poets work is one of endorsement of the hierarchies. Rather, the additional dimension achieved by the Scottish poets is that of rendering and celebrating ordinary human experience. This realist, populist quality is often associated with Scottish literature and, rightly or wrongly, with the Scottish character. It finds its fullest and most triumphant expression in "Tam o' Shanter," and it helps explain the universal appeal of both that poem and the values with which Burns is traditionally identified: "a Man's a Man for a' that."

Ramsay, Fergusson, and Burns make a major contribution to the process of the democratization of literature, challenging the old literary hierarchies and the traditions of genre and decorum, and extending the expressive capacities of inherited poetic forms. They do so as Scots, Scots within Britain. Their body of poetry expresses a cultural nationalism, which in itself may serve as a channel for the expression of an otherwise thwarted political nationalism.

Their resourcefulness may be construed as a determination on the part of Scottish writers to participate as active cultural partners in the Union. Several of Ramsay's poems reveal the poet consciously contributing to the new-found

We have to wait until Kurt Wittig for the observation that the poem is “cannily mock-heroic.”⁸ The vernacular Scots adds a degree of particularity that produces an authenticity lacking in English pastorals, which maintain decorum; and once again the range of reference is noteworthy:

Sandy: His Fame shall last: last shall his Sang of Weirs
While *British* Bairns brag of their bauld Forbears (*Works*, I, 109).

This is but one of a number of Ramsay’s poems that claim the legitimacy of vernacular Scots in British poetry.

In an important essay, “Augustan Influences on Allan Ramsay,” Carol McGuirk comments, “In using a selectively Scots diction in forms such as verse-epistle, pastoral, and satire, Ramsay was emulating (and extending) the work of the popular London Augustans, Matthew Prior and John Gay, who pioneered in the use of English rustic diction to spice up the ‘lower’ literary kinds.”⁹ While agreeing, I would contend that at times the intention is to do more than “spice up”: the implicit agenda is to challenge neoclassical constraints and free poetry to become a means of rendering real human experience. “Epistle to James Arbuckle” reveals a brilliant synthesis of modes: the flyting formula is adapted to enable Ramsay, not to berate his rival, but to introduce himself in terms of appearance, personality, and beliefs, while his actual target is rhetoricians to whose formulaic, hierarchical ordering of material he feigns adherence, only to show its absurdity. In “To Robert Yarde of Devonshire” Ramsay begins by offering the stereotypes by which Scotland and its writers are known in the south. There follows a lengthy verse-essay on moderation—“Yet ae extreme should never make / A man the gowden mean forsake.” This he applies to love:

Yet Love is kittle and unruly,
And shou’d move tentily and hooly:
For if it get o’er meikle Head,
'Tis fair to gallop ane to dead (*Works*, II, 60).

Ramsay can preach moderation in all things, like a true Augustan. Then the homily is deftly undermined:

Then wale a Virgin worthy you,
Worthy your Love and nuptial Vow;
Syne frankly range o’er a’ her Charms,
Drink deep of Joy within her Arms;

⁸Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh, 1958), p. 167. Henceforth Wittig.

⁹Carol McGuirk, “Augustan Influences on Allan Ramsay,” *SSL*, 16 (1981), 98.

Be still delighted with her Breast,
And on her Love with Rapture feast (*Works*, II, 60).

Rules are abstractions, meaningless generalities; real human beings are individuals, a point further underlined by the poet's own practice within the poem. Burns makes the same point in "The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie." A proponent of Rousseau's theories on the unfettered education, Mailie changes her tune when she comes to consider her own offspring: her son is warned to "stay content wi yowes at hame," while her wish for her daughter is

O, may thou ne'er forgather up,
Wi' onie blastet, moorlan toop;
But ay keep mind to moop an' mell,
Wi' sheep o' credit like thysel!¹⁰

Theories are fine as abstractions; woe betide them as soon as individuals get their hands on them! This element in Ramsay and Burns accords with the humanizing and secularizing thrust of Scottish Enlightenment thought.

The inference of such poems is that poetry must take account of individual difference and must accommodate the range of human experience. Robert Fergusson is adept at depicting on a broad canvas the diversity which comprises society (especially urban society), and his resourcefulness in the adaptation of modes matches that of Ramsay. "Leith Races" in its opening stanzas is evocative of the ballads: the speaker meets and converses with an attractive young lady. By stanza four she has identified herself: Mirth, a stock neoclassical personification, speaks a homely vernacular Scots. A bargain is struck (another detail redolent of the ballads): he can test her mirth-raising power if he will agree to take her to the races, which he does, enabling him to render the social panorama in all its bizarre diversity.

In "The King's Birthday in Edinburgh" the national element is foregrounded. Fergusson deliberately chooses an occasion which, since the Union, was a common holiday throughout Britain. Noting the affinities of such events with the carnivalesque, C. A. Whatley comments, "They were extraordinary occasions when normal restraints on behaviour were temporarily removed."¹¹ The restraints whose removal Fergusson seeks are those of slavish adherence to neoclassical poetic convention. The title seems to promise a formal poem written for a national occasion, but the diction—and especially

¹⁰*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 33. Henceforth *Poems*.

¹¹C. A. Whatley, "'The Privilege which the Rabble have to be Riotous': Carnivalesque and the Monarch's Birthday in Scotland, c. 1700-1860," in J. Blanchard, ed. *Labour and Leisure in Historical Perspective* (Stuttgart, 1995), p. 89.

the rhymes—of the opening stanza instantly undermine formality. In an ironic reversal of the norm the poet's persona takes care of the Muse, feigning concern for her on the grounds of her limited capacity for both whisky and inspiration; he, by contrast, offers a vivid account of the vibrant communal celebrations. By its own example the poem makes the point: poetry can be refashioned to accommodate the bizarre particularities of human experience. For Kurt Wittig, Fergusson introduces into Scottish poetry "a metropolitan spirit...which is the antithesis of kailyard parochialism; it is a poetry that looks ahead"; and he alludes to Fergusson's "disappointed nationalism" (Wittig, p. 182). Paradoxically, in its innovativeness and sophistication, Fergusson's poetry exemplifies a forward-looking nationalism, even though the tone and substance of its nationalist references are those of regret or nostalgia.

It is in Burns that the democratic tenor of Scottish poetry finds its fullest expression. Egalitarian sympathies are conveyed courtesy of reductive juxtaposition and—one of Burns's favorite techniques—inflation of the local, specific, individual, and deflation of the national, general, universal. As "Elegy on the Year 1788" demonstrates, the interplay of language levels is instrumental in the leveling process:

For Lords or kings I dinna mourn,
E'en let them die—for that they're born!
But oh! prodigious to reflect,
A Towmont, Sirs, is gane to wreck!
O Eighty-eight, in thy sma' space
What dire events ha'e taken place!
Of what enjoyments thou has reft us!
In what a pickle thou has left us!

The Spanish empire's tint a head,
An' my auld toothless Bawtie's dead;
The toolzie's teugh 'tween Pitt an' Fox,
An' our guidwife's wee birdy cocks;
The tane is game, a bluidy devil,
But to the hen-birds unco civil;
The tither's dour, has nae sic breedin',
But better stuff ne'er claw'd a midden! (*Poems*, I, 454-5)

In the eyes of the peasant farmer the death of his old farm-dog is at least as important as that of the Spanish emperor. He understands politics in his terms: the cut and thrust between Pitt and Fox is the fight to determine who will be cock of, not the walk, but the midden.

Burns ranges wide in his familiarization of the remote and abstract. The most striking example is "Address to the Deil." Anything but the "Prince/Chief of many throned pow'rs/ That led th' embattl'd Seraphim to war," the devil is a well-known local, a crony of the speaker (and, as Burns's letter to

James Dalrymple shows,¹² there is a kinship: poets are the Devil's men). He is also, simply, a pest, a right wee devil—splashing boiling water about in the kitchen; quacking like a duck; draining the milk from cattle; incapacitating the young husband's "wark-lume." The vernacular Scots in which these activities are rendered familiarizes them and so weakens their force. The speaker takes pity on his crony:

But fare you weel, auld Nickie-ben!
 O wad ye tak a thought an men'!
 Ye aiblins might—I dinna ken—
 Still hae a stake—
 I'm wae to think upo' yon den,
 Ev'n for your sake! (*Poems*, I, 172)

Even the Devil doesn't deserve to be consigned permanently to the torments of his black pit (cf., "Tam o' Shanter" where even the witches are allowed a night off and a party). The Devil has been demystified and brought within the community, whose spokesman, very much Burns's ordinary man, finds resources of compassion that encompass Satan himself. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Adam Smith had stressed the important of sympathy as a component of our moral sense. Even earlier, in concerning *Moral Good and Evil*, Francis Hutcheson had advocated acting benevolently towards rational and moral beings "in the most distant planets."¹³ Burns's speaker takes the doctrine of sympathy to its ultimate, and most practical, extreme: no one is in greater need of sympathy and redemption than the Devil; no one's redemption could better serve man than the Devil's. If only the Devil could be saved: here Burns anticipates the redemptive strain in high Romanticism.

The speaker in "Death and Doctor Hornbook," again Burns's ordinary man, encounters on his way home from the pub "something" that "put me in an eerie swither." A grotesque figure with a scythe over one shoulder and a fishing-spear over the other, it is greeted familiarly by Burns's ordinary man at his most sociable, who comes to terms with the unknown by means of the known:

Its stature seem'd lang Scotch ells twa,
 The queerest shape that e'er I saw,
 For fient a wame it had ava,
 And then its shanks,
 They were as thin, as sharp an' sma'
 As cheeks o' branks.

¹²*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), I, 93. Henceforth *Letters*.

¹³Francis Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good and Evil*, 5th edn. (London, 1753), p. 165.

Eneados (1710) showed, national pride embraced literary, as well as martial, heroes.

For the literati Scotland's right to cultural partnership with England would be assured if it had its representatives of the highest genres: William Wilkie bid for the mantle of Scotland's epic poet with *The Epigoniad* (1757), based on an obscure episode in the history of Thebes as related in *Iliad*, Book IV. Wilkie is inflexibly neoclassical: "I would have it understood as a rule, that the subjects of epic poetry should be taken from tradition only"; and he had a problem with *Paradise Lost*: "A work altogether irregular...the subject of it is not Epic but Tragic."¹⁶ Even for Lord Kames, in some ways one of the more flexible of the literati as critics, "familiarity" is the curse of the epic, "the peculiar character of which is dignity and elevation."¹⁷ The only other contenders for the title of Scottish epic were Macpherson's *Fingal* and *Temora*, essentially confluents of elements of classical epic and Celtic history and mythology to meet the needs of the vogue of sensibility.

In "Tam o' Shanter" Burns mimics features of classical epic: Tam, the errant husband with a price to pay, evokes Odysseus; Kate's prophecy as to his fate recalls the prefiguring of classical epic; abstract Care, here personified, is familiarized. "Care, mad to see a man sae happy/ E'en drown'd himsel amang the nappy" (*Poems*, II, 559)—Burns conveys a great deal here: in the context of human fellowship neoclassical abstractions have no place (they may as well go drown themselves!); his poem is about the vibrancy of real human experience, not arid abstraction. Likewise, the mock-formal apostrophe indicates that if anything in the real world warrants apostrophe it is whisky—why?: "Wi' usquabae, we'll face the Devil!" (*Poems*, II, 560). Other features mimicking epic are the wonderfully expressive mock-epic simile: "As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke...As open pussie's mortal foes...As eager runs the market-crowd...So Maggie runs, the witches follow" (*Poems*, II, 563), and the catalogue of horrors, in confronting which Tam is truly "heroic Tam."

Critical discussions of mock-heroic allude to the aggrandizing, or even mythopoeic, effect of the mode: ordinary mortals rendered in mock-heroic assume representative or mythical status. So the fight between Mr. and Mrs. Partridge in *Tom Jones* becomes *the* domestic quarrel. Thus "Tam o' Shanter" is *the* example of the Wild Ride and Tam, "heroic Tam," is our representative in confronting the supernatural. Part of Burns's immense achievement in "Tam o' Shanter" is in both rendering and transcending the local dimension (all those landmarks) and the national dimension. Thomas Crawford has suggested that, after "The Vision," "Tam o' Shanter" is "the most genuinely *na-*

¹⁶William Wilkie, *The Epigoniad*, 2nd edn. (London, 1759), p. xiv.

¹⁷Cited in G. Gregory Smith, p. 104.

tional of all Burns's poems."¹⁸ Perhaps Tam's journey is emblematic of the life of the Scot. In one short verse-paragraph, for instance, ("Weel mounted on his gray mare, *Meg*...Whare ghaists and houlets nightly cry"—*Poems*, II, 559-60), Tam is contextualized in terms of several of the determinants of his existence—weather, song, church, and the supernatural. In one respect Tam may be heroic because he not only embodies but confronts his Scottishness. But Tam is most representatively heroic because of the universality of his experiences and the authenticity of his responses. Buoyed up by alcohol, fascinated, sexually excited, "*Tam* tint his reason a' thegither" (*Poems*, II, 563): his reactions are life-threatening but perfectly natural. "Tam o' Shanter" is the most genuinely international of Burns's poems because it celebrates recognizable human responses and instincts. With the ordinary man as hero, the epic is democratized.

But what, if anything, is *mocked*? Tam is not mocked; he is subjected to a benign irony, certainly: "Kings may be blest, but *Tam* was glorious/ O'er a' the ills o' life victorious" (*Poems*, II, 559). It's Tam who finds that mellow, alcohol-induced state "glorious." It has to be recognized that the vernacular poets establish a certain distance at times. Ramsay is not the persona in "Elegy on Maggy Johnston"; Burns is not the speaker in "Elegy on the Departed Year 1788"; he is at a distance from the beggars in "The Jolly Beggars." But in recognizing that "Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious" is Tam's viewpoint we are not qualifying Burns's celebration of the common man: quite the reverse—Tam is authentic precisely because of such responses. This is art, not politics or ideology, but perhaps for that reason it is more subtly effective as politics.

Following on the achievement of Ramsay and Fergusson, Burns has extended the range of mock-heroic; indeed he has transformed it in that mock-heroic has become extended/innovative/democratized heroic. What originated as a cultural nationalism manifesting itself through challenge to, and engagement with, literary hierarchies, has, in Burns, conjoined with political radicalism. Thus the basis of Burns's universal appeal lies in the inter-relationship between the democratization of literary modes and political and social democratization.

How revealing that it was Byron, half-Scottish, who wrote:

Poets are classed by the power of their performance, and not according to its rank in a gradus...of what *order*, according to the poetic aristocracy, are Burns's poems? There are his *opus magnum*, 'Tam o' Shanter', a *tale*; the 'Cotter's Saturday Night',

¹⁸Thomas Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh, 1960), p. 222.

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a descriptive sketch; some others in the same style: the rest are songs. So much for the *rank* of his *productions*; the rank of *Burns* is the very first of his art.¹⁹

For Wordsworth, “It is as a human being, eminently sensitive and intelligent, and not as a Poet, clad in his priestly robes and carrying the ensigns of sacerdotal office, that Burns interests and affects us” (*Critical Heritage*, p. 404). For the Romantics, as for us today, it is as the poet, not of Nature, but of Human Nature, that Burns is of such importance.

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¹⁹Donald A. Low, ed. *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston, 1974), p. 326. Henceforth *Critical Heritage*.

Peter Zenzinger

Low Life, Primitivism and Honest Poverty: A Socio-cultural Reading of Ramsay and Burns

Associating the eighteenth-century Scottish vernacular tradition with “low” subject matter and style may seem little more than stating the obvious. After all, Scots had declined from a literary language to a series of spoken dialects in the seventeenth century, and in spite of the great variety of poems contained in James Watson’s *Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems both Ancient and Modern*, only *Christis Kirk on the Green* and Robert Sempill’s “The Life and Death of the Piper of Kilbarchan” (often called “Habbe Simpson”), both centering on scenes of rustic festivities, had a truly seminal influence on the Scottish poetry of Allan Ramsay. Ramsay, says Allan MacLaine, “gave to the eighteenth-century Scots revival both its original impetus and its final direction,”¹ echoing Sir William Craigie’s suggestion that it is “unnecessary to trace the . . . progress in Scottish dialect poetry from Ramsay to its culmination in Burns, as the advance is not so much in kind as in quality.”² The seemingly self-evident link between Scots verse and “low life” and the relationship of Burns’s work to that of his lesser predecessor will be the focus of my essay.

In point of fact, opinions on the socio-cultural aspects and literary affiliations of eighteenth-century Scots poetry vary considerably. Thomas Carlyle’s view of Burns as a “Volksdichter” is still occasionally repeated, though with

¹Allan Ramsay (Boston, 1985), p. 1.

²William Craigie, *The Northern Element in English Literature* (Toronto, 1933), pp. 41-2.

different ideological and aesthetic implications. In his discussion of the Scottish vernacular revival, David Craig employs the terms "folk poetry," "the people's poetry," and "national poetry" as quasi-synonyms; like John Speirs, David Daiches and, more recently, Robert Thompson and David Sampson, he stresses the communal nature of Scottish verse as opposed to the genteel, predominantly English tradition of eighteenth-century poetry.³ At the other end of the scale there is Carol McGuiirk, who suggests close links between Ramsay and the English Augustan poets and points out the influence of sensibility on Burns's work, following the positions developed by Matthew McDiarmid, R. D. S. Jack and Thomas Crawford:⁴ their critical emphasis is on the British, or European, context of eighteenth-century vernacular poetry, on interaction and historical development rather than insulation and stasis. The evidence they have produced can no longer be neglected. A brief note on Burns in Germany at the end of my paper will corroborate their arguments from the reception side of his work.

Let me sketch the literary and cultural contexts of Ramsay's early vernacular poems. These include his two additional cantos to *Christ's Kirk on the Green*, and his mock elegies and familiar epistles in the Habbie Simson stanza, all published in 1718 and 1719 alongside his "Richy and Sandy, A Pastoral on the Death of Joseph Addison," a volume entitled *Scots Songs* and several poems in conventional English. Before that Ramsay had made himself a modest reputation with three poems published in English containing more than a faint echo of Milton, Waller and Pope. As a member of the Edinburgh Easy Club, Ramsay had deliberately attempted to acquire "a Taste of polite Writing," following the advice given by Addison and Steele in the *Spectator*,⁵ which he eagerly read and discussed with his friends, and to show "Great

³David Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People: 1680-1830* (London, 1961); John Speirs, *The Scots Literary Tradition*, rev. edn. (London, 1962); David Daiches, *Robert Burns*, rev. edn. (London, 1966); Robert Thompson, "The Functioning of Folklore in the Dialect Poems of Robert Burns," PhD diss. U. of Oregon (1976), *Dissertation Abstracts*, 37/06, p. 3654; David Sampson, "Robert Burns: The Revival of Scottish Literature?" *Modern Language Review*, 80 (1985), 16-38.

⁴Carol McGuiirk, "Augustan Influences on Allan Ramsay," *SSL*, 16 (1981), 97-109, and *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (Athens, GA, 1985); *The Poems of Robert Fergusson*, ed. Matthew McDiarmid. STS, 3rd Series, 21 (1954), Introduction, esp. pp. 118-73; R. D. S. Jack, *The Italian Influence on Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh, 1972); Thomas Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh, 1960) and *Society and the Lyric: A Study of the Song Culture of Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1979). See also the present writer's study of Allan Ramsay, *My Muse is British: Allan Ramsay und die Neubelebung der schottischen Dichtkunst im 18. Jahrhundert* (Grossen-Linden, 1977).

⁵*Spectator*, No. 58 (1711).

Sence and Wit" in order to distinguish himself from "thoughtless Fools" and "unlearn'd Clowns."⁶ His Easy Club poems leave no doubt that Ramsay's cultural ideal was that of an Augustan gentleman. Like William Hamilton of Gilbertfield, Alexander Pennecuik and other poets of his time, Ramsay ascribed the low esteem he thought Scottish literature was held in to the neglect of the best models by his contemporaries.

Pennecuik is quite explicit in this respect: the modern English poets, he wrote, have "displayed immortal Capacities, an Elation of Mind which Scales the Meridian of Poesy, delivered to Posterity massy Thoughts in a splendid Dress, chang'd its Complexion, and made it shine with a beautiful Visage, gain'd a miraculous Conquest over Ignorance, and Left a perfect Pattern for Imitation."⁷

In his satiric poem *The Scriblers Lash'd* (1718; I, 83-9), which reached six editions and was included in eight collections by 1733, Ramsay harshly criticizes the uneducated Scottish "rhymers" of street ballads, panegyrics and elegies, who write, he says, "what the polite ne'er read" and "debauch our taste" (ll. 102, 140). Scotland as "an old Virtuoso Nation" (l. 189) should strive to produce elegant literature along the lines of English refinement and silence "vile Mungels of Parnassus" (l. 11).

How do Ramsay's vernacular poems, particularly his early attempts, where images of low life abound, fit into the picture then? The *Familiar Epistles* that Ramsay exchanged with Hamilton of Gilbertfield in 1719 give us some clues as to his attitude towards vernacular verse. Any claim to serious poetry is immediately thwarted by the playfulness and slight mockery that permeates these epistles. "Wanton Willy" calls the vernacular poetry "Crambo" (ll. 49, 66; I, 117), "honest Allie" (l. 43; I, 123) refers to them as "innocent auldfarren Jokes" (l. 2; I, 131). In ironic contrast to their own sense of urbanity, both poets pretend to write "rural Rhyme" (ll. 2, 73; I, 128, 134).

A similar attitude is already discernible behind Ramsay's first published poems in Scots, his two additional cantos to *Christ's Kirk on the Green*. The fifteenth-century original describing a peasant brawl was an art poem dealing with a folk theme written for the amusement of an upper-class audience.⁸

⁶"On the Great Eclipse of the Sun," ll. 18, 42. *The Works of Allan Ramsay*, ed. Burns Martin and John W. Oliver (I-III); Alexander M. Kinghorn and Alexander Law (IV-VI), STS, 3rd Series, 19, 20, 29; 4th Series, 6-8 (1951-74), I, 198. Further references will be to line number, volume and page number, and will appear in the text.

⁷Alexander Pennecuik [Merchant], Dedication "Unto the R. H. Thomas Earl of Haddington," *Streams from Helicon* (Edinburgh, 1720). For Ramsay's early poetry and its socio-cultural context see my comments in *My Muse is British*, ch. I, and on primitivism, ch. III.1.d.

⁸Allan MacLaine, "The Christis Kirk Tradition: Its Evolution in Scots Poetry to Burns," *SSL*, 2 (1964), 3-18, esp. p. 13.

While in the case of James I there was no risk of identifying the poet's persona with the low-life characters he depicts, Ramsay, as a middle-class poet aspiring to social recognition by the upper classes, was in a position that required more deliberate distancing from his subject matter; he therefore tried to widen the gap between his world and that of the "vulgar" rustics, which explains the exaggerated coarseness of the low-life images in his additional cantos. In the Advertisement to the first edition of *Christ's Kirk* (Cantos I and II, 1718), he speaks of his ambition to emulate the royal author of "this admirable Poem" and underlines his educated standpoint by adding a motto from Gavin Douglas's *Eneados*, which he even transcribed into Greek in later editions. His images of excessive drinking, pissing, vomiting and farting are ironically offered to the reader as Pope wrote "a Grace beyond the reach of Art" (VI, 31). Ramsay's condescension is even more obvious in the next edition of the same year, containing an additional canto from his pen, where he presents the poem to his readers as a comic satire,

... having Gentlemens Health and Pleasure, and the good Manners of the Vulgar in View: The main Design of Comedy being to represent *the Folies and Mistakes of Low Life in a just Light*, making them appear as Ridiculous as they really are; that each who is a Spectator, may evite his being the Object of Laughter (VI, 31).

According to the rules of neoclassical decorum, a satire dealing with low life was appropriately written in the low, or humble, style. Ramsay obviously regarded Scots as a low variant of English, for when he ridicules upper-class characters (e.g. the pedant, the fop, the fashionable belle, the corrupt courtier, or the traveler on the Grand Tour) as he does in *Tartana*, *Content*, *Health*, *The Rise and Fall of Stocks* and other poems of that period, he turns to conventional English as a matter of course.

Ramsay's "Elegy on Maggie Johnston" (I, 10-13), his earliest mock elegy in the Habbie Simson tradition, was written in 1711 but only published seven years later. To the young self-consciously urban gentleman the comic elegy in Scots was no more than a hoax, "an entertainment of the same order as macaronic or Hudibrastic verse," as Matthew McDiarmid has observed.⁹ After Ramsay had read the poem to his fellow members of the Easy Club, they jokingly discussed the question "Whether Maggie Johnstouns death or Elegy be ye more Lamentable accident" (V, 14); one of his friends comments somewhat grossly on the worth of the poem:

Thy muse with ye same Ease doth write
as Constipated dogs do shite (V, 10).

⁹Introduction to *The Poems of Robert Fergusson*, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-19.

Ramsay's praise of the Edinburgh alehouse keeper and her "pauky Knack / Of brewing Ale amaisht like Wine" (ll. 46-7) leads to a description of urban low life, of conviviality and drinking orgies, which the poet's persona participates in as one of the tipplers. John Speirs argues that the comic elegies "allow no feeling of something not quite assimilated,"¹⁰ and David Craig praises them as some of the few works where Ramsay is not "blatantly aspiring to Literature" but "is writing close to life."¹¹ Yet Ramsay's attitude towards Maggie Johnston and the drinking-bouts in her alehouse is equivocal. After all, the comic effect of the elegy in the Habbie Simson tradition is based on the ironic contrast between the low social status of the departed and the worthiness of the dedicatee of a serious elegy. Towards the end of the poem Ramsay wonders whether Maggie is "in Heaven or Hell" (l. 89), and he expresses his superior position in the concluding epitaph "*O Rare MAGGY JOHNSTON*," ironically evoking the famous epitaph on Ben Jonson. To underline his aloofness, Ramsay adds a footnote to the poem in which he distinguishes between Maggie Johnston's "frequent Customers . . . who lov'd to have a good Pennyworth for their Money," i. e. the characters described in the poem, and "many others of every Station [who], sometimes for Diversion, thought it no Affront to be seen in her Barn or Yard." (I, 10) Jokingly he can pose as a member of the first group, as he is certain of his real place with those that look down upon the common people's merry-making for their diversion.

Quite obviously Ramsay's attitude towards the tradition of low-life poetry—just like Swift's and Gay's—is divided into the "official" aloofness of the Augustan poet and his "unofficial" enjoyment of this tradition. Ramsay's comic elegies soon become less self-consciously jocular, and reach a rare degree of perfection in the portrait of Patie Birnie,¹² the fiddler who, in conjunction with the dwarfish dancer Jonny Stocks, served Burns as a model for the "pigmy Scaper" in *The Jolly Beggars*. Ramsay's skillful handling of the Habbie tradition shows best in the satiric poems "Lucky Spence's Last Advice" (I, 22-6) and "The Last Speech of a Wretched Miser" (II, 62-8), comparing favorably with the host of "last words and dying speeches" of his time. The nihilism of the dying brothel keeper and the squalor of a prostitute's life in Edinburgh evoked in "Lucky Spence" strike a note hitherto unheard in this genre. "The Last Speech of a Wretched Miser" projects the low-life pattern onto the life of a rich man, whose extreme avarice has not only reduced him to living conditions worse than a beggar's but has also killed all human emotions in him. The miser is a grotesque caricature that contrasts starkly with the

¹⁰*The Scots Literary Tradition*, p. 108.

¹¹*Scottish Literature and the Scottish People*, p. 25.

¹²"The Life and Acts of, or An Elegy on Patie Birnie," I, 186-91.

idealized figures of the enlightened gentleman and the happy plowman who increasingly turn up in Ramsay's poems of the 1720s.

Even though Ramsay had made a neat distinction between the Scots and the English literary traditions at the beginning of his career, he soon became aware of certain loopholes within the Augustan aesthetics that allowed him to use Scots in forms of poetry beyond the "comic Tale and sonnet slee."¹³ Following closely the literary debates of his day, Ramsay clearly saw a chance of introducing Scots verse into the mainstream of British poetry, and he took it. Neoclassical decorum still reduced the possibilities of the use of Scots for serious purposes,¹⁴ and Ramsay's middle-class ideas occasionally clashed with Augustan tenets rooted in the aristocratic world-picture, so that some misconceptions and arbitrary interpretations of the rules arose, but on the whole Scots and English complemented and reinforced each other in his mature poetry and largely influenced the further development of eighteenth-century Scottish verse.

The English, and European, influence shows most clearly in the concept of primitivism, which was to become Ramsay's major frame of reference. He interprets Pope's "First follow Nature" as an all-encompassing rule, "nature," like the contrasting notion of "art," having both aesthetic and ethical connotations. Low life is sublimated and turned into joyful and honest poverty. According to Ramsay, one of the charms of *The Tea-Table Miscellany* is its "merry Images of the low Character";¹⁵ indicative of this tendency are songs such as "The Happy Clown," "The Cobler's Happiness," and "The Happy Beggars."¹⁶ In *Health*, which, together with *Content*, is one of the programmatic works of Ramsay's primitivism, the poet speaks of "The whistling Ploughman's artless Tune" (l. 341; II, 12). A country girl like "The Lass of Peatie's Mill" trying to win her lover "without the Help of Art" (l. 17; I, 40) not only shows her superior taste in doing without any cosmetics but is also morally superior to the sophisticated lady of the town who thinks she depends on these decoys. "Bonny Bessie" suggests that a poor but virtuous girl is preferable by

¹³"To Mr. William Aikman," l. 29; I, 226.

¹⁴"Ramsay used Scots in no verse form an Augustan would think incompatible with his 'Doric' diction." McGuirk, "Augustan Influences on Allan Ramsay," p. 98.

¹⁵Preface to the 1730 edition, IV, 239.

¹⁶One of the most detailed recent studies of *The Tea-Table Miscellany*, which stresses the primitivistic aspect, is Johann Assbeck's *Why Are My Country-Men Such Foes to Verse? Untersuchungen zur schottischen Dichtung des frühen 18. Jahrhunderts in ihrem Verhältnis zum englischen Klassizismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), pp. 300-429.

far to mere beauty and wealth.¹⁷

The simple people of rural Scotland celebrated by Ramsay epitomize the natural, healthy, modest and happy way of life. By way of contrast, the gentry and townspeople are frequently shown as having lost their primitive instincts:

Then let's to Lairds and Ladies leave the Spleen,
While we can dance and whistle o'er the Green,

says the blithe highland lad in the epistle "To Mr. William Starrat" (ll. 34-5; II, 73). This contrast is also a central topic in the pastoral eclogue *Patie and Roger*, which was to become the first scene of *The Gentle Shepherd*.

Such images of the country life reflect a mental attitude rather than the actual facts. Thomas Crawford refers in this context to the pastoral theory of Fontenelle and his English followers Addison, Tickell, Philips and Purney and speaks of "dreams of the cultivated classes," because, he says, "the country is not in the last analysis necessary for exciting the pastoral emotions, since all that is essential is the quiet life."¹⁸ The enlightened upper classes—Ramsay's ideal reading public—are indeed described in much the same terms as the "natural" country people. *The Fair Assembly*, for example, moves the dancing scene mentioned above into the splendid halls of fashionable Edinburgh society, and in spite of its different social context contains the same primitivistic comment as the other poem: "DISEASES, Heaviness and Spleen, / And ill things mony mae" (ll. 17-18; II, 129) are warded off by dancing! Elsewhere the Countess of Wigtown, like the lass of Peatie's Mill, is praised as a woman whose "native Sweetness sought nae Help frae Art."¹⁹

The art versus nature issue also permeated Ramsay's poetic theory of the twenties.

With more of Nature than of Art,
From stated Rules I often start,
Rules never studied yet by me,

he says in one of his verse epistles.²⁰ "Pursue your own natural Manner, and be an original," is the advice of his noble patrons he claims to have followed in the Preface to the 1721 edition of his poems (I, xviii), and both *The Tea-Table*

¹⁷Ramsay's *Fables and Tales* of 1722 contain numerous poems with a similar moral.

¹⁸*Society and the Lyric*, p. 73. Henceforth Crawford.

¹⁹"Keitha: A Pastoral, Lamenting the Death of the Right Honourable Mary Countess of Wigtoun," l. 58; I, 206.

²⁰"To William Somerville, of Warwick-shire Esq," ll. 7-19; III, 123.

Miscellany and *The Ever Green* are explicitly offered to his audience as examples of "artless" poetry.

In Ramsay's pastoral comedy, Patie, the gentle shepherd, and Peggy, his future wife, combine the best of the two realms: they have been raised as shepherds but are of high degree, although they and we do not know this at first. Again, Ramsay's vantage point is that of the upper classes, whose tastes he tries to cater for. The young couple's superiority among the country people, at first seen as a sign of their natural nobility, is eventually interpreted as a consequence of their noble blood. Basically, Ramsay here follows the classical *beatus ille* tradition, which made the noblemen in his country retreat a moral example to be followed by the whole nation. In topical poems with a slighter degree of stylization, like in the song "On our Ladies being dressed in Scots Manufactory at a publick Assembly," this is quite evident:

When such first beauties lead the way,
The inferiour rank will follow soon (*ll.* 37-8; III, 79).

Real country people are normally excluded from Ramsay's fashionable poetry, and when they appear at all, as in "The Daft Bargain" or "The Twa Cut-Purses," they are similar to the clowns and bumpkins in the tradition of Restoration comedy. In his Dedication to *The Fair Assembly* Ramsay confesses openly to the traditional attitude when he contrasts "Politeness" with "barbarous Rusticity" (VI, 80).

But even if, on the whole, Ramsay's images of country life are paradigms of a state of mind, the use of dialect in *The Gentle Shepherd* and his other pastoral poems connects them with the notion of a "realistic" description of the world of shepherds. This is where the Scottish element comes in. Ramsay's pastoral comedy refers to a definite place—the Pentland Hills near Edinburgh—and creates the sense of a real local community. Images of poverty, misery and domestic strife are inserted in the Jenny and Meggy eclogue (later made the second scene of the first act), and although the pleasant aspects eventually prevail, the glimpses of the real-life conditions of the poor are remarkable in themselves as a seminal force. These scenes may not carry the main weight of the argument, but they must doubtless have made a great impact on audiences who recognized their own situation in them.

A similarly ambiguous perspective blending primitivistic pose and serious social comment characterizes Ramsay's dedication of his *Scots Proverbs* (1737) to the tenantry of Scotland. True, "Ramsay's address . . . was calculated," as Kinghorn and Law maintain (V, 59), and the literary cliché of the apostrophe "Ye happy Herds" (V, 61) makes the modern reader wince; but for all this Ramsay's praise of the vital role of the peasantry and the appreciation of "their toils obscure" anticipates the social consciousness of Thomas Gray and his generation:

. . . I scruple not to tell you that you are the Props of the Nation's Profit. It is you that are the Store-keepers of Heaven's Bountiths. Frae your Barns and Byres we enjoy the necessaries of Life; ye not only nourish your sells, but a' the idle and insignificant; ye are the Bees that make the Honey, that mony a Drone licks mair of than ye do. How nither'd and hungry wad the gentle Board look without the Product of your Riggs and Faulds? How toom wad the Landlard's Coffers be, if ye didna rug his Rent frae the Plough-gang and the green Sward? How naked wad we a' be obliged to skelp without your Lint-sheaf and Woo-pack? And alake, how sair wad it harden the braw Lad and bonny Lass's saft Looks, were they obliged to labour for their ain Meat and Claiiths? Ye take that Burden aff their Backs by laying ilka Thing to their Hand *like a peel'd Egg*, while they without Toil reap the Bennisons of your Care (V, 62).

The images of the bee and the drone establish a link with Ramsay's fables, in which he had expressed similarly advanced social views drawn from *La Motte* and *La Fontaine*.²¹ There is a new bias in Ramsay's defensive attitude towards the use of "our Landwart Language" in the *Scots Proverbs*. As early as 1721 he had claimed that "good Poetry may be in any Language" (I, xix);²² now, in 1737, this aesthetic principle is invested with direct social implications: "a brave Man can be as meritorious in Hodden-gray as in Velvet," says Ramsay, sneering at the elitist views of "the Gentle Vulgar" (V, 61). This is a far cry from Ramsay's fawning on his rich patrons discernible in his earlier work.

In Robert Burns, the revaluation of the simple country folk is paramount, though it would be beside the point to interpret this attitude as the straightforward expression of a newly gained self-confidence on the part of the Scottish peasantry. What we are offered instead is, often enough, primarily an echo of traditional literary formulas that appealed to Burns for their wish-fulfillment. Especially in his early poems, Burns falls behind the advanced position noted above. "The Twa Dogs," contrasting the life of the lairds on the one hand and "Poor *tenant-bodies*, scant o' cash",²³ on the other, tries to convince the reader that the latter are "maistly wonderfu' contented" (l. 84), while the rich, "curst" with "want o' wark" (l. 206), lead a pitiful life of languor and boredom. "The Cotter's Saturday Night" is a similar reservoir for the store of primitivistic concepts Ramsay had helped popularize, topped up with "a measure of stock Augustan reflection from Gray, Shenstone and others" (*Poems*, III, 1111).

²¹See esp. "The Twa Books" (embedded in "Epistle to the Honourable Duncan Forbes, Lord Advocate") and "The Twa Lizards," *Works*, II, 26-7 and 48.

²²The argument in the 1721 preface is that "British," Ramsay's "Mother Tongue," is as valuable as "the dead or foreign Languages."

²³*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 140. Henceforth *Poems*.

found in Fergusson's "The Farmer's Ingle." Rather than claiming to present a distinct, realistic portrait of a cotter's family, Burns frames an idealistic model ("From Scenes like these," *l.* 163) connecting simplicity and happiness:

To you I sing, in simple Scottish lays,
 The *lowly train* in life's sequester'd scene;
 The native feelings strong, the guileless ways,
 What A[itken] in a *Cottage* would have been
 Ah! tho' his worth unknown, far happier there I ween! (*ll.* 5-9)

Robert Aitken was a solicitor, not a cotter. The poem blends the old *beatus ille* topos with more recent motifs, such as the sequestered country scene (rather than the closeness to the town, which Ramsay preferred), the piety of the cotter, the ruined maid, and the basic depravity of the upper classes. R. D. S. Jack has argued that "Burns is using [the] sentimental tradition to advance [an] attack on social divisions in his country," that "indirectly . . . indict the ruling classes," and that "'The Cotter's Saturday Night' as much as 'A Man's a Man' is a poem advocating that the lower classes seize social and political liberty and do so by force if necessary."²⁴ I find it difficult to follow this argument. Admittedly, "The Cotter's Saturday Night," like Gray's "Elegy," makes the ruling classes appear in an unfavorable light and is, in this respect, political; however, the calm rhythm of both Gray's heroic quatrains and Burns's Spenserian stanza counteract any incitement to social change by force. The landlord in Burns's poem may be "Studied in arts of Hell, in wickedness refin'd" (*Poems*, I, 151) but, like the bad weather, he remains outside the cottage, serving as a foil to enhance the atmosphere of warmth and contentment inside. A real cotter would surely have drawn quite a different picture of his situation from the one we find here. And this is the point: Burns, who experienced hard work, poverty and degradation as a farmer, does not speak in his own voice in this poem, but, for all his indignation, adopts the leisured classes' view of rural happiness.

What a different image of the Scottish peasantry Burns conveys in "The Holy Fair"! This poem also celebrates the healthy, natural attitude towards life, but has the sensuous richness of *Christ's Kirk*, whose simplified stanza it employs while avoiding Ramsay's grossness. The young country folk "mind baith *saul* an' *body*" and are "weel content" (*Poems*, I, 135); they are "happy . . . an' blest" (*Poems*, I, 132) without being mere ciphers of a primitivist theory; nor are they paragons of virtue. Saints and sinners have their place in this world, "some are fou o' *love divine*" and "some are fou o' *brandy*" (*Poems*, I, 137), and there are many ways of converting and softening a human heart, as the poem demonstrates. Rarely has the democratic principle of equality found

²⁴"Robert Burns: Poet of Freedom," *Scotia: American-Canadian Journal of Scottish Studies*, 8 (1982), 46, 47, 49. Henceforth Jack.

such an admirable expression. There is no condescension, no attack against those who think or live differently. The only quarreling comes from those who ascend “the *holy rostrum*” (*Poems*, I, 133)—as Kinsley remarks, “The medieval brawl is metamorphosed in the Mauchline preachings” (*Poems*, III, 1099), so that it is the ministers of the Kirk who are now the laughing stock rather than the country yokels. Siding with the simple peasants, “The Holy Fair” has serious ideological implications, though its pervasive lightheartedness allows the criticism of clerical hypocrisy and combativeness to be no more than a faint echo of that expressed in, say, “Holy Willie’s Prayer” of the same year (1785).

Love and Liberty (The Jolly Beggars) also belongs to the same period. This important work has received ample critical attention in recent years²⁵ and can therefore be surveyed briefly. As Thomas Crawford has pointed out, Burns’s cantata is an art poem “drawing its sustenance from (i) the vernacular narrative tradition going back to *Christis Kirk on the Green*...and (ii)...popular lyric culture,” Burns’s most immediate models being the songs “The Happy Beggars” and “The Merry Beggars” from Ramsay’s *Tea-Table Miscellany*. The night Burns spent with the beggars in the Mauchline dive Poosie Nancy’s that is said to have sparked off the cantata follows the traditional pattern according to which a member of a higher social group joins the beggars “for a frolic,” (Crawford, pp. 207, 192, 195), an attitude not unlike Ramsay’s on his occasional “descents” to Maggie Johnston’s tavern. Any exaggerated claim to realism must therefore be checked against the poem’s generic context, for quite early in its history “some of the values of the pastoral tradition have become attached to the figure of the Beggar, and are beginning to move forward towards the praise of anarchy.”²⁶ Gay rendered this tendency particularly manifest in *The Beggar’s Opera*. The anarchic wishfulfillment of the tradition culminates, in Burns’s example, in the final chorus:

A fig for those by LAW protected,
LIBERTY’s a glorious feast!
COURTS for Cowards were erected,
CHURCHES built to please the Priest (*Poems*, I, 209)

Henley and Henderson’s often-quoted formula of “humanity caught in the act and summarised for ever in terms of art”²⁷ suggests that the “merry core /

²⁵Crawford examines the major trends in recent criticism in his lucid analysis of this poem in *Society and the Lyric*, pp. 187-212.

²⁶Crawford, p. 194. The reference is to John Fletcher’s *Beggar’s Bush* (?1622).

²⁷*The Poetry of Robert Burns*, ed. W. E. Henley and T. F. Henderson. 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1896-7), II, 291.

O' randie, gangrel bodies" (ll. 7-8) in this poem are mythopoetic figures and that, as Maurice Lindsay puts it, "their cantata is the expression of that revolt against 'the scheme of things' which finds a sympathetic echo at some time or another in even the most decorous heart."²⁸ The idealization of "those who are already outside the social structure" in *Love and Liberty* patently corresponds to that of "the down-trodden labourer" in "The Cotter's Saturday Night" (Jack, p. 50), what has not always been noticed, though, is that the same authorial detachment and restrictions regarding the incentive to riot apply here too. "Love and Liberty" is a very complex work; one of Burns's "exercises in romantic escapism," it "can still show a kind of heroic idealism none the less heroic for being inverted" (Lindsay, p. 92).

How dubious it is to treat Burns as a simple "folk-poet" and his images of low life as authentic records emerges from the numerous parallels existing between *Love and Liberty* and "Tam o' Shanter." As well as the traditional evocation, in the opening scenes, of conviviality heightened by the foul weather outside, both poems contain elements of that inverted heroic idealism, the "drouthy neebors" in Ayr appearing as ill-reputed in the eyes of well-meaning moralists as the beggars in the Mauchline tavern. The contradictory discursive positions²⁹ in "Tam o' Shanter" admit of both ironically reflecting the traditional aloofness towards the simple country people and glorifying their natural grandeur, or "honesty." Burns uses the honest-man motif in many contexts and moods. As shown in the narratorial comment following the announcement of the "gathering [domestic] storm" over Tam's late hours, these include the jocular and parodistic:

This truth fand honest *Tam o' Shanter*,
As he frae Ayr ae night did canter,
(Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses,
For honest men and bonny lasses.) (*Poems*, II, 557)

Christopher Whyte regards the use of "honest" and "heroic" (*Poems*, II, 561) as "markers of the mock-heroic style adopted by Burns in 'Tam o' Shanter,'" as hyperboles culminating in the lines:

Kings may be blest, but *Tam* was glorious,
O'er a' the ills o' life victorious!
(*Poems*, II, 559; Whyte, pp. 12-13)

²⁸Robert Burns: *The Man, his Work, the Legend*, 2nd edn., rptd. with corrections (London, 1971), p. 93. Henceforth Lindsay.

²⁹See Christopher Whyte, "Defamiliarising 'Tam o' Shanter,'" *Scottish Literary Journal*, 20:1 (1993), 5-18.

This is convincing enough when we consider that Burns raises a hen-pecked husband getting drunk to escape domestic tyranny for a while, above the level of royalty. But the implicit questioning of the divine right of the (Hanoverian) kings in "Kings may be blest, but *Tam* was glorious" and the ironic use of the rhymes "glorious" and "victorious" from the English anti-Jacobite song "God Save the King,"³⁰ which was being adopted as the British national anthem in Burns's days,³⁰ produce occasional political undertones, however carefully muted under the cover of humor.

"For a' that and a' that," which Crawford calls the "apotheosis...of the songs inspired by the French revolution and Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*" (Crawford, pp. 185-6), is more outspoken in this respect. Reinterpreting conventional concepts from a radical point of view, it is, in fact, one of Burns's most overtly political pronouncements, an accumulation of his most cherished ideas set to the tune of a Jacobite song. Clearly reminiscent of the lines from "Tam o' Shanter" quoted above is the following:

The honest man, though e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that.—³¹

The honest-man motif has been traced back to various sources, including the seventeenth-century ideal of the *honnête homme* and Pope's *Essay on Man*.³² In his second "Epistle to John Lapraik" Burns quotes Pope to the effect that

'The social, friendly, honest man,
'Whate'er he be,
'Tis *he* fulfils *great Nature's plan*,
'And none but *he* (*Poems*, I, 92).

While Burns here acknowledges Pope's claim that honesty is a quality basically to be found in any man regardless of his social rank ("Whate'er he be"), he

³⁰First performed by a patriotic bandmaster at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, after the defeat by Bonnie Prince Charlie's troops of the Hanoverian army at Prestonpans in September 1745, "God Save the King" "came to be referred to as the national anthem from about the beginning of the nineteenth century," *The Monarchy* (London, 1991), p. 68. According to the *Cambridge Encyclopedia* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 833, the time of adoption as a national anthem was the eighteenth century.

³¹*Poems*, II, 762. Cf. the song "My father was a farmer upon the Carrick border" (*Poems*, I, 26-8), where we find the stereotypical "cheerful honest-hearted clown" who "had ne'er a farthing" and "Thus all obscure, unknown, and poor, thro' life [was] doom'd to wander" though still contending, "I am as well as a Monarch in a palace."

³²*Poems*, III, 1467-8. Quotations from *An Essay on Man*, with references to epistle and line numbers, will henceforth be credited as *EM*.

elsewhere finds it necessary to specify that the poor are also included. His "Epistle to a Young Friend," for example, maintains:

A man may hae an *honest heart*,
Tho' Poortith hourly stare him (*Poems*, I, 249).

This defensive attitude arises from the clash between honesty as an aesthetic concept claiming universal validity and verifiable social reality. Only seemingly did Augustan generalizations such as "universal," "all mankind" contradict the deep-rooted belief in hierarchy, all major Augustan writers agreeing that those who had to do manual work to earn their living were, as a matter of course, excluded from this category.³³ It would hardly have occurred to Pope or Ramsay to emphasize poverty in their images of the simple and honest man the way Burns does, nor would they have given the aspect of social injustice any serious consideration in this context.³⁴ "The poor, oppressed, honest man" in "Man Was Made to Mourn" (*Poems*, I, 119), and poems such as "The Cotter's Saturday Night" and "For a' that and a' that" reflects a new social consciousness based on sensibility, enlightened political theory and, in Burns's case, personal experience. As mentioned above, the simple man in Ramsay's poetry was no more than a mask of the aristocrat. Even in *The Gentle Shepherd*, where Ramsay interprets the pastoral tradition in realistic terms and distinguishes between the roles of Patie, the shepherd, and Patie, the young laird, their physical identity is maintained through the cleverly devised plot: nobility of mind and gentle blood go naturally together. In Burns, the nobleman and the simple man have evolved not only into two distinct persons, but into opposing forces.³⁵ The links between simplicity and honesty still exist, but, simplicity now being increasingly seen as a realistic social reference and identified with poverty, the upper-class person has become a figure of contrast, and this contrast includes the question of moral integrity.

If poverty is honest, it is a cause for pride; consequently it is only the "coward-slave" who shamefully "hings his head," while "we dare be poor." As Pope had it, "Honour and shame from no condition rise" (*EM*, iv, 191). What establishes a man's worth is his "independent mind" rather than an independent income. Arguing from an upper-class point of view, Pope had dismissed

³³Cf. the parallels in my discussion of the concept of "taste" and its application to the fictitious reader of eighteenth-century poetry in *My Muse is British*, ch. ii.2, esp. p. 160.

³⁴Pope's equation of "guilt and greatness" (*EM*, iv, 293) refers to war heroes.

³⁵Thomas Paine's distinction between "the artificial Noble" and "the Noble of Nature" is pointed out by Thomas Crawford in *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs*, p. 365. Henceforth *Study*.

inequality in social status as “some small difference,” reasoning that the significant distinction is between “a wise man and a fool” (*EM*, iv, 195, 200).

Worth makes the man, and want of it the fellow:
The rest is all but leather or prunella. (*EM*, iv, 203-4)

Following Pope’s philosophical argument, Burns condemns the “tinsel show” of “fools” and “knaves,” expressing confidence in the “higher rank,” and eventual victory, of “Sense and Worth”; going beyond Pope and his own earlier position and connecting these abstract categories with Paine’s comments on the French Revolution and the unnaturalness of hereditary titles, Burns implicitly advocates a reversal of the existing social structure when he elevates the “honest man, though e’er sae poor” to the rank of “king o’ men” and degrades the “birkie, ca’d a lord” to the level of a “coof.” This is the basis, Crawford says, for Burns’s final egalitarian utopia, in which the “Masonic concept of Brotherhood” and the “French revolutionary ideal of Fraternity” mingle (*Study*, p. 365):

That Man to Man the warld o’er,
Shall brothers be for a’ that (*Poems*, II, 763).

My discussion of the representation of low life in Ramsay and Burns, and, in more general terms, some of the socio-cultural aspects of eighteenth-century Scottish vernacular literature has raised the issue of the relationship between literary discourse and extra-literary reality and the potential of literature to further social and political change. I have briefly sketched how Ramsay interpreted the aristocratic ideals of English Augustan culture and neoclassical poetry from his Scottish middle-class point of view, bringing them into contact with the themes and modes of Scots vernacular poetry and, in the process, changing them both. Burns took over Ramsay’s middle-class patterns and in turn reinterpreted them from the point of view of a self-educated Scottish farmer, steeped in the cult of sensibility and fascinated by the ideas of the French Revolution. For all his reliance on literary cliché, and his caution to take the edge off his most radical ideas, Burns has succeeded in sharpening his readers’ social consciousness and occasionally contributed to political change, as the German reception of his work shows.

When, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the reactionary forces of the German *Grossbourgeoisie* increased their pressure on the lower classes, Burns’s songs of liberty became a great incentive to the revolutionary movement of *Vormärz*. Ferdinand Freiligrath translated “For a’ that and a’ that” twice, in his second version adapting Burns’s song to the contemporary conditions in Germany. “Trotz alledem” was printed in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a journal edited by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in 1848 and soon gained a

central position in the song repertoire of the communist movement in Germany.³⁶ Freiligrath's adaptation contains the lines:

Wir sind das Volk, die Menschheit wir,
Sind ewig drum, trotz alledem,

which, retranslated, read,

We are the people, we are humanity,
And therefore are eternal, for a' that.

Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht frequently referred to this song when they tried to establish communist rule in Germany after the First World War, and after the Second World War every young person in East Germany was brought up with it. Its indictment of injustice and repression eventually turned it into an instrument of criticism of communist rule itself. "Trotz alledem" is associated with singer Wolf Biermann, expelled from the GDR in 1976 for his critical stance;³⁷ and when during the 1989 upheavals, which rang in the demise of the East German state, thousands of people marched through the streets of East Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden, their slogan was "Wir sind das Volk!"—"We are the people!"

Burns, naturalized by Freiligrath and reinterpreted by those who had been brought up by professed admirers of his faith in liberty and equality, helped overthrow a system of oppression! What better proof is there of his internationalism and unbroken vitality two hundred years after his death.

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³⁶Freiligrath's adaptations have been made available again by Rudi Camerer in his bilingual edition of *Robert Burns: Liebe und Freiheit* (Heidelberg, 1988), pp. 243-5. In the Soviet Union, too, the song played a central role in communist education. Ian Nimmo's book *Robert Burns: His Life and Tradition in Words and Sound* (London, 1965) contains a record with a version of "Is there, for honest Poverty" in English and Russian from a Moscow kindergarten.

³⁷Wolf Biermann, *Trotz alledem!* CBS Germany, 1978. For a list of further German recordings see Camerer, p. 333.

James Connor

Elder Brother in the Muse

No sculptur'd marble here, nor pompous lay,
'No story'd urn nor animated bust;'
This simple stone directs pale SCOTIA's way
To pour her sorrows o'er her POET's dust.¹

So reads the quatrain sculptured on the face of the headstone over the grave of Robert Fergusson, the headstone created and paid for by Robert Burns, to the poet, described by him as "my elder Brother in the muse."²

On February 6th, 1787, Robert Burns wrote to the Honorable Bailies of the Canongate in Edinburgh.

Gentlemen,

I am sorry to be told that the remains of Robert Ferguson [*sic*] the so justly celebrated Poet, a man whose talents for ages to come will do honor to our Caledonian name, lie in your church yard among the ignoble Dead unnoticed and unknown.—Some memorial to direct the steps of the Lovers of Scottish Song, when they wish to shed a tear over the "Narrow house of the Bard" who is now no more, is surely a tribute due to Ferguson's memory: a tribute I wish to have the honor of paying.—I petition you then, Gentlemen, for...your permission to lay a simple stone over his revered ashes, to remain an unalienable property to his deathless fame.—

¹"Epitaph. Here lies Robert Fergusson, Poet." *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 322. Henceforth *Poems*.

²[On Fergusson], *Poems*, I, 323.

I have the honor to be, Gentlemen,
 your very humble servant
 Robert Burns³

Burns had been appalled to discover that Fergusson's grave was unmarked, and after receiving permission to erect a headstone, he commissioned an architect, coincidentally named Robert Burn, to erect the stone. Robert Burns did not settle the account until 1792. Commenting on the delay, he wrote of Mr. Burn:

He was two years in erecting it, after I commissioned him for it; & I have been two years paying him, after he sent me his account; so he & I are quits.—He had the hardiess to ask me interest on the sum; but considering that the money was due by one Poet, for putting a tomb-stone over another, he may, with grateful surprise, thank Heaven that he ever saw a farthing of it (*Letters*, II, 133).

The bill for the headstone, as a matter of interest, was £5/10/-, quite a sum in those days, but as it can still be seen in the Canongate Churchyard along the Royal Mile, near Holyrood Palace, it was a very wise and enduring action of Robert Burns. In his Epistle to William Simpson, Burns allocates the blame for the unmarked grave when he writes:

O *Ferguson!* thy glorious parts,
 Ill-suited *law's* dry, musty arts!
 My curse upon your whunstone hearts,
 Ye Enbrugh Gentry!
 The tythe o' what ye waste at *cartes*
 Wad stow'd his pantry!⁴

But, who then was this person whom Robert Burns so respected, and so honored? "O thou, my elder brother in Misfortune, / By far my elder Brother in the muse." Robert Fergusson was born in the Cap and Feather Close in Edinburgh on the 5th of September, 1750, although the gravestone states 1751. Burns would be only fifteen years old when Fergusson died. Although he was born in Edinburgh, both Fergusson's parents came from Aberdeenshire, where part of his boyhood and early manhood was spent. He came back to Edinburgh and attended the High School for three years, taking the ordinary course in classics, being destined by his parents for the ministry. Then he moved to the Grammar School of Dundee on a scholarship for three years. After Dundee, he entered the University of St. Andrews at about fifteen years of age, where he

³*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), I, 90. Henceforth *Letters*.

⁴"To W. S*****n, Ochiltree," *Poems*, I, 94.

remained for four years as a student of Divinity. On the death of his father, he had to quit his university studies without a degree. He had been an average student without distinction. In the social life of the university he had an amazing variety of other qualifications, he had a sharp wit, and he "could set a table aroar." Temperamentally, he was vivacious and irresponsible with a flair for practical jokes (students haven't changed).

Due to his domicile being within the Eastern and North Eastern districts of Scotland, Fergusson picked up the language of that area. He acquired the various accents, colloquialisms and vocabulary which change from region to region, almost from village to village. The language on the whole is a richer and fuller Scots dialect than that used by Burns who was restricted to the Southwest of Scotland. Fergusson used far less "Scotticized English"—in fact his tendency was in the opposite direction by "Anglicizing Scots" in spelling, but seldom in pronunciation as the rhyming reveals. Fergusson also had a subtler knowledge of the Scots language, not of the rustic but of the educated classes. After all, he had had a much more extensive formal education.

But to return to a description of Fergusson's career. When he left the University of St. Andrews, in 1769 at age nineteen, he found employment in a lawyer's office which earned him only a pittance, and where he remained until just a few months prior to his death on 16th October, 1774. His poverty, however, never dampened his effervescent spirits. He had a circle of friends mostly of the law and of a bohemian nature. He made his first public appearance as poet in 1769 when he added three songs to Pietro Metastasio's opera *Artaxerxes*, with music and translated libretto by Thomas Augustine Arne, which was performed at the Theatre-Royal, Edinburgh.

Two years later, in 1771, he began to contribute to Walter Ruddiman's *Weekly Magazine* where he was to publish all of his works. He was still writing in English, and not making much progress, when it appears that he realized where his talent did *not* lie—he turned to Scots for his medium, and he burst suddenly onto the Scottish poetic scene. January 1772 opened its New Year with the appearance of his famous poem "The Daft Days" (the days between Yule and Hogmanay), containing the familiar opening lines:

Now mirk December's dowie face
Glours our the rigs wi' sour grimace,
While, thro' his *minimum* of space
 The bleer-ey'd sun,
Wi' blinkin light and stealing pace,
His race doth run.⁵

Here was something entirely different—with this poem, the "Tricky cal-

⁵*Poems by Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson*, ed. Alexander Manson Kinghorn and Alexander Law (Edinburgh, 1985), p. 121.

lant” burst fully fledged into the space left vacant by Allan Ramsay’s death fourteen years before. He seemed in the Scots tongue to have served no apprenticeship in the Muses courts, his style already formed, vigorous, accomplished and self-confident. From this moment onwards, Fergusson poured out a succession of poems of an unusually consistent level of excellence, which met with instant acclamation. He immediately became immensely popular, not only in Edinburgh, but throughout Scotland.

This was, of course, the great age of tavern clubs in Edinburgh. Tavern dissipation prevailed to an incredible extent with no rank, class or profession an exception to this rule. Edinburgh was a center of conviviality—a city of clubs, and talk and good fellowship, a city of harlotry and high jinks, a city of drink. Into this life, Fergusson entered with the hilarity of youth and success, but he was nothing abnormal—his reputation, unlike that of Burns, was unscathed by the slightest hint of concupiscence, or scandalous behavior.

At this time Fergusson joined the Cape Club whose members were mostly composed of literary, artistic and antiquarian characters. He was the “Golden Boy” of Edinburgh, much in demand for his fine singing voice and his repertoire of Scots songs. We get the image of a young, popular, fancy-free man-about-town unattached, and there is nothing reported of any amorous involvement or scandal. For almost two years this young man was feted wherever he went—but the bubble had to burst! During February of 1774, he developed a melancholia and a behavior pattern suggestive of a manic depressive psychosis—he ceased writing and became progressively more depressed.

While attending an “election frolic,” in July 1774, he had the misfortune to fall from a staircase, sustaining a severe concussion, probably resulting in what we would diagnose today as a subdural hemorrhage—a blood clot on the brain—and when he regained consciousness, his reason was visibly affected. Eventually, he was removed to the Edinburgh madhouse, amid the lamentation of his mother and sisters. He was closeted in a barred cell with only straw for his bed, and he died screaming quotations from the Bible on October 16, 1774.

To digress for a medical comment, Fergusson’s physician was Dr. Andrew Duncan who visited him at home and also in the madhouse. Duncan (1744-1828) eventually became physician extraordinary to the Prince Regent, and was one of the Founders of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (of which I have been a member since 1943). Dr. Duncan was shocked at the conditions in the madhouse, and he was instrumental in erecting the Lunatic Asylum of Edinburgh, which received its first patient in 1813. The asylum could possibly be looked upon as a memorial to Robert Fergusson.

Burns wrote:

Ill-fated Genius! Heaven-taught Fergusson,
 What heart that feels and will not yield a tear,
 To think Life’s sun did set e’er well begun
 To shed its influence on thy bright career.

O why should truest Worth and Genius pine
 Beneath the iron grasp of Want and Woe,
While titled knaves and idiot-greatness shine
 In all the splendour Fortune can bestow? (*Poems*, I, 323)

It is a great pity that Fergusson did not follow Burns instead of the other way about, for it would probably have been much better for the future development of Scottish literature and poetry, for Fergusson was great enough to have profited from Burns's example, and yet could still have gone his own way, despite the enormous fame of Burns by which he would have been confronted (yet without Fergusson, it is arguable that Burns would never have developed his richest vein). The prodigious shadow of Burns's works was to make succeeding generations think that there was no other way to write in Scots except the "Burnsian" way and no subjects except the "Burnsian" subjects—which were of the village and the small country town. But as a result of Burns's conquest of the Scottish imagination, in a mode and tense that was already old-fashioned in his own day, we find that in the nineteenth century, when industrialization was already transforming the life and ways of Western Europe, Scottish poets and novelists made no attempt to deal imaginatively with the changing world, but continued to write as if Scotland was a country of sentimental gentry, peasants and exiles.

In *Silverado Squatters* Robert Louis Stevenson portrayed the exile as saying: "I do not even know if I desire to live there; but let me hear, in some far land, a kindred voice sing out, 'O why left I my hame...?'"⁶ While authors like Balzac and Dickens were coping with the throbbing life of the new industrial age, Scotland was writing about "The bonnie brier bush" or escaping into the past of high deeds of derring-do with the works of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson, and a romantic era of Victorian Balmoral, Mendelssohn's "Hebrides Overture," Max Bruch's "Scottish Fantasia." Even up to the present time we are faced with a spate of movies concentrating on Scotland's past such as "Brave Heart," "Rob Roy," and "The Bruce," and we are slowly recovering from an overdose of "Scotland the Brave," "Flower of Scotland" and the ridiculous "Here's tae us wha's like us" attitude.

Although Ramsay was a bit of a "Country Cousin," Fergusson moved from the field and the hedgerow to the town, plainstones and the causey. Alas, Burns was unable to follow this line, and the Scottish tradition, because of Burns's immense prestige, reverted to the bucolic, from which it has scarcely escaped, even today.

It would appear that the influences of the eighteenth and nineteenth century poets and novelists have produced a freezing—a "time warp" of Scottish history for even today, the popular image of Scotland is of mountains, lochs, heather, whiskey, bagpipes, and the kilt, with clans cavorting across the High-

⁶*From Scotland to Silverado*, ed. James D. Hart (Cambridge, MA, 1966), p. 210.

lands, violently disagreeing with each other—the epitome of Caledonian anti-szyzygy!! But, after all, what is history?—a combination of fact, legend and folklore. Napoleon described history as “a set of lies agreed upon,” Henry Ford declared “History is bunk,” and Winston Churchill declared “there is no history, only biography.”

But it is significant to note that when Fergusson died at the age of twenty-four he had already published thirty-three major poems—if Burns had died at the same age, he would have published none. The earliest evidence we have of Burns’s composing poems or songs is to be found in *Robert Burns’s Commonplace Book 1783-1785*.⁷ Here we find “A Prayer, in the Prospect of Death,” which is dated August 1784, although it has been suggested that it may have been written as early as December 1781; “Song” (My father was a farmer) dated April 1784, but suggested to have been composed early in 1782; “The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie,” which could have been written in 1783. “Song, composed in August” (Now westlin winds) details an event from the poet’s seventeenth year, and appears in part in the *Commonplace Book*. “I first committed the sin of RHYME [before]...my sixteenth year,” Burns told Dr. John Moore in 1878 (*Letters*, I, 137), and the result was “O once I lov’d” (widely known as “Handsome Nell”). It should be remembered that the *Commonplace Book* contains poems which were transcribed during the period 1783-5, but some were probably composed considerably earlier—“O once I lov’d” is dated August 1783 therein, but was written almost a decade earlier. My point remains, however, that at the age of twenty-three Fergusson had published a substantial corpus of work; Burns’s first appearance in print occurred only when he was twenty-seven.

Fergusson, with his intense production within the last two years of his life, not only stirred Burns’s imagination “to emulating vigour” but suggested to Burns many of his most famous works. In the opinion of many students of Burns, Fergusson’s “Farmer’s Ingle” is more technically brilliant than “The Cotter’s Saturday Night” and there are other famous parallels in which Burns has borrowed the idea, the form and even the phraseology from his forerunner. Compare the opening stanza of Fergusson’s classic with the second stanza of Burns’s:

The Farmer’s Ingle

Whan gloming grey out o’er the welkin keeks,
 Whan Batie ca’s his owsen to the byre,
 Whan Thrasher John, sair dung, his barn-door steeks,
 And lusty lasses at the dighting tire:
 What bangs fu’ leal the e’enings coming cauld,
 And gars snaw-tapit winter freeze in vain;

⁷Ed. J. C. Ewing and Davidson Cook (Glasgow, 1938).

Gars dowie mortals look baith blyth and bauld,
Nor fley'd wi' a' the poortith o' the plain;
Begin my Muse, and chant in hamely strain.⁸

* * *

The Cotter's Saturday Night

November chill blaws loud wi' angry sugh;
The short'ning winter-day is near a close;
The miry beasts retreating frae the pleugh;
The black'ning trains o' craws to their repose:
The toil-worn COTTER frae his labor goes,
This night his weekly moil is at an end,
Collects his *spades*, his *mattocks* and his *hoes*,
Hoping the *morn* in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o'er the muir, his course does hameward bend. (*Poems*, I, 146)

The final stanza of "The Farmer's Ingle" contains the lines: "May Scotia's simmers ay look gay and green, / Her yellow har'sts frae scowry blasts decreed" (p. 164) and Burns's penultimate stanza voices this hope: "O SCOTIA...Long may thy hardy sons of *rustic toil* / Be blest with health and peace and sweet content!" (I, 51).

The curious may even compare Fergusson's "Caller Water" with Burns's "Scotch Drink"; "Leith Races" to "The Holy Fair" and "Hallow Fair" with "Halloween." Even in Burns's masterpiece, the ghost of Fergusson flits by. Compare the opening lines of Fergusson's masterpiece "Auld Reikie":

Auld Reikie! wale o' ilka town
That Scotland kens beneath the moon;
Whare couthy chiels at e'ening meet
Their bizzing craigs an mous to weet:
And blythly gar aud Care gae bye
Wi' blinkit and wi' bleering eye: (pp. 115-6).

with the opening lines of "Tam o' Shanter":

When chapman billies leave the street,
And drouthy neebors, neebors meet,
As market-days are wearing late,
An' folk begin to tak the gate;
While we sit bousing at the nappy,
An getting fou and unco happy, (*Poems*, II, 557).

⁸*Poems* by Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson, p. 161.

Many though the debts of Burns to Fergusson were (debts acknowledged and many times repaid), they did not include an attitude, an idea new in Scots poetry, that some of Fergusson's poems illustrate—the vision of the “townie” or city dweller, to whom nature though still close, is already separate and becoming romantic, to whom, amid the hurly burly of the “causey,” has come a new and innocent sense of wonder—attitudes impossible in a ploughman-poet like Burns, who never left Ayrshire or saw a city until he was twenty-eight years old. But he had other gifts that Fergusson lacked—a greater mastery of the dance of words, a more lashing tongue, greater gusto, and his own passionate, dynamic personality, and an almost neurotic introspection which he called “hypochondria.”

Fergusson and Burns form an ideal pair, for they are complementary, not in opposition. Fergusson is more tied to time and place; he is not like Burns, a world poet, but he is a fine poet, and a unique poet in Scottish letters, too easily labeled parochial and xenophobic and left at that.

In his famous essay “Robert Burns: Life, Genius, Achievement” W. E. Henley mentions Fergusson in an appreciative footnote that is a good summary:

...he was so remarkable a creature that there can be no question but in his death, at four-and-twenty, a great loss was inflicted on Scottish literature. He had intelligence and an eye, a right touch of humour, the gifts of invention and observation and style, together with a true feeling for country and city alike; and his work...with its easy expressiveness, its vivid and unshrinking realism, and a merit in the matter of character and situation...is nothing less than memorable.... Fergusson was...essentially an Edinburgh product—(the old Scots capital: gay, squalid, drunken, dirty, lettered, venerable: lives in his verses...)⁹

Hans Hecht wrote about Fergusson:

...he [Burns] loved and looked upon him as his model, not only in his works, but in his destiny.... No Scot, not even Stevenson, has done so much for Fergusson's memory as Burns, and if the present generation begins to turn again with increasing interest to the literary legacy of that fine, ardent spirit, Burns's warm-hearted championing of the Edinburgh city poet, too early fallen into decay, must never be forgotten.¹⁰

That was well said—and we have not forgotten.

London, Ontario

⁹*The Poetry of Robert Burns*, ed. W. E. Henley and T. F. Henderson. 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1896-7). Henley's essay appears in IV, 231-348. The footnote quoted above is on pp. 261-2.

¹⁰Hans Hecht, *Robert Burns: The Man and his Work*, trans. Jane Lyburn (London, 1936), pp. 101-2.

Peter T. Murphy

Burns, Ossian and Real Scottish Genius

While I have published on both James Macpherson and Robert Burns, I discovered, when I began to think about the subject of this essay, that in many years of work on these writers I had not ever thought, in a directed way, about the influence of Macpherson on Burns. By “influence” I mean, broadly speaking, a consideration of what difference it made for Burns that Macpherson had published before him. The first somewhat disappointing fact I encountered in the course of this project was that Burns refers clearly to the Ossian poems only once in all of his poetry, and there are only a few references elsewhere in all his writings. At this point I began to feel as I assume our students feel after we have given them an especially clever comparison-style paper topic: what can one say when the primary evidence is negative, a description of an absence? A few steps further, and I began to feel much better. There is not only real reason to talk about what difference it made to Burns that Macpherson came before him—reasons that are, I think, primarily cultural rather than directly literary—but in fact the one clear reference to Ossian in Burns’s poetry also turns out to be an especially interesting and expressive one. Putting Ossian and Burns next to each other can indeed tell us things of interest about both.

Macpherson’s Ossian books rank among the most popular books of the second half of the eighteenth century, but if we measure influence by the presence of imitators and direct reference, the Ossian poems are not, curiously enough, deeply influential writing, at least in English. In Europe they were enormously influential—Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther*, for instance, quotes Ossian for pages and pages at a central moment in the story—but it is

rare to find a place in English literature that wants to follow the style or even the subject of Macpherson's work. What we see instead, in English, is reference of the broadest sort, and instead of imitators Ossian inspires a general upsurge in interest in the Highlands in general. Writers tend to think of themselves as parallel to Ossian rather than descended from him.

It is interesting that this should be so; it is interesting primarily because the Ossian books were so popular, and figured so heavily in literary talk and general cultural life for so long. Almost all writers of any consequence for the seventy or so years after 1760 declare, at some point in their careers—usually some young point—their real love of the Ossian poems. Burns's case illustrates some features of why this is, and I will come to this illustration. A secondary feature that I find interesting, and which I mention simply for its own sake, is that many of the Ossian texts are really very interesting themselves—beautiful even. If we leave aside *Fingal* and *Temora*, which are turgid and impossible, and concentrate on Macpherson's first little book, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, published in 1760, we find small and delightful prose lyrics of an individual and lovely cast: prose pieces of real originality and real beauty.¹ That this beauty should not have led writers in English to imitation is curious, and would be worth a separate discussion.

Robert Burns is one of those writers of consequence who declare their love for Ossian. He does so a couple of times, but the most remembered moment is in a letter to his former schoolmaster John Murdoch in 1783. In that letter Burns declares that his

favorite authors are of the sentimental kinds, such as Shenstone, particularly his Elegies, Thomson, Man of feeling, a book I prize next to the Bible, Man of the World, Sterne, especially his Sentimental journey, M^cpherson's Ossian, &c. these are the glorious models after which I endeavour to form my conduct²

It is interesting, and symptomatic, that Burns talks about his conduct instead of his writing here. After saying this he goes on to describe his sentimental alienation from the manners and concerns of the marketplace, his poetic distance from "the paulty [*sic*] concerns about which the terra-filial race fret and fume" (*Letters*, I, 18). Since we know, looking back, that "paltry concerns" and the trials of the everyday are the things that call out Burns's greatest poetry, the first fundamental fact of the relationships between the Ossian books and Burns

¹At this writing, there is still no "authoritative" edition of the Ossian poems. The *Fragments* can be found in *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, Augustan Reprint Society Publication No. 122 (Los Angeles, 1966). My edition for the general works is *Poems of Ossian* (Boston, 1860). Henceforth *Ossian*.

²Quoted from *The Letters of Robert Burns*. 2nd edn, ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), I, 17. Henceforth *Letters*.

is that Ossian presides, with others, over a phase we are glad Burns leaves behind.

In other words, Burns summons up Ossian as so many writers do: as an atmosphere, a presence, but not as a literary model or a direct inspiration. I want to address what it means to summon Ossian in this way, what it means for Burns to refer to Ossian; it turns out that the best way of doing this is to follow the single thin but strong thread that leads from Macpherson to Burns. That thread is made from one word—the word “duan,” an Ossianic term for book or canto—which appears, along with a footnote to Macpherson, in that most interesting and flawed poem, “The Vision,” in the Kilmarnock edition of 1786. Following that thread requires starting with some descriptions of James Macpherson and his Ossian project.

These days we tend to know of the Ossian phenomenon, but we tend not to know what was really inside it; we tend, especially, not to know what the works themselves are really like.³ These texts—we could call them prose poems—are often described as “forgeries.” This is true in a legal sense: they are attributed by Macpherson to someone who didn’t write them (actually, he attributes them to someone who didn’t exist, a mythic figure from Gaelic tradition). As a description, though, it does not help us understand the interest or charm of these works. For instance, I think someone could produce them in our time and generate very little complaint. They could be labeled poems “inspired by” the classical tradition of oral Gaelic verse (the Ossianic ballads), and they would likely be received with little fanfare and some pleasure.

Macpherson started by showing small pieces to the Edinburgh elite, published as the “fragments,” and he finished by constructing longer pieces, *Fingal* (1762) and *Temora* (1763), which he called epics. As I have argued elsewhere, what Macpherson wanted above all was to get famous, and the making of epics was an important part of that task; and they accomplished this task very effectively. Macpherson did indeed become famous, and rich too. His career, which was various, but ended with him buying a Highland estate and settling in as a Highland squire, was based almost entirely on his essentially unscrupulous relationship to writing, a characteristic that made him, for instance, an obedient and effective writer of political propaganda.

Here is an extract from the *Fragments*:

Why openest thou afresh the spring of my grief, O son of Alpin, inquiring how
Oscur fell? My eyes are blind with tears; but memory beams on my heart. How can
I relate the mournful death of the head of my people! Prince of the warriors, Oscur
my son, shall I see thee no more! He fell as the moon in a storm; as the sun from the
midst of his course, when clouds rise from the waste of the waves, when the black-

³A good introduction can be gained by reading the Macpherson chapter in my book *Poetry as an Occupation and an Art* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 9-48. I refer there to many sources for further exploration.

ness of the storm inwraps the rocks of Ardannider. I, like an ancient Oak on Morven, I moulder alone in my place.⁴

These are in fact the founding lines of the Ossian phenomenon, the first lines of the first fragment Macpherson showed to John Home in 1759.

What contemporary and near-contemporary readers saw in this writing can be put in three main categories. The first is, again, the arresting, occasionally quite beautiful prose style, which got Macpherson the immediate attention he needed. The second is Ossian himself, the melancholy singer, wrapped up in his lonely, self-absorbed remembering of past glory. Here is a dark and evocative version of the sentimental hero. This figure was another source of the immediate appeal of these works; it is also, interestingly enough, one of the features most closely related to the oral ballads that Macpherson drew inspiration from: here I am thinking of the Ossianic ballads of the sort found in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*, for instance, which contain a melancholy singer of a very similar sort.⁵ The third main category is the vague presentation of a national voice, which we see here in the reference to the “head of my people,” and which is a constant feature of all Macpherson’s Ossian works. These works constantly suggest that Ossian is a figure for Scottish glory and even Scottish nationalism itself—a suggestion that offended the people who knew that Macpherson’s source was actually pan-British Gaelic culture, and that Ossian would be better described as Irish. However unfounded, this suggestion quickly found fertile Scottish soil in the leftovers of Jacobite enthusiasm, and this enthusiasm became involved in and supported the so-called “Ossianic controversy.” During this protracted debate over the status of Macpherson’s work, a debate that drew considerable attention from Samuel Johnson, among others, people who knew better defended the Ossian poems primarily because the people who attacked these works often seemed to be motivated by a kind of prejudice, by an insistence that Scottish culture was simply and by definition not capable of the brilliance the Ossian poems claimed for themselves.

This national voice, and its parallel claim (however confused) for a deep and legitimate Scottish literary heritage, are the only really enduring contributions of the Ossian books. The appearance of this voice created and sustained an upsurge of interest in Highland culture, and helped support the growing realization, in England especially, but also in the Scottish lowlands, that Highland culture had more to it than filth, poverty and the continuing threat of violence. The Ossian poems suggested, in sum, that it was possible that there

⁴This is from Fragment VII, found on p. 31 of the *Fragments*, referred to above. Interestingly, this text does not re-appear in later re-workings. *Temora*, for instance, contains a different description of the death of Oscur.

⁵For translations of poems from this book, see Neil Ross, ed. *Heroic Poetry from the Book of the Dean of Lismore* (Edinburgh, 1939).

was a Scottish *genius loci* to be found: that a deep literary culture could in fact spring from Scottish soil, and the Ossian poems made this suggestion at a crucial time, when Scottish culture in general was just beginning to make such claims to the outside world and needed all the support it could get. The irony of the enthusiasm with which Edinburgh literati greeted this claim is, of course, that they themselves had no use for the Highlands before Ossian made them notice, and especially before they felt the need to defend Ossian and Scotland from English critique.⁶

This is the atmosphere that Burns summons when he refers to Ossian, and the atmosphere he breathes when he reads Ossian and waxes enthusiastic. If we ask what was important to him in this atmosphere, we can say, first and immediately, that the Ossianic style, as a literary and expressive mode, has nothing for him at all, as interesting as it is. It is not a poetic style. That is, it has nothing to do with verse, and Burns was above all a poet, concerned with meter and rhyme and the closeness of effect that verse makes possible. On the other hand, in the early 1780s, Burns was in fact very attracted to the interesting combination of sentimental singer and national hero that he found in Ossian. This is because he knew already that he wanted, in some way, to speak in a national voice himself. At this point he doesn't quite know how. We hear his first efforts at producing his national voice in poems like "The Cottar's Saturday Night, and, especially, "The Vision."⁷

"The Vision" is a kind of workshop for the forces I have been discussing. As I mentioned, the connection between Ossian and this poem is made for us by Burns himself, who refers us, in a footnote at the beginning, to Macpherson's "Cath-Loda"; in that text Macpherson himself footnotes the word these works have in common, "Duan" (*Ossian*, p. 189). The *OED* cites "Cath-Loda" as the first use of this term in English, and "The Vision" as the second. It comes from a Gaelic word for "poem," and Macpherson uses it to divide "Cath-Loda" (which is about the death of Ossian's son Oscur) into sections; this is what Burns imitates, giving "The Vision" two "duans." In Burns's poem, it is not immediately clear that this division is necessary. It divides the poem, roughly, into a section about Scottish accomplishments and one about Burns himself (or, alternately, into sections comprised of the poet's voice and that of the muse) but that division is not a particularly powerful one. I think the best explanation for the division is simply that Burns wanted to use the word "duan" in order to conjure up the Ossianic national voice. That voice

⁶As G. Ross Roy reminded me, Burns himself adopted this same contradictory posture. During his Highland journey of the summer of 1787, for instance, he remarked in letters and in verse upon the misery of Highland life.

⁷My text for this poem comes from *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 103-113. As always, Kinsley's notes to the poem provide an invaluable introduction to its form and reference. Henceforth *Poems*.

and consists of the poet taking on a larger persona. It is ironic, of course, that the moment Burns assumes this apparently Scottish voice he begins speaking in high literary English, but this irony should at least be a familiar one. It is Burns's typical artificial voice—the way he speaks when he wants to be “fancy”; it is also what the Edinburgh elite do (think of Hugh Blair), at this period, when they adopt a national voice.

In the second duan Burns adopts, still very artificially, the already artificial machinery of *The Rape of the Lock* in order to sing his own praises. Coila recounts the trials she has had in watching over him, compares him to other poets, and ends by crowning him with her laurels; all of this is done, again, in highly “literary” verse of a mostly unmemorable sort.⁹ In these stanzas, the extremely interesting and authentic self-examination of the opening runs out in much less authentic self-aggrandizement, where Burns presents himself as the “rustic bard” that Edinburgh would very shortly and very artificially celebrate.

What I have said of “The Vision” describes a common eighteenth-century literary object: the patronage poem, a poem that, quite literally, advertises the poet, demonstrates skills, flatters the people who count, and asks for recognition. Described this way, it makes perfect sense that Burns would have added the list of luminaries when the poem moved into the larger context of the Edinburgh edition. It is a matter of business. In 1787 Burns was still pursuing his dream of a regular literary fame; the notice and patronage of the elite was crucial to this plan, and this is not the only poem of this type that he wrote.

Once we see “The Vision” as patronage poetry, we can make sense of the appearance of Ossian in it. “Duan,” the Ossianic word, is meant to conjure up a broad, atmospheric commitment to Scottish unity or patriotism, and is meant to tag this poem as sung in a national voice. As is often true in the earlier poetry, this atmosphere sits uneasily with the authentic Burns, the rustic but dignified and genuine note we hear in the opening stanzas. It is a difficult trick, to be both locally authentic and nationally representative. Ossian, Macpherson's mythic poet, is just this sort of figure, and Burns wants Ossian to hover in the background of his poem. Burns is here gesturing towards an imagined bardic role for himself, a role he hoped would appeal to the educated great, and he provides his poem with the trappings of this imagined role. Burns hasn't yet learned, in “The Vision,” that Ossian can pull this off cleanly because he is a virtual poet, not burdened with any unpleasant attachment to reality.

There, in Burns's conjuring of Ossianic atmosphere, ends the description of Ossian's influence on Burns; but the real interest of placing Macpherson and Burns side by side lies one step further on. I think we actually come upon a very interesting cultural moment, or knot, and I hope that in this small space I can do some justice to it. I have said that if we define what Burns wanted from

⁹With one famous exception: “But yet the *light* that led astray/ Was *light* from Heaven” (*Poems*, I, 112).

“The Vision” as the notice of patrons, then he was entirely right to refer to Ossian in it. This is the more true because Macpherson wanted exactly the same thing: the Ossian poems are, simply put, an enormous and extended bid for the patronage of the great, made by an isolated but exceedingly ambitious young man from the Highlands. We can go further: the Ossianic ballads themselves, upon which Macpherson built his fortune, grew out of a classical tradition of the patronage poetry of clan bards. Macpherson was keenly aware of this, and was also exceptionally smart about the courting of praise, and exceptionally good at turning praise to account as cash and employment. In his savvy way Macpherson knew he could not sell himself as a kind of Highland oddity: Burns could sell himself as a rustic bard because he was actually a poet, but Macpherson was mostly a clever adapter, a gatherer of interesting things. And so Macpherson knew he wanted to sell a highland oddity that was not himself, in the form of re-invented highland culture, re-invented so as to appeal directly to contemporary British taste. By inventing the sentimental figure of Ossian, Macpherson allowed himself to disappear behind his product, behind his own voice, and that in turn allowed the product and the noise it generated to carry him out of the Highlands, all the way to London. His lack of poetic ability notwithstanding, in Macpherson’s world it would have done him no good to actually be the melancholy Ossian, or to be a Scottish national bard: the world that would reward such a singer was still at least thirty years off. He needed, instead, to get to London, to leave the Highlands behind, to get a job and a non-literary career, and he did that by sponsoring a national bard instead of being one himself. It helped that Ossian was a bard who was not only dead but mythic anyway, and not in need of any of the profits the venture generated.

Burns’s world, and Burns himself, were very different. By 1786 the place for the national voice, if not actually created, had been sketched out (with Macpherson’s help), and Scottish culture was on the lookout for its spokesman. At the same time, the Scottish world had grown rapidly more complex, and more mercantile, and the array of tastes and interests Burns had to appeal to was much broader than the array Macpherson faced; you can see this variety in the catalogue, both material and literary, of “The Vision,” and in the array of styles we find in the Kilmarnock and Edinburgh editions.

If we remember that “The Vision” actually begins with stanzas of real strength, and recognizable identity, we can remember the other real difference we are dealing with in our comparison: Burns is actually a poet, a born poet, a literary genius instead of the strategic and mercenary genius that Macpherson was. This is why “The Vision” is disturbed, why its parts don’t match and its voice changes tone. It conjures the national voice in its summoning of the voice of Ossian, but Burns’s own voice competes with Ossian’s, and renders the texture of the poem uneven, even confusing.

Burns’s deep egotism, the egotism that is the natural by-product of his genius, disturbs the poem too. Though he sometimes thinks otherwise, Burns is far from wanting to disappear behind the national voice, as Macpherson so

cannily does; indeed, in "The Vision" he steps right up and crowns himself with the national laurels. This would seem, in a patronage poem, to be a mistake. The supplicant poet should seek recognition, not bestow it upon himself; Burns, in all his natural dignity, often makes this mistake, which is borne of his inability to stoop low enough to play the role.

Holding Ossian next to Burns shows Burns to us in all his clear, invigorating reality. Burns would in fact become the real thing, the Scottish national voice, by abandoning the gestural and artificial conjuring of voice that Ossian represents, and by turning back to the things of the marketplace that he scorns while under Ossian's influence. He would become that voice by refusing, in the end, to strive for it, or to ventriloquize it; he would become it by speaking in his natural voice, which was not only authentically Scottish but authentically poetic as well. In sum, since that is true, I think we should not only be unsurprised that Ossian appears in Burn's poetry just once, but that we should also be pleased.

Williams College



A Highlandman my love was born -----
A Gray 1996

Dietrich Strauss

Some Reflections on Burns's Command of English

A letter to George Thomson in which Burns touched upon questions of ballad and song writing contains his famous remark on his relation to English: "I have not that command of the language that I have of my native tongue.—In fact, I think that my ideas are more barren in English than in Scotch."¹

This judgment, referred to in discussions on Burns's literary potentialities again and again, has proved very influential with regard to the evaluation of the poet's use of the English language. Another influence pertaining to the same matter originated from very early assessments by reviewers of the merits of his poetry. Indeed some of the first of his critics urged him to compose in English. Occasionally this advice, probably more or less well-meaning though condescending, was put forward indirectly, yet in absurd phrasing such as that of James Anderson who in his contribution to *The Monthly Review* in December 1786 stated, "We much regret that these poems [those of the Kilmarnock Edition] are written in some measure in an unknown tongue,"² and who, when citing parts of Burns's poems, defended "the freedom to modernise the orthography a little...to render it *less disgusting* to our Readers south of the Tweed" (Low, p. 73; italics mine).

¹*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985) II, 318. Henceforth *Letters*.

²Unsigned review by James Anderson in *The Monthly Review*, LXXV (Dec. 1786); quoted in Donald A. Low, ed., *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1974), p. 72. Henceforth *Low*.

As Burns followed this hint to write more in English but comparatively reluctantly, the conclusion, drawn by these early critics, seems to have been that it was beyond Burns's poetic gifts to express himself convincingly in English—and this opinion, at first formed subconsciously, was soon to gather momentum.

It was reinforced by judgments, arising—as far as linguo-aesthetic and poetic convictions went—from quarters apparently opposite to those pro-English, neo-classical admonitions just mentioned. Matthew Arnold powerfully set the tone for further Burns criticism: “The real Burns is of course in his Scotch poems.”³ The effect, however, of statements such as the latter was, if perhaps again partly indirectly produced, a conclusion by reversal, surprisingly similar to the earlier pronouncements of the neo-classicists: Whatever Burns expressed in English was of inferior quality.

This judgment has prevailed to the present day, producing sad consequences, among which not the least is the fact that the admirable scholarly achievements of J. De Lancey Ferguson and G. Ross Roy, editors of Burns's letters, have as yet not received the attention of literary critics which they certainly have deserved. It is my intention to inquire into the validity of this predominantly negative assessment.

First one has to recall the educational atmosphere in which the poet was brought up in his parents' home, and the ensuing linguistic implications. In the second surviving letter to his cousin in Montrose and in his autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore he has, of his father, drawn the picture of a very conscientious educator, in his own words of “the ablest of instructors” (*Letters*, I, 21). From the only surviving letter which he, not yet twenty-three years old, directed to his father (Dec. 27, 1781; *Letters*, I, 6-7), we must conclude that the recipient was a man who undoubtedly appreciated that kind of English which was then elevated epistolary style. That his father had a surprising ability to express himself in an English that was at the same time clearly phrased and remarkably devoid of Scotticisms can be demonstrated by several documents. For instance *A Manual of Religious Belief, Composed by William Burnes...for the Instruction of His Children*⁴ has come down to us, a little catechism composed in the spirit of Arminianism, a Christian creed that defied some of the strict dogmata of Calvinism. This manual is preserved in the hand of John Murdoch, sometime teacher of young Robert; therefore the assumption that Murdoch may at least have been partly responsible for its more or less correct orthography and may also have influenced its phrasing here and there, is not

³*The English Poets, Selections with...A General Introduction by Matthew Arnold*, ed. Thomas Humphry Ward (London, 1880), p. xli.

⁴*A Manual of Religious Belief, Composed by William Burnes...for the Instruction of His Children*, ed. with biographical Preface by James Gibson (Kilmarnock, 1875). Henceforth *Manual*.

altogether unlikely. The concept of composing such a text betrays a spirit that strives to come to grips intellectually with its beliefs, and to do so in as intelligible and satisfying a form as could be achieved.⁵ We also know of two letters written by William Burnes, both well composed in the standard English of his time. One is to his relative James Burness of Montrose, containing family news and expressions of cordial affection. The other is a short note to someone who was to help with the harvest. What deserves to be recorded is that a poor Scottish farmer was capable of such written performances. Indubitably he profited from the fact that Scottish peasants were better educated than the English, due to a more intense acquaintance with the English Bible. The lack of Scotticisms in William's writing is an indication of the quality of the linguistic culture in the family in which the poet grew up, a culture which accepted *English* as the dominant medium of serious communication.⁶ John Murdoch put it thus:

[William Burnes] spoke the English language with more propriety (both with respect to diction and pronunciation) than any man I ever knew, with no greater advantages; this had a very good effect on the boys, who began to talk and reason like men, much sooner than their neighbours (*Manual*, p. xvii).

Next, the effects of the schooling Burns received have to be considered. In terms of length of time it was certainly only a tiny fraction of what pupils of the higher classes then obtained. However, it apparently concentrated to a large extent on the subject of English. Burns himself, when remembering his school days, noted, "I made an excellent English scholar; and against the years of ten or eleven, I was absolutely a Critic in substantives, verbs and particles (*Letters*, I, 135). And his brother Gilbert later told Mrs. Dunlop:

[Robert] soon became remarkable for the fluency and correctness of his expression, and read the few books that came in his way with much pleasure and improvement; for even then he was a reader when he could get a book.⁷

So quite evidently, apart from his schooling, autodidactic efforts soon added to the results of the teaching he was given, and before long independent reading

⁵See James Muir, "William Burnes's, 'Manual of Religious Belief,'" *Burns Chronicle*, 2nd Series, 8 (1933), 79.

⁶Avoidance of Scotticisms among the literati was of long standing—it will be recalled that the author of *The Minstrel*, James Beattie, had published in 1779 and reissued in 1787 *Scotticisms, Arranged in Alphabetical Order, Designed to Correct Improprieties of Speech and Writing*, leaving little doubt about where he stood on the subject.

⁷*The Works of Robert Burns: with an Account of his Life, and a Criticism on his Writings*, ed. James Currie. 4 vols. (Liverpool, 1800), I, 60-61. Henceforth Currie.

completely outdid in quantity and quality what he had become acquainted with at school. What finally became the astonishing circumference of his mental library of English authors cannot be even outlined here. It must suffice here to refer the reader to earlier editors and biographers and to sum up what they all testify: the poet's astounding wealth of knowledge in the realm of English literature. A man, whom we could—in twentieth-century language—call a professional, James Gray, Latin master in Dumfries and teacher of Burns's children, later headmaster, deacon and scholar, who occupied himself with, among other subjects, Indian languages, put it as follows:

to the very end of his life, reading was his favourite amusement. I have never known any man so intimately acquainted with the elegant English authors. He seemed to have the poets by heart. The prose authors he could quote either in their own words, or clothe their ideas in language more beautiful than their own.⁸

In this context it is interesting also to register what Gray had to say about the poet's educational activities:

I have frequently found him explaining to this youth [his eldest son Robert], then not more than nine years of age, the English poets, from Shakespeare to Gray, or storing his mind with examples of heroic virtue, as they live in the pages of our most celebrated English historians (Peterkin, I, lxxxv).

Abounding witness of his intimate and active relationship with the English language is, of course, to be found in his letters. More than 700 are known and it is perhaps no bad guess that their total number originally amounted to well over a thousand. What is more, however, he was proud of his "epistolary performances" as he wrote to Henrietta Don in March 1787 (*Letters*, I, 103), and later in the same year he confessed to Dr. Moore "I kept copies of any of my letters that pleased me" (*Letters*, I, 141). This did not prevent him from occasionally viewing some of these "epistolary performances" in a rather critical light. So, again in 1787, he finished a letter to Robert Muir:

If I could think on any thing sprightly, I should let you hear every other post; but a dull, matter-of-fact business like this scrawl, the less & seldomer one writes, the better.—

Among other matters-of-fact I shall add this, that I am and ever shall be,
My dear Sir, your obliged
Rob^t Burns (*Letters*, I, 151)

Coming back to Burns's statement to Thomson that he had no great command of English, this was not the only one he made on the topic. In the auto-

⁸*The Life and Works of Robert Burns*, ed. Alexander Peterkin. 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1815), I, lxxxvi. Henceforth Peterkin.

biographical letter to Dr. Moore in which he had proudly declared, as noted above, that he had "made an excellent English scholar" (*Letters*, I, 135), he also, rather surprisingly, noted with reference to a young girl that he had once fallen in love with: "My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language; but you know the Scotch idiom, She was a bonie, sweet, sonsie lass" (*Letters*, I, 137). How are these divergences to be explained? As to the latter of the two utterances just cited, it contains in itself a satisfying answer. Everyone will admit that descriptions which are emotionally highly charged may often be more convincing when expressed in a dialect rather than in a standard language.

But there is more to it. There can have been few contemporary authors more honest than Burns, and he was too alert not to realize that the concept of the "Heaven-taught ploughman," to use Henry Mackenzie's phrase,⁹ fitted rather well into an aspect of the spirit of the age, that of Rousseau's noble savage, and that this concept strikingly resembled the "current Anglo-Scottish primitivist theory" (Low, p. 6), developed under the influence of Macpherson's *Ossian*. His intelligence was too highly developed not to realize the advantages connected for him with this circumstance: the advantages of figuring as "an obscure, nameless Bard," who was "Unacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing Poet by rule."¹⁰ This concept of his poetic rôle, unrealistic though it was—probably just because of that fact—obviously needed the assumption that in his rustic dialect he was much more at home than in the standard idiom English. And apparently this assumption had now and again need of repeated pronouncement.

Moreover some linguistic considerations are necessary here, the relevance of which was perhaps instinctively seen by educated Scots of the eighteenth century, but never precisely uttered, though it has to be admitted that Burns, in the passage cited, speaks of English as "the *language*" and of Scots only as "my native *tongue*."¹¹ From the point of view of linguistics, of course, Scots had well before Burns's time lost the status of a fully developed language. Ample proof of that assertion is the fact that the poet, who was so fond of his native idiom, used it extremely rarely as linguistic medium in the more than

⁹In his review of Burns's Kilmarnock edition in *The Lounger* (Dec. 9, 1786); quoted in Low, p. 70.

¹⁰Preface to *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Kilmarnock, 1786), pp. iv, iii. Henceforth Kilmarnock.

¹¹One must not make too much of any distinction Burns made between the words "language" and "tongue." In the Preface to his 1786 edition, for example, he says that, "he sings the sentiments and manners, he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him, in his and their native language" (Kilmarnock, p. iii). On other occasions Burns did speak of Scots as a "language" too (e.g., *Letters*, II, 324).

700 letters that have come down to us. An exception can be seen in the lines he sent from Carlisle to William Nicol in June 1787. Can it have been that the experience of suddenly finding himself in England kindled some nostalgic feelings in him, so that he felt the need to communicate in Scots? Be that as it may, the contents of the letter, phrased in a supremely humorous way, is of no intellectual relevance whatever, it deals with the qualities and peculiarities of the poet's horse and the charms of two young women. Whenever he discussed serious matters in prose, and this he did abundantly in his letters, he literally had no choice but doing it in English—Scots having by then virtually lost the capacity of serving as linguistic medium for intellectual prose. Scots had well before the eighteenth century sunk to the socio-linguistic status which Heinz Kloss in 1952 termed "Halbsprache"¹² (semi-language), i.e. to an idiom that can only be used in some of the functional spheres in which a fully developed language would be operative. In the case of Scots that was the sphere of poetry—with limitations, typical for many "Halbsprachen," even in that field, although Scots poetry had the prestige of having produced venerable literary achievements in the past. Of the functional data concerning the consequences that followed for its prestige and status Burns was apparently fully aware, though he did not discuss the matter theoretically to any extent.

When one asks what Burns was capable of, when communicating in the sphere of English, one obviously has to take into consideration not only written but also oral performances. Though the latter are, with personages of the past, often not traceable at all, with Burns circumstances are, fortunately, quite different; we have many witnesses of them. The general tendency of what they testify to is the same, though they differ in a few particulars.

First perhaps as to the range of subjects on which he touched in conversations. It is in this respect that one important witness differs from the others, if only to a certain extent. Robert Anderson, though on the whole eulogizing with regard to Burns's oral capacities, was, as far as this aspect goes, at least partly critical:

Though his knowledge in many instances was superficial, yet he conversed on every subject in a manner that evinced the strongest marks of genius, sagacity, and acuteness, combined with the most powerful sallies of wit, sarcasm, and satire. With acuteness of intellect, which might sometimes be termed shrewdness, he possessed a still more useful talent, Good Sense, which enabled him instantly to discern what was right or wrong in literature, morality, and the general affairs of the world.

* * *

Jealous of the independence of his mind, which was a prominent feature in his character, he spoke in a peremptory and decisive tone upon almost every subject of dis-

¹²Heinz Kloss, *Die Entwicklung neuer germanischer Kultursprachen von 1800 bis 1950* (München, 1952), p. 118. In later publications Kloss replaced "Halbsprache" by several more differentiating terms.

cussion. The pride of genius or the affection of singularity often led him wantonly to oppose received opinions, and pertinaciously to maintain the most unreasonable positions.¹³

Josiah Walker saw the same trait of conversational demeanor in quite a different light:

His conceptions and expression...on all subjects were as remote as possible from common places. Though somewhat authoritative, it was in a way that give little offence.¹⁴

while Walter Scott and Dugald Stewart flatly denied that the poet maintained any magisterial attitude. Scott declared that Burns "expressed himself with perfect firmness, but without the least intrusive forwardness; and when he differed in opinion, he did not hesitate to express it firmly, yet at the same time with modesty."¹⁵ Stewart stated: "He took his share in conversation, but not more than belonged to him; and listened with apparent attention and deference, on subjects where his want of education deprived him of the means of information" (Currie, I, 136-7).

It goes without saying that as with all others, so also with Burns different social and convivial situations and constellations occasioned different behavior, but the three positive opinions of Scott, Stewart and Walker apparently count more than the one of Anderson, which in itself is only partly pejorative. Scott and Stewart do in fact maintain that for Burns conversation meant genuine communication—not, however, display of self-importance.

Secondly as to the phonetic and, in a somewhat wider sense, oratorical character of the presentation of what he had to say or quote in conversations, Josiah Walker commented on Burns's way of recitations, which, he noted, as "plain, slow, articulate, and forcible" (Renwick, p. 20). For the taste of the second half of our century these four adjectives comprise, with reference to someone's oral capacities, a high degree of praise; for Walker, however, the praise was only qualified, as he went on "but without eloquence or art" (Renwick, p. 20).

It may be surmised that by "eloquence" and "art" a sort of conversational or oratorical demeanor was meant by Walker which in that genteel age was

¹³"Letters from Dr Robert Anderson to Dr James Currie, 1799-1801," in *Burns Chronicle*, 34 (1925), 14-15. Henceforth Anderson.

¹⁴William L. Renwick, ed. *Burns as Others saw Him* (Edinburgh, 1959), pp. 19-20. Henceforth Renwick.

¹⁵Quoted in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), III, 1541-42. Henceforth *Poems*.

appreciated in the socially dominant classes as something very appealing, yet which for our taste would pertain to somewhat irritating elements such as rather noticeable degrees of artificiality and exaggeration. Be that as it may, Walker's reminiscence quite apparently referred to certain particular situations.

Anderson remembered a livelier kind of Burns's oral representations:

He recited his own beautiful Songs very readily, and with peculiar animation and feeling, though he affected to be ignorant of the principles of music (Anderson, p. 15).

This impression is admittedly only of relative value for the question that interests here, as, first, most of his songs are either Scots or at least tinged with some amount of Scots, and, secondly, this recitation may have been one that was sung. Anderson's recollection had, however, to be mentioned, as it refers to the subject under discussion: recitation.

Another witness of his ability to recite and phrase independently was John Gray in a statement already reprinted above at greater length:

The prose authors he could quote either in their own words, or clothe their ideas in language more beautiful than their own (Peterkin, I, lxxxvi).

Most telling is what Maria Riddell had to say about the sound of his spoken word:

His voice alone could improve upon the magic of his eye; sonorous, replete with the finest modulations, it alternatively captivated the ear with the melody of poetic numbers, the perspicuity of nervous reasoning, or the ardent sallies of enthusiastic patriotism (*Poems*, III, 1545).

From these remarks having focused more on phonetic qualities that were characteristic of Burns, to a third aspect of the field of his conversational style. Dugald Stewart wrote to James Currie:

Nothing, perhaps, was more remarkable among his various attainments, than the fluency, and precision, and originality of his language, when he spoke in company; more particularly as he aimed at purity in his turn of expression, and avoided more successfully than most Scotchmen, the peculiarities of Scottish phraseology (Currie, I, 137).

It should be remembered in passing that Dugald Stewart was Professor of Moral Philosophy in Edinburgh and as such of course entitled to judgments of a certain relevance on the quality of someone else's English. This statement of his, in itself of weight, gains in momentum, if one recalls the fact that not even the slightest evidence exists that would proclaim Burns guilty of insecurity or even clumsiness when conversing in English.

It is worth imagining that David Hume, so anxious to avoid Scotticisms, might have been proud if a colleague of his had maintained anything like the judgment just cited about the quality of Burns's conversational English.¹⁶ And it is certainly worth considering by conversion that those who later gave accounts of Burns's personality, being either socially or educationally his superiors, or having some individual reason to talk negatively of him, would indubitably have referred to defects of his command of English, if there had been any!

It remains, fourthly, to outline what the overall opinions on his conversational abilities were. Burns scholarship has been aware of the poet's faculties to utter his emotions, thoughts, convictions, and ideas orally in an impressive way. Donald Low summed it up very aptly: "Contemporaries credited Burns with brilliance in conversation," (Low, p. 7), but up to the present the momentum of that fact has, on the whole, been rather neglected by a wider literary public.

Indeed an astounding sequence of relevant judgments could be cited. James Currie reported:

The late Dr Robertson, Dr Blair, Dr Gregory, Mr Stewart, Mr Mackenzie, and Mr Fraser Tytler may be mentioned in the list of those who perceived his uncommon talents, who acknowledged more especially his powers in conversation (Currie, I, 153).

John Gray confirmed the "fascinating powers of his conversation" (Peterkin, I, lxxxv), and Josiah Walker recollected: "In conversation he was powerful. His conceptions and expression were of corresponding vigour" (*Poems*, III, 1540). Walter Scott remembered: "His conversation expressed perfect self-confidence, without the slightest presumption" (*Poems*, III, 1541). The otherwise critical Robert Anderson felt obliged to confess:

No words can do justice to the captivating charms of his conversation. It was even more fascinating than his poetry. He was truly a great orator (Anderson, p. 14).

Maria Riddell's famous judgment declared:

none certainly ever outshone Burns in the charms—the sorcery I would almost call it—of fascinating conversation; the spontaneous eloquence of social argument, or the unstudied poignancy of brilliant repartee (*Poems*, III, 1545).

Finally, Currie quotes Ochtertyre and comments:

¹⁶Cf. David Daiches, *Robert Burns* (New York, 1950), p. 32.

"I have been in the company of many men of genius...some of them poets," but never witnessed such flashes of intellectual brightness as from him, the impulse of the moment, sparks of celestial fire! (Currie, I, 190).

All these recollections are indubitable proof of the vigor and irresistible power of Burns's oral command of English. Some of the passages just quoted state this very fact not just in praising or eulogizing, but in almost hymnic terms.

All that has been presented so far is to be understood as an introduction to the question of the quality of his written English, i.e., an introduction to his written English prose in the first place—and, in the second respect, to his poetry in *pure English*. Perhaps this introduction provides a starting point from which to begin a thorough investigation into the nature of Burns's written English, which, it is to be hoped, will before long become the subject of a doctoral dissertation for some young promising scholar. The indispensable basis for such a dissertation is, of course, what Ferguson and Roy have set forth in their editions of Burns's letters.

There is no need of a revaluation of Burns's many poetic productions that are composed in a blending of English and Scots, or in English or Scots more or less tinged by the other medium, to use Burns's own words, English affected by a "sprinkling of Scotch in it."¹⁷ Crawford and Daiches, to name but these two critics, have presented excellent linguo-aesthetic analyses of this multi-shaded section of Burns's creativity. Consequently the kind of poems and songs belonging to this category will not be discussed here.

I shall close with some observations on the poet's productions written in *pure English*, one in prose, the other in poetry. First a specimen of Burns's epistolary prose: I have, for good reasons, selected a letter which I have already discussed elsewhere, however under different aspects. It is his famous letter of 8th November 1788, sent to the Editor of the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, and published on 22nd November. I shall quote this time a passage partly different from the one I cited in my earlier essay:

The Stuarts have been condemned and laughed at for the folly and impracticability of their attempts, in 1715 and 1745. That they failed, I bless my God most fervently; but cannot join in the ridicule against them.—Who does not know that the abilities or defects of leaders and commanders are often hidden until put to the touchstone of exigence; and that there is a caprice of fortune, an omnipotence in

¹⁷*Letters*, II, 246. This appears in a long letter to Thomson of early September, 1793, in which he discusses a list of seventy-four songs, in addition to sending him the text of "Auld Lang Syne." "A small sprinkling of Scotisms, is no objection to an English reader," he says of another song (*Letters*, II, 240), and of "Saw ye my father?" ("one of my greatest favorites," he comments) Thomson is told, "I have sprinkled it with the Scotch dialect, but it may easily be turned into correct English" (*Letters*, II, 245).

particular accidents, and conjunctures of circumstances, which exalt us as heroes, or brand us as madmen, just as they are for or against us?

Man, Mr. Printer, is a strange, weak, inconsistent being—Who would believe, Sir, that in this our Augustan age of liberality and refinement, while we seem so justly sensible and jealous of our rights and liberties, and animated with such indignation against the very memory of those who would have subverted them, who would suppose that a certain people, under our national protection, should complain, not against a Monarch and a few favourite advisers, but against our whole 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! I will not, I cannot, enter into the merits of the cause; but I dare say, the American Congress, in 1776, will be allowed to have been as able and as enlightened, and, a whole empire will say, as honest, as the English Convention in 1688; and that the fourth of July will be as sacred to their posterity as the fifth of November is to us.

To conclude, Sir, let every man, who has a tear for the many miseries incident to humanity, feel for a family, illustrious as any in Europe, and unfortunate beyond historic precedent; and let every Briton, and particularly every Scotsman, who ever looked with reverential pity on the dotage of a parent, cast a veil over the fatal mistakes of the Kings of his forefathers.

A BRITON
(*Letters*, I, 334-5)

The whole letter has about two and a half times the length of the passage just quoted. Apparently Burns drafted and structured the letter very carefully both with regard to language and content. The sequence of thoughts in it is convincing, the language clear, lucid, and perfectly well adapted to the intended effect. He may have been induced to speak of the "tear" by Hume who had been bold enough "to shed a generous tear for the fate of Charles I"¹⁸ in his autobiography. Certainly this letter of Burns's expressing historical truths that were then by no means generally accepted but rather suspected by many of bordering on treason, enters the sphere of philosophy of history. As far as texts written in the English language are concerned this letter of the poet constitutes one of the epistolary masterpieces in historiography. And yet, such is the power of prejudice, I have not found it in any anthology of English letters! In fact it is difficult to find any Burns text in any collection of English prose!

Finally as to a poetic example: Gilbert Burns told Currie that his brother had more than once remarked to him "that he could not well conceive a more mortifying picture of human life, than a man seeking work. In casting about in his mind how this sentiment might be brought forward, the elegy *Man was made to mourn*, was composed" (Currie, III, Appendix p. 8). It may, therefore, quite reasonably be suggested that Burns started the poem from stanzas VII-IX. Of these three I should like to quote the two latter. They contain sixteen lines;

¹⁸David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary* (Oxford, 1963), p. 611.

four of them owe their origin to Dryden, on whose work Burns, however, strikingly improved:

See, yonder poor, o'erlabour'd wight,
 So abject, mean and vile,
 Who begs a brother of the earth
 To give him leave to toil;
 And see his lordly *fellow-worm*,
 The poor petition spurn,
 Unmindful, tho' a weeping wife,
 And helpless offspring mourn.

If I'm design'd yon lordling's slave,
 By Nature's law design'd,
 Why was an independent wish
 E'er planted in my mind?
 If not, why am I subject to
 His cruelty, or scorn?
 Or why has Man the will and pow'r
 To make his fellow mourn? (*Poems*, I, 118)

It was rightly stated by Crawford that these lines are possibly the earliest example in British literature of expressing the "working-class predicament"¹⁹ in poetic form, and one has, I think, to approve of his judgment that the whole poem is "one of his best pieces" (Crawford, p. 23). It is, therefore, irritating, to say the very least, when being reminded of Hugh MacDiarmid's casual and lofty remark that most of Burns's work "is full of eighteenth-century conventionalism."²⁰

What is to be criticized about that poem is its thematic structure, because after these self-asserting stanzas two more follow which, unexpectedly, betray a totally different mood, being almost Henrysonian in sentiment, reminding one of that poet's "The Praise of Age."

What, however, is to be admired is the frank, challenging phrasing of Burns's critical assessment of the drear conditions human beings of the lowest social strata live in. The persuasive power of these lines rests on the outspoken directness and clarity of the wording, in which conventional elements, if present, are not conceived as decorative at all. The result is convincing poetic power of expression. There can be no doubt whatever that Burns's command of *pure English* was indeed masterly.

¹⁹Thomas Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh, 1960), p. 21. Henceforth Crawford.

²⁰Hugh MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow* (Edinburgh, 1959), pp. 24-5.

The wholly mistaken idea of Burns being only good when expressing himself in Scots may of course also have arisen due to subconscious Scottish national feelings, following the formula: Burns was Scotland's national bard only insofar as having created poetry in Scots. It must of course not be denied that the notion of language had a historio-political aspect in the eighteenth century. Burns was certainly aware of that. But as he clearly perceived, English was even then one of Scotland's languages, so he could use it without questioning his loyalty to his home country. Yet he was also, considered all in all, a law-abiding citizen of Britain; moreover he intensely felt that he belonged to the realm of political ideals which had originated in, and encompassed the whole of the English-speaking world. These different loyalties, perhaps not always easily reconciled to one another, made him express himself in two idioms. Thus he became an example for cultural federalism in the best sense of that expression.

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Robert L. Kindrick

Robert Burns and the Tradition of the Makars

One of the major questions involving the poetry of Robert Burns is the poet's awareness of earlier literary tradition. On the one hand is Henry Mackenzie's notion that Burns is a "natural" poet, replete with all of the gifts of nature that Rousseau ever envisioned. His use of folk meters and folk tales as his sources, and his love for the traditions and common folk culture of Scotland seem to some to embody all the elements of "untutored genius" which reaches its zenith in the Romantic period of British verse.¹ A genius, Burns surely was. But whether he was "untutored" has constantly been called in doubt. The case is hardly a simple one, for even though Mackenzie's interpretation has been largely rejected, it remains in general circulation. It is sometimes difficult to believe that a number of poets who draw their inspiration from folk verse and exhibit a sympathy towards the common man are deeply learned. Robert Henryson is only one other poet in the Scottish canon whose rhetorical ease and apparent simplicity appear to belie his immersion in the learned, as well as the folk, tradition.

The reappraisal of Burns's verse in the light of his learning has gained ascendancy. Robert Anderson, who was closely associated with Burns, argued early on that Burns had deliberately minimized his familiarity with literary tradition: "It was a part of the machinery, as he called it, of his poetical character to pass for an illiterate plowman who wrote from pure inspiration."² Most modern

¹See Henry Mackenzie, *The Lounger*, vols. 37-38 of *British Essayists* (London, 1817).

²"Letters from Dr Robert Anderson to Dr James Currie, 1799-1801," *Burns Chronicle*, 34 (1925), 12.

critics, having taken off the blinders of nineteenth-century Romanticism, have followed Anderson's lead. Donald A. Low has commented that Burns is far more learned than he is often believed to be.³ L. N. Angus-Butterworth, in discussing Burns's education, comments on the "impressive range of his scholarship," and he goes on to note that "Not only was Burns himself a cultured man, but love of learning was characteristic of his family."⁴ Maurice Lindsay comments that "He was ... in no sense an 'unlettered plowman'—although in later years, when it suited him to adopt such a pose for the gratification of the Edinburgh patricians, he did so without hesitation."⁵

Evidence of Burns's learning is easily found in his verse, and a part of that learning relates to the Middle Ages. The poet himself tells us that the roots of his devotion to Scotland are found in medieval history: "The story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest."⁶ The fact that Burns did not read Blind Harry's Middle Scots tale of Wallace but instead an eighteenth-century adaptation is a matter of some significance that we shall revisit later. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that Burns was at least indirectly influenced by medieval Scottish traditions as embodied in the poetry of the great Makars—Henryson, Dunbar, and Douglas. Moreover, his espousal of medieval traditions, no matter what the source, is clear evidence of his own literary nationalism.

Despite constant troubles with England, Scotland realized some of its greatest accomplishments during the Middle Ages.⁷ As Burns himself notes, the story of Wallace inspired generations of Scots to rally to their country's cause. The tradition of the Makars reflects such pride in country. Although influenced by southern literary forms, Middle Scots verse retains its own integrity with regard to time and place. The poetry of Robert Henryson could have been written nowhere other than Scotland, for he infuses his verse with Scottish political and social interests. William Dunbar, more closely associated with the court, brings a vitality to the characterization of James IV and the intrigue and Byzantine diplo-

³Donald A. Low, ed., *The Kilmarnock Poems* (London, 1985), p. xviii.

⁴L. M. Angus-Butterworth, *Robert Burns and the 18th Century Revival in Scottish Vernacular Poetry* (Aberdeen, 1969), p. 80. Henceforth Angus-Butterworth.

⁵Maurice Lindsay, *Robert Burns* (London, 1954), p. 40.

⁶*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), I, 136.

⁷On the medieval Scottish tradition, see *The History of Scottish Literature*, Vol. I, ed. R. D. S. Jack (Aberdeen, 1988), especially pp. 13-105. Many of the aspects of Burns's reliance on literary and cultural tradition have been thoroughly explored. See, for instance, G. Ross Roy, *Robert Burns* (Columbia, SC, 1966) and "Robert Burns: A Self-Portrait" in *Critical Essays on Robert Burns*, ed. Donald A. Low (London, 1975), pp. 13-38. Henceforth Low.

macy of his courtiers that is seldom duplicated. Gavin Douglas, even though purporting only to make an excellent translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, clearly views his source through Scottish eyes. The flowering of the arts, and especially the literary arts, in the fifteenth century remains a source of pride for the Scottish nation. And it was so recognized in the eighteenth century. The publication of David Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scots Songs* and Ramsay's *Ever Green* reflect the growing recognition of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as major cultural resources.⁸ Burns's utilization of the medieval contribution to Scottish culture and his use of the tradition of the Makars may be illustrated in at least three major areas: language and metric forms, literary modes, and literary themes.

First, Burns's decision to write dialectal poems, which reflect far more closely than eighteenth-century British standard dialect the language of the Makars, demonstrates his attachment to his homeland, but it is difficult to estimate how much his use of dialect demonstrates a conscious interest in language structure, at least as defined in modern terms. Certain dialects of the American South (and notably the Missouri Ozarks) have until recently exhibited characteristics of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British English that have remained impervious to change because of the geographical isolation of the speakers. Modern students of folklore, such as Vance Randolph, have investigated and recorded aspects of both dialect and folk tale. While they occasionally note the survival of frozen linguistic forms, it is clear that such diachronic linguistic analysis is not their main goal. They are more interested in focusing on the nature of contemporary speech and literature. The same, indeed, certainly may have been true with Burns. Yet the shadow of late medieval "Inglis" (as Middle Scots was called by the Makars themselves) lingers in interesting ways in his language. For instance, Burns spells the numeral "one" as "a-n-e" but, in 1923, Sir James Wilson recorded that the form was pronounced "yin."⁹ The spelling form itself remains unchanged from the Middle Ages, and in that sense, Burns was merely recording what he saw in printed form. His adherence to Middle Scots spelling, even in the face of variant contemporaneous pronunciation, indicates that in this case his primary interest was likely not linguistic accuracy in the modern sense but instead the basically medieval survivals that distinguished the folk dialects of his nation from British Standard dialect.

⁸See Angus-Butterworth, pp. 1-61; Raymond Bentman, *Robert Burns* (Boston, 1987), comments on how the Eighteenth Century Scottish Literary Revival would have afforded Burns access to medieval sources (p. 13); see also Dietrich Strauss, "Burns's Attitude to Medieval Reality," *SSL*, 26 (1991), 522-35, for comment on how intervening centuries colored Burns's view of the Middle Ages. Henceforth Strauss.

⁹Sir James Wilson, *The Dialect of Robert Burns* (Oxford, 1923), p. 52. See also Raymond Bentman, "Robert Burns's Use of Scottish Diction," *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, ed. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (London, 1965), and David Murison, "The Language of Burns" in Low, pp. 54-69.

It is not necessary to belabor this matter, for numerous critics since Sir James Wilson have investigated Burns's dialectal poems. It is worth noting that, in addition to variances between spelling and pronunciation, such as the one cited above, Burns's dialectal poems abound with the archaisms of the folk vocabulary, despite the Ayrshire mastery of what Tom Crawford describes as "Modified Standard" English in the district.¹⁰ The occurrence of words such as "spence," "harn," "gar," "howlet," and "souter" demonstrate his interest in the antique flavor of the vernacular of his homeland. In fact, David Murison asserts that "he gave the old Scots tongue a new lease of life."¹¹ The fact that his interest was not that of a descriptive linguist but of a nationalistic antiquarian has implications for his approach and motives in using other materials from the tradition of the Makars.

Burns's well-documented use of late medieval verse forms merits at least brief comment here. It has long been recognized that even in his earliest verse, he copied the forms of the Makars. "Mary Morison," for instance, is in the form of an octosyllabic ballade, likely introduced into Middle Scots by Henryson. Crawford argues that the direct source for Burns was Ramsay's *Ever Green*, which has about twenty poems in this form.¹² Other songs and lyrics use both traditional verse forms and melodies from folk songs, with origins usually lost in Scottish history. For instance, the air "Goodnight and joy be wi' you a" was a traditional Scottish song which Burns employed in "The Farewell to the Brethren of St. James' Lodge, Tarbolton" and "Auld lang syne" (*Poems*, III, 1195). That he enlarges its "evocative possibilities," as Carol McQuirk observes, show his mastery in the adaptation of traditional sources and his strong fervor for Scottish culture.¹³

The second area of influence is literary modes. It is likely in his use of literary modes that Burns shows the same kind of influence exhibited in his use of verse forms. Just as he drew from Herd's anthology and Ramsay's *Ever Green* for the ballad form, he also drew from near contemporaries, Renaissance poets,

¹⁰Thomas Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs* (London, 1960), p. 3. Henceforth Crawford.

¹¹Murison, in Low, p. 69. For further analysis, see *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), III, 1549-1613 (henceforth *Poems*) and James A. Mackay, *Burns A-Z: The Complete Word Finder* (Dumfries, 1990), *passim*.

¹²Crawford, p. 11. For a study of Burns's use of the ballad, see Donald A. Low, "Burns and the Traditional Ballad," *SSL*, 26 (1991), 536-42. But see also comments by G. Ross Roy on the influence of a variety of sources, including James Watson's *Choice Collection* and *The Tea Table Miscellany*, "Burns: Editions and Critical Works, 1968-82," *SSL*, 19 (1984), 231-32. Henceforth Roy.

¹³Carol McQuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (Athens, GA, 1985), pp. 120-48.

and selected medieval texts in his use of modes. One medieval mode that strikes most readers forcefully is his use of the beast fable. "Poor Mailie" incorporates all of the elements of the beast fable as described by modern literary theorists such as Annabel Patterson.¹⁴ The animal is endowed with human characteristics and addresses another character in the fable with motives and psychological insights specifically intelligible to humans. In fact, Hughoc is specifically charged with taking her "last will and testament," in a manner of speaking, and relaying it to her owner (Burns himself). Patterson also specifically emphasizes the political and ethical character of beast fables, as exemplified in Henryson's fables such as "The Sheep and the Dog." Crawford comments that the ewe's plight may indeed be compared to Burns's own situation of being entangled in the "wicked strings" of a myopic society (Crawford, p. 78). Mailie too finds herself ensnared and dying, and, albeit in a comic manner, she charges Burns with the welfare of "My helpless lambs." However, early on in the poem she also weighs in on a major agricultural controversy:

Tell him, if e'r again he keep
As muckle gear as buy a *sheep*
O, bid him never tye them mair,
Wi' wicked strings o' hemp or hair!
But ca' them out to park or hill,
An' let them wander at their will:
So, may his flock increase an' grow
To *scores* o' lambs, an' *packs* of woo'!
(*"The Death and Dying Words*
of Poor Mailie," Poems, I, 32)

The theme is the matter of enclosure for grazing flocks in Ayrshire. Crawford speaks of this as Mailie's asking Burns to engage in a whole new system of agriculture.

One other example will suffice. In "The Twa Dogs" the dialogue between Caesar and Luath touches virtually every nerve with regard to class distinction and shows Burns's sympathy with the common people. "The Two Mice" from Henryson's *Fabillis* is an excellent touchstone. Once again, all of the traditional elements of the medieval beast fable, including the nature of the characterization and the political intent, are clearly illustrated. Henryson was commenting on the differences between the "basic" life of the countryside and encroaching urbanity. His two mice represent two very different lifestyles: the former sometimes harsh but basically straightforward, and the latter replete with creature comforts but punctuated by danger. His country mouse lives "Richt soliter . . . on hir waith"

¹⁴Annabel Patterson, *Fables of Power* (Durham, 1991), pp. 1-81.

(ll. 166-68).¹⁵ The city mouse “Was gild brother and made an fre burges” (l. 172). This contrast in characterization sets the tone for the narrative of the adventures in the city, which alternate between fine dining and luxury and dangerous encounters with a cat and a spenser. The poem’s *moralitas* concludes “Blissid be sempill lyfe withoutin dreid” (l. 373), likely Henryson’s own perspective on the events.

Burns deals with a similar type of social dialogue in “The Twa Dogs.” For him, however, the debate does not just involve the virtues of country life versus the joys of the city. His focus on quality of life has much to do with both Scottish class differences and the relationship between the English and the Scots. The imperious Caesar is described as:

... keepet for his Honor’s pleasure;
His hair, his size, his mouth, his lugs,
Show’d he was nane o’ Scotland’s dogs;
But whalpet some place far abroad,
Whare sailors gang to fish for Cod.

His locked, letter’d, braw brass-collar,
Show’d him the *gentleman* an’ *scholar*; (*Poems*, I, 138).

Between the two animals, he is clearly the sophisticate and the foreigner. The other dog is Luath, named after Cuchullin’s dog in Ossian’s *Fingal*, whom Burns describes thus:

He was a gash an’ faithfu’ tyke,
As ever lap a sheugh, or dyke!
His honest sonsie, baws’nt *face*,
Ay gat him friends in ilka place; (*Poems*, I, 138).

Just as in Henryson’s beast fable, the initial descriptions set the stage for the encounter, and Burns’s themes are very similar to Henryson’s. Caesar questions how Luath lives without the finery and wealth he himself enjoys. However, whereas Henryson’s theme emerges from the narrative, Burns relies on the use of pointed dialogue to drive home forcefully not only distinctions about two types of living but also concerns about the lack of social justice and true charity among human beings. It is perhaps all too easy to understand that his two dogs “Rejoic’d they were na *men* but *dogs*” (*Poems*, I, 145). Burns shares with Henry-

¹⁵The edition of Henryson used here for all of Henryson’s poems except “The Want of Wise Men” is Denton Fox’s *The Poems of Robert Henryson* (Oxford, 1981). Hereafter, only line numbers will be cited. Citations from “The Want of Wise Men” are taken from H. Harvey Wood, ed., *The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson* (Edinburgh, 1933; 2nd edn., rev., reprint, 1958), pp. 189-91. Only line numbers will be cited. Fox did not include the poem because he was skeptical that it was written by Henryson.

son the ability to adapt the insights of his animal characters to contemporaneous social and political controversies.

"The Twa Dogs," however, also has clear elements of another medieval form, the debate. Henryson's *Ressoning betuix Aige and Yowth* shows in an allegorical fashion some of the same kind of dialogue as to be found in "The Twa Dogs." Departing from his use of narrative structure for the purposes of dramatically acting out opposing points of view, Henryson illustrates through this allegorical debate two of the Seven Ages of Man. Youth extols his own virtues throughout the poem, constantly exhorting "O, 3owth be glaid in to thi flouris grene" (l. 8). However, the somber voice of Aige reminds him of the grim realities of human life and repeats the refrain "O 3owth, thy flouris fadis ferly sone!" (l. 16). Henryson, the master of the beast fable among the Makars, seldom goes so far as to incorporate this kind of bloodless acrimony into his beast fables *per se*, unless one believes that the legally structured debate between "The Sheep and the Dog" moves in that direction.¹⁶ Yet, Burns has clearly merged the two forms to illuminate his social themes.

Most often, the debate poem in the Middle Ages often involved a dialogue between two allegorical entities.¹⁷ It was less likely to have current politics than ethical and religious issues at its core, as illustrated in *The Ressoning betuix Aige and Yowth* and *The Ressoning betuix Deth and Man*. There was usually no plot, and the interest of the poem focused on the multiple perspectives on life or the exchange of ideas. Elements of debate are also involved in the tradition of flying, to be considered shortly. In addition to "The Twa Dogs," Burns further employs the debate in the discussion between the "auld brig" and the "new brig" in "The Brigs of Ayr," which illustrates even more specific comparisons with Henryson's use of the debate. This particular debate becomes especially acrimonious. In "The Ressoning betuix aige and yowth," Henryson's "aige" says:

... 'My bairne, lat be.
I wes within thir sixty 3eiris and sevin
Ane freik on fold bayth frak, forsy, and fre;
Als glad, als gay, als 3ung, als 3aip as 3e.
Bot now that day is ourdrevin and done;
Luk thow my laythly lycome gif I le:
O 3owth, thy flouris fadis ferly sone!' (ll. 26-32)

In similar fashion, the "auld brig" says:

¹⁶See John MacQueen, *Robert Henryson* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 127-31. I have also touched on the matter in *Robert Henryson* (Boston, 1979), pp. 79-81.

¹⁷For a useful overview of the debate, see B. N. Hedberg, "The Bucolics and Medieval Poetical Debate," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 75 (1944), *passim*.

I doubt na, frien', ye'll think ye're nae sheep-shank,
 Ance ye were streekit owre frae bank to bank!
 But gin ye be a Brig as auld as me,
 Tho' faith, that day, I doubt, ye'll never see;
 There'll be, if that date come, I'll wad a boddle,
 Some fewer whigmeleeries in your noddle (*Poems*, I, 284).

Both of these passages emphasize the wisdom and often sad disappointment of experience and age. Both also strike a pose rhetorically superior to the impudence of youth. Henryson's "Yowth" responds:

'My cors is clene without corruptioun,
 My self is sound, but seiknes and but soir,
 My wittis fyve in dew proportioun,
 My curage is of clene complexioun,
 My hairt is hail, my lever, and my splene;
 Thairfoir to reid this rowll I haif ressoun:
 O 3owth, be glaid in to thy flouris grene!' (ll. 50-56)

In similar fashion, the "new brig" gives a fiery response to the "auld brig":

Auld Vandal, ye but show your little mense,
 Just much about it wi' your scanty sense;
 Will your poor, narrow foot-path of a street,
 Where twa wheel-barrows tremble when they meet,
 Your ruin'd, formless bulk o' stane and lime,
 Compare wi' bonie *Brigs* o' modern time? (*Poems*, I, 285).

Throughout both poems, one sees the continuing debate between the old and the new, just as one sees the debate between short-sighted and long-sighted viewpoints. That this debate is an essential part of human nature, no one can doubt, especially in the way it engages issues of social ethics and critical stages in the development of human beings. Yet the structure of the debate itself is clearly an ancient tradition, especially popular in the Middle Ages, which Burns adapted for his own purposes. "The Brigs of Ayr" certainly deals with contemporaneous events, but it shares the long-term perspective of the medieval debate in touching on basic human issues as well.

Dunbar's approach to "debate" became more highly personalized and even more acrimonious.¹⁸ Moving away from the tradition of abstract entities arguing about moral and ethical issues, Dunbar personalized the debate by mixing the discussion of issues with *ad hominem* attacks in a bitter and sometimes humorous vein, as "The Flying of Dunbar and Kennedie" attests. There can hardly be any doubt that Burns enjoyed a good flying, or oral duel, with his opponents.

¹⁸See Ian Ross, *William Dunbar* (Leiden, 1981), pp. 85-6 and 184-7.

Even his epitaphs such as "On a Celebrated Ruling Elder" and "On Wee Johnie" show that he was not averse to attack. His numerous responses to critics, especially those of his sexual conduct, demonstrate his interest in a good battle in public. Probably one of his best examples in the tradition of Dunbar is the "Epistle from a Taylor to Robert Burns," which chastises the poet for his "foolish tricks" (*Poems*, I, 277) and begs him to repent. Dunbar puts similar words into the mouth of Kennedie, who admonishes him to "leif thy riming, rebald, and thy rowis" (l. 32). Burns's poem shares with Dunbar's the neat rhetorical trick of answering one's critics by making them appear ridiculous through a dramatic and comic self-attack. And of course part of the fun and interest of the tradition is that there must be responses. Dunbar calls Kennedie "Iersche brybour baird, vyle beggar with thy brattis / Cuntbitten crawdoun Kennedie . . ." ¹⁹ (ll. 49-50), obviously raising the intensity of insult. In "Robert Burns's Answer," he too provides an apparently emotional and vicious retort:

What ails ye now, ye lousie b—h,
To thresh my back at sic a pitch? (*Poems*, I, 278)

In Burns's work and Dunbar's, the insults grow ever more direct, colorful, and comic after these initial exchanges. The personal tone, the vituperative nature, the rhetorical creativeness in attack and response all show through in Burns and Dunbar. In his flyting, Burns reflects the tradition of Dunbar in an advanced form of canny irony.

Also incorporating the structure of flyting along with the debate is the "debate of women" as exemplified in Dunbar's "The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" and one of Burns's songs, "The Five Carlins." Often lacking the escalating insult and vulgarity of "pure" flytings such as that of Dunbar and Kennedie, the "women's debate" nonetheless frequently dealt with issues in a highly personalized and often emotional fashion rather than relying on allegorical abstractions to mute the ferocity of discussions.²⁰ Dunbar's "Tua Mariit Wemen" for instance focuses on the joys and sorrows of sex and married life. The invectives are directed not so much among the protagonists themselves but to husbands and lovers who have abused or disappointed them. For instance, one of the women says:

My husband wes a hur maister the hungeast in erd;
Tharfor I hait him with my hert, sa help me our Lord (ll. 168-9)

¹⁹James Kinsley, ed., *The Poems of William Dunbar* (Oxford, 1979). This edition will be used for all citations. Hereafter, only line numbers will be provided.

²⁰See Edmund Reiss, *William Dunbar* (Boston, 1979), pp. 115-25.

The typical "women's debate" often focuses on love and marriage but may include comment as well on social issues. This is the aspect of the women's debate Burns emphasized in "The Five Carlins." While structured around a contested election between Sir James Johnston and Capt. Miller for the five Dumfriesshire burghs, Burns's poem incorporates the medieval tradition of women's debate. The women themselves reflect the tradition of characterization found in Chaucer and Dunbar. Maggy, for instance, is "A dame wi' pride enough," while Marjory is "A Carlin auld and teugh." Reviewing the candidates that they will send "to London town / To bring them tidings home" (*Poems*, I, 478), they focus on personalities as well as issues, and ultimately "At strife thir Carlins fell" (p. 480). The conclusion of their debate is voiced by Marjory whose "auld Scots heart was true." She will send to London town "Whom I lo'e best at hame" (p. 481). Burns's use of the women's debate, including the stereotypical characterization, personal attack, and sense of comic irony of the Makars, shows his reliance both on the poetry of his homeland and his innovative spirit in adapting this traditional medieval poetic mode to contemporary problems.

Another typically medieval form that Burns blends throughout his beast fables is allegory. His use of the genre extends far beyond the poems discussed above. Just as Burns integrates the beast fable and the debate, he also integrates the beast fable and allegory with reflective poetry. The tradition of reflective poetry in Scottish literature runs deep, and one of the finest examples among the Makars is Robert Henryson's "The Abbey Walk." Reflecting on the abbey walk, likely at Dunfermline Abbey, Henryson evaluates the human condition through his meditations. Even Dunbar, in some of his court petitions and reflections on love affairs among the nobility, employs the same allegorical principle of extending the implications of a concrete act or situation to broader issues in human life. Among the Makars, this "allegorical habit of mind"²¹ was deeply ingrained. As we have already seen, it infused the debate, the beast fable, and reflective poem, among other medieval poetic modes. Persistence in looking beyond worldly appearances for abstract principles or broader issues common to all mankind was emphasized in every medieval sermon.²² It too re-emerged in the eighteenth century largely from classical, pastoral roots, but the type of allegory associated with the beast fable and the reflective poem has particular affinities with Scotland and France. Burns's poems engage this tradition. First, there is his integration of the reflective and allegorical principles in poems that have much in common with the beast fables, notably, "To a Louse" and "To a Mouse." Crawford considers them apart from Burns's beast fables as satires and

²¹See Rosamund Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery* (Princeton, 1966), pp. 3-56.

²²See James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 269-356 and D. L. d'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars* (Oxford, 1985), *passim*. For comment on this tradition in the verse of Robert Henryson, see my *Henryson and the Medieval Arts of Rhetoric* (New York, 1993), pp. 189-272.

reflections. In technical terms, they do not meet the criteria of the beast fable. The creatures involved do not speak and possess human characteristics and motivations. Instead they are observed by the poet and inspire in him reflections on the nature of the human condition. To all intents and purposes, the animals are merely creatures in their environment engaged in natural, thoughtless, and non-articulate activities. Yet the louse inspires ironic reflections of the type that Henryson espoused in "The Want of Wise Men," illustrating how social station is not necessarily a mark of quality. In this regard, Burns has directly entered the "birth-worth" debate which was a major preoccupation of the fifteenth century.²³ The period witnessed a questioning of the traditional values with regard to the notion that "blood will tell." Whereas many previous generations of the Middle Ages had believed that genetics (in one form or another) constituted the sole basis for nobility, late medieval thinkers and poets espoused the notion that environment, personal determination, and ethical stature were the basis for nobility instead of birth. Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrez* (1495) is a dramatic allegory that engages the issues, and they have a major presence in Henryson through his depiction of the innate nobility of the "pure" men as well as in Dunbar, whose portrayal of aristocrats is hardly flattering. Burns, too, takes on the issues with his reflections on the louse on Jennie's bonnet, attacking the pride which accompanied both hereditary nobles and the aspiring middle class. Yet there is an addition, a more modern tone. The ironic tone in his final apostrophe—"O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us / To see *oursels* as *others* see us" (*Poems*, I, 194)—reflects a different notion on the importance of appearance than we find in the poetry of the Makars. Whereas fifteenth-century poets would see the contrast between Jennie's finery and the louse in terms of the vanity of human beings and the implied affront to God, Burns, by using a socially-sensitive human critic as an audience for such vanity, colors his poem with elements of social opinion and shame which Henryson would likely have ignored.

"To a Mouse" involves a different kind of reflection. Quite apart from any social satire, this poem inspires sad reflection on the mutability of life and the futility of human planning. The futile situation of the poor creature whose house is ruined by human plow is all too common in the allegorical thinking of the medieval mind. This theme runs throughout Henryson's beast fables, but it extends well beyond them. Indeed, both "The Testament of Cresseid" and "Orpheus and Euridice" are developed around the vanity and futility of human efforts.²⁴ Cresseid, who was once the "flour of luv" and "A per se" of Troy, descends to prostitution and is condemned by the Gods to die of leprosy. Orpheus loses his love because of carnality. Of course, Douglas' *Eneados* also vividly represents

²³See Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Indian Summer of English Chivalry* (Durham, 1960), pp. 3-32.

²⁴See Matthew P. McDiarmid, *Henryson* (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 59 and 112-15.

the frustration and futility in the relationship of Aeneas and Dido. The theme of mutability and fortune's wheel has a long history in the literature of the Middle Ages. Burns's reflections on the "Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim'rous *beastie*" join this tradition, particularly through his portrayal of the mouse as a "*fellow-mortal*." He further extends the mouse's plight to humankind in the final stanza where he observes that the mouse is affected only by the present but that humans have "prospects drear" in their past and fear the future. Allegory is critical to a number of Burns's other poems. "The Brigs of Ayr," "The Vision. Duan First," and "The Holy Fair," (which shares characteristics with *Piers Plowman*) all illustrate how Burns follows the basic principle of giving ideas "a local habitation and a name." In so doing, he uses concrete objects or the characterization of abstractions with an eye to inspiring meditation on the general human condition as well as theological notions of ethics. Burns's modernization of the allegorical tradition reflects not only the evolution of the form from the fourteenth through the eighteenth centuries, but also a distinctly Scottish flavor.

There are many nuances to Burns's use of medieval modes. The final mode, on which I wish to touch briefly, is the peasant brawl.²⁵ This mode was basically a satire on the chivalric tournament, usually displacing noble knights with the peasants and replacing the object of the brawl or tournament with a peasant woman instead of a noble lady. Late medieval examples include "The Tournament of Tottenham," Heinrich Wittenwaller's *Der Ring, Christis Kirk*, and most notably Dunbar's "The Tournament" (which deals with a satirical tournament set in hell). This medieval mode was likely inspired by the same spirit that brought about "the feast of misrule" during which boy bishops ruled the community for one day instead of traditional religious authorities. It turns social conventions upside down, replacing order with disorder and rules of civility with acrimony. One of the most obvious examples of such disorder in Burns is "Halloween." Its bawdy tone, in an atmosphere of the misrule that marks the holiday when evil spirits have a fling prior to All Saints' Day, is linked to the portrayal of rustic delights. The dance itself reflects not only the *danse macabre*, but also the spirit of the peasant festival which underlies the poems in the peasant brawl mode. The comedy of the poem, for instance in the description of the "Wanton Widow" Leezie, is maintained through the conclusion where the poet stands witness that "Wi' Merry songs, an' friendly cracks / I wat they did na weary" (ll. 244-5). Such an approach to life, emphasizing festivity and spontaneity instead of order and restraint, is the obverse side of Burns's use of allegory and the reflective poem. Burns's own jocular spirit clearly demonstrates why he would be attracted to this particular medieval form.

Generally, in his use of these medieval modes, Burns makes changes, integrates, and creates. He reflects the temper of the Middle Ages, but often with a

²⁵See George F. Jones, "'Christis Kirk,' 'Peblis to the Play,' and the German Peasant Brawl," *PMLA*, 67 (1953), 1101-25.

new twist, such as that sometimes found in the verse of the Renaissance or in poets such as Ramsay. The same is true in Burns's use of medieval themes. These themes pervade his work, and they range from larger social themes such as the class struggle in medieval Scotland, as illustrated by Henryson's fable of "The Wolf and the Lamb," to an ethical interest in the blessings of the simple life, as found in "The Two Mice." The continuing reflection of these themes in Burns's poems is hardly unique. Indeed, other societies at other times in other places have maintained or resurrected these medieval themes, which themselves have an inheritance from the classical period. However, the fact that Burns chose to focus on them during a century when the internationalization of Britain was having a major social impact again illustrates his feeling that the roots of his homeland were to be found in a folk culture with many interests that continued only slightly modified since the fifteenth century.

Burns's thematic interests reflect many of the concerns of his time. His yearning for the simple rustic life is much in line with the taste of his century. The French and English courts and their poets had a stylized taste for the country coupled with an idealistic view of rustic life. However, Burns's sympathy with the lower classes and their sense of the inherent dignity they possess seems to be more realistic than stylized. This sense that dignity and worthiness transcend class boundaries is pervasive in the works of Henryson. In "The Sheep and Dog," he shows how an innocent sheep is beguiled of his wool by a ruthless dog and a court peopled with vicious "Men of Law." In "The Wolf and the Lamb," he laments the ways in which the poor are victimized by the mighty. His emphasis on this theme led Marshall Stearns to observe that Henryson's "sympathies are always with the poor."²⁶ Burns's best known example of such sympathy is "For A' That and A' That" in which he extols "honest Poverty." His scorn for "yon birkie ca'd, a lord" is balanced with his respect for "The man of independent mind" (*Poems*, II, 763). He once again ties this theme in with the "birth-worth" debate. His final prayer is:

That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth
Shall bear the gree, and a' that. (*Poems*, II, 763)

The vitality of this poem with its forceful rhythm and repetition has attracted much comment. Its emphatic tone strongly argues for something more than just poetic convention. However, it is hardly the only example of Burns's sympathy with the common people. His reflections on the ruling monarchy as "a Race outlandish" in "Lines on Stirling" show both his nationalistic longings and his reproof of the upper classes. Burns is perhaps less like Dunbar, who attacked the upper classes but often with sympathy or as an element of court quarrels. Unlike Henryson, Dunbar was much more the court poet, dependent upon the nobility

²⁶Marshall Stearns, *Robert Henryson* (New York, 1949), pp. 106-29. For comparison see James Kinsley, *Robert Burns and the Peasantry* (London, 1974).

for his living. While poems such as “A Dance in the Queen’s Chamber,” “Aganis the Solistaris in Court,” and “Schir Thomas Norny” bitterly attacked particular courtiers or nobles, Dunbar never goes so far as Burns or Henryson in a generalized attack on the upper classes. Among the Makars, it is Henryson whom Burns most closely parallels in his use of this theme.

In similar fashion, Burns attacks the decline of wisdom in political life. His song, “Such a parcel of rogues in a nation,” is built around the deterioration of current conditions. Its thematic touchstone is the opening line: “Fareweel to a’ our Scottish fame.” Burns berates the treason that has brought Scotland to such a pass and longs for the days of Robert Bruce and William Wallace:

O would, or I had seen the day
 That treason thus could sell us,
 My auld grey head had lien in clay,
 Wi’ BRUCE and loyal WALLACE!
 But pith and power, till my last hour,
 I’ll mak this declaration;
 We’re bought and sold for English gold,
 Such a parcel of rogues in a nation! (*Poems*, II, 644).

Topical though this poem may be, the theme is medieval in its roots. Henryson’s “Want of Wise Men” focuses on a similar state of social decline. Conditions in his time, Henryson laments, are so bad that now fools sit on the benches of court. The old virtues are gone and the changes are not positive:

now wrang hes warrane, and law is bot wilfulness;
 quha hes the war Is worthin on him all the wyte,
 For trewth is tressoun, and faith is fals fekilness;
 Gylle is now gyd, and vane lust is also delyte;
 Kirk is contempnit, thay compt nocht cursing a myte;
 Grit god is grevit, That me rycht soir forthinkis:
 The causs of this ony man may sone wit,
 That want of wysmen garis fulis sit on binkis. (*ll.* 49-56)

While the cause of Burns’s distress is English gold and Henryson’s is the general lack of wisdom, both have the same result—social disorder and injustice. Both also have basically the same cause: covetousness in the medieval sense of over-attachment to the things of this life. In certain ways, these poems are variations on the *ubi sunt* motif. Just as medieval poets wondered what happened to “the snows of yesteryear,” as Villon would say, so Burns and Henryson compare the current age with the past and find contemporaneous life a source of regret. Douglas too employs this motif, but it is hard to say how much of it is originally his and how much he derived from Virgil. In any case, once again, Burns reflects a tone and sentiment much more like Henryson’s than that of any of the other Makars.

Many of Burns's other poems have medieval roots but it is possible to provide only a brief sampling. His reflections on mutability incorporate a common medieval topos in "To a Mouse." Mutability was a favorite theme of the medieval poet and manifested itself in many ways in poems such as Henryson's "Lion and the Mouse" and Dunbar's "This World unstable." In a different vein, "Tam O' Shanter" reflects not only the peasant brawl but contains some grisly burlesque in exploring the confrontation between human mortality and the face of the supernatural. Both Henryson and Dunbar engage in rather grim humor with regard to the fleeting nature of human existence. Henryson's "Thre Deid Pollis" best establishes the macabre irony that this particular theme takes in the Middle Ages; Dunbar tends to mix such themes with a kind of levity as in "Fasternis Evin in Hell." Burns's poems seem to reflect more of Dunbar's raucous and grotesque humor than Henryson's somber satire.

Burns also attacks religious hypocrisy in "Holy Willie's Prayer." This theme had a long history in the Middle Ages, and it appears in the poetry of both Henryson and Dunbar. Henryson's fable, "The Confession of the Fox," portrays clergy as ignorant and easily beguiled wolves. Dunbar's "False Friar of Tungland" exposes with bitter ridicule the dishonesty and corruption of a charlatan. Burns couches his attack in terms of the pious pretensions of those who claim social and moral superiority. Willie's own unwitting revelation of his lack of wisdom and basic dishonesty of character place him in the great tradition of Henryson's wolfish clergy and Dunbar's abbot of Tungland.

As Tom Crawford has observed, Burns made use of the medieval motif of the Seven Ages of Man (Crawford, p. 19). Crawford shows that "Man was Made to Mourn" explores this theme particularly well in its second stanza. In describing the foibles of man in the stages of his life, he strikes a tone of medieval melancholy:

Young stranger, whither wand'rest thou?
 Began the rev'rend Sage;
Does thirst of wealth thy step constrain,
 Or youthful Pleasure's rage?
Or haply, prest with cares and woes,
 Too soon thou hast began,
To wander forth, with me, to mourn
 The miseries of Man (*Poems*, I, 116).

Henryson employs this same theme—the misery and essential tragedy of life—in "The Want of Wise Men" and extends it to women in Cresseid's lament in "The Testament." Among other elements reflective of the Middle Ages, Burns's comic and satirical tone has been recognized as having much in common with *Christis Kirk* and other late medieval romps.²⁷ David Daiches comments on the

²⁷See J. C. Bittenbender, "Bakhtinian Carnival in the Poetry of Robert Burns," *Scottish*

importance for Burns of Ramsay's tendency to localize works in Scottish settings, an artistic technique clearly traceable to Henryson and Dunbar.²⁸ Like the Makars, Burns consistently uses settings and characters unique to his homeland. Even his epistles reflect the dictaminal rhetoric of the Middle Ages,²⁹ but not in so pronounced a fashion as to suggest genuine scholarly research.

In fact, it would be a mistake to conclude based on this evidence that Burns was in any modern sense a devout scholar of the Middle Ages. Was Burns influenced by the Makars? The answer definitely has to be yes. Parallels in language, theme, and mode clearly indicate Burns's comfort with and mastery of the forms and poetic concerns of his great predecessors. Burns espoused and renewed the traditions of his beloved homeland. He drew his inspiration largely from poets of the sixteenth century and the immediately preceding generation of poets who had kept the earlier traditions alive. Insofar as he imbued those themes and traditions with a new vitality, he attempted to embrace comprehensively the history of Scottish literary art. His own immediate familiarity with fifteenth-century tradition seems to have been limited, filtered through the eyes of subsequent generations, with some immediate access to medieval texts through collections such as Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs* (Roy, p. 231). Burns's reading copy of *The History of Sir William Wallace* was an anglicized version modernized from the original by Allan Ramsay's friend and verse correspondent, William Hamilton of Gilbertfield (Angus-Butterworth, pp. 86-7). In short, Burns's model of literary antiquity was mixed, just as our own is, by the texts and interpretations of the era. Burns was undoubtedly learned, and he hides his learning just as well as Henryson does. One result of that learning was that he often came to the Makars through their preservation in the tradition of Ramsay and Ferguson. Dietrich Strauss argues effectively that this "inherited vision" of the Middle Ages colors his view of what he borrows (Strauss, especially p. 533).

Yet filtered as Burns's view was of the Middle Ages, his interest appears sincere. His attraction for peasant life, the traditions of his homeland, and the rustic setting were far less affected than was the approach of his contemporaries to an idealized concept of bliss in country life. Between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, things had moved more slowly in the Scottish countryside than they had in the cities. Traditional culture was hallowed and retained both in folk ritual and literate social history. Even if he did not come to the tradition of the Makars through a close reading (by modern standards) of Henryson, Dunbar, and Douglas, the preservation of the Makars' tradition in the Scottish folk culture and

Literary Journal, 21 (1994), 23-38; and Donald A. Low, "Byron and Burns," *SSL*, 27 (1992), especially 133-41.

²⁸David Daiches, *Robert Burns* (New York, 1966), pp. 26-7.

²⁹For a discussion of such rhetoric, see Kindrick, *Henryson and the Medieval Arts of Rhetoric*, pp 113-46. Burns's epistles have drawn considerable attention. For a summary comment see John C. Weston, "Robert Burns's Use of the Scots Verse Epistle Form," *PQ*, 48 (1970), 188-210.

in the verse of his learned predecessors resulted in unique adaptations of medieval language, modes, and themes to eighteenth-century problems and gave an added dimension to Burns's celebration of the cultural life and history of his beloved Scotland.

The University of Montana



Charlie is my darling —
A Gray 1996

Jeffrey Skoblow

Dr. Currie, C'est Moi

I should start by saying that I come to Burns, as I imagine most American academics do, by a route most indirect—and telling, perhaps, in its indirection. In a nutshell, Burns was not a given in my education—or if he was a given, only in the sense of a thing to which one pays no attention beyond noting that it is in fact there. Burns was not a question, certainly, not a site of inquiry; rather, as we fashionably say, an absence. I was never assigned to read a Burns poem in all the years of my schooling, high school, college, grad school. I picked up a little along the way: my brother read me “To a Louse” out of his community college textbook (although I don’t know if he’d been assigned it either), a friend told me where the bit about best laid schemes of mice and men really came from, I stumbled upon “A Man’s a Man for a’ That” in my own high school textbook, and puzzled over it pleasurably, and a handful of other works floated into my awareness with Burns’s name attached—Tam, Dr. Hornbook. And I learned somewhere that it was Burns behind “Auld Lang Syne”: the song, after “Happy Birthday To You,” that more Americans may have sung together more often than any other.

Burns in short appeared to me as someone not an object of the academic gaze—or if so only of the most fugitive sort, lurking on the verge of oblivion. I did not learn to assume, as I might have if I were Scottish, that Burns is a natural and significant part of an organic and ongoing tradition, or, as I might have if I were English, that Burns is a natural if pesky part of *another* organic and ongoing tradition. Although I am sure that all this is true, I also know that the Scottish and English traditions, like my own American tradition, resist Burns, and that Burns resists us all as well: resists the anthologies, resists the teach-

ers, resists the critics and scholars, that he remains to be picked up, to the extent that he is picked up at all, by revellers on New Year's Eve, by the crowds at Burns Night Dinners, by connoisseurs of bawdy, by the odd suburban youngster like myself, and at gatherings such as the conference at the University of South Carolina the Proceedings of which gave rise to this volume.

Now I don't exactly lament this situation. I don't mean to be proposing, for instance, that the MLA Convention Committee (through the Affiliated Association of some society of Burnsians) sponsor a session on Burns every year—although that might not be a bad idea. I don't mean to rectify the marginality of Burns so much as to appreciate it, to celebrate it, even—to ask what it might mean that might please me. Marginality, though, perhaps isn't even the right expression: the word suggests a border and a center to begin with, like a map—and all maps are Adamic, to name and have dominion over—whereas what I want to imagine is more a globe, or a world or a life. Whether in our map of whatever tradition we locate Burns marginally or centrally, there is something in him that challenges the very prerogatives of mapping, something extraneous, it seems, to the whole process. A matter of excess, as Georges Bataille would say, of waste: the profligate unredeemed, the vulgar vulgate rampant—something which meets the academic gaze and returns nothing: a black hole of sorts. What does one do with a black hole?

The question Burns raises, it seems to me, has less to do with what we make of him, than with what we make of ourselves when we apply the instruments of our profession to him. In fact when I applied my professional instruments—five years ago, having just completed a book on William Morris and grown interested in figures (like Burns) once highly regarded and now largely neglected, curious about such phenomena and what the process might signify—what I found was that these instruments didn't work very well. I found Burns quite unreadable, and I don't just mean that I needed a glossary. Scots is part of the story, of course—as it most pointedly was for many of Burns's earliest reviewers—but Scots is not the whole story: one reads MacDiarmid, for instance, or Sydney Goodsir Smith, or Dunbar, as one cannot read Burns. What I mean is that I found Burns not so much impenetrable as insusceptible even to questions of penetration.

Maybe penetration isn't an apt expression either, maybe this is all phallic fantasy, a tale fit for the Tarbolton Bachelors Club. At any rate, I found, as Iain Crichton Smith has observed, that “in a sense nothing much can be said of a Burns lyric except that it is there. No resources of modern scholarship can be brought to bear on it.”¹ And not just the lyrics, the poems too seemed to me to present the same face. I have since of course come to read Burns more familiarly, have come to love him, and have found much of interest in the modern

¹“The Lyrics of Robert Burns,” in *The Art of Robert Burns*, ed. R. D. S. Jack & Andrew Noble (London, 1982), p. 24.

scholarship brought to bear on him—in the work of Professors Daiches, Ferguson, Low, McGuirk and many others, work highly and rightly esteemed, and invaluable to my own understanding. But my first impression has stayed with me: there is something in Burns which doesn't love a literary critic.

I will put it like this: Literary Criticism is an industry of production and consumption, specializing in services pertaining to cultural representation and reproduction. (Or so it is readily construed.) Within this industry, various interests compete for attention, for sway, for market share—for power, and if the terrain competed over may seem ethereal at times, the struggle is no less real for that, the consequences no less material. The business in which we are engaged, the business of cultural representation and reproduction, is the serious business of establishing (and revising) what questions it is possible to ask. Literary Criticism is a custodian of critical consciousness as well as an instrument of social control.

But Burns comes along, himself very much concerned with questions of cultural representation and reproduction, and insists that these questions are not to be regarded in terms of production and consumption. He insists that cultural representation and reproduction occur somehow beyond the reach of social control—his vision is a utopian one, ultimately—where neither the poetic work nor the poet's life is a commodity. What is poetry when it is not a commodity? For Burns the answer is: a performance—which is a metaphor that raises a wholly different set of questions.

Unlike a commodity, a performance cannot be reproduced; although it can be recorded, this is less to reproduce than to translate it. The performance itself, for instance, always includes the audience, as well as other specific circumstances affecting the performer, and these can never be duplicated. A recording can be commodified, but not a performance—it vanishes more resolutely than pork belly futures.

Now as I write of this I'm thinking, of course, primarily of Burns's songs—his astonishing output of material for James Johnson and George Thomson, thinking too of his refusal of payment (“downright Sodomy of Soul!” he called it)² and his general refusal to credit his name with the work, his resistance to its commodification. In its close relation to questions of performance, the genre of song is sort of Burns's *ur*-form—it embodies his essential impulse—but I would include his poems as well within the performative model, as exempla of the noncommodified. Although he does submit both poems and songs to the market's appraising eye, what Burns provides in effect are recordings—translations from the performative to the textual—and not the thing itself, not the performance, of which, it is important to reiterate, no adequate account can be made. Burns's work exists to say: Something there is, in

²*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), II, 149.

the world of cultural representation and reproduction, of which your instruments can make no account.

The commodification of Burns, I mean to say, means more than the Ayrshire Tourist Board. Literary criticism is not well equipped to deal with questions of performance (as the Geographer tells the Little Prince, ephemera are of no account). We too must fawn over the commodity, we too must contest in the arena of the capitalist intellect—there's no getting around it: it has ever been thus, since Burns's time, at least, that critical moment in the expansion of public discourse, of discourse as commodity.

I think here of "The Jolly Gauger," that epitome of Commodity Man, *homo economicus* straying from the path of his official duties and attending to others, "down by yon river side,"³ with a beggar for his queen. The man is never *not* a gauger, but his work is plainly not all in the king's service. His pursuit of production and consumption, we might say, is punctuated by performances that do not make it into the excise ledger.

The ledger in our case is Literary Criticism, and what doesn't register there is what we can't ascribe a value to: Burns in a sense represents the anxiety of the commodity, the imagination of a limit to the power of commodification. Burns marks a border, a debatable land, not so much between Scotland and England (although this makes a useful analogy or metaphor) as between a world governed by the administration of relative values and a world not so governed, a world we lack a language for—an unadministered world, as a Marxist critic like Theodor Adorno might imagine, in which market value is only an intrusion, an excrescence. And I think here of Jenny, "poor body / Comin thro' the rye... Gin a body kiss a body / Need the world ken!" (*Poems*, II, 843-4)—where the exclamation marks that same border, between what is known, appraised, exchangeable or discardable, and what is not, what is human rather—our lives and loves: when a body meets a body. Burns's border lies between the maw of the market and the non-commodified life: he challenges the hegemony of the former by raising the standard of the latter.

The anxiety Burns provokes—the drive to commodify him and the recognition that he resists or even thwarts the effort—is clear from the start. The first review of the Kilmarnock *Poems* in the Oct. 1786 *Edinburgh Magazine*, probably by J. Sibbald, represents Burns not merely as a class interloper but as a particular conundrum for the industry of letters—an act of effrontery not only to class but to the very possibility of knowledge. In fact, with the opening sentence of this first (anonymous) review, in which our Bard appears as "a person who has come unbidden into company," Burns seems to provoke a kind of critical schizophrenia, to compel the reviewer to speak for himself in another's voice:

³*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), II, 902. Henceforth *Poems*.

Who are you, Mr. Burns? will some surly critic say. At what university have you been educated? what languages do you understand? what authors have you particularly studied? whether has Aristotle or Horace directed your taste? who has praised your poems, and under whose patronage are they published? In short, what qualifications entitle you to instruct or entertain us?⁴

Note that the question is not what languages do you *speak*: our Bard is of note here not for what powers he has, but for what powers he recognizes. This list of questions is admirable for the precision with which it delineates the terms of a contract, which Burns, having put his poems into general circulation, might be presumed to have signed. Institutional affiliation, linguistic command, curricular history, classical allegiance, current sponsor: these are the sites of validation and judgment—all matters of identifying documents, entitlements—beyond which “Mr. Burns” might be said to be of no account whatsoever. This surly critic, at least, hardly looks up from his desk.

At the same time, the naked insistence on these documents and entitlements—a kind of half-joke that reveals more weight than it pretends—carries the shadow of its own uncertainty. Mr. Burns *is* a commodity, he *will* be accounted for, but at least he will remind us that accounting is what we are doing—as opposed to engaging in some other relation, for instance loving him—a possibility beyond the pale.

Henry Mackenzie’s instantly famous review appears two months later in *The Lounger* to smooth these ruffled feathers, to assure us that nothing lies beyond the pale—there is no pale, only taste and sensibility—that knowledge and its institutions are in fine shape, thank you very much, never been better. He begins:

To the feeling and the susceptible there is something wonderfully pleasing in the contemplation of genius, of that supereminent reach of mind by which some men are distinguished. In the view of highly superior talents, as in that of great and stupendous natural objects, there is a sublimity which fills the soul with wonder and delight, which expands it, as it were, beyond its usual bounds, and which, investing our nature with extraordinary powers, and extraordinary honours, interests our curiosity, and flatters our pride (Low, p. 67).

Mackenzie’s rhetoric is that of a select club in which nature is invested, curiosity interested, and pride flattered, a connoisseurship of the most exalted discrimination which takes in everything and turns it to account—an account, ultimately, of the club itself, of course, the whole world (beyond even the soul’s usual bounds) reduced to a tickling of refined taste. This club may not

⁴Donald A. Low, ed., *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1974), p. 63. Henceforth Low.

be ours, exactly—the characteristic tone of our own contemporary, institutionally academic critical discourse doesn't tend to the smug nobility of "something wonderfully pleasing in the contemplation of genius"—our lingo tends more to the dispassionate, the New Critical. But in speaking to the club of Edinburgh literati in 1786, Mackenzie speaks to us as well; the approval of the professional class is the prize and the main point of interest—as when Mackenzie speaks of Burns's work and "that superior place, which the enthusiasm of its patrons would have assigned it" (Low, p. 68). It is a self-reflexive business: poetical productions are commodities by means of which our taste and our power can appreciate itself, thereby appreciating in power—a profitable business.

Dr. Currie, of course, speaks to us as well—speaks for us, even. Currie dots the i's and crosses the t's in the commodification of Burns, *Work and Life*; ever after the equation is set—although the relative values may change. Burns is an entity, a phenomenon, a prodigy, not to be accounted for by the usual means, but in the end—a little bowdlerized, perhaps, or otherwise spun—nevertheless made out to speak a language we know the value of. In Currie's case this language is essentially anthropological—an affair of distance, and of distance scientifically overcome. His extensive "Prefatory Remarks, on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry"⁵ frame the project, at once recognizing and negating the alien nature of the material Burns's corpus represents. Burns again is Other, but this Otherness, which might otherwise threaten, is nevertheless explicable.

Currie divides the subject of the Scots into five: "church establishment," "absence of poor laws," "music and national songs," "laws respecting marriage and incontinence," and "domestic and national attachments"—in each case an inquiry into organs of regulation. Burns, and with him all of Scotland, appears as if an object of the doctor's autopsy: the "separate and independent" (Currie, I, 2) body of Scotland, or of Burns, is no more—Burns's poetry "displays, and as it were embalms, the peculiar manners of his country," Currie notes (I, 31). Embalms and as it were reproduces for consumption. The separate and independent becomes the unseparated, dependent—Burns's fate a consummation of the Union of Parliaments and of Crowns.

Although our own categories may differ entirely from Currie's, I would argue that in our institutional claim to the power of explication we share his point of view. We too must see to it that Burns is knowable, that his resources are well managed (Currie worked on behalf of the widow and orphans; we work for posterity as well), that his texts are cleaned and spruced up to enable deepest appreciation, that the Bard sings in a register we can recognize. We must see to it that the power of explication, even when challenged, is un-

⁵James Currie, ed., *The Work of Robert Burns*. 4 vols. (Liverpool, 1800), I, 1-31. Henceforth Currie.

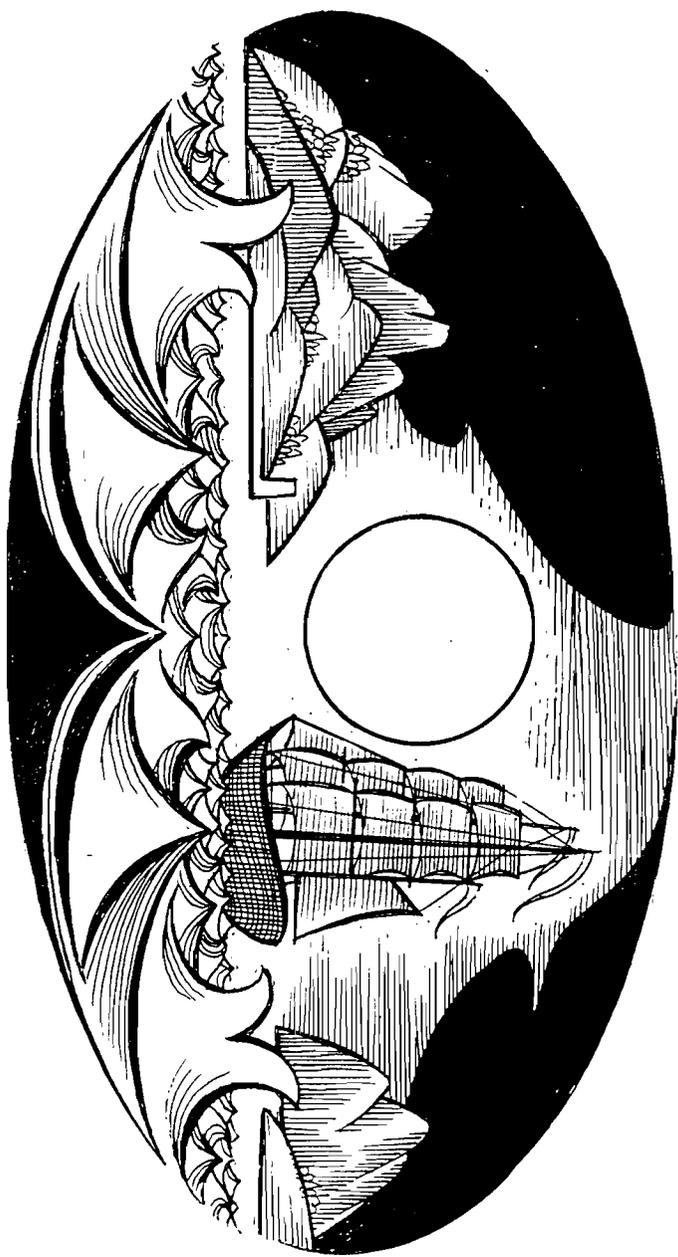
daunted. Currie is our model, his work the seminal document of Burns's after-life; and to us as to him, the ghost of Burns says "No. Say what you like about me, it will be beside the point, can take nothing of my measure."

He says this again and again, in his songs, in his poems, in his prose; the songs in particular and the poems as well say as much again in themselves, in their forms, in their insistence on being performed. They say, "Play me or say me, but don't speak for me."

"What's *done* we partly may compute, / But know not what's *resisted*"—that's how Burns closes his "Address to the Unco Guid, or the Rigidly Righteous" (*Poems*, I, 54). My point here is that however casually unrighteous we may be, Burns addresses us here too, that his work as a whole embodies an impulse of resistance to computation—Mackenzie's, Currie's, our own—that life, and the life of poetry, lies elsewhere, and that this radical unknowability (unaccountability) of poetry is a kind of triumph over the institutions of social control, an escape from its prescriptions, a demonstration that the administration of meaning does not extend everywhere.

It's an old trope, of course, that I'm offering—Burns the embodiment of Freedom. I only wish to add that this freedom constitutes a particular critique of the industrial production and consumption of meaning, as practiced by modern institutions of intellectual enterprise. Freedom and intimacy, ultimately, are what Burns demands—what can be neither produced nor consumed—a language our discipline of literary criticism can hardly speak. He aims, if we will, to save us from ourselves.

Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville



Excile —

A Gray 1996

Norman Elrod

Robert Burns and Thomas Paine: Two Proponents of Human Rights

I intend to address Robert Burns's regionalism and internationalism, and to draw some comparisons with these traits in the works of Thomas Paine. That Burns was a Scotsman, devoted to the strengthening of Scottish self-awareness and self-confidence, seems clear to me. We need only think of the collection of 274-odd songs which he wrote or amended for James Johnson's *The Scots Musical Museum* and George Thomson's *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs*, many of them definitely set in Scottish history, referring to the hopes and hardships of the people of Scotland. Certainly one of these songs has in itself up to the present time inspired countless Scots to be proud of their native land, grateful for the chance to be part of the Scottish community. I am thinking, of course, of "Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn," now usually referred to as "Scots Wha Hae." In short, I am assuming that Burns's literary nationalism is obvious to most people who encounter a good number of his works. The language in many of his poems dealing with Scotland is certainly not the kind spoken in London, Dublin, or Swansea, let alone in Boston or Atlanta.

Burns's regionalism is not so easy to come by, particularly for his many readers who are not acquainted with the landscape of Ayrshire, an area in the southwest of Scotland. As John Inglis has shown in a recent essay on Burns, the poet was fundamentally rooted in Ayrshire.¹ This is verified by most of the poet's Epistles, which "touch on, one way or another, aspects of everyday life"

¹John Inglis, "Burns—Poet of Ayrshire," *Burns Chronicle*, New Series, 3 (1994), 88-92.

in the Ayrshire area (p. 89). Time and again Burns's poems refer to real people, "the lads and lasses of Ayrshire" he knew and with whom he amused himself, "the folks he came in contact with at work in the fields, at the kirk, in the taverns" (p. 89). Burns wrote:

A country lad is my degree,
 An' few there be that ken me, O;
 But what care I how few they be,
 I'm welcome ay to Nanie, O.²

As for the scenery of Ayrshire, Burns portrayed it more than once with beautiful descriptive passages in his poems, ballads and songs.

One night as I did wander,
 When corn begins to shoot,
 I sat me down to ponder
 Upon an auld tree root:
 Auld Aire ran by before me,
 And bicker'd to the seas,
 A cushat crouded o'er me
 That echoed thro' the braes.
 ("A Fragment," *Poems*, I, 13).

The flora of the area assumed a prominent place in "To a Mountain Daisy," and Ayrshire's fauna, for example some of its local birds, was mentioned in Burns's song "Now Westlin Winds." In the second stanza of this song he mentioned seven of these birds in the space of eight lines:

The Pairrick lo'es the fruitfu' fells;
 The Plover lo'es the mountains;
 The Woodcock haunts the lanely dells;
 The soaring Hern the fountains:
 Thro' lofty groves, the Cushat roves,
 The path o' man to shun it;
 The hazel bush o'erhangs the Thrush,
 The spreading thorn the Linnet.
 ("Song, Composed in August," *Poems*, I, 5)

In my study of the life and works of Robert Burns I have been particularly interested in a stance of his which I suggest we call internationalist. Certainly he was not a cosmopolitan like Thomas Paine, the author of *Common Sense*, an exceptionally influential work in North America from its publication in 1776

²*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), "Song," I, 9. Henceforth *Poems*.

onward, and *The Rights of Man* (1791; 1792), a highly explosive work which came out in London and dealt with the subject of monarchy, an institution which Paine argued should be brought to an end both in Great Britain and France.

Burns was familiar with some of Paine's endeavors and agreed with him on certain fundamental matters dealing with the nature of human beings and how the cause of humanity is to be furthered, for example, at that time by the freeing of the slaves. But Burns had a home; he was rooted in the Ayrshire region, and he considered himself a Scotsman through and through. Paine, although he grew up an Englishman and later became in his mind a citizen of the United States of America and of France, did not really belong, I suggest, to any of these nations. We might think, while reading a poem Paine wrote in Paris and reflecting on what it says, that he really felt attached to the United States. I would not argue that he did not, but, it seems to me, he was all for the *idea* of what the USA stood for, not for the land and its people as it and they existed and developed from day to day. The poem I am referring to reads as follows:

CONTENTMENT; OR, IF YOU PLEASE,
CONFESSION

O could we always live and love,
And always be sincere,
I would not wish for heaven above,
My heaven would be here.

Though many countries I have seen,
And more may chance to see,
My Little Corner of the World
Is half the world to me;

The other half, as you may guess,
America contains;
And thus, between them, I possess
The whole world for my pains.

I'm then contented with my lot,
I can no happier be;
For neither world I'm sure has got
So rich a man as me.

Then send no fiery chariot down
To take me off from hence,
But leave me on my heavenly ground—
This prayer is *common-sense*.

Let others choose another plan,
 I mean no fault to find;
 The true theology of man
 Is *happiness of mind*.³

Paine was, it seems to me, a true cosmopolitan, a man who treated the world as his country. He was a citizen of the world, as they say in German a *Weltbürger*. Paine worked out for himself a philosophy of life that was free from national attachment or prejudices. With this thought in mind he (1778) wrote: "My attachment is to all the world, and not to any particular part, and if what I advance is right, no matter where or who it comes from" (*Writings*, I, 146). This view got Paine into serious trouble in England, France and the United States. When persons and institutions became angry over what he was out to accomplish and attacked him, Paine had, in a sense, nothing to fall back on. He could very well be a citizen of the world but the reality of this world was only in his mind; it was not an entity to lend him support in time of need.

As time went by, Burns, too, came to realize that his understanding of civil life and loyalty to region and nation did not correspond to what the majority of the people in Scotland considered right and proper. Difficulties developed, problems which became quite acute from 1792 to the time of his death in 1796, owing to his advocacy of democratic reform within the nation of his abode, and of support for republican movements in other countries.

Some local difficulties with Burns's notion of proper living cropped up quite clearly in the 1780s in connection with his sexual relationships with women. These were not taken lightly, and it looked for a while as if he would be obliged to leave the country and emigrate to Jamaica. We can imagine that the thought of leaving the region which had been his home filled Burns not only with separation anxiety but also with melancholy.

With the storming of the Bastille in July 1789 it was not only in France that Burns's world began to be turned upside down. The government in London, led by William Pitt the Younger, revealed itself to be more and more sensitive to the events in Paris and began to dictate how certain current affairs should be judged, expressing expectations which did not suit Robert Burns in the least. Indeed, by its very nature, this official analysis and evaluation could only frustrate, and certainly not inspire him.

A major policy which the government started putting into practice in the latter part of 1792, and then in earnest after the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793, was the restriction of freedom of the press and of speech, together with freedom of assembly. The first two restrictions, the threats to free speech and the free press, greatly irritated Burns. But, as many of us know, he was obliged to hold his tongue in public and to get on with the business of

³*The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner. 2 vols. (New York, 1945), II, 1098-9. Henceforth *Writings*.

making a living to support his many dependents.

In his songs and poetry Burns found on occasion an opportunity to express himself so that readers would understand his real evaluation of what was going on in the world. Two examples of what I mean read as follows:

O wae upon you, Men o' State,
That brethren rouse in deadly hate!
As ye make mony a fond heart mourn,
Sae may it on your heads return!
How can your flinty hearts enjoy
The widow's tears, the orphan's cry:
But soon may Peace bring happy days
And Willie, hame to Logan braes!
(“Song,” *Poems*, II, 691)

* * *

Grant me, indulgent Heaven, that I may live
To see the miscreants feel the pains they give:
Deal Freedom's sacred treasures free as air,
Till SLAVE and DESPOT be but *things which were!*
(Untitled lines written extempore
in a lady's pocket-book, *Poems*, II, 693)

But all in all, when I think about how Paine fared between 1792 and 1809, the year of his death, Burns was fortunate in having his dependents, in being rooted in Ayrshire. Burns felt himself to be, and was, responsible for specific individuals. Paine was for the happiness of everyone. Burns was forced to remain closely associated even with many of his enemies, for example, when he became a member of the Royal Dumfries Volunteers, a civilian self-defense organization set up by the government early in 1795 to train male citizens in marching and in the handling of musketry “two or three times a week,” James Mackay informs us.⁴ In a sense Paine burned all his bridges behind him, writing, for instance, as he did in 1792 in Part II of *The Rights of Man*, “I speak an open and disinterested language, dictated by no passion but that of humanity....I view things as they are, without regard to place or person” (*Writings*, I, 413-4).

With Paine's concern for reality in the raw, so to speak, and living according to the principle “my country is the world, and my religion is to do good” (p. 414), he could even begin, apparently in 1797, setting forth a plan to have England invaded by General Bonaparte in order to liberate the people. He did, in fact, as Philip Foner writes, submit “a plan to the French Directory in 1798 for a military expedition against England....Napoleon received Paine's pro-

⁴James Mackay, *R B: A Biography of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 589. Henceforth Mackay.

posal enthusiastically and even visited the writer to discuss the plan," (*Writings*, II, 675). Paine went still further and "contributed funds he could hardly spare toward the expedition" (*Writings*, I, xl).

Did Paine change his mind with the passing of time? Apparently not, from what Foner writes: "in 1804...Paine welcomed the report of Napoleon's plan to invade England and pledged it full support," (*Writings*, II, 675). With this in mind Paine (1804) even wrote an article spelling out in some detail how he viewed such an action on Napoleon's part. Before Paine wrote this letter, he had, while still in Europe, even actually gone to Belgium "to watch the collecting of two hundred and fifty gunboats destined for the English invasion."⁵

Various aspects of Paine's development during the last twenty years of his life warrant careful consideration, if only because of the important role he played in the freeing of the thirteen English colonies in North America from Great Britain. Ehsan Naraghi says of Paine, "as one of his biographers has written, 'Washington was the sword of the American Revolution, Paine was the pen.'"⁶

There is no doubt that Paine contributed greatly to launching the American Revolution, but once the revolution was more or less over, he was, in a sense, out of work—homeless. In contrast to Benjamin Franklin, who once reportedly remarked to him, "Where liberty is, there is my country," Paine quipped in reply, "Where liberty is not, there is my country."⁷ I think I know what Paine meant by his reply to Franklin, but I do not think he realized what the attitude also implied, namely combating arbitrary government with arbitrary means. Paine, it seems to me, made a dogma out of disassociating himself from regional and national obligations. Cut off from various ties of dependency and responsibility, he was unable to make a self-critical reappraisal of certain prejudices he held, for example those concerning William Pitt the Younger. As for the British statesman, Paine came out in the early 1800s with generalizations about him which were, as I see it, simply false. I refer to the following statement he recorded in 1804:

With respect to the French Revolution, it was begun by good men and on good principles, and I have always believed it would have gone on so had not the provocative interference of foreign powers, of which Pitt was the principal and vindictive agent, distracted it into madness and sown jealousies among the leaders (*Writings*, II, 683).

⁵Kingsley Martin, *Thomas Paine* (London, 1925), pp. 15-16.

⁶Ehsan Naraghi, "1789 An Idea that Changed the World: The Republic's Citizens of Honour," *The Unesco Courier* (June 1989), p. 15. Naraghi's quotation is unattributed.

⁷John Keane, *Tom Paine: A Political Life* (London, 1995), p. xiii.

Such an evaluation of Pitt's influence on French affairs in the early 1790s is absurd, at least from what we now know about Pitt's ideas and activities at that time. Certainly his administration was not "the plague of the human race," as Paine, according to Keane "was fond of repeating" (Keane, p. 440).

Now it seems to me that I need not bring a number of specific proofs from Burns's writings to demonstrate that he would in no way have agreed with Paine's plan for Napoleon to invade England. One poem, "The Dumfries Volunteers" (Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?), from 1795, would appear to be enough:

O, let us not, like snarling tykes,
In wrangling be divided,
Till, slap! come in an *unco loun*,
And wi' a rung decide it!
Be BRITAIN still to BRITAIN true,
Amang oursels united;
For never but by British hands
Must British wrongs be righted.
(*Poems*, II, 765)

Furthermore, even as things stood while both men were alive, Burns and Paine did not agree on the essential question, "What is to be done?" Burns, for example, wrote that he had nothing against the execution of Louis XVI, whom he called a "perjured Blockhead."⁸ Paine was definitely against it and spoke twice to the French National Convention, agreeing with the Girondins that the king should be banished or interned.⁹

It would seem as though Burns and Paine came to very different conclusions on how human rights might be realized. Let us take a brief look at what they may have considered human rights to be—at that time considered natural rights.

As to what is human, I should think both of them would have agreed that God in his wisdom and goodness did not make both rich and poor. According to George Spater, Paine claimed that God "made only *male* and *female*, and He gave them the earth for their inheritance."¹⁰ Both Burns and Paine were definitely conscious of men's and women's inherent ability to attain certain degrees of independence in daily life. Most of us can remember what Burns

⁸*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), II, 334.

⁹See "Reasons for Preserving the Life of Louis Capet" and "Shall Louis XVI be Res-pited?" *Writings*, II, 551-8.

¹⁰"European Revolutionary, 1789-1809," in Ian Dyck, ed. *Citizen of the World: Essays on Thomas Paine* (New York, 1988), p. 65. See *Writings*, I, 274.

wrote on this subject. As for Paine, he noted in *The Age of Reason*: "My own mind is my own church" (*Writings*, I, 464). Certainly both Burns and Paine had a high regard for reason and each in his own way tried to use reason in his writing to expose many of the scholarly, priestly and political perversions he encountered. To be more specific, both of them questioned a number of theological dogmas on the nature of male and female human beings. They were passionately opposed to hypocrisy and very much in favor of men and women being, as Paine wrote, "mentally faithful" to themselves (p. 464). All human beings are equal, they thought, a view that did not sit well with the power elites in Great Britain, France and the United States of America. Let us not forget that in the 1790s in America members of the House of Representatives "were apportioned among the states according to their respective numbers of free persons...including three fifths of 'all other persons,' that is, slaves."¹¹ That meant quite simply "one Negro only counted for three-fifths of a white."¹²

However, as I mentioned earlier, not only those in power resisted the analysis of human society set forth by Burns and Paine. Both men met with popular opposition. To be sure, Great Britain banned the slave trade in 1806, but it took decades before the slaves were freed in the United States, and only then in 1863 during the waging of a bloody civil war.

Burns and Paine learned time and again that freedom, harmony and love are treasures not easily come by and easily lost. This was particularly the case with Paine, who went astray by thinking human beings are essentially only responsible to themselves. He considered ideas as valid or false regardless of their reception and interpretation by other people. And so he could write, quite arrogantly I would argue, "I have never yet made, and I hope I never shall make, it the least point of consideration, whether a thing is *popular* or *unpopular*, but whether it is *right* or *wrong*."¹³ I also see Paine's tendency to make absolutes of his own ideas in the following statement: "I scarcely never quote; the reason is, I always think."¹⁴

Always thinking? Was Paine thinking when he suggested an invasion of England to Napoleon? Of course he was, but it was a thinking disassociated from the current and past history of France and England, having no regard whatsoever for what the majority of the population in England thought, felt and

¹¹Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The Beards' New Basic History of the United States*, ed. William Beard (New York, 1968), p. 131.

¹²Russel B. Nye and J. E. Morpurgo, *A History of the United States, I, The Birth of the U.S.A.* (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 259.

¹³Paine, quoted in Spater, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁴Quoted in George Spater, "The Early Years, 1737-1774," in Ian Dyck, ed. *Citizen of the World: Essays on Thomas Paine* (New York, 1988), p. 18.

wanted in the 1790s. If Paine had been related to these people as they were in flesh and blood he could have learned something:

In the winter of 1792-1793, in particular, there were dozens of public demonstrations of popular hostility to the seditious views of Thomas Paine. He was burned in effigy across the length and breadth of the country. There were at least thirty such incidents in the north-west of England alone, and almost as many occurred in Northumberland and Durham even though the north-east was one of the least militantly loyalist in the country.¹⁵

On a theoretical level Paine set forth in one sentence his conception of what constituted a nation:

A nation is composed of distinct, unconnected individuals, following various trades, employments and pursuits; continually meeting, crossing, uniting, opposing and separating from each other, as accident, interest and circumstance shall direct (*Writings*, II, 371).

It is not surprising that when he was growing old and had returned from France to the United States in 1802, Paine found himself with no family and few close friends. It is said he was "cantankerous and argumentative, turning more and more to the solace of drink."¹⁶ He died on 8 June 1809 and was buried at his farm in New Rochelle. Only a handful of New Rochelle neighbors and friends showed up for the burial. There were no dignitaries, no fanfare, no ceremony, no eulogies, no official notices of his death. Paine really departed from the living as a cosmopolitan, as a citizen of the world more or less completely forgotten or ignored by the countless people he had left behind him, the men and women of North America he had inspired to free themselves from the British monarchy.

On the other hand Robert Burns, the regionalist, nationalist and internationalist, ended his life very differently from Thomas Paine, the cosmopolitan. To the very end Burns was quite strongly involved in interactions with various people around him, as Mackay (pp. 585-632) informs us in a very convincing way. Other people also took an interest in him, and I do not mean only Matthew Penn, who in his capacity as lawyer for the haberdasher David Williamson wrote to Burns early in July 1796, demanding payment of a bill which stood at £7 4s for the making of Robert's uniform for the Royal Dumfries Volunteers (Mackay, p. 623). Allan Cunningham, who may have been in the

¹⁵H. T. Dickinson, "Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism, 1789-1815," in H. T. Dickinson, ed. *Britain and the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Basingstoke and London, 1994), p. 118.

¹⁶Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth, 1976), Introduction, p. 36.

Dumfries area at this time, wrote later that various people, of high and low station, showed a concern for Burns's health, particularly in July 1796. And when two or three of them met and talked to each other the topic was Burns, what he had been and had achieved and what seemed now to be coming to an end (Mackay, p. 626).

If the man, Tom Paine, was put in his grave with the world he had opted for more or less completely indifferent to the event, Robin Burns, the lad of Ayrshire, Scotland's bard, was laid to rest with "a grand and proper parade," as his close friend John Syme had wanted (quoted in Mackay, p. 630). William Grierson noted at the time of the funeral that it "was uncommonly splendid" (quoted in Mackay, p. 631). And rightly so; Burns in his loyalty to region and nation could only die a patriot, a fact recognized by those people in power at the time, who saw to it that he should have "a funeral with full military honours" (Mackay, p. 659). Certainly when we hear of this we can think of the last lines of "The Cotter's Saturday Night":

O SCOTIA! my dear, my native soil!
 For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent!
 Long may thy hardy sons of *rustic toil*
 Be blest with health and peace and sweet content!
 And O may Heaven their simple lives prevent
 From *Luxury's* contagion, weak and vile!
 Then howe'er *crowns* and *coronets* be rent,
 A *virtuous Populace* may rise the while,
 And stand a wall of fire, around their much-lov'd ISLE.

O THOU! who pour'd the *patriotic tide*,
 That stream'd thro' great, unhappy WALLACE' heart;
 Who dar'd to, nobly, stem tyrannic pride,
 Or *nobly die*, the second glorious part:
 (The Patriot's GOD, peculiarly thou art,
 His *friend, inspirer, guardian* and *reward!*)
 O never, never SCOTIA's realm desert,
 But still the *Patriot*, and the *Patriot-bard*,
 In bright succession raise, her *Ornament* and *Guard!*
 (*Poems*, I, 151-2)

Thus spoke the loyal nationalist Robert Burns. The loyal regionalist Robert Burns can be heard, so the story goes, in two toasts given after having eaten meat in the Globe Inn, Dumfries, which was run by Mrs. Jean Hyslop and her husband William, whom Robert called "Meg" and "the landlord" respectively:

[Graces—at the Globe Tavern]

After Dinner [A]

O Lord, since we have feasted thus,
Which we so little merit,
Let Meg now take away the flesh,
And Jock bring in the spirit!
Amen.

After Dinner [B]

L—D, we [thee] thank an' thee adore
For temp'ral gifts we little merit;
At present we will ask no more,
Let William Hislop give the spirit.
(*Poems*, II, 821)

And a hundred years later? The Heritage Club reports in an article entitled “A Man’s a Man”:

On July 21, 1896, “at least fifty-thousand people” assembled in the market town of Dumfries, in southern Scotland, to observe the one-hundredth anniversary of the death of Robert Burns. “At two o’clock within the Drill Hall a conversazione, attended by four thousand persons, was held,” *The Publisher’s Circular* of London reported in its next issue. “At St. Michael’s Churchyard, wreaths presented by one hundred and thirty Burns and other societies were handed to Lord Rosebery [the Prime Minister], who placed them on the poet’s tomb. The most modest wreath, and yet probably the most interesting, was that from the Glasgow Mauchline Society. It consisted of holly and gowans, the latter grown on the field of Mossgiel, celebrated by Burns in his poem ‘To a Mountain Daisy.’ The wreath was made up by the granddaughters of Burns.”¹⁷

In closing this paper I would like to note that I have learned from this study of Burns and Paine, as I see them in relation to each other, that cosmopolitanism sounds good but overlooks what life is all about. Burns, by adjusting to reality as it was developing in the 1790s, has on more than one occasion been called an opportunist. I think that he made the best of what was possible. I assume most readers are familiar with the various responsibilities he had as a husband, a father and member of two families, and a supporter of various organizations and projects. Therefore, he could only moderate his tone in public on his various proposals for reform and revolution. It is not to be forgotten, as Christopher Hobbhouse noted in 1934, referring to Great Britain in

¹⁷Heritage Club, “A Man’s a Man,” *Sandglass*, XII, 29 (1965), 1.

general: "In 1795, to organize in favor of reform was an indictable offense, and any prominent reformer, or even a prominent dissenter, was in danger of being mobbed in the streets."¹⁸ And so Burns chose to follow the path Montaigne wrote about: "I speak the truth, not enough to satisfy myself, but as much as I dare speak."¹⁹

Zürich-Kreuzlingen

¹⁸Christopher Hobhouse, *Fox* (London, 1947), p. 259.

¹⁹Quoted in George Spater, "The Legacy of Thomas Paine," in Ian Dyck, ed. *Citizen of the World: Essays on Thomas Paine* (New York, 1988), p. 143.

Jeff Ritchie

Robert Burns and William Wordsworth: Positioning of a Romantic Artist in the Literary Marketplace

With the publication of the Kilmarnock edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, Burns positioned himself in the literary marketplace through the creation of different literary personae. Among those Burns created in this edition the “ploughman poet” and the “Scotch Bard” are particularly important to subsequent views of Burns as one who personifies the romantic artist. Burns’s near contemporary William Wordsworth defined his conceptions of the romantic artist or poet in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*,¹ and his reactions to Burns both preceding and following the Preface demonstrate, if not a causal relationship between Burns and Wordsworth’s theories of literature, then definitely a distinct parallel. But whereas Wordsworth sees the romantic artist as subjectively independent and timeless, his conception of the romantic artist does not take into account the impact of the marketplace and society on the artist; therefore the purpose underlying the creative act is often ignored or simply viewed in terms of an individualistic assertion of the artist’s viewpoint. When viewed in terms of Raymond Williams’ definition of the romantic artist and the social forces at work on him,² Wordsworth’s idealization of Burns as a separate and distinct entity dissolves into a product of a changing society and

¹William Wordsworth, “Preface, Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*,” *English Romantic Writers* (San Diego, 1967). Henceforth Preface.

²Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1850* (New York, 1983). Henceforth CS.

time. Burns's literary positioning and Wordsworth's interpretations of it can be seen as Burns self consciously creating and maintaining the role of the "ploughman poet" and the "Scotch Bard" as a result both of his desire to publish his poetry and his threatened national identity as a Scot in an increasingly Anglicized Great Britain.

The role of the ploughman poet in *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* is twofold. It dictates the subject matter and positions the artist. The subject matter of a ploughman poet revolves around agriculture and rural themes, and the role of the ploughman poet also positions the actual poet as one whose lack of formal education results in a poetry of natural ability. Burns's Kilmarnock edition of the *Poems*, its Preface, Burns's use of the vernacular and his subject matter all served to create this image and theme.

Within this conception of the ploughman poet can be seen a parallel to the idea of the romantic artist portrayed by Wordsworth. A poet is

a man speaking to men,. . . endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him (Preface, p. 324).

Poetry should be in the language of the common man, which is more permanent and philosophically minded than other languages. And Wordsworth defines

all good poetry [as] the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings...recollected in tranquillity...poems where any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply (Preface, p. 321).

The emphasis Wordsworth places on the uniqueness of the romantic artist should be noted, as well as the stress placed on the proper subject matter and language of poetry. Wordsworth's definitions are democratic in that they are accessible to everyone, especially the poor and uneducated.

Williams elaborates on Wordsworth and the Romantic periods' new conception of both the literary marketplace and the artist. The artist is a special kind of person who is no longer viewed as an artisan (CS, p. 36). The artist's craft is a result of genius rather than a learnable skill and is increasingly seen as both a specialized form of production and a means to truth. Furthermore, art is subjected to the demands of the market (the public) as a result of the change in the system of patronage which was occurring at this time (CS, pp. 32-3).

Viewed in light of Williams and paralleling Wordsworth, Burns self consciously created and maintained the role of the ploughman poet in the Preface to the Kilmarnock edition of *Poems*:

[Burns] sings the sentiments and manners, he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him, in his and their native language.³

Burns does not focus on the literary or social conventions of poetry which mold the poet, but rather the emotions, language and subject matter of the poet and common man. The Preface to the Kilmarnock edition exemplifies Burns's self-fashioning as a poet of sensibility, more akin to Wordsworth's definition of a romantic artist. He creates a history or picture of himself to compete and function within the literary marketplace and society; to combat the threats of criticism and industry to the artist as well as to combat the threat to the culture from which he draws his inspiration and material.

A fundamental part of this picture Burns creates is that he is a spontaneous and "heaven taught" poet, as in his poem *The Vision*.

Thou canst not learn, nor I can show,
To paint with *Thomson's* landscape-glow;
Or wake the bosom-melting throe,
 With *Shenstone's* art;
Or pour, with *Gray*, the moving flow,
 Warm on the heart⁴

The eighteenth century emphasis on the artist's forms and conventions, which can be taught, is replaced by romantic sensibility, which cannot be taught and is akin to the idea of genius. Burns writes in the Kilmarnock Preface,

The following trifles are not the production of the Poet, who, with all the advantages of learned art, and perhaps amid the elegancies and idlenesses of upper life, looks down for a rural theme, with an eye to Theocrites or Virgil. To the Author of this, these and other celebrated names their countrymen are, in their original languages, 'A fountain shut up, and a book sealed.'⁵

I find these lines both telling and ironic. The confession of an inability to read classical languages both betrays the lack of a classical education (which would be expected for a ploughman poet) as well as rhetorically distances Burns from possible failings of his poetry in regards to poetic convention. If his poetry fails, it is because he didn't know any better. However, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* would be found by those unable to understand Scots as "a fountain shut up, and a book sealed." In an ironic turn, through the use of

³Robert Burns, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Kilmarnock, 1786), p. iii.

⁴*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 112. Henceforth *Poems*.

⁵*Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Kilmarnock, 1786), p. iii.

Scots the exclusive world of the educated is partially excluded from the ploughman poet's world. However, this partial exclusion decries the decline of the ploughman poet's culture and language in his attempts to resurrect or recreate it.

Burns's lack of formal education and his subsequent posing as the "ploughman poet," aside from playing what is now considered the romantic theme of artistic genius versus classically trained imitator, also plays along the theme of native art forms. If the poet had only the models of Scottish folk songs and other common art to imitate or influence him, then this artist's art would be considered more uniquely Scottish than an artist who was able to read and be influenced by foreign or non-Scottish art forms, including English, continental and classical texts. The threats of the market place and industry to the artist are then mirrored in the threat of English and foreign culture to Scottish culture, in that all threaten to silence the ploughman poet. Taken in this light, he becomes the Scotch bard, the unique spokesperson of Caledonia.

In an interesting twist, Wordsworth, whose familiarity with the Cumberland border counties' dialects allowed him "not only to understand but to feel" Burns's poems, introduces in the same note an element which Burns poetry was to focus upon. Wordsworth writes:

May these few words serve as a warning to youthful Poets who are in danger of being carried away by the inundation of foreign literature from which our own is at present suffering so much, both in style and points of far greater concern.⁶

These lines echo what was inherent in Burns's poems, the encroaching English culture was eroding the Scottish language, customs, dress and culture, just as Wordsworth saw non-English literature encroaching upon English culture. Burns similarly exhorts and admonishes his Scottish audiences in "The Cotter's Saturday Night,"

O SCOTIA! my dear, my native soil!
 For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent!
 Long may thy hardy sons of *rustic toil*
 Be blest with health and peace and sweet content!
 And O may Heaven their simple lives prevent
 From *Luxury's* contagion, weak and vile!
 Then howe'er *crowns* and *coronets* be rent,
 A *virtuous Populace* may rise the while,
 And stand a wall of fire, around their much-lov'd ISLE.
(*Poems*, I, 151)

⁶William Wordsworth, note written in 1842; rptd. in *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Donald A. Low (London and Boston, 1974), p. 63. Henceforth Low.

The "crowns and coronets . . . rent," perhaps referring to the events of 1745-46, resulted in the defeat of the Scots. With this in mind, the "virtuous populace," referring to the "hardy sons" of Scotland, are called upon to "stand a wall of fire around their much-lov'd isle." The connotations of this exhortation suggest far more than merely protection of Scotland from foreign enemies. It suggests an idealization of culture as a pure, static and monolithic entity which is not open to change or interaction with other cultures.

Burns aspired to be a Scotch Bard, to be recognized as the voice of his people, so that the dissemination of Scottish culture might take place. In a letter to a friend, Burns wrote,

The appellation of, a Scotch Bard, is by far my highest pride; to continue to deserve it is my most exalted ambition. —Scottish scenes, and Scottish story are the themes I could wish to sing. —I have no greater, no dearer aim than to have it in my power, unplagu'd with the routine of business, for which Heaven knows I am unfit enough, 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 honored abodes of her heroes.⁷

Yet who is this people for whom Burns is the voice? Essentially, Burns's ambition is to take part in the construction of the Scottish myth; the creation and preservation of what Peter Murphy calls a "blurry people" or "imaginary class,"⁸ which in fact echoes Wordsworth's idea of the common man. Both are the idealized stereotype of a nationalistic myth. But whereas Wordsworth generalizes his mythic people to Eurocentrically represent humanity, Burns's subject matter is essentially Scottish and patriotic. While possibly of the highest motives, Burns positioned his work in such a way that allowed him to better sell his books. He converted the celebration of native culture into an economic activity through marketing a "people" to the public.

Yet while Burns was creating this idealized or generalized Scottish people, the public, or those people to whom he had to sell his works, was in the process of change as well. The patronage system was gradually changing into a system of subscription, and, later, commercial publishing, and this change affected the manner in which artist and his audience interact (CS, pp. 32-4). The ploughman poet or romantic artist increasingly found himself catering to the needs and demands of a largely unknown public. This change in the literary marketplace roughly coincided with the change in the linguistic relationship between England and Scotland. The Act of Union, May 1, 1707, and other Scottish political setbacks, gradually came to mean that English was the official lan-

⁷*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), I, 101.

⁸Peter Murphy, *Poetry as an Occupation and an Art in Britain, 1760-1830* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 51.

guage of Britain. That Burns did not adhere strictly to the vernacular in his poems, and that he did include a glossary in the Kilmarnock edition possibly indicate that the accessibility of Scots to a potential reader (or especially buyer) was somewhat restricted and that the market forces prevailed. However, the inclusion of a glossary in the Kilmarnock edition stressed the linguistic and cultural differences that still remained between the two cultures and served to create the image of a more coherent Scottish culture in order to oppose the English “other.” Also, the glossary fulfills two different purposes. It serves to impress upon the readers the existence of a coherent Scottish culture, and it reminds these same readers of the repressed and forgotten customs and language of the Scots. The bottom line was that in order for Burns to get the book published, he had to collect subscriptions. The more people could access his poetry, the more copies could be sold.

John Anderson, a contemporary of Burns who reviewed *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, echoed this sentiment when he wrote in *The Monthly Review*, a London publication:

We much regret that these poems are written in some measure in an unknown tongue, which must deprive most of our Readers of the pleasure they would otherwise naturally create; being composed in the Scottish dialect, which contains many words that are altogether unknown to an English reader.⁹

Even though Burns included notes and a glossary, the result was still that of reading a foreign language, further reinforcing the difference between the “us” of Scottish language and culture and the “them” of the encroaching English language and culture.

Also, the creation of a cultural myth, idealized in ideas of a “people,” provides a useful marketing ploy, in that foreign contaminants are xenophobically walled out, that nothing might alter or threaten the “people” created. Burns ties together economic and cultural production in an odd mixture of national pride, poetry, and Scotch in the poem “Scotch Drink,” where he celebrates native economic and literary production through playfully identifying Scotch as the Muse of the Scottish Bard.

O thou, my MUSE! guid, auld SCOTCH DRINK!
 Whether thro’ wimplin worms thou jink,
 Or, richly brown, ream owre the brink,
 In glorious faem,
 Inspire me, till I *lisp* an’ *wink*,
 To sing thy name! (*Poems*, I, 173)

Through relating the economic concerns of Scotland to both Scottish cultural and literary production, Burns gives an added incentive to buying his poetry.

⁹John Anderson, unsigned review; rptd. in Low, p. 72.

Wae worth that *Brandy*, burnan trash!
Fell source o' monie a pain an' brash!
Twins mony a poor, doylt, druken hash,
 O' half his days;
An' sends, beside, auld *Scotland's* cash
 To her warst faes. (*Poems*, I, 175)

Burns's admonition to his readers to reject foreign goods is similar to that of Wordsworth's warning to "youthful Poets who are in danger of being carried away by the inundation of foreign literature."¹⁰ Not only are those people who buy foreign wines, or foreign products from countries such as France or England, sending the money of Scotland to their foes, but by inference supporting the Bard by buying his poetry becomes a patriotic act.

In "The Cotter's Saturday Night," Burns, mixing both English and Scots, ends the poem with an exhortation to the Scots and an encomium on Scotland. Speaking of Scotland, Burns writes,

O THOU! who pour'd the *patriotic tide*,
 That stream'd thro' great, unhappy WALLACE' heart;
Who dar'd to, nobly, stem tyrannic pride,
 Or *nobly die*, the second glorious part:
(The Patriot's GOD, peculiarly thou art,
 His *friend, inspirer, guardian and reward!*)
O never, never SCOTIA's realm desert,
 But still the *Patriot*, and the *Patriot-bard*,
In bright succession raise, her *Ornament and Guard!*
 (*Poems*, I, 151-2)

It is ironic that Burns should praise Scotland and exhort those for whom Scotland serves as "friend, inspirer, guardian, and reward," the "patriot" and the "patriot Bard," in English, and base his poem on English models. As Henderson notes:

This is true, but the piece as a whole is formed on English models. It is the most artificial and the most imitative of Burns's works. Not only is the influence of Gray's *Elegy* conspicuous, but also there are echoes of Pope, Thomson, Goldsmith, and even Milton; while the stanza, which was taken, not from Spenser, whom Burns had not then read, but from Beattie and Shenstone, is so purely English as to lie outside the range of Burns's experience and accomplishment.¹¹

¹⁰William Wordsworth, note written in 1842; rptd. in Low, p. 163.

¹¹*The Poetry of Robert Burns*, ed. W. E. Henley and T. F. Henderson. 4 vols. (London, 1896), I, 362.

This stanza and the language it is written in, more than any other, demonstrate the tenuous position Scottish culture enjoyed in Great Britain. The “patriot Bard” or “Scotch Bard” is forced to abandon his own language, as a result of the decline in his own culture, and sing the praises of his native land in a foreign tongue. Yet, Carol McGuiirk holds that Burns’s purpose in writing in dialect was,

to emphasize Scotland’s continuing cultural difference ... he chose dialect not only to assert the substantiality and validity of his Scottish world but also to disseminate it abroad: not so much to reflect Scotland as to evoke it.¹²

The fact that he emphasized his Scots vocabulary, when taken in this light, downplays cultural preservation and nationalism as primary motivations and pushes to the front his social ambitions and the motivation of publishing and sales. In order to disseminate his picture of Scotland, Burns had to sell books. In making Scotland intelligible to outsiders, through mixing Scots with English and adding a glossary and notes, Burns widened his market. The rusticity and Scottishness of his pictures would be put forward as the quaint attribute of a marketable commodity. The role of the “Scotch Bard,” related to and stemming from the “ploughman poet,” is just the position for which Burns aspired, which is basically that of a patriotic master craftsman pedaling his wares.

Romanticism in these terms can be related to cultural nationalism. The Romantic artist is attempting through the use of language, to create a “People” in Williams’s sense of the word, through the artifice of the artist’s literary creations. Wordsworth’s romantic notion of native genius, the language of the common man used to describe common scenes from everyday life, all of these, if based solely on the example of Burns, stem from an individual in a combative stance in both the marketplace and a culturally ravenous and consuming world. Wordsworth’s conceptions of the romantic artist, as applied to Burns, are erroneous, because Wordsworth failed to take into account the social factors influencing literary production. In opposition to Wordsworth’s belief in a peaceful coexistence with nature and the world (a belief he later outgrew), the idea of a romantic artist, as seen in Burns, revolves around recovering/recreating/creating a “cultural identity” of the Scottish people and competing in a literary marketplace to make this artifice known and permanent.

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¹²Carol McGuiirk, “Scottish Hero, Scottish Victim: Myths of Robert Burns,” in *The History of Scottish Literature*, Vol. II, ed. Andrew Hook (Aberdeen, 1987), p. 236.

Recovering Burns's Lyric Legacy: Teaching Burns in American Universities

This paper has grown out of a need to explore the problems of teaching Burns in my own setting, the University of Georgia, specifically in the contexts of British literature surveys, introductory literature courses, and Romantic literature courses. It is a lonely business. Recently I surveyed the faculty of my English department, only to discover that I am one of only two to have taught Burns in the past several years. Most say that, given time constraints, the choice is between Burns and Blake—and Blake wins.

Teachers of British literature, faced with institutionally imposed course titles such as "Masterpieces of English Literature since 1700," may not recognize in university curricula what Donald Low has called "a gross imbalance in favour of the English poets."¹ English departments lacking specialization in Scottish literature (almost all of them) often ignore Scottish writers completely; and Burns exemplifies the Scottish poet whose work has rated inclusion in the anthology but seldom on the syllabus. Based on my conversations with faculty at Georgia as well as with some from other universities, the reasons for overlooking Burns may be generalized. Simply put, most teachers lack enough basic knowledge of Burns to feel comfortable teaching him with any authority. Complicating factors abound, but include the difficulties inherent in teaching a vernacular poet and a general misunderstanding of Burns's role in literary history. Resource materials and recordings lately becoming available render the former issue slightly less

¹ *Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, 1986), p. 131.

problematic; the latter, however, demands a rethinking of Burns's relationship to Romanticism.

The critical tradition having regarded Burns more in the light of biography than poetry, even today he is considered more rustic than poetic genius. Indeed, Low reminds us of T. S. Eliot's patronizing—and distancing—censure of Burns as the “decadent representative of a great alien tradition.”² To rescue Burns's reputation from post-Eliot dismissiveness, we must find ways of communicating to the next generation of scholars the crucial nature of Burns's contributions to lyric poetry. This paper will examine his position in the canon and suggest a few ways in which Burns, as a moving force in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature, may be integrated into the curriculum.

The problem is not that Burns is absent from the canon; having long held a place in the sacred “Hall of Literature,” he might even be described as a literary monument in what Tricia Lootens calls literary history's “architectural canon,” the “imaginary architecture of canon-as-place”:

Envisioned as a museum, church, courtroom, library, or pantheon, this canon...is a creation whose metaphoric halls are fit to house the cultural “monuments” invoked by works such as T. S. Eliot's “Tradition and the Individual Talent.”³

This canon, “[c]onceived as an enclosed physical space...is a place of containment: its contents are almost inevitably defined by exclusion and shaped through competition.” (p. 7). Such a place houses the metaphorical busts of many great writers, among them certainly a bust of Burns—in a back room perhaps, covered with dust.

The picture I have drawn is not a pretty one for lovers of Burns's poetry, but it is one that should be considered further. For professors and scholarly critical books—though they contribute to the construction of new wings of the Hall of Literature, the refurbishing of old wings, or the acquisition of new monuments—are not the ultimate arbiters of taste. Far more authority lies with teaching anthologies, especially those recommended or required for department-wide use: in selections that purportedly represent an author's “characteristic” work as well as those excluded, and in biographical headnotes that perpetuate our favorite anecdotes, many of which have attained the status of legend. Here students may find the “extra” information not covered in class, the background they believe necessary for the course. As Lootens argues in her discussion of “literary legend formation,” certain passages of criticism “have

²“Byron and Burns,” *SSL*, 27 (1992), 129; Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (Cambridge, MA, 1933), p. 98.

³Lootens traces this concept of canonization throughout literary history, but focuses particularly on its nineteenth-century constructs. See *Lost Saints: Gender, Silence, and Victorian Literary Canonization* (Charlottesville, 1996), p. 6.

attained iconicity” and influence readings of an author’s work: “Literally, iconized criticism often ‘introduces’ poets and their poetry, thus shaping critical first impressions” (p. 39). The biographical tidbits offered in anthology headnotes are convenient because they are memorable and portable, easily detached from the poetry, and reducible to a short-answer question on a mid-term exam.

First we may consider the ways in which Introduction to Literature anthologies used as Freshman English readers present the legendary, monumental Burns. These texts generally include one or two poems by Burns, almost exclusively one of the short lyrics. Most often, editors pull “A red red Rose” into service to exemplify figurative language (especially simile, metaphor, and hyperbole) or the love lyric, though little if any mention is made of Burns’s lyrics as songs. Among the anthologies I have examined, other choices that appear occasionally include “John Anderson my Jo,” “Mary Morison,” and “Auld lang syne” (the latter used as an example of dialect).⁴

And how does Burns figure in that monumental tome the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, so frequently used in British literature survey courses? In the first three editions (1962, 1968, 1974), Burns appears as the first author of the Romantic Period and is represented by thirteen poems: “Song” (It was upon a Lammas night; this work is also variously known by its air *Corn Rigs are bonie* or the first line of the chorus: “Corn rigs, an’ barley rigs”), “To a Mouse,” “Green grow the Rashes,” “Holy Willie’s Prayer,” “Willie brew’d a peck o’ maut,” “Tam o’ Shanter,” “Afton Water,” “Song” (Ae fond kiss), “The Banks o’ Doon” (“A” version, Ye flowery banks o’ bonnie Doon), “Robert Bruce’s March to Bannockburn” (Scots, wha hae), “Song—For a’ that and a’ that,” “A red red Rose” and “Auld lang syne.” With the fourth, fifth, and sixth editions (1979, 1986, 1993), Burns shifts to second place after William Blake, and “To a Louse” replaces “Corn rigs an’ barley rigs” and “Willie brew’d a peck o’ maut” for a total of twelve poems. This is not a bad selection for an anthology of its kind. The range of Burns’s skill in lyric poetry, mock heroic, and song is shown; and anyone teaching a survey of British literature can find material here that will engage students. Considering Burns-as-monument, however, with the exception of a few words the sympathetic biographical headnote by David Daiches has remained unchanged—and perhaps undusted—over the course of thirty-four years. Burns makes no appearance in the *Norton Anthology of Major Authors*, in which Blake is generously represented.

⁴ Interestingly, Michael Meyer, editor of *The Bedford Introduction to Literature: Reading, Thinking, and Writing*, 4th ed. (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1996), ignores Burns’s use of a persona in “John Anderson my Jo,” calling the song “a sincere lyric with little distance between the speaker and Burns himself....It expresses the importance to him of companionship and looks back on a friendship that has lasted into old age” (p. 274).

Burns actually fares better in the Norton than in two new anthologies of Romanticism, a wing of the Hall of Literature where, given the direction of recent Burns scholarship, we might expect to find more selections from which to choose.⁵ In Duncan Wu's influential *Romanticism: An Anthology*, the choices ostensibly "indicate [Burns's] range and influence."⁶ In the brief headnote, Wu rightly emphasizes Burns's popularity among the Romantics; however, Burns is represented by only five poems: the first "Epistle to J[ohn] Lapraik, An Old Scotch Bard" (dated Apr. 1, 1785), "To a Mouse," "Man was Made to Mourn, a Dirge," "Tam o' Shanter," and "A red red Rose" (edited from manuscript). Another anthology, *British Literature: 1780-1830* edited by Anne K. Mellor and Richard E. Matlak, has been long-awaited because of its promise to include noncanonical writers.⁷ In a selection decidedly different from that offered by the Norton, this anthology contains eleven Burns poems: "John Barleycorn," "To a Mouse," "Address to the Unco Guid, or the Rigidly Righteous," "Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn," "Song—For a' that and a' that," "Auld lang syne," "Such a parcel of rogues in a nation," "A red red Rose," "The Fornicator," "Green grow the Rashers," and "Why should na poor folk mowe."

⁵Disturbingly, the recently published anthologies considered in this essay contain one-sixth to one-third the number of Burns's poems as Russell Noyes' 1956 anthology *Romantic Poetry and Prose* (Oxford University Press), which includes thirty poems. (In a five-and-a-half-page headnote, Noyes also challenges common Burns myths and discusses in detail the poet's place in late eighteenth-century Romanticism.) If further analysis of anthologies confirms the trend suggested here, a decline in the representation of Burns, perhaps scholars should be concerned that Burns may soon be "decanonized" through neglect, even as many noncanonical writers are being introduced or reintroduced into the canon through the efforts of energetic proponents.

⁶*Romanticism: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 119. In the headnote, Wu offers a rationale for his choices:

"Epistle to J. Lapraik, an Old Scotch Bard" shows Burns's colloquial, lyric style at its most engaging; his advocacy of "nature's fire" reveals a poetic creed that would strongly influence *Lyrical Ballads*. "To a Mouse" (one of Dorothy Wordsworth's favourite poems) underlines Burns's sympathy with the natural world. "Man was Made to Mourn" is a precursor of Wordsworth's "The Last of the Flock" and "Simon Lee," the old man at its centre anticipating such characters as Wordsworth's leech-gatherer. "Tam o' Shanter" may be Burns's most important single work, remarkable for the skill of its storytelling and its energy.

⁷*British Literature: 1780-1830* (Fort Worth: Harcourt-Brace, 1996) claims a higher proportion of women writers than any other anthology of Romanticism. This anthology seems to slight Scottish poets, however; for example, though John Clare is amply represented by ten poems (only one less than Burns), James Hogg is notably absent. Henceforth *British Literature*.

British Literature also includes excerpts from two of Burns's letters, one to Helen Craik (of 9 Aug. 1790) claiming that "Bewitching Poesy is like Bewitching Woman," the other to Robert Graham of Fintry (of 5 Jan. 1793) in response to charges that he sympathized with the French Revolution (*British Literature*, pp. 359-60). Presenting works in order of their historical production, Mellor and Matlak clearly favor the politically rebellious and bawdy Burns; they omit "Tam o' Shanter" and skim over the love lyrics, erroneously numbering the songs "200 or more" instead of the 370-plus of which we are aware (*British Literature*, p. 355). The biographical headnote perpetuates the "destructive" myths about Burns⁸ that are downplayed, relatively speaking, in the more mainstream *Norton Anthology*. The Norton cites the "Heaven-taught Ploughman" label, but at least frames it with a discussion of the "natural poet" as "a favorite myth of later 18th-century primitivists":

Burns himself sometimes fostered this belief, and rather enjoyed playing the role of the poet by instinct. But in fact he was a well-read (although largely self-educated) man, whose quick intelligence and sensibility enabled him to make the most of limited opportunities. And although he broke clear of the contemporary conventions of decayed English neoclassicism, he did so not by instinct but as a deliberate craftsman who turned to two earlier traditions for his models—the Scottish oral tradition of folklore and folk song, and the highly developed Scottish literary tradition, which goes back to the late Middle Ages.⁹

Compare this to Mellor and Matlak, where Burns is relegated once again to rustic genius, albeit legendary one:

One might apply to Robert Burns, Voltaire's comment on the divine: "if [He] did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him." Burns was an ideal discovery for a democratic, revolutionary age, because he fulfilled the expectations of cultural primitivism: that poets be natural, rather than schooled; that they be isolated from literate culture by either place or class to be free of meretricious aesthetic norms; so that their poetry and its language would flow freely from the heart and its passions, rather than be contaminated by artifice and imitation. Born in a two-room, thatched cottage, Burns did not have to pretend to be a peasant poet. Almost entirely self-educated, Burns could only modestly compete with university-trained poets, when he attempted writing in the King's English. Thus it was a great advantage to him

⁸ See Carol McQuirk, "Scottish Hero, Scottish Victim: Myths of Robert Burns" (*The History of Scottish Literature*, Vol. II, ed. Andrew Hook (Aberdeen, 1987), p. 220. Henceforth McQuirk.

⁹ M. H. Abrams, ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th ed. 2 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), II, 80.

that scholars and antiquarians were prepared to receive a “natural” bard who would validate their philosophical theories of native genius (*British Literature*, p. 354).

Not only do Mellor and Matlak contradict the long-fought-for and myth-diffusing understanding of Burns as a careful and deliberate craftsman, one who borrowed and adapted the aesthetic principles of esteemed predecessors, but they also resurrect the moniker of “Heaven-taught Ploughman,” and identify Mackenzie as “the celebrated author of *The Man of Feeling*” (1771); in one stroke they perpetuate the myths of Burns as primitive artist and sentimental Man of Feeling, as though approving the legendary accounts.¹⁰ Drawing attention to Burns’s reputation as a womanizer, they name the historical women who were his “muses,” thereby emphasizing his love affairs and illegitimate children. The introductory headnote highlights “The Fornicator,” detailing Burns’s affair with Elizabeth Paton and their subsequent public humiliation by the church, concluding that here and in “Why should na poor folk mowe?” Burns “makes lovemaking an act of social, political, and even existential significance” (*British Literature*, p. 355).

Much of this is undeniable, and all of it is fascinating, but how does the information contribute to our understanding of Burns’s poetry? Unfortunately, what survives in academic memory is mostly anecdotal praise of the variety that Burns critics have fought to overcome. As Carol McGuirk observes, “Burns the person has been ‘immobilized’ by Burns the myth, metamorphosed into a ‘motionless prototype’...who lives on in place of the complex and notably elusive man behind the assumed mask” (McGuirk, p. 219). That myth determines the shape of the Burns monument in the architectural canon, the sacred Hall of Literature.

Relative to the other new anthologies of Romanticism considered here, Jerome J. McGann’s *New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse* covers a wider range of Burns’s influential works.¹¹ From *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), he includes “Address to the Deil,” “Halloween,” “The Cotter’s Saturday Night,” “To a Louse,” and “It was upon a Lammas night.” From *Scots Musical Museum* (1790, 1792, 1796) come “John Anderson my Jo,” “Song” (Ae Fond Kiss), and “A red red Rose.” This anthology also includes works published individually, including *Tam o’ Shanter*, *Love and Liberty*, *A Cantata*, and “Holy Willie’s Prayer.” McGann’s presentation of all material in order of publication, without isolating any author’s works, may cast

¹⁰ See Donald Low, ed., *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage* (London & Boston, 1974), pp. 16-17, for a discussion of Mackenzie’s mixed response to *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* and the damaging effects of his review.

¹¹ Oxford University Press, 1994.

Burns's influence on the Romantics in its most advantageous light.¹² McGann avoids creating icons. Omitting headnotes, he comments on the works only in the context of concise endnotes; for *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, acknowledged as one of the most important works published in 1786, he defers to Burns's own prefatory note, then provides an extensive gloss and informative annotations.

To navigate the maze of anthologies and to counter the negative effects of iconized criticism, we must insist on recognizing Burns's place in literary history, his profound effect on the development of lyric poetry. The Romantic poets celebrated Burns in reviews, letters, imitation, and poetic tribute.¹³ That they admired him is certain; that they learned from him is more significant. Far more than hero worship, the poets' recognition of Burns's qualities bespeaks their admiration of his poetic skill. Poets as diverse as Wordsworth, Keats, Scott, Byron, Hogg, Joanna Baillie, and Carolina Oliphant (Lady Nairne) gleaned inspiration from Burns that they could not find elsewhere. By shifting emphasis from biography to poetry, with students we may discover—and recover—Burns's innovations. His advocacy of natural language predates Wordsworth's manifesto in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. His musical use of vernacular Scots opened doors for Scottish writers who otherwise never would have picked up the pen. In other experimentation, he adopted and imaginatively transformed poetic conventions, as in his ingenious applications of Standard Habbie. (Why, indeed, should Burns's stanzaic choices not be as familiar as Keats's Spenserian stanza in "The Eve of St. Agnes" or Byron's *ottava rima* in *Don Juan*?) Perhaps most important is his use of the folksong and ballad traditions, for he carried the example of Allan Ramsay, Thomas Percy and David Herd a step beyond antiquarian imitation, into the arena of sophisticated lyric poetry and song. As what McQuirk terms "a self-consciously idealizing reviser" rather than "a neutral transmitter of collective folk tradition,"¹⁴ Burns provided a model for using oral tradition for literary purposes. The poets following him eagerly explored this role for themselves.

In teaching Burns, I continue to experiment with methodology. I have found that students benefit from playing out loud with the Scots language, practicing old-fashioned recitation to experience the musicality of Burns's

¹² Given the tendency among authors of the period to circulate manuscripts among their friends, McGann's emphasis on the historical production of texts (i.e., chronological publication) presents problems of its own. An attempt to place Burns's poetry in its Romantic context, however, benefits from this kind of organization; generally, those who credit his influence the most encountered him first through his published work.

¹³ See Low, *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage*.

¹⁴ "Burns, Bakhtin, and the Opposition of Poetic and Novelistic Discourse: A Response to David Morris," *The Eighteenth Century*, 32 (1991), 63.

supplemented, and the prejudices of iconized criticism must be mitigated. I do not suggest that Burns's colorful biography be ignored but that privileging his poetry (as informed by his life) will clarify his place in the development of lyric. Making a monument of Burns does him disservice. A monument is stationary, acted upon rather than acting, whereas Burns's poetry, above all else, celebrates active living.

University of Stirling



Robert Burns
A Gray 1997

Donald Wesling

Moral Sentiment from Adam Smith to Robert Burns

Reconstructing from the 1990s, I shall attempt to think back from the 1780s to attach Robert Burns's moral premises to a line of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy. I say *attach to* and not *derive from*, because along the way I will argue that in the famous Kilmarnock volume (*Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, 1786) Burns wrenches and exceeds the Francis Hutcheson-David Hume-Adam Smith philosophy of approbation, or judgment of the propriety of passions, where the moral agent is seen by the eyes of the community. After 1789 and the events in France, Burns enters the insurrectionary politics of a new era, though more obliquely and hesitatingly than the unknown William Blake and the infamous Thomas Paine. Now, say in 1795 when Burns versifies Paine in "The rank is but the guinea's stamp, / The Man's the gowd for a' that,"¹ he is more concerned with exposing the inequities of rank in his Scottish community than with defining—also aggressively defying—a reputation as a man of correct and modest virtue. By the end of this essay I come round, if like Burns only partially, to Romanticism. Like his near-contemporary Blake, Burns in his poetry is the culmination, and surpassing, of certain eighteenth century traditions. Neo-classical satirists and Romantic singing bards: Blake and Burns are transitionally both, but also neither because their satire is no longer Augustan, and their songs are not yet individualized as lyrical ballads.

¹"For a' that and a' that" in *Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), II, 762. Henceforth *Poems*.

The starting point is the double question David Craig asked in *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People, 1660-1830*:

Why was it . . . that the expression of Scottish socialness was carried on so exclusively by the vernacular writers? why did the communications represented by the national poetry stay so insulated from the more refined manners and ideas which the educated classes were learning from France and England?"²

I have no wish to challenge Craig's splendid evidences from Scots poetry, a "distinctively native mode of expression [which] held together through several generations" (p. 20) and culminated in Burns, but I would make the suggestion that Burns lived out his Scottish socialness in and through moral categories he learnt, assuredly, from Calvinist religion—but also (here is where I claim a modest originality) from Scottish philosophers. That is, Burns is the linking figure between the Scottish people and the educated classes, and he works out the linkage through his distorting reference to certain categories of the system of approbation-disapprobation, principally self-control, sympathy, generosity, and remorse. The linkage is one-way, from Burns to educated Glasgow and Edinburgh, because the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment do not mention poetry; and because the Edinburgh people who become or pose as his patrons, after his trip there in 1786, usually make a myth of what he is about.

Burns may not have read every page of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published in the year of Burns's birth, but one page obviously caught his passionate attention in 1783. We do not know why Burns identified with just this passage in Smith, but he did; it was not until later that he committed the deed that provoked condemnation by many members of his community.³ Burns entered in his commonplace book two long sentences where he said "I entirely agree with that judicious philosopher, Mr Smith," and then he wrote a short, rather horribly conventional blank verse poem about the embittering sentiment of remorse.⁴ His views, in the poem and related prose, entirely follow Smith's Section II, Chapter 2, "Of the Sense of Justice, of Remorse, and of the consciousness of Merit," on the painfulness and sense of social isolation of remorse, where our

²David Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People, 1660-1830* (London, 1961), p. 20.

³On May 22, 1785, Burns's daughter Elizabeth (his "dear-bought Bess") Paton was born, but it was not until June 25, 1786, that he appeared before the Kirk Session and then made the required appearances before his congregation for the sin of fornication with Jean Armour. On Burns's behalf it should be recalled that his offer of marriage was refused by Jean's father. It was not at all uncommon among the peasantry of eighteenth-century Scotland for a couple to delay marriage until pregnancy occurred.

⁴The sentences on Smith, from the *First Commonplace Book*, are printed as a headnote to "Remorse" (*Poems*, I, 37).

guilt is deepened by the knowledge that our crime has ruined another person, and where we learn the need, in Burns's phrasing, for "a proper penitential sense of our misconduct" and "a glorious effort of Self-command" (*Poems*, I, 37). Burns appears to have been bowled over by the second-last paragraph of Smith's chapter, where Smith gives a splendid moral-psychological account of the stages of remorse in the violator, who is self-banished from society and then ricochets back from solitude into the "presence of mankind" to beg protection from the judges who have condemned him. The poem's reference to the torment of a "burning Hell" seems to be Burns's own image, but he takes directly from Smith the sense that remorse is the "most dreadful"⁵ of sentiments, that it comes from involving innocent others in folly, that the terror of punishment needs to be met by penance and firm resolve—what Burns in the last line of the poem calls "magnanimity of soul." I mention this explicit Burns-Smith connection, in a poem Burns himself did not print and whose merit is only as a symptom, because we can generate from the terms in this poem what is most important of Smith's moral system; then we can show how in the *Kilmarnock* volume Burns uses Smith's categories to judge himself and those who would judge him.

Remorse is not simple regret, but more like shame and guilt in its acceptance of responsibility for injuries to others. Remorse is directed inward, because one holds oneself to blame; it would seem, though neither Smith nor Burns says this, a self-indulgent sentiment, wherein the human agent is more concerned with its esteem in its own eyes than with the victims of its folly. Remorse wards off censure from others by first inflicting it upon oneself; such dramas of self-interest are typical of Burns, as we shall see.

In the paragraph just following where Adam Smith offers his disturbing description of remorse, the philosopher examines how the "opposite behavior"—that is, generosity—"naturally inspires the opposite sentiment" (Smith, p. 85). Performing a generous action, giving to another rather than taking, is worthy of the approbation of an impartial judge, and the generous person is "secure that he has rendered himself worthy of [the] most favorable regards" of all mankind (Smith, p. 85). Generosity is not antagonistic to self-love, if we wish to inspire in others, about ourselves, the sentiments of approbation or gratitude, or if we wish to avoid blame, censure, or punishment. Of all human virtues, generosity is most useful to other persons. The tenderness of humanity is the virtue of a woman, Smith unkindly says (Smith, pp. 190-91), while generosity is the virtue of a man who has greater self-denial, self-command, and a fuller sense of propriety. Generosity, magnanimity, and justice command a high degree of admiration (Smith, p. 167). In allowing magnanimity to decline into a general sense of benevolence, we have perhaps lost the full urgent Enlightenment concern for the dignity of one who can learn from the community's disapprobation, and wisely judge how and

⁵Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford, 1976), p. 85. Henceforth Smith.

when to despise an advantage. Justice is the most useful to society of all these virtues. Smith says, “though it may be awkward and pedantic to affect too strict an adherence to the common rules of prudence or generosity, there is no pedantry in sticking fast to the rules of justice” (Smith, p. 175); this because justice maintains the integrity of the social rules themselves in their general applicability to all persons.

Those are some leading value-terms of Smith’s system, categories he shares with his Scottish predecessors in the philosophy of approbation, Hutcheson and Hume. Earlier than Smith, Hume in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), had held that “virtue is whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation”—and vice the contrary;⁶ both Hume and Smith determine moral approbation by qualities as they are agreeable to others, and both make fellow-feeling, or sentiment or sympathy, a main constituent of their moral philosophy. Smith’s originality involves developing the system of regard, amplifying the relationships of the sentiments, emphasizing the mediating role of sympathy for others as we calculate our position in relation to them, and notably theorizing the role of a real or imaginary impartial spectator—whose opinion we might take as standing for the community’s. Believing that self-control is the capability around which all the other passions gravitate, Hume and Smith are moral conservatives who applaud cool behavior, even as they elaborate a theory of the passions; for them humans can be purposive and rational in their emotional lives.

Why bother to outline this classification of the passions? It is always of value to inquire how subjectivity is fitted into discourse, and Hume and Smith are distinguished contributors to a European problematic that is part of the fate of feeling in the West. In the 1980s, Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (1981, 1984) rejected the Enlightenment project of Hume and Smith because of the disappearance, there, “of any connection between the precepts of morality and the facts of human nature,” and the inadequacy of their notion of sympathy as a philosophical fiction to bridge the logical gap.⁷ In Winter 1996, *New Literary History* built a whole issue around a programmatic essay by Tzvetan Todorov, who takes Smith with Rousseau and Hegel as the great Western philosophers of the social dimension of our experience.⁸ Todorov defends moral recognition, in the eyes of the community, against what he calls the “self-mutilating” (p. 14) monotony of current scholarship’s obsession with a conflict over power. So Smith has not been forgotten in serious recent work. Still, the mapping of the

⁶David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), ed. J. B. Schneewind (Indianapolis, 1983), p. 85.

⁷Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, 1984), p. 56 (quotation), p. 49 (on inadequacy of sympathy).

⁸Tzvetan Todorov, “Living Alone Together,” *New Literary History*, 27 (Winter 1996), 1-14.

relationships of the passions is a frankly archaic side of Smith's book, and my purpose in returning to it is not to denounce or promote Smith but to show a pattern of behavior in Burns's *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*.

This great book opens with an abject Preface, and ends with the imagined epitaph of a poet, entirely Adam-Smithian in its invocation of fellow-feeling, denunciation of unchastity, and last-stanza hope for the italics-emphasized quality of "*self-controul*" (*Poems*, I, 247). The contents of this book, between these wobbling-tone brackets, often lead us to think that Burns is a combustible person who would say anything. There is the element of danger and instability. From Smith, Burns apparently drew reinforcement for his impulses to self-command, and permission for his impulses to sympathy. His book contains many magnificent peaks of sentiment, profound and quotable, such as lines that are straight out of Smith though strikingly transformed by context:

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see ourself as others see us!
(*"To a Louse"*; *Poems*, I, 194. Italics are Burns's)

Who else but Burns would have seen that, and who else could have used it for a distinctively Scottish socialness?

The person who lacks it most, most eagerly supplicates self-control. Burns in his 1783 poem "Remorse," worried about his reputation, has already the developed anxiety that will persist to his dying words—on how his character will be attacked as soon as he dies. It is this anxiety of being in the eyes of the community that predisposes Burns to the moral philosophy of Smith, where he sees his weakness chastised and also his possible redemption through self-command. His weakness, he well knows, is for the most part a specifically sexual emotional volatility, what he calls the "*softer flame*" in the last-page "Bard's Epitaph" of the Kilmarnock volume (*Poems*, I, 247). Like David Hume, who in one of his essays declared that the "affection of gallantry is natural in the highest degree...as generous as it is natural,"⁹ Burns was more apt than Smith was, or than we are, to forgive and wish forgiven sexual follies and crimes.

Carol McGuirk puts the general point well when she affirms that "to be candid, even feckless, in one's emotional responses was central to Burns's idea of being heroically human."¹⁰ She thinks Burns, in his inability to pin down a stable identity, is like James Boswell, that wavering Scot who needing something obdurate cultivated in Samuel Johnson a model and interlocutor of supreme definiteness—except that Burns had no Johnson. Burns, says McGuirk, exposes his "vast social unease" (see pp. 86-8) in his letters, not in his poems, which after

⁹David Hume, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 132-3.

¹⁰Carol McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (Athens, GA, 1985), p. 129.

all are very secure and subtle in their presentation of character-types and in their firm familiar sense of who may be the addressee of the utterance. I would extend the "vast social unease" to the poems, and will argue that Burns's Lowland, laborer-farmer experiences of class and gender, mediated through moral categories he partly learned from Smith, permeate the Kilmarnock volume as well. The unease is no place more evident than in the structure of experience I have already called "warding-off." In "Remorse," Burns inflicted punishment on himself in order to duck the disapprobation of his community; in the satirical and familiar-epistle poems of the later 1780s, where misanthropy is the polar opposite of sympathy, he excoriates others, including others not known to him personally, like King George III. The person who craves self-control most eagerly identifies the want or excess of self-control in others; those vulnerable to censure, censure first. In many of the poems of the 1780s, within and without the 1786 volume, Burns is the virtuoso of the preemptive insult.

Burns had twenty years as a writer. He began writing songs at 16 under the combined incentive, he said, of love for a girl and competition with the poem-writing son of a laird. He worked largely as a satirist and familiar-epistle poet to the age of twenty-seven, when his breakthrough to publishing and to Edinburgh high society, in 1786, put him in touch with the wider intellectual community in Scotland. Then he spent the decade to his death working largely as a writer and re-writer of Scottish songs. The songs Burns arrives at, or ends with, effortlessly find a language anterior to anxiety of class and masculine desire, and previous to propriety, esteem, and the regard of community. Those like David Craig and Angus Calder, who would connect Burns to the Scottish folk tradition through the songs, are perhaps the critics least likely to see Burns's linkage with the other, educated tradition through the language of approbation in satires and epistles.¹¹ To study the language of approbation, we must focus on the work other than songs. We should remember that contest with the laird's son, whose deep meaning I interpret as inaugurating the intention of literature, which hoists Burns from his social and moral milieu, puts him into articulate conflict with the monologic Calvinists of Ayr and Irvine, obliges him to read Adam Smith and identify himself in a paragraph on remorse, obliges him to read Milton and identify with Satan's magnanimity, and puts him into a passive-aggressive struggle with the dying institution of patronage.

There are four places to look for the structure of moral sentiment in Burns.

First, a conspectus of many of the issues concerning Burns in the eye of the community comes from "The Brigs of Ayr" (1786), where the poem as a whole sets the bridges arguing in their own voices, the new against the old, a forensic debate of eras that is possible to orchestrate because it is in the first instance raging in Burns's own mind. Part of the author's self-assignment here is to work

¹¹For David Craig, see Note 2; for Angus Calder, see his "Descriptive Model of Scottish Culture," 2, 1 (1995), 1-14, esp. p. 10.

through the problem of gaining a patron, here John Ballantine to whom the poem is dedicated, without becoming a sycophant. The poem opens with self-naming as a "simple Bard," a frequent awkward propitiatory rhetoric in Burns, with possibilities for taunting, as to say, I'm "rough at the rustic plough" (*Poems*, I, 280), but see what such a one can write!

Second, if a Calvinist humanism related to honest labor and individual freedom surfaces in Burns's thought after 1789, as Liam McIlvanney argued in *History Workshop Journal*,¹² a conventional Calvinism is earlier evident in his many references to the devil. Through these references, religion is both respected and taunted; religion needs to be attended to in order to be corrected. There is not only the famous "Address to the Deil" in the Kilmarnock volume, but also the violently sarcastic "Address of Beelzebub" where in his own voice the devil urges further excesses of Scottish aristocrats, as they ruin the lives of working people. There are many other references to the devil, mostly in passing like the "Poor devil" who is forced to eat a French ragout instead of a proper sheep's stomach in "To a Haggis." These devils are treated humorously, but Beelzebub gets some good lines, and there are enough devils in varied contexts to suggest the poet fears and admires the energy in Satan's challenge to authority. Even in rejecting the devil, Burns is talking to or as the devil, skirting the darkness. The devil may, in Burns's reading of Milton, have magnanimity and self-control, but assuredly Satan lacks sympathy, generosity, gratitude, fellow-feeling, justice and all other virtues. Speculatively and ironically, to talk to or as the devil tries out a denial of the moral sentiments of Adam Smith, the Scottish Enlightenment, and the religious leaders of the day.

Third, the meeting place of established religion, personal sexual error, and poetry is always a place of anxiety where the theory of moral sentiments is brutally tested. Here is the second stanza of "A Poet's Welcome to his love-begotten Daughter":

Tho' now they ca' me, Fornicator,
And tease my name in kintra clatter,
The mair they talk, I'm kend the better;
E'en let them clash!
An auld wife's tongue's a feckless matter
To gie ane fash (*Poems*, I, 99).

The poem is tender toward the daughter ("fatherly I kiss and daut thee") and angrily articulate against the priests who condemn the poet; Burns will turn the disapprobation into approbation by transposing it to a literary context: blame is fame. Smith, who is a stickler for chastity, would not approve, but Burns is improvising on—taunting—the notions he has inherited of the mode of regard. As

¹²Liam McIlvanney, "Robert Burns and the Calvinist Radical Tradition," *History Workshop Journal*, 40 (1995), 133-49.

a poem containing the same elements but with a radically different logic and tone, I would point to Burns's "Address to the Unco Guid, or the Rigidly Righteous" where after baiting his accusers he ends by asking that they "gently scan": ask motives, ask about remorse, wonder to what extent any of us may judge a sovereign other:

Then at the balance let's be mute,
 We never can adjust it;
 What's *done* we partly may compute,
 But know not what's *resisted* (*Poems*, I, 54).

Besides being exact as prosody and tight as logic, this is an appeal to the moral calculus, and takes ethical questions to the edge of religious faith. "Unco Guid" begins as preemptive insult and ends, unpredictably, in an urgent morality inhabited by Soren Kierkegaard, not Adam Smith.

Finally, the generation after 1780 was the last generation of literary patronage—that scheme of rewards where social and literary approbation are knit together. The practice became unworkable when, increasingly, the booksellers' market took over. Signs of breakdown of this practice are all over Burns's work; one who believes "the Man's the gowd" cannot help mocking the part of himself that wants to be patronized, given praise, and given a job in the Excise. "A Dedication to G.H. Esq.," from the Kilmarnock volume, is a letter poem in couplets where Burns swears he will engage in no bowing, flattering, and begging, but by denying this he has raised the thought. Then he ends by imagining Gavin Hamilton (G.H. of the title, his rich letter-receiver) is broke, "as poor a dog as I am" (*Poems*, I, 246): the least convenient argument if he wishes to get Hamilton's financial help. The other outrageous example of a patronage poem off the rails is "A Dream," also from the 1786 volume, a birthday poem in fifteen stanzas for (and spoken *to*) George III. This is often dismissed by critics in a sentence or two, but it is a very impressive social poem—in fact, to my mind the greatest poem of *lèse majesté* in any language. Not only must the King of Great Britain listen to 135 lines in Scots dialect; the King must also have rehearsed for him his loss of the American colonies and his inability to control his own family. Speaker and addressee are on one level, in a calculated insulting familiarity. Perhaps here, in poems about patronage that diminish his possible patrons, Burns most exceeds the confines of Adam Smith's elaborate scheme of approbation-disapprobation.

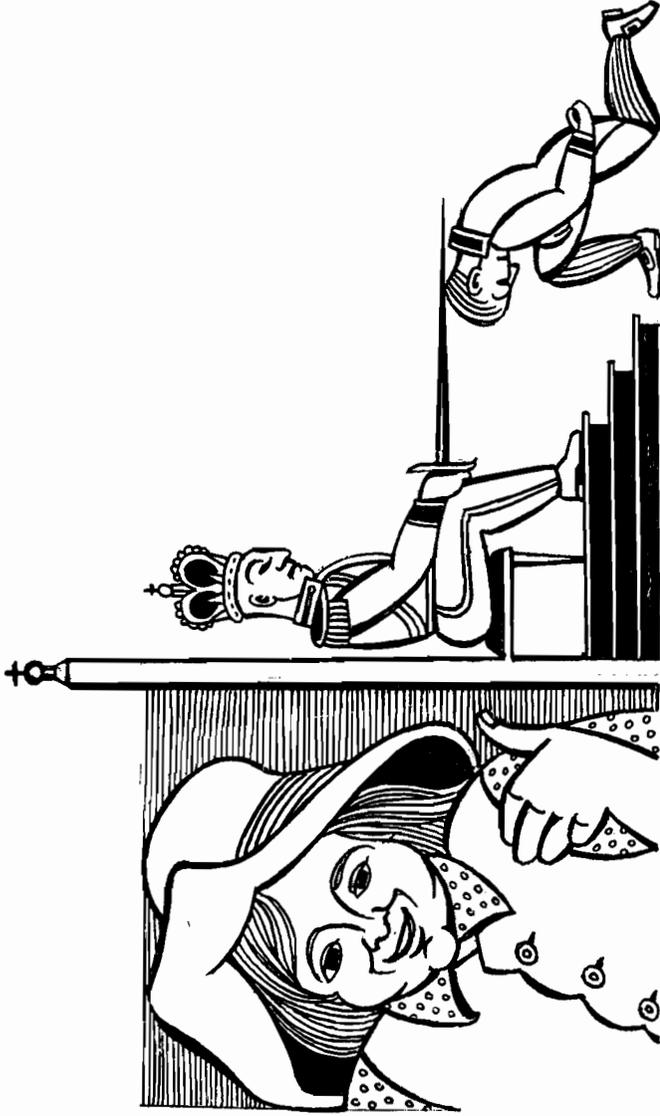
Smith followed *Moral Sentiments* with his far more influential master-work *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776; here, leaving moral sentiments behind to study capitalist markets, he inquired into the economic motives for human actions. Later in 1790, the year of his death, he published a revision of *Sentiments* with additional materials in Part VI, section ii (2.12-18), where he registered his shock at civil faction in the French Revolution—the overthrow of a whole social order

based on what were for Smith merely abstract ideas.¹³ This thoroughly Edmund-Burkean position in 1790 casts a light back on a limitation that was always there in the *Sentiments*, namely a tendency for the economically secure person to assume that the manners and institutions of society are appropriate to the deepest needs of all persons. Smith, with his settled belief in rank, overlooks the questions of inequality that torment Burns, and in this respect, however haltingly, Burns makes the turn to Romanticism and modern society while Smith does not.

Approbation is in the eye of the community, but who is the community? Burns forces the question; Smith need not. The community of Scottish socialness is not the implicit order of Smith. Rank is not of the essence but ornamental: "The rank is but the guinea's stamp" ("Song—For a' that and a' that," *Poems*, II, 762). Burns, it seems, found a slippage at the center of Smith's philosophy, but he did not point it out or make the issues explicit. In the 1780s he worked it out in satires and epistles, anxiously exceeding Smith's sympathy with his misanthropy. In the 1790s he worked it out in a few lyrics about brotherhood, like "For a' that and a' that," exceeding Smith's sympathy with his radical idea of equality. Earlier I touched on Alasdair MacIntyre's complaint that no one at the time understood the failure of Enlightenment moral philosophy, its separation of conduct from religion. But if my argument is correct, at least one Scots contemporary of Smith in part understood this failure: Robert Burns.

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¹³Raphael and Macfie discuss Smith's late revisions in response to the events in France in their Introduction, pp. 18-19.



A King can make a belted knight, a marquis, duke
An honest man's above his might — and a' that ;
----- The man o' independent mind, he looks & laughs at a' the
A Gray 1996

Thomas C. Richardson

John Lockhart's Burns:
Stirring "National Enthusiasm"

John Lockhart's *Life of Robert Burns* was first published in 1828 as a volume in Constable's *Miscellany*, a series of literary and scientific works cheaply published (in duodecimo) and widely available to "readers of every class." The biography has enjoyed remarkable publication success, reprinted frequently throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An octavo edition was also published by Constable in 1828; the third, "corrected," edition was published in 1830 by Constable in the *Miscellany* format. Murray, Tegg, Bell, and Ward-Lock also published editions in the nineteenth century; twentieth-century publications include Hutchinson's Library of Standard Biographies; a limited edition (520 copies) by Henry Young, edited by William Scott Douglas; and a Dent Everyman edition, published first in 1907, reissued as late as 1976, and currently available in an AMS reprint.

As the printing history might suggest, the critical response to Lockhart's biography has been largely positive, although nearly always qualified; critics have always acknowledged flaws, but the overall quality of the work and the popularity of the subject have largely overshadowed the weaknesses and inaccuracies. The extreme critical positions are represented by Andrew Lang and Franklyn Bliss Snyder. Lang in his 1897 *Life and Letters of Lockhart* wrote: "New Lives of Burns follow fast on each other, but Lockhart's is never likely to be superseded."¹ Snyder, in 1932, had a different opinion: "The best that

¹Andrew Lang, *The Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart*. 2 vols. (London, 1897), II, 28.

one can say of it today, however, is that it occasioned Carlyle's review. It is inexcusably inaccurate from beginning to end, at times demonstrably mendacious, and should never be trusted in any respect or detail."²

For the most part, however, critical opinion places the work somewhere between Lang and Snyder, closer to the assessments offered by Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Carlyle. Scott wrote to Lockhart in June 1828 that the biography had done Lockhart "infinite credit"; although Scott could provide evidence to support his differing perspectives, he concedes that Lockhart chose "the wiser and better view."³ On 29 May 1828 Scott had already recorded his opinion of the work in his journal:

I have amused myself to-day with reading Lockhart's *Life of Burns*, which is very well written—in fact, an admirable thing. He has judiciously slurred over his vices and follies; for although Currie, I myself, and others, have not said a word more on that subject than is true, yet as the dead corpse is straightened, swathed, and made decent, so ought the character of such an inimitable genius as Burns to be tenderly handled after death. The knowledge of his vicious weaknesses or vices is only a subject of sorrow to the well-disposed, and of triumph to the profligate.⁴

Thomas Carlyle, in his review of the biography for the *Edinburgh Review*, saw Lockhart's as the best to date (1828) of the biographies of Burns, citing Lockhart's achievement in portraying Burns as "the high and remarkable man the public has pronounced him to be" and "delineating him" as a "whole man, as he looked and lived among his fellows"; Lockhart, according to Carlyle, presented the "true character of Burns."⁵ Yet, Carlyle was critical of Lockhart for not writing enough, either in terms of the depth of treatment or, especially, in Lockhart's own voice—which led Carlyle to pronounce that "we are far from thinking that the problem of Burns's Biography has yet been adequately solved" (Carlyle, p. 3).

Lockhart clearly recognized that there was not universal agreement regarding Burns, that not everyone was so generous in his assessment of Burns's poetry or so tolerant of his social behavior or political leanings. Regardless of the varied opinions either about Burns himself, as a person and a poet, or the accomplishments of Lockhart's writing about Burns, Lockhart in his *Life of*

²Franklyn Bliss Snyder, *The Life of Robert Burns* (New York, 1932), pp. 488-9.

³*The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson. 12 vols. (London, 1932-7), X, 427.

⁴*The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*. 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1890), II, 195.

⁵Thomas Carlyle, *Essays Scottish and Other Miscellanies*, Introd. James Russell Lowell (London, 1967), p. 3. Henceforth Carlyle.

Burns offers a point over which, he claims, "there can be no controversy; the poetry of Burns has had most powerful influence in reviving and strengthening the national feelings of his countrymen."⁶ It is Burns as a stimulus to "national enthusiasm" that is central to Lockhart's writing about Burns, and it is this focus that I will explore in this paper. I wish to look at Lockhart's *Life of Burns* in the context of nearly two decades of Lockhart's writing and thinking about Burns and Scottish nationalism, examining the circumstances in which the biography was written and setting the work in the context of Lockhart's ideas about biography as a genre.

Lockhart had written a great deal about Burns long before he contracted to do the biography for Constable. In an article on Thomas Moore in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October 1818, Lockhart had developed in miniature the spirit of the Burns biography:

There are few things more worthy of being studied, either in their character or in their effects, than the poems of Robert Burns. This man, born and bred a peasant, was taught, like all other Scotsmen, to read his Bible, and learned by heart, in his infancy, the heroic ballads of his nation. Amidst the solitary occupations of his rural labours, the soul of the ploughman fed itself with high thoughts of patriotism and religion, and with that happy instinct which is the best prerogative of genius, he divined everything that was necessary for being the poet of his country. The men of his nation, high and low, are educated men; meditative in their spirit, proud in their recollections, steady in their patriotism, and devout in their faith. At the time, however, when he appeared, the completion of their political union with a greater and wealthier kingdom, and the splendid success which had crowned their efforts in adding to the general literature of Britain—but above all, the chilling nature of the merely speculative philosophy, which they had begun to cultivate, seemed to threaten a speedy diminution of their fervent attachment to that which was peculiarly their own. This mischievous tendency was stopped by a peasant, and the noblest of his land are the debtors of his genius. He revived the spark that was about to be extinguished—and taught men to reverence with increasing homage, that enthusiasm of which they were beginning to be ashamed. The beauty of many of his descriptions, the coarseness of many of his images, cannot conceal from our eyes the sincerity with which, at the bottom of his heart, this man was the worshipper of the pure genius of his country. The improprieties are superficial, the excellence is ever deep—The man might be guilty in his own person of pernicious trespasses, but his soul came back, like a dove, to repose amidst images of purity.—He is at present, the favourite poet of a virtuous, a pious, a patriotic people; and the first symptom of their decay in virtue, piety, and patriotism, will be seen on the instant when Scots-

⁶John Gibson Lockhart, *Life of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, 1828), p. 428. Henceforth *Life*.

men shall cease to treasure in their hearts the "Highland Mary," the "Cottar's Saturday Night," and the "Song of Bannockburn."⁷

In *Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk* (1819), Lockhart provides extended discussions of Burns and Scottish nationalism. In reading *Peter's Letters*, one cannot altogether lose sight of the method Lockhart uses, writing in what can reasonably be called the "literature-as-hoax school" of the early days of *Blackwood's Magazine*; Lockhart's voice is the fictional persona of Dr. Peter Morris, a Welshman, who travels in Scotland and connects with the important literary, social, and political figures of the time, and then writes his observations in letters back to his relatives and friends in Wales. Yet, the fictional veil is very thin. In the penetrating character sketches, the biases towards Tory politics and against the *Edinburgh Review*, and the incisive critical commentary, the text will not let us suspend our disbelief in the voice of the *Blackwood's* Lockhart for very long. When we read, then, of the Burns supper and literary nationalism, one hears Lockhart, especially as that voice is clearly corroborated in the biography itself.

Lockhart through Morris defines literary nationalism in terms of associations—language, religion, historical circumstances, "fine poetical situations"⁸—that transcend political boundaries. Morris advises that while Scotland "looks back upon the history of England, as upon that of the country to which she has suspended and rendered subordinate her fortunes, yet she should by no means regard English *literature*, as an expression of her mind" (*Peter's Letters*, II, 360-61). Thus, it is in portraying the "national modes of feeling" that such writers as Burns and Scott have secured and maintained a national identity for Scotland that is both a-geographic and portable because it is internal.

Dr. Morris attends his first "Burns Dinner" in February 1819, having procured a ticket to this sold-out event from Henry Mackenzie; the dinner had to be held in the Assembly-Rooms in George Street in order to accommodate the crowds. Morris exclaimed that he had

never witnessed a more triumphant display of national enthusiasm, and had never expected to witness any display within many thousand degrees of it, under any thing less than the instantaneous impulse of some glorious victory....—the highest, and the wisest, and the best of a nation assembled together—and all for what?—to do honour to the memory of one low-born peasant. What a lofty tribute to the true no-

⁷John Gibson Lockhart, "Remarks on the Poetry of Thomas Moore," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 4 (Oct. 1818), 1.

⁸John Gibson Lockhart, *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*. 2nd edn. 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1819), II, 358. Henceforth *Peter's Letters*.

bility of Nature!—What a glorious vindication of the born majesty of Genius!
 (*Peter's Letters*, I, 111-12).

Morris was not long in his euphoric exclamations, however, before he turned his attentions to Francis Jeffrey and Jeffrey's disparagement of Burns in the *Edinburgh Review*—and his comments turned caustic. Morris does not understand how a man of such high principles as Jeffrey could possibly justify “concentrating the whole pitiless vigour of his satire” on Burns who, regardless of his faults, was entitled to compassion; or how Jeffrey could exhaust “his quiver of poisoned shafts in piercing and lacerating the resting-place of one, whose living name must always be among the dearest and most sacred possessions of his countrymen.” He continues to argue that Jeffrey “displayed in that attack a very lamentable defect, not merely of nationality of feeling, but of humanity of feeling” (*Peter's Letters*, II, 117-18). Although Morris acknowledges that Jeffrey had to some degree a change of heart about Burns, for Morris (and for Lockhart as well) the point still must be made unequivocally that there is no place for politics (or “Whig-bigotry” as Morris calls it), social haughtiness, or moral self-righteousness in the assessment of Burns's value to Scottish literature and, thus, to the Scottish nation. The image of Burns is central to Scottish identity, as Lockhart writes in the biography:

Amidst penury and labour, his youth fed on the old minstrelsy and traditional glories of his nation, and his genius divined, that what he felt so deeply must belong to a spirit that might lie smothered around him, but could not be extinguished. The political circumstances of Scotland were, and had been, such to starve the flame of patriotism; the popular literature had striven, and not in vain, to make itself English; and, above all, a new and cold system of speculative philosophy had begun to spread widely among us. A peasant appeared, and set himself to check the creeping pestilence of this indifference. Whatever genius has since then been devoted to the illustration of the national manners, and sustaining thereby the national feelings of the people, there can be no doubt that Burns will ever be remembered as the founder, and, alas! in his own person as the martyr, of this reformation (*Life*, pp. 428-9).

The character of Lockhart's Burns was well defined, then, when Lockhart was given the opportunity to do a *Life* for *Constable's Miscellany*. Lockhart was closely involved with the development of the *Miscellany* from its inception in 1825, and the Burns biography was among the early projects in the plan. In May 1825 Lockhart writes to Constable with suggestions for works to be included in the project and even a suggestion for the name of the project. It is early September, however, before Constable writes to Lockhart, saying that he will soon send a prospectus, after having developed “twenty editions.” On 20 September 1825 Constable writes to Lockhart that he has sent Lockhart copies of various editions of Burns and related works, adding that he had “upwards of a hundred originals of letters, and Poems, which are at present in the hands of a Book binder,” although much of that material had been “seen and used by

Cromek.”⁹ Lockhart writes to Blackwood several days later that he has “much to say when we meet—something very seriously on the subject of Constable’s *Miscellany* which (the programme having come to me by post) is I suppose no longer a secret. You will perceive that I have undertaken to write for it a little volume about Burns for which he, Sir W[alter] Scott, & Sir A[lexander] Don have put some strange materials into my hands.”¹⁰

Lockhart begins collecting material and writing the biography in the fall of 1825, but the entire *Miscellany* project was temporarily shelved due to what Lockhart called “the derangement in Constable’s affairs”;¹¹ Lockhart himself left Edinburgh in December 1825 to become editor of the *Quarterly Review* in London. It is late January 1827 before the correspondence resumes between Lockhart and Constable regarding the Burns biography. Constable writes that he would “feel much mortification were you not to give me the life of Burns,” adding that it “would do a vast thing for me, and gratify the literary world” if Lockhart were to write two volumes rather than one.¹² Lockhart writes to Constable that he is happy to hear that the *Miscellany* had started successfully:

Since you think that my Life of Robert Burns is worth the asking for *now*, I am sure I shall have much pleasure in writing it: but unfortunately, considering the matter was at an end, I had some time ago boxed up all the materials I had collected in London & that in such a way that I fear I cannot without great difficulty get at them for some time. I trust nothing is to prevent my spending the chief part of next summer in Scotland & shall look forward to *Burns* as my work during that time.

As to *two* volumes—I doubt whether that would not be too much for a *Life* of Burns: if a selection from his poetry is to be included, the case is altered & indeed I think it would be doing a service to his fame to place before the public those pieces by which alone he merits his place, apart altogether from his mawkish attempts in the English dialect, & also those Scottish performances the coarseness of which much overbalances their wit & which at any rate sh[oul]d never be included in such a work as your *Miscellany*. I shall be happy to hear what you have to say to these suggestions & of course to see the original pieces of Burns in your possession. I have myself obtained several trifles of his in MS from various quarters: & curious enough *memoranda* from 2 or 3 friends who recollect the Poet in the flesh.¹³

⁹National Library of Scotland, MS 331 ff. 255-6. Henceforth NLS.

¹⁰NLS, MS 4015 f. 14.

¹¹NLS, MS 1553 ff. 1-2.

¹²NLS, MS 331 f. 271.

¹³NLS, MS 331 ff. 269-70.

In November Lockhart writes to Scott for “personal recollections of Robert Burns” and as soon as possible “for I am far advanced with my little book about him,”¹⁴ although in June 1828 he is still asking Scott for “memoranda” as the book is to be “reprinted forthwith.”¹⁵ Allan Cunningham had also provided anecdotes for Lockhart when he first began writing, but two years later when he gets back to the project he cannot find the Cunningham material; in January 1828 Lockhart writes to Cunningham again, confessing that his “most valuable & delightful letter about *Burns*...was *too* carefully put by.... May I beg the very unheard of favour that you w[oul]d write me another letter embracing the most material matters.”¹⁶

Although the *Life of Burns* was largely written in the late 1827 and early 1828, it is significant nonetheless that Lockhart had begun his *Burns* in 1825. From 1821 to 1824 Lockhart wrote and published four novels and completed a major revision of one of the novels for a second edition: *Valerius; A Roman Story* (1821); *Some Passages in the Life of Mr. Adam Blair, Minister of the Gospel at Cross-Meikle* (1822; 2nd edn., 1824); *Reginald Dalton* (1823); and *The History of Matthew Wald* (1824). His novel titles could be mistaken for biographies; in fact, one might be tempted to argue that Lockhart’s training as a biographer came as a fiction writer, that for Lockhart there is little distinction between the purpose of the biographer and the purpose of the novelist. In 1826 Lockhart published a review of Scott’s *Lives of the Novelists* in which he argued that the task of the novelist above all is to excel in the “conception and delineation of *character*.... We read no fiction twice,” Lockhart continues, “that merely heaps description upon description, and weaves incident with incident, however cleverly. The imitating romancer shrinks at once into his proper dimensions when we ask—what new character has he given us?”¹⁷

Lockhart’s practice as a biographer was to present character; presenting the image was more important than strict accuracy in recollecting events or presenting “facts”—which explains why Lockhart relied so heavily on personal recollections and anecdotes. Writing to John Murray in 1846, Lockhart suggests that Christopher Wordsworth might “take in hand Carlyle’s *Cromwell*” to review for the *Quarterly Review*. Lockhart comments on Carlyle’s method of biography in terms that could well apply to his own; Lockhart writes: I

¹⁴NLS, MS 3905 f. 161.

¹⁵NLS, MS 3906 f. 291.

¹⁶NLS, MS 1553 ff. 1-2.

¹⁷John Gibson Lockhart, “Lives of the Novelists,” *Quarterly Review*, 34 (Sept. 1826), 378.

“suspect [Carlyle] makes fact bend to image rather than otherwise.”¹⁸ William Menzies also makes this point well in a letter to Lockhart after the publication of Lockhart’s *Life of Scott*:

I perfectly well recollect the incident of the “hand” tho’ I am afraid you have embellished it a little. Some literary Grub, criticizing the works of Lockhart some 50 years hence, may accuse him of inaccuracy, & and in support of his charge, prove that in 1812 W. M.’s only Uncle was in India, & that the said W. M. did not reside in George Street before Whitsunday 1818. In the summer of which year I imagine the “Hand” alluded to took place. The anecdote however is so well introduced where it stands, as to make the anachronism of no consequence.¹⁹

Another characteristic of Lockhart’s image-making biography is that he does not write all he knows about his subject’s character. Lockhart’s method of character portrayal in biography also insisted upon discretion in presentation of delicate personal matters, especially if there were living relatives who might be hurt by public disclosures of family secrets, and especially if those living relatives were women. When James Hogg, for example, published his *Anecdotes of Scott*, Lockhart was outraged at Hogg’s insensitivity in publishing embarrassing comments about the Scotts; as Lockhart wrote to Blackwood, Hogg had included in his memoir of Scott two objectionable passages, “one of them being a most flagrant assault on Scott’s *veracity* & the other a statement about poor Lady Scott such as must have afflicted for ever her children & especially her surviving daughters.”²⁰ As another example, in 1839 Thomas De Quincey had published a series of articles in *Tait’s Magazine* on Wordsworth and the Lake Poets, including unflattering sketches of Dorothy and Mary Wordsworth. Lockhart was incensed by the improprieties in De Quincey’s publications and writes to Whitwell Elwin: “How he sh[oul]d have dared to print such papers in 1839 is inconceivable on any other theory than that of insanity or intoxication but no doubt the malice had long been deliberately fixed.” Lockhart continues: “De Quincey must be punished by neglect. His publishing such papers about W[illiam] W[ordsworth] in his lifetime was monstrous—but the drawing detailed portraits of the wife & sister, both then & still alive, seems to me to match the old Lowther tyrant’s audacity of wickedness.”²¹ Lockhart’s sense of propriety undoubtedly affected his approach to the life of Burns.

¹⁸John Murray Archives.

¹⁹NLS, MS 935 f. 12.

²⁰NLS, MS 4039 ff. 83-4.

²¹NLS, MS 2262 ff. 22-4.

If it is significant that Lockhart began his biography of Burns in Edinburgh in 1825, it is just as significant that he finished the work in London in 1828. Lockhart's strong nationalistic themes that run throughout his early criticism and fiction are only intensified by his move to London in a political atmosphere less than favorable to Scottish interests; indeed, Lockhart seemed to regard himself as something of an exile, an attitude that is manifest in the correspondence with Scott and others in Scotland, his own brief political ambitions, and particularly in the quiet but regular contributions to *Blackwood's Magazine*, even while he was editor of the *Quarterly Review*. Lockhart's "Noctes Ambrosianae" in the September 1829 issue of *Blackwood's* is exemplary. Although Lockhart writes to Blackwood that since these are "ticklish times for politics"²² he is sending something different, in fact this "Noctes" is a highly-charged political discussion of the effects of the Union and its aftermath on the Scottish people, Scottish trade, even Scottish religion, and the Union's stimulus to emigration. This "Noctes" includes the well-known "Canadian Boat-Song," a poem by Lockhart that purports to be a translation from the Gaelic of a Highland oar-song sent to Christopher North by a friend "now in Upper Canada." One verse will illustrate the tone of the poem:

From the lone shieling of the misty island
Mountains divide us, and the waste of seas—
Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland,
And we in dreams behold the Hebrides:
Chorus *Fair these broad meads—these hoary woods are grand;
But we are exiles from our fathers' land.*

And in the poem written in September 1831 on the occasion of Scott's departure from Abbotsford for Malta, Lockhart echoes the exilic terms of the "Boat-Song." Lockhart published his "Lines Written on Tweedside *September 18th, 1831*," in his *Memoirs* of Scott. The immediate inspiration for the poem was a farewell dinner hosted by Scott; dinner guests included Captain James Burns, son of the poet, as well as Lockhart and others. Although the poem is perhaps overly dramatic in its national spirit, Lockhart suggests the poem expressed "the sincere feelings with which every guest witnessed this his parting feast."²³ Three of the twelve verses capture the spirit of the poem:

What princely stranger comes?—what exiled Lord
From the far East to Scotia's strand returns—

²²NLS, MS 4025 ff. 72-3.

²³John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott*. 5 vols. (London, 1900), V, 352. Henceforth *Memoirs*.

To stir with joy the towers of Abbotsford
And "wake the Minstrel's soul"?—The boy of Burns.

O, Sacred Genius! blessing on the chains,
Wherein thy sympathy can minds entwine!
Beyond the conscious glow of kindred veins,
A power, a spirit, and a charm are thine....

The children sang the ballads of their sires:—
Serene among them sat the hoary Knight;
And, if dead Bards have ears for earthly lyres,
The Peasant's shade was near, and drank delight (*Memoirs*, V, p. 353).

For the Scottish people, who were exiled from their native land, either having literally left their country, or perhaps as important, who felt in their political circumstances at home that their country had left them, the "Peasant's shade" is always near. It is in this spirit that Lockhart concludes the *Life of Burns*: "Burns, short and painful as were his years, has left behind him a volume in which there is inspiration for every fancy, and music for every mood; which lives, and will live in strength and vigour—... a volume, in which centuries hence, as now, wherever a Scotsman may wander, he will find the dearest consolation of his exile." (*Life*, pp. 445-6).

When Lockhart put his hand to the writing of biography, he had at his service the skills of the novelist in character development as well as a deep commitment to the cause of Scottish nationalism as a personal perspective if not a political reality; Burns is the ideal subject for his first biography. Lockhart's *Life of Robert Burns* is not a work of fiction, but like fiction the work excels in the "conception and delineation of character." And the central character of this prose is clearly conceived in such a way as to stimulate national enthusiasm. Thus, it is perhaps as appropriate to regard the words *Robert Burns* as a trope as much as a name in Lockhart's writing, for Lockhart expected the words to create an image that transcends the physical or literary life of the person.

Mississippi University for Women

Rodger L. Tarr

“Close thy Byron; open thy Burns?”
OR
Carlyle’s Burns

“I want a hero,” so proclaimed Byron, partly in jest and partly in lament, in *Don Juan*. “I want a hero!” For Thomas Carlyle, locating heroes was never a problem; if absent, he created them; if lost, he resurrected them. One of his most enduring heroes, often lost in the Carlylean *mélange*, was Robert Burns. Why Burns was a hero to Carlyle might appear simple enough. His personal identification with many of the trials and tribulations of Burns made it so. The critical imagination takes flight when one considers that Dumfriesshire borders Ayrshire, that Ecclefechan is only a hammer’s throw from Dumfries, that Carlyle was a mere bairn of six months when Burns died in 1796, or that when Carlyle penned his famous essay on Burns for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1828, he was living on a desolate farm named Craigenputtock, which is just above Dunscore, which in turn is just above Dumfries, a farm which Carlyle in the context of his essay called the “Devil’s Den.”¹ What is more, each made the archetypal journey to Edinburgh in search of literary fortune. Indeed, in reading Carlyle’s essay on Burns, one is struck by how much of it is autobiographical. Carlyle’s Burns is, in many respects, Carlyle’s Carlyle, and this I believe is a key to understanding his reverence for Burns. Carlyle’s first interest is not in Burns the Poet, but rather in Burns the Man. In his *Reminiscences*, for example, he draws a sharp contrast between Burns and his beloved father, James, who once saw Burns outside Rob Scott’s Smithy in Ecclefechan. The two were not alike, muses Carlyle: James Carlyle was a man of “Conduct”; Robert

¹Thomas Carlyle, *Two Note Books* (New York, 1972), p. 129.

Burns a man of "Speculation."² In this telling passage Carlyle has actually drawn the difference between his father and himself: one a man of Conduct, the other a man of Speculation, a distinction that allows him and through him his hero Burns to escape the daunting strictures of Calvinism.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Carlyle concentrates his evaluation on Burns the Man, albeit the well-spring of Burns the Poet. From the outset and repeatedly throughout his essay, Carlyle reminds the reader that Burns was forever at work attempting, more often than not fruitlessly, to reduce his physical poverty, a poverty not engendered so much by Burns's own actions as by the social forces external to him. To Carlyle, Burns was scarcely a product of his own being, but instead that of the "grand maxim of supply and demand,"³ a culture in which Utilitarian margins were valued more than speculative inventions. Burns, says Carlyle, spent "his short life...in toil and penury; and he died, in the prime of his manhood, miserable and neglected," (p. 258) a stranger in a strange land. Burns, Carlyle says later, "wast[ed]" away in a "hopeless struggle with base entanglements, which coiled closer and closer around him, till only death opened him an outlet" (p. 264). To Carlyle, Burns was a victim of fickle Destiny, who with "queenlike indifference" (p. 264) gave him genius but robbed him of will. Already Carlyle has created the legend from whence heroes rise. He appeals to the reader's sympathies for the "ill-starred" (p. 264) Burns, whose spirit we are led to believe was finally and irrevocably bowed before the lions of Edinburgh and the guillotine of *laissez-faire*, in spite of and perhaps because of his speculative genius. Carlyle argues this very point in a letter to Goethe on 25 September 1828: "Perhaps you have never heard of this *Burns*: and yet he was a man of the most decisive genius; but born in the rank of a Peasant, and miserably wasted away by the complexities of his strange situation.... We English, especially we Scotch, love Burns more than any oth[er] poet we have had for centuries."⁴ Carlyle then proclaims Burns superior to Schiller. Whether this is said in earnest or to please Goethe is finally of no consequence to a hero-builder like Carlyle. Facts pale in the light of myth-making. Burns the Man was more than a Poet, he was a Man of Letters, the "most gifted British soul we had in all that century of his."⁵

²Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. C. E. Norton (London, 1887), I, 14.

³Thomas Carlyle, "Burns," *Works*, ed. H. D. Traill. 30 vols. (London, 1896-1899), XXVI, 258. Further references to this essay will appear in the text.

⁴*The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. Charles R. Sanders and K. J. Fielding (Durham, NC, 1970), IV, 407.

⁵Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, in *Works*, V, 190.

Where Burns is concerned, the "dearly beloved Carlyle,"⁶ as he was later characterized by the *Edinburgh Review* after his lavish toast to Burns at a dinner held for Allan Cunningham in 1831, is relentless in his condemnations and his glorifications. He finds little to credit in J. G. Lockhart's *The Life of Robert Burns*, a "trivial" book he was "to pretend reviewing" (*Collected Letters*, IV, 383). Lockhart and others of his ilk have missed the locus of Burns's life, Carlyle thought, the personal, later epic struggle to become a hero in a world hostile to heroes. Carlyle senses the paradox here. "No man...is a hero to his valet," he opines, "but the fault is at least as likely to be the valet's as the hero's" (p. 259). Continuums of Time and Space, those precious commodities assigned by Kant, are always at work, heaping paradox upon paradox. Why is it, Carlyle concludes, that personal heroes like Burns must die in order to live? Why is it that literary heroes like Burns must suffer the building of mausoleums before their fame is secure? The answer comes clear: "...to the vulgar eye few things are wonderful that are not distant" (p. 259). Irony drips across Carlyle's impressionistic page. It all seems backwards. Heroes should be of this life, not of the next. The social contract suffers when heroes must die to live. Distancing serves neither the body nor the spiritual politic.⁷ The glory of firsthand experience is lost. Worse: Posthumous anecdotal accounts, like Lockhart's, err in their "repeated attempts" and "repeated approximations" (p. 259). Essence is lost in such biographical accounts. Carlyle's frustrations with Lockhart's *Life* curiously parallel his frustrations with the creators of the New Testament, just as his frustrations with the emphasis on the historical Burns curiously parallel his frustrations with the emphasis on the historical Christ. Burns, Carlyle argues, was a man of feeling, the signet of all genuine heroes. He lived; he suffered; and he died. We want to know "why," not "how."

Heroes are real to Carlyle. Burns is real to Carlyle. Burns united the Possible with the Necessary to bring out the *Real*, wherein also lies the Ideal (*Reminiscences*, I, 13). Lockhart's failure, then, will not be Carlyle's failure. Thus, his essay becomes an exemplum on what he believes constitutes biography. He appeals for passion in the face of disinterestedness. He embraces invention. Value is preferable to Fact, Allegory to Symbol. Where Lockhart and Currie and Walker before him fail is that they re-trace rather than re-create. Their biographies are filled with stories, but devoid of parable. Biographers, argues Carlyle, should be meta-historians, not purveyors of simple creed. Carlyle is convinced that the "great end of Biography" is not found in "facts

⁶[John Wilson], "[Carlyle on Burns]," *Edinburgh Review*, 30 (1831), 484.

⁷I am indebted to Carol McGuirk who pointed out to me that Henry Mackenzie in his essay on the "Original Genius" of Burns, 9 December 1786, opens by discussing the difficulty for critics of acknowledging genius in their contemporaries. See *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Donald Low (London, 1974), p. 67. It is unlikely that Carlyle was aware of Mackenzie's essay.

and documents”; rather it is located in the “inward springs and relations” (p. 261). Readers, says Carlyle, echoing Hume, want to know “effect” (p. 261). What impact did the man Burns have upon his society, and indeed what impact did it have upon him? Lockhart fails to answer these questions; indeed, Lockhart fails to approach these questions. Carlyle’s socio-moral, almost Marxian, vision of what constitutes biography is couched not so much in the remnants of the past, but rather what the cloth of the present says about the garment of the future. Biography should be inter-, not intra-. Imagination, the meta-fictional relative of invention, is always superior to fact. Carlyle is a Romantic, not a Victorian. And, in the end, Carlyle’s Burns and Carlyle’s Carlyle gain significantly from such eclectic vision.

Just how precisely Carlyle’s essay on Burns contributed to the developing veneration of the poet is, of course, difficult to establish. By 1828, Burns was already legend, made more so by poets and poetasters who penned their experiences in tears before his grave. Yet one could argue that Carlyle’s review of Lockhart’s *Life* altered the pitch of Burns’s reputation, or at the very least it did nothing to damage Burns’s increasing popularity among the intellectuals. To put it in another context, Carlyle did not end the reputation of Burns as he did, unwittingly, ten years later when he dismissed and thus sullied the novelist Walter Scott before the same biographical eyes of J. G. Lockhart, whom Carlyle chastises once again for bringing out a “well-done compilation” instead of a “well-done composition.”⁸ Scottophiles have never forgiven Carlyle for the damage he inflicted upon Scott, nor perhaps should they. But in the same vein, Burns devotees, I submit, have never given Carlyle proper credit for providing a new vision upon which Burns’s reputation might be enhanced, a vision that provided a context for Burns’s myriad accomplishments. Consider for a moment some of the language Carlyle develops to embrace his hero Burns.

We are assured that Burns was born in the “most disadvantageous” of times, when the “mind, if it accomplished aught, must accomplish it under the pressure of continual bodily toil....” Yet, Carlyle continues, “through the fogs and darkness of that obscure region, [Burns’s] lynx eye discerns the true relations of the world of human life; he grows into intellectual strength, and trains himself into intellectual expertness...” (p. 263). Such protean conclusions, told in the face of Burns’s “darksome drudging childhood,” could not be more idealistic (Carlyle was reading and translating Saint-Simon at the time), or more inventive (Carlyle was beginning his “Essay on Metaphors,” later retitled *Sartor Resartus*, at the same time as well). In his essay on Burns, closely edited by Francis Jeffrey, Carlyle takes Burns by his mortal pre-Romantic bootstraps and catapults him into the ether of Victorian eternity. Carlyle’s Burns, re-formed upon the language of the apocalypse, rises from the material dead and ascends into cosmos of the heroic. Even Carlyle is taken aback by his own

⁸“Sir Walter Scott,” *Works*, XXIX, 28.

inventive genius, and at one point pauses in mid-thought to say to the reader: "We are anxious not to exaggerate" (p. 263).

Never mind. Carlyle continues to corral the already tethered reader by asserting globally that "We love Burns, and we pity him; and love and pity are prone to magnify" (p. 263). The reader now is a direct participant in the creation of this "New Mythus," this new Burns. We have been fully assimilated. Aesthetic distance, if it ever existed, is gone; no objective correlative is to be found here. Art is life. Carlyle defines Burns by urging the reader past dreary factual discourse. To paraphrase Lavater, Burns in Carlyle's hands is at once nothing and at once all. Carlyle's *Iliad* delivers Burns from the corporeal indignities that plagued him. He reminds us that once the "good...avoid[ed]" Burns (*Reminiscences*, I, 13), largely because of unwarranted, often malicious anecdote. Carlyle seems determined to change the course of Burns criticism. In the face of substance, we are asked to concentrate on essence. And, with a masterful grapeshot of litotes he dismisses proto-Arnoldians everywhere: "Criticism, it is sometimes thought, should be a cold business; we are not sure of this; but, at all events, our concern with Burns is not exclusively that of critics" (pp. 263-4). It is at this point in the essay that Carlyle mounts his most passionate defense of his "Peasant Poet" Robert Burns.

In almost causal brilliance Carlyle walks the reader through "To a Louse," "To a Mouse," and "To a Mountain Daisy," poems "so full of inborn riches, of love to all living and lifeless things! How his heart flows out in sympathy over universal Nature" (p. 265). Working himself into a crescendo of torrid passion, Carlyle observes that Burns "dwells with a sad and oft-returning fondness in these scenes of solemn desolation..." His poetry is not, however, an "Arcadian illusion." The "rough scenes," formed "in the smoke and soil of a too harsh reality, are still lovely to him," and it is over these "the lowest provinces of man's existence he pours the glory of his own soul" (p. 265). Carlyle compares his Peasant Poet to the Classical Æolus who harnessed the "vulgar wind" and changed it into "articulate melody" (p. 166). Burns's poems, says Carlyle, are "mere occasional effusions; poured forth with little premeditation..." (p. 266). Here, through allusion to Coleridge and Shelley, Carlyle conflates Classical metaphor and Romantic discourse and thereby assures the already breathless reader that Burns's poems (and songs) were not written for the "literary virtuosos: but instead for the "unlettered and truly natural" classes "who read poetry for pleasure." Burns's virtue is "his *Sincerity*, his indisputable air of Truth.... He does not write from hearsay, but from sight and experience;...and he speaks forth what is in him" (p. 267). Carlyle's distinctly Wordsworthian views end with predictable passion: "This [writing what one feels] is the grand secret for finding readers and retaining them: let him who would move and convince others, be first moved and convinced himself" (p. 268).

Interestingly, it is at this point in his essay that Carlyle offers a digression on Byron to provide counter-example. Byron's failure, we are assured, is that

he leads readers to “dislike, or even nausea” (p. 269). Unlike Burns, Byron does not create “real men; we mean, poetically consistent and conceivable men” (p. 269). Byron’s theatrics, exclaims Carlyle, are akin to the “bawling of a player in some paltry tragedy” (p. 269). Byron’s “stormful agonies,” “teeth-gnashing,” and “sulphurous humour” are marks of insincerity (p. 269). Satan is “Byron’s grand exemplar, the hero of his poetry, and the model apparently of his conduct” (p. 315). Burns, on the other hand, is “an honest man, and an honest writer,” who is “ever clear, simple, true, and glitters with no lustre but his own” (p. 269), though he too learned too late that “vulgar Ambition will not live kindly with poetic Adoration” (p. 316). Yet, in spite of his capitulation to Mammonism, Burns in Carlyle’s next breath is favorably compared to Shakespeare and then to Homer. It could not be otherwise. Even the *Edinburgh Review*, always under the stern editorial eye of the patrician Jeffrey, was unable to check entirely Carlyle’s elaborate conceits.⁹ Poets, after all, are prophets of the human condition; their “Ideal world is not remote from the Actual, but under it and within it...” (p. 272). Myth, to Carlyle, is Reality.

Taking into account, then, Carlyle’s declared disgust for Byron and his unbridled passion for Burns, I find it curious that his famous injunction in *Sartor Resartus*, “Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe,”¹⁰ does not read “Close thy Byron; open thy Burns,” loosely translated “Close thy Cant; open thy Sincerity.” My emended declaration would certainly make Carlyle’s contextual point more dramatically, and at the very least would have earned him the enduring affection of Burnsians everywhere. Of course, one could make the argument that *Sartor Resartus* is German-like; hence Goethe is more appropriate. Yet such conclusions are faulty. Carlyle’s understanding of German idealistic/transcendental philosophy was imperfect at best, and at the writing of *Sartor* there is evidence that he was already moving away from the teachings of Goethe, understood or not. Further, and perhaps more to the point, why is it that Carlyle does not mention Burns by name in *Sartor Resartus*, his most philosophic and allusive work? John Sterling, for one, notes the absence of Carlyle’s “favourite Burns” in his famous letter of 29 May 1835 in which he criticizes the excesses of Carlyle’s “Rhapsodico-Reflective” style.¹¹

Carlyle’s neglect of Burns in *Sartor Resartus*, his most profound, enduring, and influential work, is indeed striking. Perhaps this neglect lies deep in

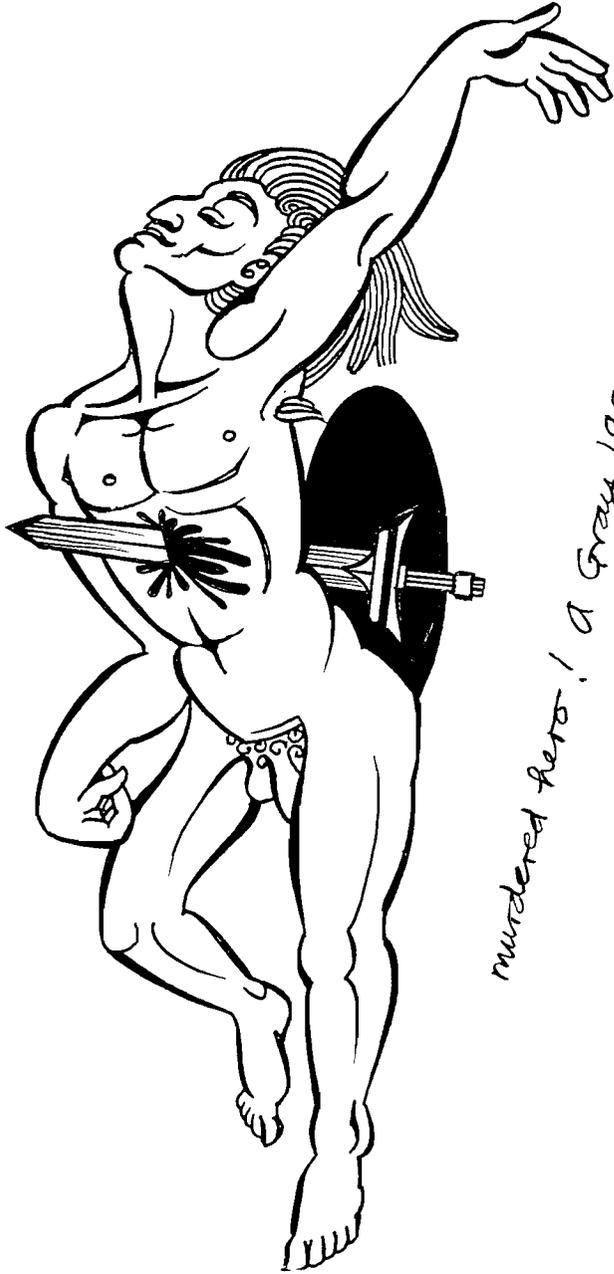
⁹After reviewing the essay in manuscript, Jeffrey urged Carlyle to give up his mystical language and “write to your countrymen & for them.” Carlyle rejected Jeffrey’s pleadings, which in turn led Jeffrey to editorial excision. See Maxwell H. Goldberg, “Jeffrey: Mutilator of Carlyle’s ‘Burns’?” *PMLA*, 56 (1941), 466-71, and P. Morgan, “Carlyle, Jeffrey, and the *Edinburgh Review*,” *Neophilologus*, 54 (1970), 297-310.

¹⁰*Sartor Resartus*, in *Works*, I, 153.

¹¹Thomas Carlyle, *The Life of John Sterling*, in *Works*, XI, 109.

Carlyle's Scots-born psyche, somewhere in that "Devil's Den" Craigenputtock just above Dunscore. Perhaps, just perhaps, Carlyle did not mean the accolades advanced in his essay on Burns. Fortunately, we are rescued from such fantasies by Carlyle himself. A decade later as he closes his lecture, "The Hero as Man of Letters," in *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, Carlyle adopts once again his messianic cloak, declaring Burns a "giant Original Man" who took his "rank with the Heroic men." To which Carlyle adds, with an air of excitement born from incredulity: "...and he was born in a poor Ayrshire hut" (V, 188). Unable to contain his exaggerations, Carlyle through evocative language and descriptive metaphor paints the image of Christ into the character of Burns: "The largest soul of all the British lands," he concludes, "came among us in the shape of a hard-handed Scottish Peasant," only to fall victim to the Edinburgh "Lion-hunters" who were his "ruin and death" (pp. 188, 194). A number of years later Yeats paused over similar sentiments, an echo of The Book of Revelation, in "The Second Coming." Perhaps we should pause as well. Veneration after all is the stuff that dreams (and heroes) are made of. The bicentenary celebration of Burns is confirmation of such dreams and such hero-worship.

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Murdered Aero! A Gray 1996

Alasdair Gray

On Neglect of Burns by Schools
and His Disparagement by Moralists and Whitewashers
With Some Critical Remarks

There was no Bible among the many books in my earliest home, and only one volume of poetry: a stout maroon edition of Burns's poems published in 1938 by the *Scottish Daily Express*. Since there was an identical copy in my uncle and aunt's home (the only other home we much visited), I thought it could be found in every Scottish house. My mother had been a member of the Glasgow Orpheus Choir and had a book of Scottish songs from which she sang while accompanying herself on the piano. Burns's was the only name attached to many of these so I assumed he had written them all. Since I also heard these tunes on the Scottish Home Service (the only local radio station in that pre-television era), Burns seemed a familiar and pleasant part of the air we breathed.

In Scottish schools Burns was only taught in the least valued part of the curriculum—the singing lessons: and now that music has been abolished in most Scottish schools because of cuts in spending we can be sure he is hardly taught at all. The English department of Whitehill senior secondary school taught me Chaucer, Shakespeare, Pope, Keats, and Wordsworth. The Scottish educational system had been created to turn most children into tradesmen and factory workers and the rest into auxiliary Englishmen attached to the highest levels of Britain's industrial and financial empire—which the English controlled. But there was a more important reason why the greatest part of Burns's verses was not and cannot be taught in respectable state-supported schools or to any children whose parents take any sect of the Christian faith very seriously.

A fig for those by LAW protected,
 LIBERTY's a glorious feast!
 COURTS for Cowards were erected,
 CHURCHES built to please the Priest.¹

In some of his poems and songs Burns asserts that most folk were more harmed than helped by churches, governments and legal codes which mainly profited those who managed them. Worse still he believed that sexual love was not only the most essential human activity (which is true of all life forms more complex than the amoeba); he believed it was the greatest of human pleasures, and that pleasure is good.

What is TITLE, what is TREASURE,
 What is REPUTATION's care?
 If we lead a life of pleasure,
 'Tis no matter HOW or WHERE.

With the ready trick and fable
 Round we wander all the day;
 And at night, in barn or stable,
 Hug our doxies on the hay.

Does the train-attended CARRIAGE
 Thro' the country lighter rove?
 Does the sober bed of MARRIAGE
 Witness brighter scenes of love? (*Poems*, I, 208).

These quotations are from the last song of his cantata *The Jolly Beggars*, where this faith is most nakedly asserted. And his poems which do not assert it take it for granted. All children find authority oppressive and think pleasure is the best thing they can get, and of course adults instinctively believe that too, a fact which the fathers of all Christian churches from St. Augustine to Calvin used to justify the doctrine of original sin. Almost all educational systems are deliberately devised to destroy or divert or pervert that faith, which explains why Burns has been largely ignored by schools and universities and stayed popular with folk who had nothing to do with these—another reason for academia to neglect him in days before popular cultures became the material of academic discourse.

Yet Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron and Keats took his greatness for granted. In Matthew Arnold's "The Study of Poetry," Burns's writings are put second only to those of Chaucer, though Arnold regrets the ugliness of Burns's Scottish subject matter because, "no one can deny that it is of advantage to a

¹"Love and Liberty," *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 209. Henceforth *Poems*.

poet to deal with a beautiful world.”² T. S. Eliot’s essay on Arnold mainly approves his high estimate of Burns and defends the subject matter because a poet should, “be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory.”³ But with sinister dexterity, Eliot first condescends to Burns as “a decadent representative of a great alien tradition”—by which he likely meant that most great Scots pre-Reformation poets were courtiers, that Burns (like Herman Melville) never rose above the rank of exciseman, and that his poetic vocabulary was not used by royalty. But since a German dynasty was popped onto the British throne who but Eliot has thought royalty a source or defense of profound speech?

In a recent biography of Burns the author says that too many other biographies of Burns have described legends and that the two-hundredth anniversary of his death seems a good time to “look again at the facts.”⁴ But Ian McIntyre’s book is no hammer smashing a popular icon. All important facts of Burns’s life were available when he died because in poetry, diary and verse he was his own most truthful biographer, telling his contemporaries the best and worst about himself. Nineteenth-century biographers could turn Wordsworth and Dickens into icons of national respectability because their unsanctified love-lives were only brought to light long afterward. This could not be done with the author of a poem welcoming the birth of his bastard daughter.

Throughout the nineteenth century biographers deplored, regretted or made excuses for Burns’s plentiful love-life and occasional drunkenness. Scandal might add Satanic splendor to Lord Byron, but hardly anybody wrote at length about Burns without giving a grotesque self-portrait of their own prejudices. One of the earliest biographers, a reformed alcoholic, turned Burns’s life into a road-to-ruin sermon on the evils of drink and self-indulgence. Carlyle liked Burns’s poetry but thought his achievement a fragment of what it should have been because (1) his father could not afford to send him to university, and (2) he did not work hard enough at writing. Stevenson said Burns wasted his life and talent by marrying Jean Armour who (though conceiving two sets of twins by him before marriage) did not really love him, and whom (though he fathered five children on her after it) he never truly loved.⁵ In the early twentieth century Scottish literary life sank into stagnation from

²Matthew Arnold, “The Study of Poetry,” in *Essays in Criticism Second Series* (London, 1888), p. 44.

³T. S. Eliot, “Matthew Arnold,” in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* (London, 1933), p. 106.

⁴Ian McIntyre, *Dirt & Deity: A Life of Robert Burns* (London, 1995), p. xv. Henceforth *Dirt & Deity*.

⁵See his essay “Some Aspects of Robert Burns.”

which only the creative violence of Hugh MacDiarmid stirred it. Burns's reputation (like Scotland's) passed into the keeping of respectable, unadventurous professional folk who whitewashed it by telling his life story in a form that would not bring a blush to the face of the most innocent child. It went thus:

A poor farmer's son damages his health between the ages of thirteen and fifteen by doing a man's work as his father's only laborer. While guiding the plough, he discovers his genius for poetry and has some youthful romantic adventures. Smitten by poverty he prepares to emigrate but first arranges his poems for the press and proposes marriage to Jean Armour. Jean rejects him, the book suddenly makes him famous, he gives up the West Indies for Edinburgh and charms lords, ladies and literati with his brilliant conversation. Later, he asserts his manly independence by marrying Jean Armour after all, returning to the plough, later getting work as an exciseman, becoming a hard-working family man who died in poverty and neglect after struggling nobly to support a wife and family. All of which was true but ignored at least a third part of the man—the part still rowdily celebrated at men-only Burns suppers where many respectable folk who whitewashed him in public cheered him as the sort of satyr and lady-killer they would have liked to be.

But in 1930 Catherine Carswell's biography appeared which told Burns's life in a narrative that was honest yet unflustered by his sexuality. It made Victorian moralists and contemporary whitewashers look equally immature and for a while made her the most hated woman in Scotland. Burns once wrote two letters telling how he had met Jean Armour, again pregnant by him, and this time wanting the marriage she had previously rejected. To a man friend, in Rabelaisian speech based on Urquhart's translation of *Gargantua*, he boasts of how he fucked her until she agreed to live with only his affection and financial support. To the married middle-class lady in Edinburgh with whom he was Platonically flirting he uses Jane Austenish language to say that her refining influence had made the vulgarity of his former mistress revolting to him—that he could hardly stand Jean's presence. Catherine Carswell presented this duplicity without surprise, perhaps because she thought many people are capable of it, even intelligent, well-educated folk like you and me. Sixty-five years later Ian McIntyre brings to the same letters a vast surprise: "There is no period in his short life when it is so hard to read Burns as in those early spring months of 1788. Nor is there a time at which it is so difficult to observe his behaviour with any degree of sympathy or understanding" (*Dirt & Deity*, p. 205). In "Some Aspects of Robert Burns" a century earlier, R. L. Stevenson had written that one of Burns's private letters made him want to buffet Burns about the ears.

Such feelings about the poet's character have taken too much attention away from his work. This essay will end in a similar cul-de-sac if I don't attempt at least one piece of critical appreciation.

Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* proposes a new course for English poetry: the lives and emotions of country folk should be written about in the language they used themselves. Wordsworth wanted to do what Burns had done in Scottish vernacular a few years earlier. I'll quote one:

RATTLIN, ROARIN WILLIE

O Rattlin, roarin Willie,
O he held to the fair,
An' for to sell his fiddle
And buy some other ware;
But parting wi' his fiddle,
The saut tear blin't his e'e;
And Rattlin, roarin Willie,
Ye're welcome hame to me.

O Willie, come sell your fiddle,
O, sell your fiddle sae fine;
O Willie, come sell your fiddle,
And buy a pint o' wine;
If I should sell my fiddle,
The warl' would think I was mad,
For mony a rantin day
My fiddle and I hae had.

As I cam by Crochallan
I cannily keekit ben,
Rattlin, roarin Willie
Was sitting at yon boord-en',
Sitting at yon boord-en',
And amang guid companie;
Rattlin, roarin Willie,
Ye're welcome hame to me! (*Poems*, I, 407-408)

Notice the many voices in that. The first six lines are a brisk past-tense, third person account by a neighborly voice who shows the musician stepping out then suddenly presents him in close-up at a moment of sudden grief—at which the voice becomes the present tense of someone welcoming Willie home: probably his wife. The next half stanza is obviously spoken by a cajoling tempter; the second half is Willie's mournfully defensive reply. Finally—and unexpectedly—the voice of the opening describes Willie glimpsed at the head of a table in a happy pub interior. Maybe he sold his fiddle and is treating friends with the gains—maybe they are treating him, but he is in good company and will still be welcomed home. This community of voices linking the fair with the public house and home are none of the voices of Robert Burns. He

has made them in the way described by Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

The simplest epical form is seen emerging out of lyrical literature when. . . . the personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea. This progress you will see easily in that old English ballad *Turpin Hero*, which begins in the first person and ends in the third person. . . . The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence.⁶

That is how Burns worked: from lyrical beginnings to dramatic monologues, dialogues or narratives presenting himself as a character in a poem, as he does in the lines describing his meeting with Lord Daer (*Poems*, I, 297), or the verse called Rob Mossgiel (*Poems*, I, 58). You should not think the presentation is more like the real Burns than Holy Willie is, or the cocksure young woman who expertly hooks and lands the man she wants in "Last May a Braw Wooer." Dante was Virgil as well as pilgrim of the *Divine Comedy*. Joyce was Bloom as much as Dedalus. Burns was not less myriad-minded.

Glasgow

⁶James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York, 1916), p. 252.

Donald A. Low

1786 and 1996: Ideals, Prejudices and Burns the Writer

Burns is a person of the late eighteenth century who challenges his own time and also ours. The ideals of friendship and love are as central to his writings and daily living as is prejudice, both political and religious. In an age when political opinions mattered, Burns radically blew apart the shallowness of the political correctness of his time. His views were not limited by current preferences but revealed insights that would otherwise have been overlooked or even ignored. Today, as in Burns's time, too many are held prisoner by current political fashion to achieve what they want. One set of idealistic concerns alike in 1796 and 1996 has to do with nature and the environment. Burns as person and poet is of his age, but forward looking in his sympathy for the natural world and his opposition to the mindless slaughter of birds and animals as in "Now westlin Winds, and slaught'ring guns." At times of political correctness there is much to be said for the subversive. I believe that the next phase of subversive Burns criticism is going to have to challenge feminist priorities as of less than permanent value. The fashionable does not endure. Burns knew this. We have two centuries of male chauvinism to set aside but let not women's ideology and secondary issues obscure Burns's art as a writer. Whichever view you hold depends not only on gender assessment but also on how much attention you pay to the beauty of the songs and poems and how much to scandal and political disgrace. His views on women need to be reconsidered as do many of the earlier uncritically accepted views of Burns. Remember the age in which Burns wrote and the negative filter which has since

been applied to many of his songs. The time has come to return to detailed study and analysis of Burns's poems and songs.

If the range and beauty of Burns's art come first we have lots of examples of his lyrical enthusiasm. His songs have taken his poetry round the world. He shows his flair as a lyricist at his best in his love songs. Think of the first song he wrote to the fourteen-year-old Nelly with which most readers will be familiar. Burns was not only impressed with her looks—she was “a bonie, sweet lass” and a “bewitching creature”—he was also impressed with her signing. Other women inspired other songs. “Young Peggy blooms our boniest lass” to the tune *Loch Eroch Side* was written as a result of his meeting with Margaret Kennedy at Gavin Hamilton's house in 1785. When Burns sent her the song he explained:

Poets, Madam, of all Mankind, feel most forcibly the powers of BEAUTY; as, if they are really Poets of Nature's making, their feelings must be finer, and their taste more delicate than most of the world...the company of a fine Woman...has sensations for the Poetic heart that the HERD of Man are strangers to.¹

Recollect the tenderness and wistfulness of “Mary Morison” and the haunting line “Ye are na Mary Morison” which MacDiarmid calls “The most powerful line Burns ever wrote.” As I see it, literary art is what matters first of all with regard to any writer, whatever misgivings may exist about negative personal habits. A. L. Kennedy, the much respected feminist writer, comments in a Valentine's Day article in *The Scotsman* in 1996:

As part of a general intellectual devaluation, we now live in a country where the writer is reviewed instead of the writing... The tenderness of [Burns's] love lyrics, his liking of, reliance on and passion for women are apparently forgotten. As a writer I can admire Burns the poet, above all for his ability to make passion articulate, to let love speak. His sins were largely those of a writer and for those I can only forgive him. I have writer's sins of my own.

Friendship was all important to Burns and in this he was a man of his age. Think of the names of some of the gifted friends he valued most highly. Francis Grose reveals his European outlook, Allan Masterton a musician whose flair for song-writing complemented his own skill with words and Matthew Henderson who shared an Ayrshire background with Burns. These friends of Burns in different ways provided him with poetic inspiration. Burns often made friends with people older than himself. Henderson was fifty, Burns twenty-eight when they met. Despite their age difference the two men found each other's company stimulating. Henderson's untimely death eighteen

¹Letter to Miss Margaret Kennedy [early Oct. 1785], *The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), I, 26-7. Henceforth *Letters*.

months later in 1788 so shocked Burns that he wrote of his distress to Cleghorn, Dugald Stewart and to Mrs. Dunlop making mention of an elegy he had written in memory of Henderson. From the correspondence it is clear that Burns completed the poem in stages. His letter of 23 July 1790 from Ellisland to Robert Cleghorn begins:

Do not ask me, my dear Sir, why I have neglected so long to write you.—Accuse me of indolence, my line of life of hurry, my stars of perverseness—in short, accuse anything, but me of forgetfulness.—You knew Matthew Henderson. At the time of his death, I composed an elegiac Stanza or two, as he was a man I much regarded; but something came in my way so that the design of an Elegy to his memory gave up.—Meeting with the fragment the other day among some old waste papers, I tried to finish the Piece, & have this moment put the last hand to it.—This I am going to write you is the first fair Copy of it (*Letters*, II, 39-40).

On July 30 he expands on his affectionate feelings for Henderson to Dugald Stewart:

He was an intimate acquaintance of mine; & of all Mankind I ever knew, he was one of the first, for a nice sense of honor, a generous contempt of the adventitious distinctions of Men, and sterling tho' sometimes outré Wit.—The inclosed Elegy has pleased me beyond any of my late poetic efforts.—Perhaps 'tis "the memory of joys that are past," and a friend who is no more, that biasses my criticism... I regret much that I cannot have an opportunity of waiting on you to have your strictures on this Poem—How I have succeeded on the whole—if there is any incongruity in the imagery—or whether I have not omitted some apt rural paintings altogether (*Letters*, II, 42).

"Elegy on Cap^l[ain] M[atthew] H[enderson], A Gentleman who held the Patent for his Honours immediately from Almighty God!" which so pleased Burns "beyond any of my late poetic efforts" begins with a conventional first line but then the "meikle devil" hauls Death to the smiddie and there subjects him to a beating like an old "stock-fish." The second stanza in contrast is a tribute to Henderson:

He's gane! he's gane! he's frae us torn,
The ae best fellow e'er was born!
Thee, Matthew, Nature's sel shall mourn
By wood and wild,
Where, haply, Pity strays forlorn,
Frae man exil'd.²

²The *Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 438. Henceforth *Poems*.

Then in a well ordered and beautifully detailed sequence of natural scenes which must be among the most moving in Scots pastoral elegy, Burns shows his regard for his friend Henderson. Hills, cliffs, groves, burns and rivers, in fact all Nature are invoked to mourn his passing. Let me quote two further stanzas:

Mourn, ilka grove the cushat kens;
 Ye hazly shaws and briery dens;
 Ye burnies, wimplin down your glens,
 Wi' toddlin din,
 Or foaming, strang, wi' hasty stens
 Frae lin to lin (*Poems*, I, 439).

The description and details of the birds in stanza seven are outstanding as is the Scots in which the lines are written:

Mourn, ye wee songsters o' the wood;
 Ye grouss that crap the heather bud;
 Ye curlews calling thro' a clud;
 Ye whistling plover;
 And mourn, ye whirring pairtrick brood;
 He's gane for ever! (*Poems*, I, 439).

The Epitaph which concludes the elegy is in marked contrast to the preceding stanzas. Each verse of the Epitaph highlights a quality of Henderson's which Burns recalls with warmth and affection. No one could have a finer memorial to friendship than the line in the last stanza "Matthew was a rare man" (*Poems*, I, 442).

The "Elegy" is in direct contrast to the verses written for another antiquarian, Captain Grose. In an age when one of the fashions was for collecting antiquities, Francis Grose came to hunt for material for a series of volumes on *The Antiquities of Scotland* to follow on from his six-volume *Antiquities of England* published between 1773 and 1787. In 1789 Burns met Grose who was staying with Burns's neighbor Captain Robert Riddell. Grose's larger-than-life personality appealed to Burns. In a letter to Mrs. Dunlop dated July 1789 Burns states:

I have never seen a man of more original observation, anecdote & remark...he has mingled in all societies, & knows every body.—His delight is to steal thro' the country almost unknown, both as most favorable to his humour & his business.—I have to the best of my recollection of the old buildings, &c. in the County, given him an Itinerary thro' Ayrshire (*Letters*, I, 423).

In "On the Late Captain Grose's Peregrinations thro' Scotland, collecting the Antiquities of that Kingdom" Burns makes fun both of Grose's size—"a fine, fat, fodgel wight, / O' stature short"—and of his interests in "auld nick-

nackets: / Rusty airn caps and jinglin jackets” (*Poems*, I, 494, 495). Grose was also an accomplished artist, and Burns urged him to draw Alloway Kirk for his second volume of *Antiquities*. Grose’s reply was an instant yes—but on one condition. Burns must provide a tale of witchcraft to accompany the picture. Burns duly obliged. In June 1790 Burns gave three traditional stories in prose associated with Alloway Kirk to Grose. The second of these was “Tam o’ Shanter” and the rest, as they say, is history. Burns wrote to Grose on 1 December 1790:

Inclosed is one of the Alloway-kirk Stories, done in Scots verse.—Should you think it worthy a place in your Scots Antiquities, it will lengthen not a little the altitude of my Muse’s pride....print my piece or not as you think proper.—Authors have too often very little to say in the disposal of this world’s affairs, but it would be very hard if they should not be absolute in their own Works (*Letters*, II, 62-3).

The poem however first appeared in *The Edinburgh Herald* of March 18, 1791, and somewhat later in Grose’s *Antiquities* where it was published as a footnote—probably the most famous of all literary footnotes—with the following comment:

This church [Alloway] is also famous for being the place wherein witches and warlocks used to hold their infernal meetings.... Diverse stories of these horrid rites are still current; one of which my worthy friend Mr. Burns has here favoured me with in verse.³

“Tam o’ Shanter” is a teasing, playful, comic story—the perfect antiquarian joke for a middle-aged man with a keen interest in language and local history, the conventions of which Burns sends up in a light-hearted manner. A comic tale for a friend has become a comic tale for the world.

Allan Masterton was described by Burns as “one of the worthiest men in the world, and a man of real genius” (*Letters*, I, 444). For the first time Burns had the opportunity to collaborate with a live composer and it inspired him. Together the “sprouts of Jacobitism” agreed to dedicate the words and air of “Strathallan’s Lament” to the cause even though Burns admitted that his Jacobitism was by way of “Vive la bagatelle.” There is a sense in which this song and “The Braes o’ Ballochmyle” as well as “Beware o’ bonie Ann” (Ye gallants bright I red you right) could be overlooked, but “Willie Brew’d a Peck o’ Maut” never could be. In the interleaved *Museum* in Alloway, Burns comments:

This air is Masterton’s; the song mine. The occasion of it was this.—M^r W^m Nicol, of the High School, Edin^f, during the autumn vacation being at Moffat, honest Allan,

³Francis Grose, *The Antiquities of Scotland*, Vol. II (London, 1791), p. 199.

who was at that time on a visit to Dalswinton, and I went to pay Nicol a visit. We had such a joyous meeting that M^r Masterton and I [decided] each in our own way should celebrate the business.⁴

Words and melody fit together easily and naturally: the entire song, and above all the repetition of the chorus, conveys a mood of convivial friendship and enjoyment of the malt. The rhythm of the music and simple happiness of the occasion are unmistakable:

Here are we met, three merry boys,
Three merry boys I trow are we;
And mony a night we've merry been,
And mony mae we hope to be!
Chorus
We are na fou, we're nae that fou,
But just a drappie in our e'e;
The cock may crawl, the day may daw,
And ay we'll taste the barley bree (*Poems*, I, 477).

What of the future of Burns studies? Someone recently said to me that Burns would have been at home with e-mail as he was a natural communicator. Burns is a poet and song writer whose words have gone round the world and will continue to do so via the Internet, Web pages and CD ROM. I noted with keen interest Jerome McGann's decision to focus on Burns in "The Rationale of Hypertext."⁵ McGann is right to highlight the potential now before us. Having edited and seen published *The Songs of Robert Burns*, and being drawn instinctively by computing possibilities, I share McGann's recognition that we are now in a new world of interrelated documents. Technology is constantly changing but the excellence of the best writers like Burns does not diminish.

University of Stirling, Emeritus

⁴*Notes on Scottish Song by Robert Burns*, ed. James C. Dick (London, 1908), p. 52.

⁵Jerome McGann, "The Rationale of Hypertext," *The European English Messenger* 4.2 (Autumn 1995), 35-6.

A. M. Kinghorn

Scots Wha Hae and A' That

On St. Andrews Day, 1995, it was announced on the BBC that a nationalist procession, seeking the early return of a Scots Parliament, was marching down the Royal Mile in Edinburgh to the skirl of the pipes while a demonstration was held by the Wallace Monument in Stirling. A goodly measure of independence from England is a probability today whereas two centuries ago it was never on the cards. Some Scots are asking if Robert Burns, their national poet, has a role to play in the nation's political future while others would have him deified as an Immortal Memory, not to be sullied by the vulgar rivalries of a modern national movement? Which identity suits him better?

Burns was no sentimental Jacobite in the spirit of Ramsay's Easy Club, animated by hazy ambitions to turn the clock back to pre-Union times, but a Scottish poet-patriot who developed radical views and republican leanings. Anglophobe he was not. His attack on "such a parcel of rogues in a nation" was launched at fellow-countrymen who had in the popular view sold out their country and committed treason "for English gold," rather than at the English themselves. Comparison with the martial days of Wallace and Bruce he made with regret that these "hireling traitors" of his own generation had greedily surrendered to corruption.

After 1745 feelings that their national identity had been surrendered forever and belief that union with England had driven a hard and unfair bargain caused an undercurrent of resentment to flow through all ranks, especially the poorer classes, who continued to endure the blatant inequalities and injustices of the age. This fueled radicalism rather than nationalism. Old-fashioned patriotism was sustained by tradition and separated from political movements.

Fired by youthful enthusiasm for the American and French revolutionary movements and later by Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*, Burns spoke up for the "have-nots" ground down by poverty at a time when great wealth meant great power and expressed contempt for the "haves" and their reliance on the hierarchy of birth and its attendant trappings, riches, class and outward show, a social despotism upheld by the national government. That is what the song "For a' that and a' that" signifies and it is easy to see why it soon became popular in America, since it lauded the basic tenets of the U.S. Constitution and, in fact, paraphrased Paine's message.

Social unrest, marked by riots in England, spread to Scotland. Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth, Dundee and Aberdeen witnessed violent uprisings between 1787 and 1791. Republicanism was in the air; nationalism became less significant than the power of universal brotherhood united in a quest for reform. It is hard to over-estimate the influence of the distant American Revolution and the nearer French example on popular opinion in both England and Scotland. It cut through all classes and problems of government, attracting leading philosophers and historians, including Adam Smith, David Hume and Dugald Stewart, *literati* who regretted that Scotsmen had not shown more interest in claiming their civil liberties. The fact that the French, for hundreds of years acquiescent slaves of a despotic ruling class, had suddenly burst into revolt, stirred the apathetic majority to remember their own comparable grievances.

With his trenchant poetic appeals to the idealized Brotherhood of Man, Burns's name as a favored voice of the new doctrine spread to London although he was not the only Scots poet to attack the government. James Wilson, a weaver from Paisley, gave Paine's *Rights of Man* strong support in even more incisive verse but unlike Burns's his fame remained local. Many of Burns's poems and letters sigh for the passing of heroic resistance and as in "Such a parcel of rogues in a nation" bewail the national decline. Narratives of Wallace and Bruce ensured that the image of a continuous struggle for freedom, with the adversaries delineated as good and evil forces, would live on in the common memory. Stereotyped tales of these doughty warriors were handed down from one generation to the next so that every Scottish child knew about Wallace's campaign and martyrdom and Bruce's victory at Bannockburn.

Burns's first hero was Wallace, representing the oppressed poor. In a frequently-quoted letter to Dr. John Moore we find his dramatic self-dedication recalling Wallace's story, one of "the two first books I ever read in private," which "poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest,"¹ and in 1794 he designed an irregu-

¹*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), I, 136. Henceforth *Letters*.

lar ode for Washington's birthday into which he worked the name of his champion:

Where is that soul of Freedom fled?
Immingled with the mighty Dead!
Beneath the hallowed turf where WALLACE lies!²

bewailing the disappearance of the nation's warlike qualities. He goes on to contrast the dead Wallace "quenched in darkness like the sinking star" with an image of his own degenerate land, a "palsied arm of tottering, powerless Age" (*Poems*, II, 734, alternative reading). These regrets about the old freedom refer to a present nostalgia for a social cohesion that had slipped away rather than to any clear political ideal to be pursued now and into the future. The freedom that Burns sought for himself and others was in the main release from the grinding poverty that crushed ambition from birth: "Poverty! Thou half-sister of Death, thou cousin-german of Hell, where shall I find force of execration equal to thy demerits!" he declared in a 1791 letter to Peter Hill (*Letters*, II, 65). The subject was never far from his mind.

Another graphic contrast with post-Union apathy is the stirring song "Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn" (frequently called "Scots Wha Hae"):

Scots! wha hae wi' WALLACE bled,
Scots, wham BRUCE has aften led,
Welcome to your gory bed,—
Or to victorie.— (*Poems*, II, 707).

was the first of six stanzas Burns set to the old tune "Hey Tutti Taitie" which "often filled my head with thoughts of Liberty & Independence" (*Letters*, II, 235). The song isolated one decisive event in Scottish history and made it into a glorious image of resistance. In 1793, when Burns wrote the words, French revolutionary fervor was at its height in Scotland. Though such lines may have stirred dormant emotions by appealing to Scotland's colorful and violent feudal past, the aggressive feelings they might have roused were unfocused. To survive, nationalism needs an enemy but no conspicuous foe stood at the castle gate, though many thought that he had been living inside the castle wall since the Act of Union. The political ideal of loyalty to the Union existed uncomfortably alongside traditional Scots patriotism rooted in the kind of narrative and anecdotal history compiled by Hector Boece in the fifteenth century and given authority by George Buchanan in the sixteenth.

William Robertson, Adam Ferguson, the Jacobite Gilbert Stuart, and other Enlightenment figures, convinced of the essential progress by peaceful evolu-

²*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), II, 733. Henceforth *Poems*.

tion of civil society from feudal barbarity to their own more fortunate orderly condition were succeeded in the nineteenth century by academics like Patrick Fraser Tytler and John Hill-Burton who sought hard documentary evidence and blew legend away. Their school demolished most, but not all, of the romantic structure erected by Boece and Buchanan.

Most but not all. Barbour's epic poem *Bruce* retained its status as a reliable authority for the events recorded in it and in modernized versions bathed later events in its reflected glory. A century later, Hary's *Wallace* (read by Burns in a version by William Hamilton of Gilbertfield) exaggerated the heroics and distorted the chroniclers' evidence. Looking back through the eyes of the young Burns, the field of Bannockburn was magnificent, that of Flodden was tragic, Wallace was a martyr, savagely done to death by the English. The War of Independence, viewed as the start of a constant struggle for liberty from Southron tyranny, made it possible for the old guerrilla warriors to be admired while their feudal legatees the Catholic Stuarts were condemned in the progressive spirit of the Union and the approved belief in the ascent of civil society from the dark ages. The rest of the literary-historical saga was clouded by royal tyranny, religious oppression, treachery and violence unpleasing to "enlightened" Scots. The Scottish universities neglected it and the early heroes were silently celebrated by numerous monuments erected in her cities and towns during the nineteenth century.

Scotland easily creates myths. After the Union, another myth grew up. This one, also expressed in the English poems of Goldsmith and Gray, idealized rural conditions unchanged since the seventeenth century and earlier. The "couthie" picture of poor but honest Lowland peasantry speaking Braid Scots and content on a diet of oatcakes and kail found its immediate literary models in Ramsay's pastoral *The Gentle Shepherd* of 1725, which had a Restoration setting, and Burns's "The Cotter's Saturday Night," published in the Kilmarnock edition of 1786. The latter pictured the poor cotter's family and contrasted their humble virtue with the empty pomp of conventional religion by which their lowly lives were regulated. But it had a sting in the tail. Burns's final stanza, an invocation to "SCOTIA! my dear, my native soil"

O THOU! who pour'd the *patriotic tide*,
 That stream'd thro' great, unhappy WALLACE' heart;
 Who dar'd to, nobly, stem tyrannic pride,
 Or *nobly die*, the second glorious part:
 (The Patriot's GOD, peculiarly thou art,
 His *friend, inspirer, guardian and reward!*)
 (*Poems*, I, 151-2).

ended on a note of incitement which arbiters of taste, like Hugh Blair and Henry Mackenzie, did not notice or chose to overlook.

"The Cotter's Saturday Night, with their seal of approval, became an inspiration for generations of followers who reworked its sentimental elements.

After the publication of Mackenzie's *Lounger* review of the Kilmarnock volume on 9 December 1786, the sympathetic face of Burns, the "Heaven-taught" ploughman-poet, was held up to the light and flattered by the tea-urn ladies of Edinburgh who believed him to be a true native genius straight from the plough and, for a few months, drew entertainment from his "shocking" opinions. Initially gratified, Burns came to dislike being treated as a curiosity and left Edinburgh for good. His egalitarian utterances became more frequent and started to attract official attention after the fall of the Bastille in July 1789 sparked off the French Revolution.

His biographer Chambers reflected the conventional attitude to Burns's egalitarianism in the 1790s. Of "For a' that and a' that," a late piece composed in January 1795, Chambers commented: "This song may be said to embody all the false philosophy of Burns's time, and of his own mind." Scottish radicalism took a more definite shape after Burns's death. Its politics of envy and the bitterness felt by people in the new industrial Glasgow and Stirling areas, who blamed their wretched working conditions on the Union, eventually came to a head in the violent insurrection of 1820 known as "the Radical War." The spirits of Wallace and Bruce were invoked and "Scots Wha Hae" sung at anti-government meetings as a national anthem.

Had Burns survived, without falling victim to the virus of "bourgeois respectability" in his old age, he would certainly have been held up as a totem of this failed uprising, the leaders of which were given sentences of hanging or imprisonment. After this purge radicalism went underground, to re-emerge after 1850 in a less violent form which survives to this day in the policies of the Scottish National Party.

Though Burns paraded radical beliefs he was above all a dedicated Scots-writing poet and it would be wrong to tie Burns, the Scots language and political nationalism too closely together. When C. M. Grieve, an ardent Scottish nationalist, announced in 1925 that his inspiration for his new Scots or Lallans was not Burns but Dunbar, he associated the revival of this modern literary movement with the recorded vocabulary of late medieval Scots *makars* like Dunbar and Douglas, rather than with Burns, whose "plain braid Lallans" he affected to despise because it depended heavily on English borrowings.³ Such a rigid connection of Scots language (or Gaelic which was also a contender for rehabilitation) with Scots political nationalism chains the literary heritage, but Burns is not to be shackled by any ideology that restrains his Muse.

It may be asked why Robert Fergusson did not fill a similar role when his contribution to the revival of Scots was as great and even more varied than Burns's. Fergusson died aged twenty-four in 1774, before the international revolutionary movement had made an impact and with only local fame as a poet. He celebrated the City of Edinburgh and its worthies, and his political

³*Albyn, or Scotland and the Future* (London, 1927), p. 35.

interests lay in satirizing local elections, though he occasionally cast a backward, nostalgic glance at Scotland's historical past, for example in "Auld Reikie":

To Holy-rood-house let me stray,
 And gie to musing a' the day;
 Lamenting what auld Scotland knew,
 Bien days for ever frae her view:

* * *

For O, waes me! The thistle springs
 In domicile of ancient kings,
 Without a patriot to regret
 Our palace, and our ancient state.⁴

In "The Farmer's Ingle" he praises the simple diet which supposedly led the Scots to their (legendary) victory over the Danes at Luncarty. But Fergusson was not given to uttering bellicose exhortations in the spirit of "Scots Wha Hae"—at least not in his published verse. He followed the example set by Ramsay, Hamilton of Bangour and others more obscure, using whatever resources of Scots vocabulary he could absorb, notably the "livan words" he heard around him. Though Fergusson was the first to construct a rich Lallans, Hugh MacDiarmid had little to say in his favor, impetuously consigning him to the same linguistic rubbish-heap as Burns.

Nasty rumors were spread about Fergusson by his earliest biographers, notably David Irving, and a just evaluation of his worth was blocked for over a century. After Robert Heron's memoir of Burns in 1797 and James Currie's 1800 edition, representing the poet as a drunken womanizer and self-inflicted victim of an artistic temperament, a politically subversive Burns might well have suffered from the same curse of character-assassination as Fergusson had it not been for a popular inclination to pass over this boozy demon in favor of the milder Burns. The Currie image was softened and the ploughman-poet's reputed amatory and alcoholic indiscretions forgiven by generations of worshippers. The first of many monuments to his immortal memory was erected in 1816.

However, the face of Burns most likely to attract modern campaigners for an independent Scotland is the one which his conservative contemporaries suppressed, namely, the whipper-up of the disaffected, the rabid adversary of the establishment known as far afield as London for his dangerous opinions, the denouncer of the all-powerful Kirk and its two-faced ministers and in this anniversary year of his death proposed as an anonymous writer of inflammatory verses for the radical press in London as well as Edinburgh.

⁴*Poems by Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson*, ed. Alexander Manson Kinghorn and Alexander Law (Edinburgh, 1985), p. 148.

Opinions on this last point are divided. Was he really such a menacing subversive or just a fireside soldier who when it came to serious action, hesitated on the brink? How far can his correspondence be relied upon to provide an answer?

In a December 1794 letter to his loyalist friend Mrs. Dunlop Burns says that he approved of the executions of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, whom he calls "a perjured Blockhead & an unprincipled Prostitute" (*Letters*, II, 334)—betraying a naive and ill-informed prejudice. The counterparts of those admiring Edinburgh ladies in Paris and Lyons were soon to take the low road to the guillotine. Would Burns have approved of that? He soon came to lose his faith in France, a far-off country of which he really knew very little, but his sympathies with the democratic principles which had fired both the American and French Revolutions, as distinct from the blood-letting which shocked young idealists like Wordsworth, had been outspoken enough to alienate many of his loyalist friends. When he wrote this letter, the Terror launched by Robespierre was at its height in France. The execution of Louis XVI in January 1793 had horrified the government and encouraged the ordinary man in "North Britain" to support the monarchy; those who attacked the establishment were henceforth regarded as traitors. This made the radical position dangerous.

Cunningham's *Life* supplies an account of Burns's petty gestures, speaking of peers and politicians with contempt, defiantly praising Washington before Pitt and hesitating to remove his hat in the Dumfries Playhouse when the National Anthem was being performed. Dumfries was a loyalist town and a non-conformist stood out; in Cunningham's words:

all his rash words about freedom, and his sarcastic sallies about thrones and kings, were treasured up to his injury, by the mean and the malicious. His steps were watched and his words weighed; when he talked with a friend in the street, he was supposed to utter sedition⁵

Burns was certainly a handy target for slanderers and there was enough truth in what they said to put him in danger. He probably went out of his way to annoy. He had made enemies and his correspondence after 1790 suggests political wariness. In a reply to Robert Graham, Commissioner of Excise, dated 5th January, 1793, Burns denied party-political connections and active participation in the Playhouse incident, revered the Monarch and the Constitution of 1688 and restricted his professions of reform to unveiling corruption.

On the other hand, those who would admit Burns to the pantheon of Scottish heroes as a brilliant inspiration for modern nationalist supporters believe that the famous myth has obscured a political influence much greater than Cunningham and the lave of biographers have claimed. The power of Burns to in-

⁵*The Complete Works of Robert Burns...With a New Life of the Poet...* by Allan Cunningham (London: George Virtue, nd), p. xl.

flame the mob through his verse was, according to this hypothesis, quite enough to frighten the loyalists. This is to consider him not as a poet but as a hammer. One must ask how he wanted to be seen at the time. It is hard to believe that he envisaged such a restricted view of his own potential and this version of Burns as a firebrand-parliamentarian ranged against Pitt and Dundas sells the poet short.

Nevertheless, such a view has its supporters. Attention has been drawn to radical poems printed anonymously in London's *Morning Chronicle* and *The Edinburgh Gazetteer* and attributed to Burns. One is titled "The Ghost of Bruce" and demands liberation from slavery in conventional eighteenth-century English verse.

I who erewhile the Ghost of far fam'd Bruce
 Made aft the dread and eke the joy to see
 Alone went wandering through his laurel'd field
 The other night revolving all the ills
 Our country has indur'd from P..t D....s
 And all their pentioned slaves
 That curse your Isle
 O'erwhelmed with grief and bursting into tears
 Cried indignant — O dear Native Land!
 My country!

Printed in *The Edinburgh Gazetteer* on 6th February, 1793, this is not particularly distinguished stuff and could have been composed by any patriotic journalist conscious of the power of King Robert's name to evoke folk-memories of national heroism. Here Bruce has been turned into an eighteenth-century Man of Feeling. The tone is weak and this tearful indignant phantom is scarcely a fit companion for the belligerent living Bruce of "Scots Wha Hae" which Burns composed only seven months later.

After his death there were many self-styled "ploughman poets" trying to cash in on their inheritance from the Kilmarnock volume. In the absence of MSS or other solid evidence Burns's authorship is doubtful. In a letter to Robert Graham, Burns said that he knew nothing of Capt. William Johnston, editor of *The Edinburgh Gazetteer* (like the *Star* known for its radical outlook) though he had written to Johnston praising the paper and ordering a subscription (*Letters*, II, 174, 158). This was apparently enough to brand him subversive in a spy-conscious town like Dumfries.

Burns emphatically denied authorship of any such political correspondence. "I never, so judge me, God! wrote a line of prose for the *Gazetteer* in my life," he stated (*Letters*, II, 174). He had, however, sent verses on "The Rights of Woman" to that paper. His "Rights" were those of protection, decorum and most of all admiration, attributes hardly likely to appeal to today's feminists. Johnston went to prison about that time, as did his successor later,

so it seems that Burns suffered for this indirect connection with a known reformist publisher.

But was he not somewhat economical with *la vérité*? In a 1789 letter to Alexander Cunningham he said: "I would scorn to put my name to a Newspaper Poem" (*Letters*, I, 405). A few weeks later a poem of his appeared in the London *Star* (a paper which frequently changed its name) signed "Duncan M'Leerie." His few *noms-de-plume* were not difficult to unveil, though, like "Aratus" they could have been misappropriated. In early April 1789, Burns had complained that verses falsely attributed to him had been printed in the *Star*, and copied to the *Gazetteer* and *New Daily Advertiser* (see *Letters*, I, 394-6).

From what we may deduce from estimates of his open character and professed ideals of honesty, Burns was not one to tell calculated untruths (except possibly to women), to allow misleading impressions about his social status to stand, or to hide under an impenetrable cloak of anonymity. He was proud of his name and said so more than once, resisting definition by others. Writing to Peter Stuart, editor of the *Star*, he sought permission "to correct the addresses you give me,— I am not R. B. Esq.... I am as yet simply, Mr ROBERT BURNS, at your service" (*Letters*, I, 408). On a previous occasion Burns had identified himself simply as "A Briton" in a letter to the editor of the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* dated 8th November, 1788, in which he defended the Constitution, the present royal Family, the shortcomings of the House of Stuart and the sanctity of the fourth of July as a tribute to the American Congress—a fine example of how to be fair to all sides.

A week is said to be a long time in politics and Burns was surely entitled to modify his opinions, especially in the 1790s. After all, he had a family to support. To avoid arrest under the 1792 Sedition Laws and to keep his Excise job Burns said that he made a declaration undertaking not to publish political matter. He had probably made it unwillingly, for in March 1794, through Patrick Millar, he was offered a job on the London *Morning Chronicle* on a generous salary thrice his Excise wage, which he turned down, perhaps foolishly, on family grounds, though recompense for his efforts was never a great concern of the poet. His diffidently-expressed wish to contribute "little prose Essays" to "a Newspaper" (*Letters*, II, 289) was stated in a reply to Millar, but no such essays have ever turned up. In his letter of refusal he enclosed a copy of "Scots Wha Hae" which *The Morning Chronicle* published anonymously on 8 May 1794, but with a broad hint of authorship.

Though it is tempting to be carried away by enthusiasm for a new slant on Burns, especially when it is timed to coincide with the bicentenary of his death, the circumstantial evidence is not strong enough to credit the poet with authorship of many anonymous contributions reflecting the common radicalism of his time, though it may still be asked whether the republican Burns or the cosy Rabbie of the myth is the truer "Man For A' That"—the latter elected as a fitting symbol of old Caledonia to be wheeled out if ever the militancy of "Scots

Wha Hae” and the old rousing exhortations to fight for that elusive lost liberty be called up to help rearrange the socio-political face of Scotland. Carlyle, who idealized Burns as an heroic man-of-letters, raised the poet’s popularity by casting him in the heroic mould, in these pseudo-democratic times an unfashionable status but still acceptable if the hero in question is long dead.

So, to a conclusion. Is Burns to serve in a materially prosperous and possibly independent Scottish nation of the future only as a signpost to her romantic history, looking down from his monument like Wallace and Bruce, or will he continue as an updated Immortal Memory, not purged of “offensive” elements by a trail of latter-day launderers but taken all in all for what he actually represented, Edwin Muir’s Protean figure?

What would Burns himself have decided? In an era of unprincipled political greed, not unlike that of the eighteenth century, we should find it encouraging that a Scots poet should still be exalted far from Scotland two hundred years after his death. Were Burns to return today and tell us which of his works he would wish preserved he would surely choose the songs, done for no pecuniary reward, and above all the love songs, for example, “I Love my Jean” to Jean Armour, composed when he was lonely and separated from her:

There’s wild-woods grow, and rivers row,
And mony a hill between;
But day and night my fancy’s flight
Is ever wi’ my Jean.— (*Poems*, I, 422)

Like Ramsay before him, Burns took Scottish landscapes for his subject and his hills and his streams are familiar. His images carry the exile back to home ground—“The Banks o’ Doon,” “The Braes o’ Ballochmyle,” “Afton Water,” Alloway’s “auld haunted kirk” with Tam o’ Shanter and Souter Johnnie “bousin at the nappy,” Tam’s resentful wife Kate, a “sulky sullen dame”; the quack Dr. Hornbook and the many worthies drawn with such flair come to life from unmistakably Scots originals; his mouse and his louse, even if they are now seen as political symbols, owe their immortality to this young man of outstanding perceptions and common sense. In these words Burns, unwilling to be defined by others, defined himself:

A Scottish Bard, proud of the name, and whose highest ambition is to sing in his Country’s service.... The Poetic Genius of my Country...bade me sing the loves, the joys, the rural scenes and rural pleasures of my natal Soil, in my native tongue.⁶

Sandwich, Kent, Emeritus

⁶Robert Burns, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Edinburgh, 1787), Dedication to the Noblemen and Gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt, pp. v-vi.

Margery Palmer McCulloch

Burns, MacDiarmid and Beyond:
Transformations of the Love Lyric and its National Context

At the international Burns Bicentenary Conference at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, I concluded my paper on Catherine Carswell's *The Life of Robert Burns* with a move outwards from Carswell's focus on the sexuality of Burns and his women to a consideration of Burns's love songs as a poetry of desire, where the love relationship depicted in the song was itself a metaphor for a reaching out to the "beyond," to an ideal unrealizable in this sublunary world. In this connection, I saw a relationship between the motif of *Sehnsucht* found in Romanticism generally and especially in German Romantic poetry and *lieder* and the keynote of longing so often struck in Burns's songs. I would like to take up again Burns's transcendent use of the love song, the poetry of desire, relate it to his perception of his national context and then move forward to compare and contrast this eighteenth-century situation with that of MacDiarmid in the Scottish Renaissance period of the early twentieth century.

One of the notable qualities in Burns's love lyrics is their celebration of the natural countryside alongside their celebration of love or their lament for the loss of love. There is, of course, a long tradition stretching back to classical times of love imagery being borrowed from the natural world and used for mundane or transcendent purposes, and in Burns's own century Alan Ramsay brought the sense of the everyday life of the countryside into his love drama *The Gentle Shepherd* alongside its pastoral conventions. Burns, on the other hand, seems able to communicate an emotionally charged and less circumscribed experience of the actual world of nature in his verses. To adapt a phrase from Wordsworth's 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, we find Burns giving us a selection of the natural world as really experienced by men and

women, and giving it to us in a selection of the language really used by his Ayrshire contemporaries. This is a new poetic voice speaking to us apparently directly and communicating moods and associations with which we can empathize; and it is the recognition of this emotional reality beneath the crafted surface which draws out our deep response to the poetry and music of the songs.

In Burns's early poem "The Vision," there is a more ambivalent encounter with love and the natural world in the persona of the Muse Coila who comes to give the speaker her validation of his poetic aspirations. At first Coila would appear to offer the possibility of being the object of the speaker's sexual desire as he watches her enter the room, "A tight, outlandish *Hizzie*, braw" with "such a leg [that] my bonie JEAN / Could only peer it."¹ However, rather than the real-life girl who, as Burns tells us in his *Commonplace Book*, so often acted as the Muse who brought together "Love and Music and Poetry," Coila is one of Scotland's national Muses, and the poet is the object of *her* interest rather than she herself being the sexual object of his. Coila is the Muse of Burns's own Ayrshire district of Kyle, who has watched over his poetic development and has now come to confirm his role as rustic bard and to encourage him at a time when he appears to be regretting his chosen vocation and feeling himself a failure:

All in this mottie, misty clime,
I backward mus'd on wasted time,
How I had spent my *youthfu' prime*,
 An' done nae-thing,
But stringing blethers up in rhyme
 For fools to sing. (*Poems*, I, 103)

It is interesting to contrast this modest, even if ironically expressed view of Burns's aspirations as local poet with his view of himself as National Bard in the late 1780s and early 1790s. In the later period we find a much more confident artist who has tested himself through the publication of his poems and through his interaction with Edinburgh intellectual society. His experience of Scotland was much wider also as a result of his journeyings in the late 1780s, and his awareness of the ambivalences of the political world within and without Scotland more mature. Much ink has been spilled over the question of whether Burns was Nationalist or Unionist, Jacobin or Jacobite, or whether—in

¹"The Vision," *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 104, 105. Henceforth *Poems*.

anticipation of MacDiarmid—he was “whaur extremes meet,”² being all of these things at one and the same time. What seems relevant to my topic, however, is Burns’s perception at this later date of his own involvement with Scotland as opposed to the more modest involvement with his local Ayrshire district of Kyle in “The Vision”; and his perception also that Scotland and her culture were under threat. As with Scott’s comments in the final chapter of *Waverley* about “tracing the evanescent manners of his own country,”³ so Burns in his song-collecting and revising appeared to see himself as helping to preserve the threatened traditions of his country in the form of its national song. And in this way he was fulfilling the bardic tradition of involvement with cultural definition and national focus.

On the other hand, in her account of Burns’s song collecting in *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era*, Carol McGuirk suggests that “self-preservation was also among Burns’s motives as he revised traditional material.” She says: “His private values are consistently—if covertly—conveyed in most of his song revisions,” and she adds provocatively: “Scottish song fragments were the formal shell into which Burns chose to retreat after Edinburgh.”⁴

This interaction of the personal and the national motives brings me back to my starting-point of Burns’s poetry of desire and the transcendent role played by his love song revisions in particular. When we read and listen to the love songs, we notice that the longing expressed through words and music is not the conventional plea from male lover to coy mistress who will not give him the satisfaction he seeks, but a longing which takes account of mutability and yet transcends human time. Absence, and with it longing, is the keynote of “For the sake o’ Somebody”—whether the absence of the loved one or the Prince across the water, if one reads this song in a Jacobite context. And longing is also the keynote of “The Banks o’ Doon,” especially in its less specific third version and musical setting. Yet alongside the evocation of absence or longing in both songs, there is also the positive evocation of what has been or what could be were circumstances different: “Thou minds me o’ departed joys, / Departed, never to return” (*Poems*, II, 575); “I could range the world around...I wad do—what wad I not— / For the sake o’ Somebody!” (*Poems*, II, 850). In “Ca’ the yowes to the knowes,” on the other hand, the lover appears to speak confidently of trysting, of the strength of his passion and of his inability to part from the loved one: “I can die—but canna part” (*Poems*, II, 739); but when sung, we notice that the melody accompanying these apparently positive

²Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* in *Hugh MacDiarmid: Complete Poems 1920-1976*, ed. Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken. 2 vols. (London, 1978), I, 87. Volume and page numbers for further quotations will be given in the text.

³Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley* (1814), Everyman paperback edn. (London, 1976), p.478.

⁴Carol McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (Athens, GA, 1985), p. 116.

sentiments is in the minor mode which, when combined with the slow dotted rhythm and the evocative structure of leaps and steps, subverts the positive verbal communication and creates a sense of longing and *potential* absence which points beyond the present to some unknown future. This recognition of loss or absence through the melody may then turn us back again to the words where we notice that much of the poem is in fact written in the future tense, and this proleptic narrative interacts with the minor melodic mode to produce that sense of *Sehnsucht*, that longing for the transcendent ideal found so often in Romantic period poetry and song. There is a similar scenario in "O wert thou in the cauld blast," by tradition written by Burns during his last illness for Jessie Lewars who had come to help Jean with house and children. Here the dominant note is again one of stretching out to the ideal relationship, with the longing balanced by the motif of protectiveness which has often been pointed to as a recurring element in Burns's love songs: "Oh wert thou in the cauld blast...I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee" (*Poems*, II, 813). One notices, however, that the tense here is conditional and one remembers that in real life at this time Burns himself was the one in need of protection from the harshness of the everyday world.

Burns's love songs, then, however much tradition has associated them with the celebration of a particular woman or sexual relationship, are, as is increasingly being recognized, art works which transcend their immediate source of inspiration and are also, I would argue, transformed into symbols of a longing for the ideal which goes far beyond the longing for an ideal love relationship. In his book *Scottish Journey*, Edwin Muir described the Burns Cult as a myth "based on a firm foundation of sanctified illusion and romantic wish fulfilment." And of Burns himself he said:

This legendary figure is a Scotsman who took upon himself all the sins of the people, not to redeem them, but to commit them as ideally as they should be committed.... He was a scapegoat driven out to sweet pastures, while the people elected to remain in the wilderness.⁵

This caustic assessment seems to me to be unfair to Burns and the Scots, both of whom have had to try to come to terms with an uncertain identity and, in the case of the Scots, with an often *unarticulated* sense of national loss and aspiration which may explain their conscious or unconscious response to the note of longing struck in Burns's songs. This itself is a human response felt also far beyond Scotland and the Scots. So far as Burns himself is concerned, I find myself remembering Rilke's definition of *Sehnsucht* in relation to Burns's last years. For Rilke, "Das ist die Sehnsucht, wohnen im Gewoge und keine Heimat haben in der Zeit" (That's what longing is: to live in a state of flux and

⁵Edwin Muir, *Scottish Journey* (1935; rptd. Edinburgh, 1979), p. 90.

have no homeland in the world of Time).⁶ Burns too was in a state of flux when he had scaled the Mount Parnassus of Edinburgh and found that not only was it *not* the home of art and intellect he had imagined it might be, but that, whatever its nature, it could not offer him a place where he could function and where others would accept him as the professional artist and craftsman he was, as opposed to the heaven-taught ploughman they wished him to be, and the farmer they insisted on keeping him, despite his attempts to find the patronage which would lead to another occupation. Caught between his love for and at-oneness with his rural environment and his contrary need for the intellectual stimulus of minds which matched his own which he had glimpsed in Edinburgh but which had been ultimately denied him, it is little wonder that the note of *Sehnsucht* is so often struck in his love songs and that, as McGuirk has suggested, his song collecting became a vehicle for self-preservation as well as for cultural preservation. In both activities, however, the stretching out to the beyond, to the transcendent ideal, was a dominant motif.

The question of reconciling personal and national Muses is more straightforward when one comes to the poetry of Burns's twentieth-century successor, Hugh MacDiarmid. For one thing, the love lyric is not a genre much used by the modernist MacDiarmid and the few love songs he wrote are either impersonal and reflective in tone as in the chilly "First Love" from *Stony Limits*, or they are openly symbolical and transcendent. The fine lyric "Milk-Wort and Bog-Cotton" from *Scots Unbound* is a love-song to the *earth* written, in part, in the metaphor of a human love relationship:

Cwa' een like milk-wort and bog-cotton hair!
I love you, earth, in this mood best o' a'
When the shy spirit like a laich wind moves
And frae the lift nae shadow can fa'
Since there's nocht left to thraw a shadow there
Owre een like milk-wort and milk-white cotton hair.

In the second stanza, however, the transcendent mode becomes more explicit as, in the manner of Thomas Hardy, the poet draws attention to sunlight and shadow in the natural world and applies this opposition and balance of natural forces philosophically to the human world:

Wad that nae leaf upon anither wheeled
A shadow either and nae root need dern
In sacrifice to let sic beauty be!
But deep surroondin' darkness I discern

⁶Raine Maria Rilke, "Das ist die Sehnsucht" in *Harrap Anthology of German Poetry*, ed. August Closs and T. Pugh Williams (London, 1957), p. 498.

Is aye the price o' licht. Wad licht revealed
Naething but you, and nicht nocht else concealed. (I, 331)

MacDiarmid's female Muse is thus characteristically in the service of a philosophical or ideological apprehension of the nature of human existence and, in contrast to the poetry of Burns, there is little of a more traditional love-song surface identity to mislead the reader.

What Burns and MacDiarmid share, on the other hand, is the bardic mingling of the personal and the national in their operation as poets, but here again MacDiarmid is much more explicit and didactic in his expression of his mission to revitalize his country and her culture. In this objective MacDiarmid looked for support to Russian writers such as Dostoyevsky and Blok, who also believed that a writer should become involved with the fate of his country. And it is in his "Silken Leddy" adaptation of Blok's symbolist poem "The Lady Unknown" (I, 88-9) that the Drunk Man's poetic aspirations in relation to his country are validated, just as in "The Vision" the Muse Coila had affirmed Burns's poet-speaker's similar if more modest ambitions. In the work of both poets, therefore, the female Muse is an essential ingredient in the poetry of personal and national desire.

Burns and MacDiarmid both lived at times of crisis with regard to Scottish culture and language, but the crisis was much more apparent and decline much further advanced in the years immediately after the First World War when MacDiarmid initiated the revival movement which has come to be known as the Scottish Renaissance. His approach to regeneration was therefore more didactic and more explicitly ideological than was the preservation mission of Burns 150 years before. There was also in the late modernist period a more general sense that civilization—and European culture in particular—was in decline, as can be seen by the reader response to Eliot's *The Waste Land* which appeared to speak for a generation in its expression of the nihilism of the time, while a poem such as Yeats's "The Second Coming" with its message: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,"⁷ took on implications which reverberated beyond its national inspiration in the Troubles of Ireland. *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* belongs to this literature of crisis, but unlike the elegiac tone of *The Waste Land* and the mood of withdrawal in much characteristic modernist writing, MacDiarmid's nationalist agenda brings the spirit of Romantic idealism into the poem to interact with its modernistic features. Thus *A Drunk Man* not only dramatizes scenarios of decline, it simultaneously proposes ideals of regeneration. And it is here that we find among the shifting symbols of the poem the symbol of woman, either in the everyday persona of the Drunk Man's wife Jean, or in the transcendent

⁷W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, (London, 1982), p. 211.

persona of the Silken Leddy, or Muse, both of whom inspire the Drunk Man and rescue him from his despairs and excesses. In passages such as “A luvin’ wumman is a licht / That shows a man his waefu’ plicht” (a lyric, MacDiarmid tells us, suggested by the French of Edmond Rocher) which leads to the enigmatic ballad “O wha’s the bride that cairries the bunch / O’ thistles blinterin’ white?” (I, 102), and, especially, in the Drunk Man’s “hymn” to his wife Jean beginning “The munelicht is my knowledge o’ mysel,” woman is a symbol of personal salvation for the male speaker, who admits his human failings and limitations and looks to the woman in his life to ignore these and through their sexual relationship to quicken and clarify him:

E’en as the munelicht’s borrowed frae the sun
I ha’e my knowledge o’ mysel’ frae thee,
And much that nane but thee can e’er mak’ clear,
Save my licht’s frae the source, is dark to me.

* * *

Bit[e] into me forever mair and lift
Me clear o’ chaos in a great relief
Till, like this thistle in the munelicht growin’,
I brak in roses owre a hedge o’ grief.... (I, 112-13)

As the borrowing of the name Jean for the everyday woman symbol might suggest, Burns is a frequent presence in MacDiarmid’s long poem, in its early stages in particular, both as a fellow-poet who can be called upon to help regenerate Scotland and the world: “Rabbie, wad’st thou wert here—the world hath need, / And Scotland mair sae, o’ the likes o’ thee!” (I, 85); and also as a symbol of the distortions which ignorant human beings can make out of achievements and philosophies which they adapt for their own purposes, ignoring the original perceptions: “Mair nonsense has been uttered in his name / Than in ony’s barrin’ liberty and Christ” (I, 84). For despite his acquired reputation as being anti-Burns, MacDiarmid’s target was not Burns himself but the Scots and what they had made of Burns and the literary tradition from which he came. It is, however, in what we may call the “Ballad of the Silken Leddy” section that we find the woman symbol functioning as poetic Muse in a way which allows meaningful comparisons between Burns and MacDiarmid with reference to Burns’s “Vision,” a Burns source MacDiarmid does not draw attention to but which seems to me equally valid with the acknowledged Blok source in the national regeneration context. Here both poetic personae sit in the howff alone of an evening and both are visited by a mysterious female presence who explicitly in Burns and more implicitly in MacDiarmid reveals herself as their Muse and inspires them to continue with their chosen vocation:

*I seek, in this captivity,
To pierce the veils that darklin’ fa’*

—See white clints slidin' to the sea,
And hear the horns o' Elfland blaw. (I, 89)

MacDiarmid's poem took its starting-point from a translation by Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky of Blok's symbolist poem, but his adaptation transformed it into a lyrical ballad which takes its place happily in the vernacular tradition of Fergusson and Burns. Set in a context of "white-washed cottons" hanging above "the vennel's pokiness" (I, 88), the cries of children and the sounds of the young men and their girls rowing on the lochan, its evocation of Scottish rural life displaces the modernist cynicism and world-weariness of the original while the mysterious lady becomes suggestive of the ballad world of Thomas the Rhymer. In this lyrical ballad, as in Burns's love lyrics, the female Muse inspires the poet to aspire to the ideal, to the beyond: "A sun is gi'en to me to haud... My soul stores up this wealth unspent" (I, 89); while at the same time, in mundane terms her appearance generates a poem which affirms the Scottish literary and linguistic tradition.

There is another Burns resonance here too, it seems to me. For what MacDiarmid is doing in his adaptations of European writers is not so far removed from Burns's revising practices in the song-collecting of his post-Edinburgh period. Both were using existing models for their own personal and national poetic purposes, and both transformed their originals in a way which added something new and of high quality to the Scottish poetry tradition. And although MacDiarmid complained about Burns's destroying original folk-song sources in his song-revising,⁸ he himself behaved similarly in his early Scots lyric collections where, for example, the poem "Empty Vessel" from *Penny Wheep* is utterly changed from its demotic and predictable folk-song source, "Jenny Nettles,"⁹ becoming in the transformation a modernist poem, elliptical in form and philosophical in import, while still maintaining a relationship with the Scottish tradition through the intimacy of its language, its ballad-like verse movement and enigmatic narrative.

Let me turn now briefly to MacDiarmid's second long poem, *To Circumjack Cencrastus* and his use of a female figure as personal and national Muse in lyrical passages from this poem.

In his discussion of contemporary Scottish culture in *Scott and Scotland*, published in 1936, Edwin Muir commented that "a really original Scots poet like Hugh MacDiarmid has never received in Scotland any criticism of his

⁸Hugh MacDiarmid, *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. Duncan Glen (London, 1969), p. 140.

⁹See Kenneth Buthlay, *Hugh MacDiarmid (C. M. Grieve)* (Edinburgh & London, 1964), p. 33.

more ambitious poems which can be of the slightest use to him."¹⁰ Muir's complaint confirms MacDiarmid's own dejected letter to George Ogilvie shortly after the publication of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* and its lukewarm and / or puzzled reception:

I set out to give Scotland a poem, perfectly modern in psychology, which could only be compared in the whole length of Scots literature with 'Tam o' Shanter' and Dunbar's 'Seven Deidly Sins'. And I felt that I had done it by the time I finished—despite all the faults and flaws of my work.

To Circumjack Cencrastus followed *A Drunk Man* in 1930 after MacDiarmid had left Scotland for London to work on Compton Mackenzie's short-lived *Vox* magazine and had written to George Ogilvie: "I ought to have been here years ago."¹¹ It is a more fragmented poem than *A Drunk Man*, something which may reflect the crisis of identity in its poet. Like its predecessor it is personal, metaphysical and national in orientation, but its poet's disillusionment with his country and its failure to recognize his achievement is demonstrated by the fact that passages dealing with Lowland Scottish culture have become largely satiric in form while the visionary quest now takes place in the context of the Highlands and their Celtic traditions. Yet here the poet is handicapped linguistically in a way far beyond any language difficulties experienced by Burns or the *Drunk Man* poet. For the *Cencrastus* poet, like his Lowland compatriots, has no Gaelic and he is therefore confronted not merely with the task of revitalizing his nation's culture but doing so with the realization that his country's culture is seriously divided in addition to being in decline. In the lyric "The Mavis of Pabal" the speaker describes himself as

A pool cut aff frae the sea,
A tree without roots that stands
On the ground unsteadily.

For poetry's no' made in a lifetime
And I lack a livin' past; (I, 191-92)

imagery he was to use again for a similar purpose in the later and starker 'Lament for the Great Music':

¹⁰Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer* (Edinburgh, 1982), p. 22.

¹¹C. M. Grieve, Letters to George Ogilvie 9.12.26 and 6.1.30. *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. Alan Bold (Athens, GA, 1984), pp. 90, 101.

...My native land should be to me
 As a root to a tree. If a man's labour fills no want there
 His deeds are doomed and his music mute. (I, 472)

It is, nevertheless, to the Gaelic tradition that the *Cencrastus* poet looks for inspiration:

...to the islands
 Where the wells are undefiled
 And folk sing as their fathers sang
 Before Christ was a child. (I, 208)

The appearance of the female Muse in the *Cencrastus* poem is associated with Gaelic rather than Lowland culture in lyrical sections such as “*Aodhagán Ó Rathaille sang this sang*” (I, 224), “*My love is to the light of lights*” (I, 291) and “*North of the Tweed*” (I, 269). In his note to the first-mentioned lyric, MacDiarmid comments that Egan O’Rahilly was an early eighteenth-century Irish poet whose vision poem “*Gile na Gile* (‘The Brightness of Brightness’) ‘sees, in the image of an Irish maiden, that idea of which Plato dreamed; and this strange pulchritude is also Eire herself—the secret Ireland of the Gael’” (I, 294). The choice of model here therefore, even if a borrowed Irish Gaelic poet (and the eighteenth-century resonances would appear now to be Ossianic as opposed to Burnsian), fits with the bardic tradition and MacDiarmid’s own identification with his country’s fate. Like O’Rahilly, the *Cencrastus* poet similarly meets his Brightness of Brightness in a lonely glen, but, he is uncharacteristically lacking in confidence, not at all sure of his welcome: “And will she lauch ahint her haund / At my uncouth demeanour”?—uncertain, even, if he will be able to recognize the authentic Celtic Muse:

...But tho' I'm blinded in her licht
 The hardy doot's still rife
 That aiblins I am sair beginked
 Thro' sma' experience o' life,
 And favoured here wi' nae King's dochter,
 But juist...a minister's rinawa wife.... (I, 226)

Language is the principal problem: “*O wad at least my yokel words / Some Gaelic strain had kept*”; and in the end he is forced to admit defeat:

—Fain through Burns' clay MacMhaighstir's fire
 To glint within me ettled.
 It stirred, alas, but couldna kyth
 Prood, elegant and mettled. (I, 225)

MacDiarmid has more success with his *personal* poetic quest as expressed in the lyrics “*North of the Tweed*” and “*My love is to the light of lights.*” This

So the poet finds that nature and love have between them released him from
 “A’ sense o’ livin’ under set conditions,” making him once again

A seven-whistler in Kintyre, or yon broon hill
 That’s barren save for fower pale violets on
 A South-leanin’ bank. (I, 270)

Significantly, the poem’s final words state his intention to resume his poetic role: “Noo I’ll pipe instead—what tune’ll you hae?— / On Rudha nam Marbh” (I, 271), the aptly named Point of the Dead.

I find “*North of the Tweed*” one of MacDiarmid’s finest lyrical nature poems, rooted in that conjunction of female Muse and the natural world, personal vision and national celebration which is the tradition he inherited from Burns, a poem which suggests also a coming together of his Borders roots and Celtic aspirations through its imagery of the varied Scottish landscape; and a poem which succeeds in keeping the lyrical voice while extending the tight form of his early Scots lyrics to the slower, more meditative pace of blank verse form. Like the more overt Celtic-theme poems in *Cenchrastus* and the vision of the silken leddy in *A Drunk Man*, like the love songs of Burns, this too has been a poem of desire for what is beyond the earthly, but it is a desire which, in keeping with the recognition of the beauty in everyday things which is a major element in MacDiarmid’s poetry, has been—at least temporarily—satisfied and given expression through the imagery of a loving human relationship and of the natural world as found in the poet’s country, Scotland.

When I first started out on this exploration of the love lyric, I intended to move beyond Burns and MacDiarmid to the contemporary situation to see whether one could still find in an age of greater sexual equality, urbanization and more ambivalent local and international alliances this particular conjunction of woman and nature in a transcendent poetry of desire. I realized, however, that, to borrow from MacDiarmid’s *Drunk Man*, this would be like trying to put “An ocean in a mutchkin” (half bottle; I, 87) and that a detailed investigation would have to wait until another opportunity. For the moment the case must rest on Burns and MacDiarmid and their transformations of the love lyric and its national context.

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“Nocht Sae Sober As a Man Blin’ Drunk”:
MacDiarmid’s Transformations of Burns
in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*

Naomi Mitchison compares the two greatest poets of modern Scots in a Burns Night oration quoted by MacDiarmid in his memoir *Lucky Poet*:

Where Burns, in his time, could only whisper, we can shout. Hugh MacDiarmid shouts, sometimes rather deafeningly. The two Scots poets are both beautifully tactless, but where Burns—in deference to his age—apologized and even effaced, though not always convincingly, Hugh MacDiarmid...plunges deeper.¹

In an earlier Burns Night oration (delivered in 1892, the year of Christopher Murray Grieve’s birth), G. K. Chesterton, who was thirty-three years later to become the butt of an early section of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, locates the source of what Mitchison calls the “effacing” quality in Burns. Chesterton, noting Burns’s “hopes for the devil and charity for all classes of men, except the humbug,” singles out Burns’s “universal sympathy” as his chief distinction.² Though Chesterton goes too far—Burns’s sympathy, far from being universal, was greatly diminished when he looked up from the helpless to the lordly—an underlying confidence in human fellowship, along

¹Naomi Mitchison, quoted in *Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas* (London, 1943), pp. 232-3.

²G. K. Chesterton, Burns Night oration, reprinted in *The Debater*, 2.8 (Jan. 1892), 73.

with a downright affection for fellow-sinners and transgressors, does provide a leaven in Burns's poetry, including almost all of his satires.³

When Hugh MacDiarmid adapts and echoes Burns's images, it is the sentiment, the implicit optimism that underlies Burns's sympathy, that he tends to question. *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* echoes the language and imagery of Burns almost on every page. But two mock-epics by Burns are especially important in influencing the setting, imagery, subject-matter, and even "plot" of MacDiarmid's masterwork. In "Tam o' Shanter," a middle-aged man distinctly under the influence gallops through the night-landscape and, instead of falling from his horse into the river Doon and drowning—as he fully deserves and as has been predicted by his own wife Kate—instead is positively rewarded for his bad behavior. Tam is given a fleeting vision of the apprentice-witch Nanny, the feminine Other as illuminated by lightning, firelight and moonlight. In Burns's "Death and Dr. Hornbook," which in its essentially comic presentation of the supernatural may be read as an early sketch for "Tam o' Shanter," Burns's speaker and the skeletal figure of Death enjoy a companionable moonlit discussion of the medical secrets of the community. Like "Tam o' Shanter," "Hornbook" is a narrative poem that appears to be about a drunk man's nocturnal encounter with the transcendent; yet the intense focus of both poems' speculative gaze is really nothing more or less sublime than the undraped human body: alive or dead, diseased or poisoned in "Hornbook," emphatically gendered as female in the figure of Cutty Sark, her unclothed fellow-witches, and even the exposed rump of the mare Meg in "Tam o' Shanter."

In both "Tam o' Shanter" and "Death and Dr. Hornbook," Burns's setting is a comic yet visionary darkness silvered by moonlight, a night-setting that yields revealing glimpses of a range of community transgressions, from those Burns clearly regards as venial—lewd dancing, indecent exposure, husbands who won't go (or stay) home, drunkenness—to what should be the more serious matters of suicide, Satan worship, infanticide and parricide. In both poems, however, Burns's tone in referring even to the grimmest matters is distinctly giddy, a consequence of choosing a protagonist temporarily impaired by drink and disinclined to prudent judgment. As in Jonson's anti-Puritanical *Bartholomew Fair*, satire turns back on the satiric impulse itself, ever on the hunt for "enormities." Policing human behavior becomes the unenviable task

³The reading of Burns as "universally" benevolent and genial may well be more a creation of the Burns-cult than an inevitable response to Burns's poetry. In "Robert Burns's Satires," John C. Weston well argues that the reading of Burns as sympathetic is usually taken much too far: "that Burns's satires are not tragic, black, visceral does not mean that they are merely gently bantering and wittily amusing. Their power derives from the fierceness of Burns's hatreds and his intention to wound his adversary. The splenetic and the friendly temperament can exist together." *The Art of Robert Burns*, ed. R. D. S. Jack and Andrew Noble (London, 1982), p. 37.

of wives and magistrates (the Kates and the Overdos)—not of poets or their chosen mock-heroes.

The background role played by Pope's mock-epic *The Rape of the Lock* in "Tam" is played by Eliot's *The Wasteland* in MacDiarmid's poem. But it is not T. S. Eliot who is being echoed when Hugh MacDiarmid adopts a drunken speaker, a nocturnal moonlit setting, and a body-based subject matter: all these come from Burns, as does the exuberant refusal of any ostentatious high seriousness. And yet the differences are more striking than the similarities. MacDiarmid does, in some sections of *A Drunk Man*, have a mind to catalogue enormities, as in his bitter indictment of the outcome of the General Strike. And he exhibits almost none of Burns's fundamental fondness for the human body—for sins and also virtues of the flesh. In *A Drunk Man*, MacDiarmid's speaker tends to deny that he is embodied by his body: "I canna feel it has to dae wi' me."⁴ MacDiarmid's speaker cannot rest in appreciative contemplation, as Burns's so often do, of the body as a source of pleasurable sensation and response. The flesh is not for MacDiarmid a solution but very much part of the problem of existence—the sign of the Cradle-and-Coffin, the skeleton-at-the-feast. An utter absence of pleasurable response is emphasized even in the final two lines of MacDiarmid's poem, spoken by the speaker's absent wife. "Jean's" projected rejoinder to some 2,600 preceding lines of inspired reverie, including the speaker's final comment "O I ha'e Silence left," is merely tart and deflating: "'—'And weel ye nicht,' / Sae Jean'll say, 'efter sic a nicht!'" (ll. 2684-5).

A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle is curiously like Burns's "Death and Dr. Hornbook" in this arbitrary closure. Burns's poem, like MacDiarmid's, ends very abruptly and may even have been excluded by Burns from the Kilmarnock edition of 1786 because the poet regarded it as unfinished. Similarly, well-known legend has it that *A Drunk Man* eluded final form until MacDiarmid sought help from his former schoolmaster, the composer F. G. Scott, who not only suggested how the various parts should be arranged, but himself wrote Jean's two concluding lines. The conclusion of *A Drunk Man* is like "Tam o' Shanter" in giving the last word to the voice of the prosaic and the prudent. Burns's concluding moral, which might have been drafted by Tam's long-tongued but also long-suffering wife Kate, is as follows:

Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,
Ilk man and mother's son, take heed:
Whene'er to drink you are inclin'd,
Or cutty-sarks run in your mind,

⁴*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, in Hugh MacDiarmid: *Selected Poetry*, ed. Alan Riach and Michael Grieve (New York, 1992), p. 37, l. 329. Subsequent references are to the line numbers as given in this edition.

Think, ye may buy the joys o'er dear,
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.⁵

The superego is handed these final moralizing lines, but the heart and soul of Burns's most ebullient poem lie elsewhere, in Tam's scene with the joyously libidinous witches.⁶ In MacDiarmid's poem, the absent wife Jean, though more respectfully considered than Tam's wife Kate in "Tam," nonetheless performs Kate's role as the housebound wife whose prudence is administered ultimately as a kind of antidote to poetic flight and whose scoldings about drunkenness are earlier dismissed by the Drunk Man as just so much "natter, natter, natter" (in *l.* 164, where Jean's "natter" rhymes with, and deflates, an earlier echo of Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" in *l.* 161 "water! water!").

Jean's unimpressed final rejoinder, like the final moral of "Tam o' Shanter," may seem arbitrary and insufficient precisely because the entire text of *A Drunk Man* is already a rejoinder—not only to the poems of Burns but to a hundred other poets and texts echoed within it. *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* could be read not only as MacDiarmid's belated modernist rendering of Burns's themes but also as the thundering vernacular rejoinder that Burns never received in 1785 or 1786 from David Sillar, John Lapraik, and the rest of the local poets he addressed in all those dialect verse-epistles so deeply preoccupied with the status of poetry in Scots and the boundaries between the local, the national and the international in poetry. It may have taken 140 years, but Hugh MacDiarmid finally does respond to the issues raised by Burns.

Early in "Death and Dr. Hornbook," Burns's young narrator confidently confesses to what he defines as a slight overindulgence in ale:

The Clachan yill had made me canty,
I was na fou, but just had plenty;
I stacher'd whyles, but yet took tent ay
 To free the ditches;
An' hillocks, stanes, an' bushes kenn'd ay
 Frae ghaists an' witches.

The rising Moon began to glow
The distant *Cumnock* hills out-owre;
To count her horns, wi' a' my pow'r,

⁵*Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford, 1968), II, 564, *ll.* 219-24. Henceforth *Poems*.

⁶Because of the gap between the beggars' sentimental, idealistic songs and their actual (self-serving, self-destructive, aggressive) behavior, the anarchic and revolutionary values they articulate in "Love and Liberty"—"Courts for Cowards were erected," etc.—actually are undercut. Cf. my note to "Love and Liberty" in *Robert Burns: Selected Poems*, ed. Carol McQuirk (London, 1993), pp. 220-23.

I set mysel,
But whether she had three or four,
I cou'd na tell.

I was come round about the hill,
And todlin down on *Willie's mill*,
Setting my staff wi' a' my skill,
To keep me sicker;
Tho' leeward whyles, against my will,
I took a bicker.

I there wi' *Something* does forgather
That pat me in an eerie swither; (*Poems*, I, 79-80)

MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man* opens with an echo of these stanzas from "Hornbook," but it is an ironic and revisionary echo in its emphasis on waning energy:

I amna' fou' sae muckle as tired—deid dune.
It's gey and hard wark coupin' gless for gless
Wi' Cruivie and Gilsanquhar and the like,
And I'm no' juist as bauld as aince I was. (*ll.* 1-4)

In adopting Burns's motifs, as here, MacDiarmid often undercuts them by removing Burns's emphasis on comfort taken from good fellowship and community. Unlike Tam o' Shanter's "glorious" hours at the tavern in Ayr, the speaker's drinking bout with Cruivie, Gilsanquhar and the rest is remembered resentfully as hard and tedious work. Unlike Tam or the unnamed speaker of "Hornbook," MacDiarmid's *Drunk Man* cannot "free the ditches" but begins with a fall. Lying in a moonlit ditch, immobilized but not silenced (rather like James Joyce's Dubliners), MacDiarmid's narrator contemplates the thistles and bracken. Sometimes he slips into Burnsian octosyllabics even as he echoes and revises Burns:

I canna ride awa' like Tam,
But e'en maun bide juist whaur I am. (*ll.* 833-4)

Unlike the speaker of "Hornbook," who has Death to converse with, and unlike Tam o' Shanter, who has Nanny and the female community of witches to contemplate, MacDiarmid's *Drunk Man* is solitary, reduced to soliloquy and dramatic monologue—to which, as mentioned, only a distinctly insufficient and unsympathetic response will be forthcoming. Community, relationship and rejoinder—those evidences of human interconnectiveness in which Burns takes such comfort and delight—are not absent in MacDiarmid, but they are unstable and phantasmagoric. The speaker's musings on Scottish community and identity in *A Drunk Man* are continuously being projected, constructed, and

dismantled as he observes and explores the alternately lovely and grotesque transformations of the thistle.

Burns assaults the smug virtue of the “unco guid” in his epistle to Jamie Smith; their rigidity is counterpointed by his and Jamie’s likely more zigzag and storm-tossed course on the sea of life: “Ye are sae *grave*,” Burns’s speaker mockingly informs the righteous, “nae doubt ye’re *wise*” (*Poems*, I, 183). MacDiarmid shares Burns’s decided preference for Scottish sinners over Scottish men of property:

And O! to think that there are members o’
St Andrews Societies sleepin’ soon’,

* * *

Nae doot they’re sober, as a Scot ne’er was,
Each tether’d to a punctual-snorin’ missus,
Whilst I, *puir fule*, owre continents unkennt
And wine-dark oceans wander like Ulysses. . . (ll. 385-6; 397-400; emphasis added)

Incidentally, the feminine rhyme in that last stanza—most unusual in modernist poetry—recalls Burns’s habitual double and feminine rhyme: “hose well” / “Boswell” in “The Author’s Earnest Cry”; “unsought for” / “fought for” / “unwrought for” in “A Poet’s Welcome,” etc.

Images associated with Burns are sometimes provided by MacDiarmid with an updated political edge. In famous lines from his first epistle to La-praik, for example, Burns prays to his Muse: “Gie me ae spark o’ Nature’s fire, / That’s a’ the learning I desire” (*Poems*, I, 87). MacDiarmid’s revision in “The Weapon” section of *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930) transforms these lines to: “Scots steel temper’d wi’ Irish fire, / Is the weapon I desire.” Another example: Burns’s song “A red red Rose” was considered by Yeats to contain the purest lyric images in all Burns’s work; but when the song’s central image is appropriated by MacDiarmid in a famous section of *A Drunk Man* (sometimes titled “Ballad of the General Strike,” sometimes “Ballad of the Crucified Rose”), the red red rose is politicized, signifying the brief hope awakened by the initial success of the General Strike. The red rose—a symbol of reform, unlike the reactionary, Jacobite “little white rose of Scotland” of a later poem by MacDiarmid “that breaks the heart”—is crucified, so that another failure of sympathetic rejoinder is stressed in this section of *A Drunk Man*. “The Ballad of the Crucified Rose” documents the rose’s final martyrdom at the hands of the community:

A rose loup’t oot and grew, until
It was ten times the size
O’ ony rose the thistle afore
Had heistit to the skies. (ll. 1155-8)

* * *

And still it grew until it seemed
The hail braid earth had turned
A reid reid rose that in the lift
Like a ball o' fire burned. (*ll.* 1163-6)

* * *

Syne the rose shrivelled suddenly
As a balloon is burst;
The thistle was a ghaistly stick,
As gin it had been curst.

Was it the ancient vicious sway
Imposed itsel' again,
Or nerve owre weak for new emprise
That made the effort vain, (*ll.* 1171-8)

* * *

The vices that defeat the dream
Are in the plant itsel',
And till they're purged its virtues maun
In pain and misery dwell.

Let Deils rejoice to see the waste,
The fond hope brocht to nocht.
The thistle in their een is as
A favourite lust they've wrocht. (*ll.* 1191-8)

* * *

Like connoisseurs the Deils gang roond
And praise its attitude,
Till on the Cross the silly Christ
To fidge fu' fain's begood! (*ll.* 1207-10)

MacDiarmid, moving between embittered echoes of "A red red Rose" and "Tam o' Shanter" (the deil who plays pipes for the witches' dance likewise "fidges fu' fain" at the marvels of human anatomy the witches' dance reveals), betrays none of Burns's sneaking fondness for the deil. A later section of *A Drunk Man*, "The Thistle's Characteristics," comically echoes the language both of "A red, red Rose" and Lady Nairne's Jacobite song "Will Ye No Come Back Again," though MacDiarmid's politics preclude any sympathy for Burns's nostalgic Jacobitism, let alone the Lady Nairne's:

Wull a' the seas gang dry at last
(As dry as I am gettin' noo),
Or wull they aye come back again,
Seilfu' as my neist drink to me, (*ll.* 1379-82)

The lines that immediately follow these echo central images from another of Burns's early mock-epics, "Scotch Drink":

Food fills the wame, an' keeps us livin:
Tho' life's a gift no worth receivin (*Poems*, I, 174)

Burns's lines are tinged with a certain gloom, deepened in MacDiarmid's adaptation:

Yet but fer drink and drink's effects,
The yeast o' God that barmis in us,
We nicht as weel no' be alive. (*ll.* 1401-03)

A Drunk Man has many comic and lighter moments, for MacDiarmid does not darken or embitter all of his literary borrowings. As his source-images in Burns are usually genial and comic (or typically are read that way by the Burns audience MacDiarmid is chastising in *A Drunk Man*), MacDiarmid places his own stamp on these images by recasting them in more disillusioned terms and contexts. By contrast, with a somber or sacred literary source such as the sublime first command of God in Genesis, MacDiarmid's revision will lighten and undercut: "'Let there be Licht,' said God, and there was / A little" (*ll.* 2101-02). MacDiarmid's comic variations on sober sources are typically offered as a punishment for sentiment, as in his dismissive echo of the Lady Nairne, or of overly metaphysical high-mindedness. Yeat's poem "Among School Children," written in June 1926, nonetheless must have been known to MacDiarmid that same year, for *A Drunk Man* impudently recasts "How can we know the dancer from the dance," its evocative final question:

Guid sakes, I'm in a dreidfu' state.
I'll ha'e nae inklin' sune
Gin I'm the drinker or the drink,
The thistle or the mune. (*ll.* 448-49)

I will conclude with MacDiarmid's provocative war-cry "Dunbar, not Burns!" Given this well-publicized slogan, MacDiarmid's protest in *Lucky Poet* that "my attitude to Burns has been sorely misunderstood" seems distinctly disingenuous (p. 191). And yet it is almost always Burns's sentiment, not his artistry, that Hugh MacDiarmid challenges. MacDiarmid always included Burns in what he called the Scottish poetic trinity: "I have been hailed in many quarters as the greatest Scottish poet since Burns. . . or—the way I prefer it put—as one of a trinity with Burns and Dunbar" (*Lucky Poet*, p. 175). In *A Drunk Man*, MacDiarmid's comparison of Robert Burns with Jesus Christ—"As Kirks wi' Christianity ha'e dune, / Burns Clubs wi' Burns" (*ll.* 109-10)—not only places Burns as a member of the Scottish poetic trinity but also as the linchpin figure, the ever-doomed, ever-resurrected redeemer.

MacDiarmid once assailed Keith Henderson's biographical compilation *Burns by Himself*, which attempted to combat the Burns myth by restricting biography to direct quotation only of the poet's own words. MacDiarmid angrily insisted, however, that it is not a poet's words in describing his life but only a poet's words as used in his poems that matter: "[Henderson's book] sheds no light whatever on the two most important points about Burns—his reversion to Scots from English . . . and that inflexible core of purpose. . . . [Burns] exercised all along a wonderful self-control and tenacity of purpose in regard to what mattered most—[his writing]" (*Lucky Poet*, p. 192). When MacDiarmid praises Burns's continuing productivity as a poet throughout his difficult life—that "inflexible core of purpose"—he is challenging the myth of decline that underlies popular misconceptions about Burns. But MacDiarmid's singling out as the most important point about Burns his so-called "reversion to Scots" is even more interesting. For MacDiarmid may have been the first modern critic of Burns to stress how significant it is that Burns did not write in the Scots dialect merely as a matter of course, or "naturally." (Raymond Bentman also emphasized this in his excellent 1987 Twayne guide to Burns.) MacDiarmid reminds us that Burns chose Scottish vernacular only after an apprenticeship writing in the standard and near-standard English of such early lyrics as "Song Composed in August" and "Mary Morison." And MacDiarmid's earliest poetry (published under the name Christopher Grieve) was likewise not written in Scots but in standard English. Despite the differences in tone and tenor produced by *A Drunk Man's* tendency to contradict at the same time that it echoes earlier poets and texts, there is still one element that Burns and MacDiarmid share: a "reversion to Scots," or self-conscious adult choice of Scottish dialect as the vehicle for poetry that bridges the local, national and international. If the bridge of Doon becomes the poem's symbolic as well as Tam's literal goal in "Tam o' Shanter," the forming of the "sentrice" or arch is just as central to human behavior in *A Drunk Man*: "we maun braird anither tip / Oot owre us ere we wither tae, / And join the sentrice skeleton / As coral insects big their reefs" (ll. 1511-14).

Both MacDiarmid and Burns adopted new names as part of their self-fashioning as vernacular bards, Christopher Grieve transforming himself at age thirty into Hugh MacDiarmid and Burns at twenty-eight simplifying from Burness to Burns. Burns chose the name by which he would be known to posterity while circulating the subscription list for his first volume of poems "chiefly in Scottish"; and he had chosen Scottish dialect several years earlier only after encountering by chance the brilliant and cosmopolitan dialect poems of Robert Fergusson: Burns's earlier work is written in standard English. MacDiarmid's revisitings of Burns's imagery, language, and subject-matter in *A Drunk Man* likewise stem from MacDiarmid's close and mature study of Burns's prosody and other poetic practice. For, as MacDiarmid writes in *Lucky Poet*, "[Burns] was taboo in my father's house and quite unknown to me as a boy" (p. 191). Hugh MacDiarmid's relationship with Burns, like Burns's with

Robert Fergusson, was first begun and later intensified as a result of MacDiarmid's own adult commitment to writing in Scots. MacDiarmid's re-invention of Burns's images and language in *A Drunk Man* follows the same pattern as Burns's re-invention of Fergusson: despite frequent correspondences of imagery, language, and even plot—as in the very close relationship of Fergusson's "Leith Races" to Burns's "The Holy Fair"—what is really striking is each poet's transformation of his predecessor.

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Hamish Henderson and the Modern Folksong Revival

The modern Scottish folk-song revival, which began in 1950, forms a bridge between the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, conceived and inspired by Hugh MacDiarmid, and contemporary Scottish culture. It widens the scope of its predecessor: together the two movements contributed to one of the periodic upswells in the confidence of Scotland's national, cultural and political consciousness.

The folk-song revival also, I would argue, had a decisive influence on the concept of "literary nationalism" which emerged during the earlier literary campaign—and in this respect these movements bear out the long running intertwined relationship between the Scottish folk and literary traditions. This has been a central argument of Hamish Henderson, the poet, singer, folk-song collector and political activist, who was the major architect of the Revival movement, and it is his achievement which I will concentrate on here.

Thanks to Eckermann we know that Goethe explained Robert Burns's greatness as the result of his being born into the carrying stream of the folk tradition:

...the old songs of his ancestors lived in the voice of the common people; they were, so to speak, sung to him at the cradle; as a youth he grew up among them, and the high excellence of these examples became so much a part of him that they formed a living foundation upon which he could build his writings.¹

¹J. P. Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe*, ed. Hans Kohn, trans. Gisela C. O'Brien (New York, 1964), pp. 113-14.

Like Burns, Hamish Henderson was born into the carrying stream. His mother was a beautiful singer; his grandmother had a prodigious folk repertoire and memory. She was also an indigenous Perthshire Gaelic speaker, and Henderson grew up in a trilingual culture, at the meeting point between Gaelic, English and Scots, Highlands and Lowlands.

Henderson shares Burns's ability to bridge the gap between the "heich" and "laich" arts: he crosses boundaries between high and low art and boundaries between social classes, art forms and geographically and socially isolated cultures—for instance, traveling physically and culturally from his Perthshire childhood, to the left-wing intelligentsia of Cambridge University in the 1930s, fighting alongside Partisans in the Apennines in the War, and tramping the roads with tinker-gypsies on this folk-song collecting forays, in Sutherland in the high Summers of the 1950s. As a poet and a folk collector he has acted as a bridge between the high Modernism of MacDiarmid, and the post-war renewal of popular and traditional Scottish culture.

I will begin by outlining the development of Henderson's life and work in the immediate post-war years; the period in which MacDiarmid was very much his mentor. The two first met in 1946, when Henderson was twenty-seven and MacDiarmid fifty-four. He was a tireless supporter of MacDiarmid's poetry, and shared, to an extent at least, his nationalist and Communist beliefs. And, returning from the crucible of war, much as MacDiarmid had done after World War I, Henderson brought with him a renewal of the campaigning zeal to rebuild Scotland. In his essay "Scotland's Alamein" he asks: "How are we going to reconcile the survivors with the dead except by facing up with the problems they would have faced had they been alive."²

Henderson's *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica*, his only published collection of poetry, received the Somerset Maugham award. The *Elegies* remain one of the great poetic responses to the Second World War. As an attempt to write a philosophical collection of poems, to discern a wider significance in the conflict, they clearly follow MacDiarmid's lead, sharing his concern with the enduring political, cultural and historical problems of Scotland. The enemy the poet confronts in this poem is Fascism; but he identifies this as a tyranny which is not only a political entity—the wartime enemy army and Nazi State—but also something which extends to include the imposition of any barriers of race and creed, any attempt to curb or confine love. For instance, the imaginative fusion of Cyrenaica and Scotland, which is suggested in landscapes which merge "the wilderness of your white corries, Kythairon"³ and memories of the "treeless machair" and "circled kirkyard" (Fifth elegy, p. 27), implicates the

²"Scotland's Alamein," *Voice of Scotland*, III.4 (June 1947), 3.

³*Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica* (London, 1948), Fifth Elegy, p. 29. Further references will appear in the text.

spiritual and artistic desolation of Calvinism, a tyranny in the poet's own homeland. Thus the *Elegies* represent a spiritual quest; but, as a poetry of the battlefield, this introspective inquiry only intensifies the poet's yearning for the shared human values of love and solidarity—so much so that, confronted by the barren desert, an uneasy alliance is forged between the opposing armies, disrupting preconceptions about nationalism and patriotism.

It is interesting to compare the *Elegies* with the poetry of MacDiarmid written on Whalsay (the tiny rocky island in the Shetlands which was his home for most of the 1930s). Some of these poems anticipate Henderson's imaginative synaesthesia of Scotland and the desert. MacDiarmid confesses:

I was better with the sounds of the sea
Than with the voices of men
And in desolate and desert places
I found myself again.⁴

The two poets' different representations of the desert underline their respective tendencies to communality and isolation—which in turn calls to mind Burns' apposite lines in his beautiful "Song, composed in August":

Thus ev'ry kind their pleasure find,
The savage and the tender;
Some social join, and leagues combine;
Some solitary wander.⁵

Henderson's wartime experiences spurred his search for an art which could successfully surmount tyranny on every level. This would have to be an art of direct and shared communication. In the Prologue to the *Elegies* he describes the effort required to harness his creativity to art poetry: "...a bit / That sets on song a discipline, / A sensuous austerity" (p. 9). It was this austerity the folk-song revival would eventually free him from, returning him to the art of his childhood as, just as Burns had before him, he set aside poetry in favor of song, the art that was truest to his own creative personality.

In Henderson's case song also seems to have recaptured the emotional tenor of wartime, the solidarity of the battlefield. In 1947 the first published example of his collecting appeared in his *Ballads of World War II* (Glasgow, 1947), a collection of soldier songs, songs of humor and protest, including some of his own best songs, for instance, "The D-Day Dodgers" and "Banks O' Sicily." He recently remarked:

⁴Hugh MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems, 1920-1976*, ed. Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken. 2 vols. (London, 1978), I, 454. Henceforth MacDiarmid.

⁵*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 5.

[my songs are] a sort of fusion of my two greatest loves: the anonymous song poetry of Scotland...and the comradesly solidarity of the anti-fascist struggle which dominated my early manhood.⁶

The various political and aesthetic arguments Henderson constructed around the folk-song revival are secondary to these more immediate personal experiences. When in his most important essays of the immediate post-war period, "Flower of Iron and Truth" and "Lallans and All That," which discuss MacDiarmid and his younger poet allies, Henderson demands that poetry should be in direct living contact with the people, he is also anticipating the song collecting tours he would embark on a few years later. Perhaps it should be no surprise that following the success of his *Elegies* Henderson published very few poems of substance. The great expectations of him as a poet were not realized. In their flytings, MacDiarmid implied that Henderson had failed in this respect. Replying in his own defense, Henderson described the attitude he now held toward his art:

...the final shape of a new long poem I have been working on still eludes me.

In any case I have come to set greater store by my songs 'in the idiom of the people' than by other kinds of poetry that I have tried to write.⁷

The quotation is from Burns. In the years to come, Burns would increasingly become a crucial battleground in their disagreements and flytings. When MacDiarmid accused Henderson of underachieving he did have evidence to justify this: he is indicting the hesitancy Henderson admits to in his letter. Although poetry had served for his remembrance of the desert campaign, it was not the most natural vehicle for the emotions Henderson wished to express, for all the reasons of temperament and background I have already described.

Committing himself to folk-song, Henderson went against literary fashion; against the whole Modernist sensibility which had been such a strong influence on him since Cambridge. Even worse, he brought himself into direct conflict with MacDiarmid and the new Scots poetic vanguard who followed him. Henderson had already pledged allegiance to this progressive nationalist, socialist, cultural and political campaign, for instance, in the two early essays already mentioned. There was, it seems, good reason for MacDiarmid to condemn his defection: after all, what was he expected to make of this new folk-

⁶Hamish Henderson, sleeve notes, *Pipes, Goatskin & Bones*, Grampian Television: Aberdeen, 1992.

⁷Hamish Henderson, letter to *The Scotsman*, 28 Nov. 1959. Reprinted in *The Armstrong Nose: Selected Letters of Hamish Henderson*, ed. Alec Finlay (Edinburgh, 1996), p. 88. Henceforth *The Armstrong Nose*.

song project? Years before, MacDiarmid had campaigned against the genteel interpretations of traditional song, the remnants of Victorianism, which still held sway in the concert hall and on the B.B.C.—with gusto he had attacked Hugh Robertson's Glasgow Orpheus choir and the popularity of Marjorie Kennedy-Fraser's settings of Gaelic songs, as well, of course, as the Burns cult, and the bowdlerizing of Burns songs—and there seemed little reason why he should change his views on folk song now. MacDiarmid's own emphasis was firmly on nurturing the Modernist aesthetic in Scottish music as well as its poetry.

There were three crucial reasons why Henderson felt his attention to folk-song was justified. The first and most obvious was his own love of song. The second derived from his analysis of Scottish culture; from his awareness of a vast underground of genuine traditional music and song, which formed a living connection with the great ballad tradition of the past. His aim was to record this, and then reintegrate it within the wider Scottish Renaissance movement. Thirdly, and following on from this, was his understanding of the intertwined relationship between the folk and literary traditions. After all, hadn't many of our greatest poets and novelists been involved in the revivals of the past, poets such as Ramsay, Fergusson, Burns, Scott, and Hogg. These song revivals of the past had, he argued, played their part in encouraging and sustaining the literary revivals they accompanied. This mixture of faith and intellectual conviction guided his commitment to the folk-song revival campaign—a revival which, as the new decade of the 1950s dawned, was about to be born.

If the revival was, to an extent, consciously planned, its beginnings can still best be traced to a chance encounter—one signaled in a letter Henderson received from his friend and supporter, Ewan MacColl on 16 February 1951, warning him of an imminent arrival:

...there is a character wandering around this sceptred isle at the moment yclept Alan Lomax. He is a Texan and the none the worse [*sic*] for that, he is also just about the most important name in American folksong circles. He is over here with a super recording unit.... The idea is that he will record the folk-singers of a group of countries.... He is not interested in trained singers or refined versions of the folksongs.... This is important, Hamish. It is vital that Scotland is well represented in this collection (*The Armstrong Nose*, pp. 46-7).

Lomax and Henderson traveled the Highlands that summer. With the synchronicity of this meeting all of the elements that would gel into the modern folk revival fell into place.

Henderson was a born collector. He was already going on collecting forays as a teenager, cycling as far as Aberdeen, where he gained access to the University to see the Greig/Duncan folk-song collection for the first time. Over the course of a lifetime he amassed a collection which Ewan MacColl praised as "one of the great Scots collections, worthy of being ranked with

those of Gavin Greig and David Herd.”⁸ After the success of Henderson’s first collecting trips to the North-East, apprenticed to Alan Lomax, the newly formed School of Scottish Studies financed a number of further collecting trips—“God’s own job,”⁹ as he described it in a letter of the time. It was on these tours that Henderson discovered and recorded from singers such as Willie Mathieson, John MacDonald, John Strachan, and then, in 1953, Jeannie Robertson.

The importance of the meeting with Jeannie was immediately clear to him; he had predicted that there would be someone with just such a rich repertoire of traditional material, probably a woman, possibly a traveler, the only surprise was that he had expected to find her living in the countryside. The short walk from the University Library in Kings College, Old Aberdeen, where he studied Grieg’s collection, to Jeannie’s house in nearby Causwayend, where he would often walk into an impromptu ceilidh or story-telling session, became symbolic of the gulf between academicism and the living tradition. It was this cultural apartheid that he set about to remove once and for all.

With each collecting tour he carried more songs and stories back to the archives of the School of Scottish Studies; then, through the ceilidhs he organized, and his appearances at folk clubs, recordings and radio programs, these were passed on to the young apprentice singers in the cities. He collected from farm workers, shepherds, and, especially, from amongst the tinker-gypsies.

It is impossible to imagine a social group more isolated from contemporary Scottish society, nor one with closer ties amongst themselves, than these tinker-gypsies, or travelers, and this partly explains why many of the finest of the source-singers upon whose repertoire the new revival was founded, came from this community. Henderson accorded them respect, and held their art in high esteem:

In the long run it seemed to us that it was the singers themselves who could elucidate best some of the still resistant problems of ballad-scholarship... The language, the music, the atmosphere, the personality of Scots folk song can best be got straight from them.¹⁰

Norman Buchan, another comrade in this new project, comments on his unusually catholic attitude:

[Henderson] recognised it wasn’t an archaic, an antiquarian ploy that he was on. It was something that was living... Curiously enough for someone who was a poet, and

⁸Ewan MacColl, “Hamish Henderson,” *Tocher*, 43 (1991), 2.

⁹Hamish Henderson, Letter to Marian Sugden, 29 Nov. 1951. *The Armstrong Nose*, p. 59.

¹⁰Hamish Henderson, sleeve notes, *The Muckle Sangs* (TGNM 119/D), 2.

a very good poet, he fortunately did not wish to discriminate in his folk collecting... He had both the quality approach, as it were, understanding the importance of a big ballad, understanding the importance of a living tradition, but also knowing that the squibs were part of the process. He understood the process as well.¹¹

In his program notes for the 1952 People's Festival, Henderson made his own wider aims clear:

If the Ceilidh succeeds in its purpose, it will perform something of tremendous cultural significance for Scotland. In our cities the folk tradition has never completely disappeared, in spite of all the inroads made upon it, and it is still possible to graft these flowering branches from the North and West upon a living tree. We are convinced that it is possible to restore Scottish folk-song to the ordinary people in Scotland, not merely as a bobby-soxer vogue, but deeply and integrally.

The revival, which I have only briefly outlined here, was as radical and far-reaching as the project of cultural renewal MacDiarmid began in the 1920s, and like its forerunner, it was a synthetic means to reassert a living tradition. Although MacDiarmid came to oppose the revival as the natural enemy of his own aims, a natural rapprochement between the two movements emerged, and this argues much for Henderson's vision of their inter-connectedness.

What of the relationship with MacDiarmid? Throughout the early 1950s, as the folk revival slowly made headway, the two remained on good terms. MacDiarmid attended some of the early ceilidhs in Edinburgh. At one, where he was the guest of honor, he rose to propose a vote of thanks to the performers, saying:

Our tremendous treasury of folk-song in Scotland, whether in Lallans or Gaelic ... has been occluded, very largely for political reasons, from the majority of our people. This Edinburgh People's Festival, and the movements in which my friends on the platform and other in the audience are concerned, is a reassertion of that tradition.¹²

Henderson felt he had achieved much in allying the folk revival with the best of modern Scottish poetry, a strategic move reuniting the "heich" and "laich" arts. However, as the movement progressed he was, undeniably, moving away from the urban proletarian sympathies of MacDiarmid, which were still largely defined in Stalinist terms. He was journeying back towards the country and the folk he had grown up with in Perthshire, and the Highlands beyond. This symbolic journey, in many ways recalls Burns's crucial visits to

¹¹"Norman Buchan on Hamish," *Tocher*, 43 (1991), 21.

¹²MacDiarmid, quoted in Henderson's "Tangling with the Langholm Byspale," *Cencrastus*, 48 (Summer 1994), 9.

the Highlands, which were such a rich source of new songs and tunes, and an inspiration to his art and his nationalism.

Although Henderson never reneged on his political allegiance to working-class culture, his move away from an urban poetry of commitment was, inevitably, deplored by MacDiarmid, who held that the proletariat was the only legitimate vehicle for political and cultural progress. Henderson's attitude was more pragmatic. He held that the urban and the rural working class are equally part of Scotland's political and cultural past and future. He dedicated himself to reconciling the growing antagonisms between town and country, antagonisms which industrial society had brought about (evident in a song like Burns's "The Collier Laddie"), antagonisms which MacDiarmid's political analysis in a sense depended upon and perpetuated. These ideological differences soon became tied up in their arguments over Burns and his influence.

MacDiarmid's criticisms of the Burns cult are well known; of particular relevance here though is a crucial essay "Robert Fergusson: Direct poetry and the Scottish Genius" (published in 1952—the very same year that he made his speech of praise at the folk-song ceilidh, a typical MacDiarmidian contradiction). This essay is largely an attack on the fledgling folk-song revival, clothed as a comparison of Robert Burns and Robert Fergusson. Burns is described by MacDiarmid as having "betrayed the movement Ramsay and Fergusson began." The language question is "the crux of the whole matter."¹³ Fergusson represents the possibilities of direct Scots speech, allied to a firm political resolve, one which is resistant to all Anglification, and committed to the urban proletariat, while Burns, at his worst, represents Scottish sentimentality, anti-intellectualism, political wavering, and a romanticized attachment to the rural poor. (All accusations which would later be directed, in their turn, at Henderson).

MacDiarmid summarized his quarrel with Burns in a short piece written for *The Guardian*:

I think [Burns] sacrificed the possibilities he had of becoming a great poet very largely to his work of renovating and redefining Scottish folk-songs. That wasn't his proper business at all, and I deplore that he spent so much time on it.¹⁴

His attacks on the revival derive from his belief that folk-song was inextricably connected with the social conditions and the attitudes of the Scottish peasantry and rural laborers of the 18th and 19th centuries. In a letter from their first flying, in 1960, he accuses Henderson of wanting "to stabilise people at a low

¹³"Robert Fergusson: Direct Poetry and the Scottish Genius," *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. Duncan Glen (London, 1969), p. 136.

¹⁴"MacDiarmid on MacDiarmid," reprinted in *The Uncanny Scot: A Selection of Prose by Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. Kenneth Buthlay (London, 1968), pp. 169-70.

level corresponding to a state of society that has virtually ceased to exist.” And, in *Aesthetics in Scotland* he repeats the accusation: “The folk-song movement is hopelessly bogged down in senseless repetition and a hopelessly sentimental attitude to an irrecoverable past.”¹⁵ For MacDiarmid, folk-song was incapable of forming an avant-garde culturally or politically, precisely because its popularity involved in inevitable compromise.

For Henderson the achievements of any Scottish avant-garde depended on its respecting the integral balance within Scottish culture: the progressive phalanx of art poetry must keep in touch with the people, a contact best achieved through the more democratic folk-song revival. For a time he tried to maintain the alliance with MacDiarmid, despite their aesthetic differences. There was good reason for this, as MacDiarmid was the closest modern equivalent to the poet, song-composing and folk-song collecting predecessors that Henderson so much admired—Ramsay, Burns, Scott or Hogg. Despite MacDiarmid’s own cavil, Henderson would go on insisting that MacDiarmid’s poetry had one foot in the Folk tradition. For instance, in a letter written shortly before the poet’s death, he firmly ties him to this role within the carrying stream, describing him as the greatest poet since Burns—one who has devoted his life to the cultural resurgence of his country, and as someone whose “work exemplifies many of the best features of the marriage between folk-song and art song.” What the features of this marriage were I will come to shortly.

Although Henderson would always maintain that MacDiarmid’s poetry had its roots firmly planted in popular folk tradition, his own allegiance with MacDiarmid was eventually broken by the poet’s increasingly virulent attacks. A careful reading of their writings reveals that in fact, quite a long time before their public flytings (which began at the end of the 1950s), their positions had begun to draw apart. In an essay titled “Enemies of Folk-song” Henderson attacked the idea of a literary or political elite, and discussed the antagonisms between folk-song and art poetry:

Folk-song is a challenge to the culture of the elite, [because] it expresses with power and élan the communal creativeness of the people against a book-song and art poetry increasingly contracted and withdrawn from the life of the common people.¹⁶

Published in the same year as MacDiarmid’s epic intellectual poem *In Memoriam James Joyce*, this statement is clearly a warning against the dangers of such elitism. The precise nature of MacDiarmid’s elitism is brilliantly summarized by George Davie in his book *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect*:

¹⁵Hugh MacDiarmid, *Aesthetics in Scotland*, ed. Alan Bold (Edinburgh, 1984), p. 98.

¹⁶Hamish Henderson, *New Saltire Review*, 2 (Autumn 1955), 46.

The starting point of [MacDiarmid's] argument...is the historic rivalry between national groups as well as within national groups, over the question of excellence in culture, knowledge, thought, etc....some groups will always be superior to others...there is...a corresponding struggle between the elite, the intellectual few who do the discovering, and make possible the progress, and the anti-elitist many, who are not equal to participating in the general argument, and who seek, often successfully, to bring to an end "The insatiable thocht, the beautiful violent will, / The restless spirit of man" by imposing egalitarianism, of which the Burns International is the great example.¹⁷

These sentiments echo those in his long poem *To Circumjack Cencrastus*:

The mob'll never ken
 For this in the last resort
 Mak's them less apes, mair men (MacDiarmid, I, 266)

MacDiarmid's concept of the literary avant-garde was very closely modeled on the political or revolutionary elite—for instance, on Lenin and the Bolshevik revolution, or the Irish Rebellion of Easter 1916, or in his involvement with fascism in the 1920s, and with the 1320 Club in the 1960s. In his later poetry MacDiarmid also allied his poetry with the technological and scientific elite, the "intellectual few" Davie refers to. Thus Henderson found himself confronting, in the Scottish poet he most admired, an image of the tyranny he had sworn to oppose. In retrospect MacDiarmid's life and work seem to have inevitably drawn complex psychological responses for those he influenced, inspiring a mixture of devotion and rebellion (in American terms one thinks of the similar relation between Charles Olson and Ezra Pound).

Henderson's response to this relationship goes beyond their increasing personal antipathy, to encompass a commentary on poetry and authorship. He describes MacDiarmid as a craggy symbol of remoteness, a solipsistic genius. This image of solitary tyranny is also a penetrating reflection on Henderson's own creativity, remind us of his own hesitancy concerning art poetry. The art poet is here predominantly a paternal figure, while the folk-song tradition is associated with the maternal; one thinks here of his own family home, of Jeanie Robertson, and of the importance of women in the whole oral tradition.

Beyond the personal, political, and contemporary aesthetic differences between them, was a recognition that their positions paralleled a long-running tension in Scottish culture; a tension which can be traced back to the Enlightenment, or earlier, and which is discussed by David Hume and by Robert Burns, the tension between an intellectual elite and the common people. George Davie summarizes Hume's argument, which is against:

¹⁷George Davie, *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 111-2.

The...real danger of an intellectual atomisation in which the learned and conversable...get out of contact with one another, losing in the process the sobering sense of the common origin of their respective modes of culture in what Hume refers to as the animality of the vulgar...¹⁸

It often seems as if, over the course of his life, Henderson has made a series of strategic interventions in "MacDiarmidism" (as Angus Calder has called this period); interventions which seem in hindsight to be guided by Hume's warning. For instance, he suggests that "If the Renaissance in Scottish arts and letters is to be carried a stage further, our poets and writers could do no worse than go to school once again with the folk-singers."¹⁹ Folk-song embodied the "animality of the vulgar"—just as Burns had before him, Henderson delighted in celebrating the sexual comedy, for instance, in his long poem "Auld Reekie's Roses," as well as collecting bawdy songs. It is true that there are examples of such Rabelaisian sentiments in MacDiarmid's poetry; nevertheless, there is a warmth and range of emotion—for instance the love and comradeship expressed between brother men, as well as between the sexes—in Henderson's work which resonates in Burns's songs and poetry, and which is not found in MacDiarmid's work to the same degree.

Folk-song offered new models of the Scottish voice and new models of authorship, and, in doing so, the revival offered a new concept of "literary nationalism." It is these models which I will examine in my conclusion.

Having acknowledged the antipathy between folk-song and art poetry, Henderson quite deliberately exploited the role of folk song as the bastard cousin of its more respected literary relative. As he puts it: "The best of our literature is impregnated through and through with the despised folk tradition."²⁰

Throughout Scottish history there has been a constant interplay between the folk-tradition and the learned literary tradition... Burns is the preeminent example of this—a poet who understood and recreated his own work in the folk tradition of his people. (Ceilidh, p. 27).

The songs of Robert Burns are certainly the most famous example of this interplay; and Burns and Henderson are examples of how this process tends to di-

¹⁸George Davie, "The Social Significance of the Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense," *The Scottish Enlightenment and Other Essays* (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 58.

¹⁹Hamish Henderson, "Programme Notes for the People's Festival Ceilidh," reprinted in *Chapbook*, III.6 (1967), 27. Henceforth Ceilidh.

²⁰Hamish Henderson, "The Underground of Song," *Scots Magazine*, 1963, reprinted in *Alias MacAlias: Writings on Songs, Folk and Literature*, ed. Alec Finlay (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 35. Henceforth *Alias MacAlias*.

minish authorial identity, in its literary form, in favor of the communal identity of folksong, “the idiom of the people.” It was not unknown for Henderson to record his own wartime songs on the early collecting tours, from singers who had no idea the song even had an author, let alone that he was sitting at the same table.

Up to this point, the arguments between art poetry and folk-song have largely been based on differing socio-political analyses. Henderson attempted to challenge the literary model of authorship with one drawn from the very different models of the folk tradition, and this seems likely, at first glance, to increase the disagreement between himself and MacDiarmid, who, as we have seen, held resolutely to the sovereign power of the poet, a figure at the forefront of a cultural and political avant-garde. However, on closer examination of Henderson’s argument, a surprising parallel between the folk and literary idioms is revealed, and here we move beyond the limited socio-political argument that had taken precedence up until now. The first clue to this connection is found in Henderson’s essay on MacDiarmid, “Alias MacAlias,” in which he points to the frequency of the alias in modern Scottish literature, a lingering trace of the old folk attitude to authorship—MacDiarmid is the most famous example that springs to mind, but, as we have seen, modern Scottish literature is full of them. Henderson is keen to remind us that:

Burns set up a folk song-workshop of his own, and transformed, without seeming effort, our whole conception of the meaning of traditional art for society...[his]creative methods included: ‘appropriating opening lines or even whole stanzas from earlier or contemporary authors—or from popular tradition—and using them as a basis for this own productions.’²¹

Henderson realized that this attitude to authorship connected directly with MacDiarmid’s poetic methods:

[MacDiarmid’s] acquisitive attitude to material from all sorts of sources is strongly reminiscent of the folk poet, who frequently appropriates lines or even whole stanzas from other poems or songs.²²

The various controversies in MacDiarmid’s lifetime over his use of unattributed quotations, most famously in poems like “Perfect” and “The Little White Rose,” are well known. In this new light, these poems are examples of the continuing currency between the folk and literary traditions. This use, or re-use, of existing materials is common to much modernist poetry and art—as, for instance, in the “objet trouvé” or “found poem”—and the parallels Hender-

²¹Hamish Henderson, “Freedom Becomes People,” *Chapman*, 42 (Winter 1985), 1.

²²Hamish Henderson, “Hugh MacDiarmid: The Langholm Byspale,” *Edinburgh City Lynx*, No. 35 (21 September 1978).

son reveals here make sense of his determination to keep the literary avant-garde in connection with the idiom of the people.

What confirms these parallels, in my view, is a similar parallel between the modernist avant-garde and the folk, oral and literary traditions, discussed by MacDiarmid—with different ends in mind—in his essay on “Ossian: James MacPherson,” published in *Scottish Eccentrics* (1936). MacDiarmid uses Ossian as a model of authorship; he deliberately blurs the borders of the individual creative intelligence, challenging the literary bourgeois figure of the author.

MacDiarmid’s subject matter gives him the opportunity to explore this in the context of translation and its relationship with poetry. It is now commonly acknowledged that MacDiarmid’s own translations are reworkings of cribs done for him by friends, or are modeled on other existing translations; so it is no surprise to find him challenging the conventions of the art of translating, and taking such an interest in Ossian. The success of a translation is, in his view, not to be measured by how much of the original has passed intact from one culture and language into another. In MacPherson’s case, the supposed fraud—the distance between his Ossian poems and the original oral lays—is, he argues, beside the point. The poems must be evaluate din their own right, as poems in English.

MacDiarmid goes on to speculate about the true nature of the Scottish genius: a gift for “transition” rather than “translation,” based on “the play of personality,”²³ as the poet absorbs the mask of another creative personality (which attain helps to explain the tendency to adopt an alias). Conventional translation is a pale shadow of these greater gestures. This new model of authorship justifies the poet’s using any raw materials—whether these are existing folk poems or songs, translations, or prose or poetry—as his genius will affect a transition, or recomposition, fusing these elements together into a dynamic new work of art.

The essay on Ossian presents a vision of the poet as a kid of literary superman, a figure free from any confining rationale or logic; a sublime figure, whose daring breaks through conventions through willpower and overriding genius. In comparison, Henderson’s ideal author figure escapes convention by identifying with the common people, by—as in Burns’s case—entering into the carrying stream. Of course, as I have already indicated, these models of authorship relate directly to their political points of view.

MacDiarmid’s attitude to translation, in the context of these models of authorship, is motivated by the primary task he had set himself; that of renewing the Scots language, and single-handedly recomposing a national literature—and what could be more natural than that, in their attempts to model a new or renewed language, poets should look to other languages. All of the major Scottish Renaissance poets were translators, Henderson included. The

²³Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Eccentrics* (London, 1936), p. 239.

Lallans or Renaissance poets were also, to varying degrees, writing in a language which they did not speak, day to day; they were, in MacDiarmid's case in particular, composing with dictionary in hand—even writing their own poetry, they could find themselves involved in a kind of translation.

In his poetic experiments MacDiarmid was motivated by the attempt to create a language which was, in his own words, “resistant to Anglification.” Debates in Scotland over language and voice have always gone hand-in-hand with the debate over political identity. There is no doubt that, when the renaissance was in its infancy, it seemed necessary to insist on Scots as “both a language and a literary tradition entirely separate from English.”²⁴ Henderson saw the revival could have a major role in this process, offering real and practical examples of a living speech or song, from which poetry could learn. These examples of speech were very varied. The revival broadened the Renaissance's exploration of the old tongues, and highlighted the spoken Scottish voice in all its distinctive variations and languages, including the modern demotic language of the new urban singers. By stressing speaking over writing he continued his campaign to reunite “Govan or Hamilton...with Comrie or Lochboisdale,”²⁵ the rural and urban voice—not creating a single homogeneous nation but a melting-pot of voices—one with, as he said, “deviations to Highland and Lowland.”²⁶

In one sense, folk-song has consistently been identified with a distant golden age in Scottish culture, because it seems to reach back beyond the linguistic dichotomy imposed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the dichotomy which forced literate Scots to carry two languages in their heads, English for writing, Scots for speaking. Edwin Muir famously summarizes this as the dilemma for the Scotsmen of *feeling* in Scots and *thinking* in English.²⁷ MacDiarmid's Renaissance confronted the psychological effects of this head on. First of all, in the campaign for Scots, and later, when he envisaged a campaign whose eventual conclusion would be the renewal of Gaelic as the national language—an argument paralleled by some of his most controversial comments about the true racial life. Henderson's attitude was, once again, more pragmatic: to him Scotland's linguistic diversity was a strength, not a

²⁴Roderick Watson, “Alien Voices in the Street: Demotic Modernism in Modern Scots Writing,” *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 25 (1995), 147.

²⁵Hamish Henderson, “Flower of Iron and Truth,” *Our Time* (10th September 1948), p. 305.

²⁶Hamish Henderson, Letter to the Scotsman, 17th February, 1953; rptd. *The Armstrong Nose*, p. 63.

²⁷See the discussion of this in David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London, 1972), p. 68.

weakness. It was the best guarantee against MacDiarmid's overbearing anglophobia, and a challenge to the ascendancy of any single tongue, something Scotland has never had; here again, we might recall the importance of his Perthshire childhood, hearing Gaelic, Scots and English spoken. In his attitude to voice and its political implications Henderson echoes Antonio Gramsci's vision of folk culture as something which can never be entirely subsumed within any one political or national identity.

The ballads remain at the heart of Henderson's ideas on the question of voice. Many of the best interpretations came from travelers and embodied their distinctive way of life. In an important retrospective essay, "'At the Foot o' yon Excellin' Brae': The Language of Scots Folk-song" (1983), he favorably compares the folk-song tradition with Scots art poetry, and seeks to break open the bastion of MacDiarmid's cultural separatism: "the anonymous ballad-makers...were...operating in a zone which ignored national and political boundaries. The themes of the great tragic ballads...cross national language boundaries" (*Alias MacAlias*, p. 53). Having seemed to abandon MacDiarmid's literary nationalism completely, Henderson then reasserts the uniqueness of the Scottish singing voice within this new perspective:

...the unchallenged excellence of many of our ballad versions resides in the actual nature of the language in which they are couched—in what we may term 'ballad-Scots'.

This...idiom...is a flexible formulaic language which grazes ballad-English along the whole of its length, and yet remains clearly identifiable as a distinct folk-literary lingo.... In the folk field, as well as in the less agile literary Lallans, Scots may be said to include English and go beyond it (*Alias MacAlias*, p. 53).

Here the Scottish voice, or voices, becomes the new defining medium for political identity; a more loosely defined nationalism, to be defined by speech and song rather than the standardized conventions established by texts, or by dictionaries.

The folk-song revival was clearly a forerunner of the demotic vitality of the new poetry which flourished in the 1960s. These young poets shared Henderson's pragmatic attitude to the issue of voice and the realities of political nationalism. For instance, to quote briefly, Edwin Morgan agrees with Henderson that: "Scottish speech itself is still very fluid in the range from broad Scots to standard English." And, like Henderson, he favors "an unguished flexibility in this matter of language."²⁸ Ian Hamilton Finlay's poems in Glaswegian dialect, *Glasgow Beasts and a Burd*,²⁹ which MacDiarmid described as deplorable, and "written in the language of the gutter," are a perfect

²⁸Morgan, "The Beatnik in the Kailyaird," *New Saltire Review*, No. 3 (Spring 1962), 71.

²⁹Edinburgh, 1961.

realization of Henderson's folk aesthetic in poetry, combining a gentle rural feyness with contemporary urban speech and the humor of the music hall comedian.

In conclusion, in many ways the sum of the task Henderson set himself amounted to a kind of healing process applied to Scottish culture, reintegrating the folk and literary traditions. This was born of his own need constantly to discover and rediscover the moment of direct and open communication between people. In terms of the influence this had on literary nationalism, his argument is in favor of the plethora of spoken and sung voices, for a sovereignty which rests with the people, or peoples, rather than the nation, state or political party.

Multiplicity is one of the most recognizable aspects of Henderson's credo. His rejection of the excesses of nationalism is finally confirmed by and extended through his close identification with that most dispossessed group of all, the travelers—a people who cannot be placed within conventional national boundaries. Their nomadic traditions carried back to a time before Scotland was a fixed political entity. Their way of life is pre-capitalist, and, in his words, “profoundly alien to most industrialised Western society”³⁰; they are an ancient counter-culture, perfectly expressive of his own wish to exceed categorization and convention.

Edinburgh

³⁰Hamish Henderson, sleeve notes, “Folksongs and Music from the Berryfields of Blair” (Prestige International 25016, 1962), reprinted in *Alias MacAlias*, p. 103.

James M. Montgomery

How Robert Burns Captured America

Before America discovered Robert Burns, Robert Burns had discovered America.

This self-described ploughman poet knew well the surge of freedom which dominated much of Europe and North America in the waning days of the eighteenth century. Burns understood the spirit and the politics of the fledgling United States. He studied the battles of both ideas and infantry.

Check your knowledge of American history against Burns's. These few lines from his "Ballad on the American War" trace the Revolution from the Boston Tea Party, through the Colonists' invasion of Canada, the siege of Boston, the stalemated occupation of Philadelphia and New York, the battle of Saratoga, the southern campaign and Clinton's failure to support Cornwallis at Yorktown. Guilford, as in Guilford Court House, was the family name of Prime Minister Lord North.

I

When *Guilford* good our Pilot stood,
An' did our hellim thraw, man,
Ae night, at tea, began a plea,
Within *America*, man:
Then up they gat to the maskin-pat,
And in the sea did jaw, man;
An' did nae less, in full Congress,
Than quite refuse our law, man.

II

Then thro' the lakes *Montgomery* takes,
 I wat he was na slaw, man;
 Down *Lowrie's burn* he took a turn,
 And *C-rl-t-n* did ca', man: [Carlton
 But yet, whatreck, he, at *Quebec*,
 Montgomery-like did fa', man,
 Wi' sword in hand, before his band,
 Amang his en'mies a', man.

III

Poor *Tammy G-ge* within a cage [Gage
 Was kept at *Boston-ha'*, man;
 Till *Willie H—e* took o'er the knowe [Howe
 For *Philadelphia*, man:
 Wi' sword an' gun he thought a sin
 Guid Christian bluid to draw, man;
 But at *New-York*, wi' knife an' fork,
 Sir Loin he hacked sma', man.

IV

B-rg—ne gaed up, like spur an' whip, [Burgoyne
 Till *Fraser* brave did fa', man;
 Then lost his way, ae misty day,
 In *Saratoga* shaw, man.
C-rnw-ll-s fought as lang's he dought, [Cornwallis
 An' did the Buckskins claw, man;
 But *Cl-nt-n's* glaive frae rust to save [Clinton
 He hung it to the wa', man.¹

In one of his satires Burns had Beelzebub lament the ambitions of some emigrating Highlanders bound for North America.

I doubt na! they wad bid nae better
 Than let them ance out owre the water;
 Then up amang thae lakes an' seas
 They'll mak what rules an' laws they please.

Some daring Hancocke, or a Frankline,
 May set their HIGHLAN bluid a ranklin;
 Some Washington again may head them,
 Or some MONTGOMERY, fearless, lead them;
 When by such HEADS an' hearts directed:

¹"Fragment" in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 49-50. Henceforth *Poems*.

Poor, dunghill sons of dirt an' mire,
May to PATRICIAN RIGHTS ASPIRE;
(“Address of Beelzebub,” *Poems*, I, 254)

But nowhere did Burns state so emotionally, so emphatically—almost treasonably—his love of liberty than in these lines from his “Ode for General Washington’s Birthday”:

See gathering thousands, while I sing,
A broken chain, exulting, bring,
And dash it in a tyrant’s face!
And dare him to his very beard,
And tell him, he no more is feared,
No more the Despot of Columbia’s race.

* * *

But come, ye sons of Liberty,
Columbia’s offspring, brave as free,
In danger’s hour still flaming in the van:
Ye know, and dare maintain, The Royalty of Man.

Alfred, on thy starry throne,
Surrounded by the tuneful choir,
(*Poems*, II, 732-3)

If Robert Burns had a love affair going with the principles of American liberty, surely the people and the poets on this side of the Atlantic have returned the affection for more than two centuries.

Within a year after the 1787 Edinburgh edition of his poems, American editions—piracies—were published in both Philadelphia and New York. Ever since we have adopted the beauty, the humor and the wisdom of Robert Burns as part of our own culture and our own idiom—often, even usually, without knowing the source in Scotland’s ploughman poet. We lament “the best laid plans of mice and men”; we wish we could “see ourselves as others see us”; we declare “our love is like a red, red rose” and annually we bellow the question of whether old acquaintances should be forgot—and only occasionally wonder what the hell an “auld lang syne” might be. The high school student who dismissed the importance of Shakespeare might have said the same of Burns: “I don’t see what’s so great about him; all he did was string a bunch of famous sayings together.”

Biographical records are replete with the influence of Burns on our country’s famous men. Indeed, one gets the idea that Burns-and-the-Bible was a standard part of every nineteenth century traveling kit.

In 1867 the young naturalist John Muir, who later was to found the Sierra Club, made his “Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf”—walking from Wisconsin to Florida. Climbing the Cumberland Mountains on a lonely trail near the

Kentucky-Tennessee border, he accepted the offer of a passing horseman to carry his pack to the top of the rise. Muir realized too late the intent was robbery and ran after the rider as he rounded a bend.

When he thought I was out of sight [wrote Muir] I caught him rummaging my poor bag. Finding there [little more than] a copy of Burns poems, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and a small Testament, he waited for me, handed back my bag and returned down the hill, saying he had forgotten something.²

Abraham Lincoln discovered the power of Burns somewhere on the Indiana-Illinois frontier at a young age. He developed an affection for Burns which he carried throughout his life. Milton Hay, who studied law under Lincoln in 1840, recalled:

He could very nearly quote all of Burns' poems from memory. I have frequently heard him quote the whole of 'Tam o' Shanter', 'Holy Willie's Prayer' and a large portion of 'Cottar's Saturday Night' from memory. He had acquired the Scottish accent and could render Burns perfectly.³

By Burns's centennial birthday, January 25, 1859, there were at least fifteen Burns Clubs in the United States. They and various Scottish groups as well as ad hoc committees sponsored centenary celebrations in more than sixty locations from Boston to San Francisco, from St. Paul to Mobile. In the southern United States, at Charleston, a full-dress military parade led celebrants to St. Andrews Hall for the occasion. Reports from Savannah asserted the event "was celebrated here by a fete the most brilliant in every respect that ever transpired in this state."⁴ Baltimore, Washington, Natchez and New Orleans all reported their Burns events. The observances ranged from genteel gatherings in homes to multiple galas in the meeting halls of major cities. The head table would boast the area's outstanding men of letters and civic life. In New York the renowned pulpiteer Henry Ward Beecher was the principal speaker before three thousand people at the Cooper Union. At the New York Burns Club's meeting author and poet William Cullen Bryant was the featured speaker. There, too, while responding to a toast "to the press," *New York Tribune* founder Horace Greeley (of "Go west, young man" fame) remarked:

²John Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* (Dunwoody, GA, 1969), pp. 17-18.

³Quoted in Alexander G. McKnight, "Abraham Lincoln—Robert Burns," *Burns Chronicle*, 2nd Series, XVIII (1943), 30. Henceforth Lincoln.

⁴James Ballantine, ed., *Chronicle of the Hundredth Birthday of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh & London, 1859), p. 603. Henceforth *Chronicle*.

In its hour the Press has owed much to Burns. It has learned to take the side of the friendless against tradition and against the privileges of the higher classes. This character it owes to the spirit of Robert Burns....The Peasant Poet—great in what he has done for the unprivileged million—greater in what he has taught them to do for themselves (*Chronicle*, p. 590).

For pomp no city exceeded Chicago, where, despite the weather, tens of thousands witnessed a review of all the area's colorful militia units and military bands followed by the city fathers, the Odd Fellows, the Knights Templar, the Masonic Lodge, the St. Andrews Society and the Citizens Fire Brigade. Later almost three thousand crowded Metropolitan Hall to hear orators in praise of Burns. The evening ended with a banquet and ball. Nearby, at a much smaller observance in Springfield, the *Daily State Journal* reported that Congressman Abraham Lincoln responded to one of the toasts. Unfortunately they never followed through on their promise to print his words.

But for enduring prestige no one could touch the Burns Club of Boston. There in the nation's cultural center, the dais was shared by Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Russell Lowell and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Some question whether John Greenleaf Whittier attended or submitted a poem to be read. It is worth hearing again what Emerson said that night when responding to the primary toast:

[Burns] has given voice to all the experiences of common life; he has endeared the farm-house and cottage, patches and poverty, beans and barley; ale, the poor man's wine; hardship, the fear of debt, the dear society of weans and wife, of brothers and sisters...and finding amends for want and obscurity in books and thought...*he has made that Lowland Scotch a Doric dialect of fame. It is the only example in history of a language made classic by the genius of a single man.*⁵

Lowell presented two poems that night. In one he chipped away at the tendency of many Victorians, whose praise of Burns always followed a preamble to decry his supposed social and moral transgressions. In Lowell's dream Burns arrives at heaven only to find "Holy Willie" on temporary duty at the gate, backed up by many of the elect:

So, when Burns knocked, Will knit his brows,
His window-gap made scanter,
And said, "Go rouse the other house,
We lodge no Tam O' Shanter!"
"We lodge!" laughed Burns, "now well I see
Death cannot kill old nature,

⁵*Celebration of the Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Robert Burns, by the Boston Burns Club. January 25th, 1859* (Boston, 1859), pp. 36-7. Italics mine. Henceforth *Celebration*.

No human flea but thinks that he
May speak for his Creator!" (*Celebration*, p. 56)

* * *

Old Willie's tone grew sharp's a knife;
"Imprimis, I indict ye,
For makin' strife wi' the water o' life
And preferrin' *aqua vitae*."
Then roared a voice with lusty din,
Like a skipper's when 'tis blowy,
"If *that's* a sin, *I'd* ne'er ha' got in,
As sure's my name is Noah!"

Sly Willie turned another leaf,—
"There's many here ha'e heard ye,
To the pain and grief o' true belief,
Say hard things o' the clergy!"
Then rang a clear tone over all,—
"One plea for him allow me,
I once heard call from o'er me, 'Saul,
Why persecutest thou me?"

To the next charge vexed Willie turned
And, sighing, wiped his glasses,—
"I'm much concerned to find ye yearned
O'er warmly tow'rd the lasses!"
But David cried, "Your ledger shut,
E'en Adam fell by woman,
And hearts close shut with if and but,
If safe, are not so human!" (*Celebration*, p. 57)

Then, a voice from above:

"They make Religion be abhorred
Who round with darkness gulf her,
And think no word can please the Lord
Unless it smell of sulphur;
Dear Poet-heart, that childlike guessed
The Father's loving-kindness,
Come now to rest! thou didst His hest,
If haply 'twas in blindness!" (*Celebration*, p. 59)

Even if absent, Whittier perhaps had the strongest credentials to be on the stage that evening. The abolitionist poet had long credited Robert Burns with launching his career as a poet. As a fifteen-year-old New England farm boy, he had been given a volume of Burns by a teacher. It not only inspired him to become a poet, it gave him his ticket off the dreaded farm. Unable to attend the

banquet in Boston, Whittier sent a letter to the assembly in which he speaks of Burns as “the truest and sweetest of all who have ever sung of home, and love, and humanity” (*Celebration*, p. 61). He also enclosed a poem which was read by Emerson. I take a stanza from it:

To-day be every fault forgiven
Of him in whom we joy;
We take, with thanks, the gold of heaven
And leave the earth's alloy.
Be ours his music as of Spring,
His sweetness as of flowers,
The songs the bard himself might sing
In holier ears than ours. (*Celebration*, p. 62)

For the 1859 celebration Holmes had written the second poem of his for a Burns night. In 1856 he offered these sentiments:

The lark of Scotia's morning sky!
Whose voice may sing his praises?
With Heaven's own sunlight in his eye,
He walked among the daisies
Till, through the clouds of fortune's wrong,
He soared to fields of glory
But left his land her sweetest song
And earth her saddest story.⁶

The influence of Robert Burns continued past that nation-wide celebration. As President Lincoln attended a Burns Night at the Washington Burns Club and was asked for an extempore toast to Burns, his quickly penciled notes read:

I cannot frame a toast to Burns. I can say nothing worthy of his generous heart and transcending genius. Thinking of what he has said I cannot say anything which seems worth saying (Lincoln, p. 34).

Years later John Hay confirmed that respect for the poet. He remembered Lincoln reading from Burns and then commenting that he “never touched a sentiment without carrying it to its ultimate expression and leaving nothing further to be said” (Lincoln, p. 33). We can only speculate on the influence of Robert Burns's poetry on the powerful, terse prose Lincoln used to rewrite American government in the Gettysburg Address.

Nor was love of Burns divided by the Mason-Dixon Line. Shortly after returning from his second recuperative, post-War trip to Europe, former Con-

⁶Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes*. 13 vols. (Boston, 1892), I, 241.

federate President Jefferson Davis delivered the St. Andrews Day address in Memphis. He recalled his thrill at visiting in 1874 the sites related to the "sweet plough-boy poet" and sitting—so he was told—in the very chair where Tam o' Shanter drank with Souter Johnie.⁷ Hudson Strode tells us this about Davis:

When Davis made a pilgrimage to the thatched birthhouse of Robert Burns, his favorite poet after Shakespeare, at Alloway just outside Ayr, a surprise awaited him. On his arrival he noticed that the two lady custodians, great-nieces of the poet, regarded him with a strange, fluttering interest, though [his companion, the poet & editor Charles] Mackay gave no indication of his companion's identity. When they led him into an inner room where stood the curtained bedstance in which the poet had been born, to his amazement he saw, beside a portrait of Burns, a framed likeness of himself. Bemused, he turned a questioning glance from the photograph to the smiling pair. "We read in the papers," one of them said, "that Mr. Jefferson Davis was in Scotland, and we felt sure that he would be coming to pay his respects to Robert Burns some day, so we prepared a little welcome."

* * *

Because of his life-long love of Burns, the sight of the River Doon carried special overtones for Davis, as did the town of Kilmarnock, where the first edition of his verse was printed. In a day of half-mist and half-August sunshine, all Ayrshire suggested an idyll to Jefferson Davis.⁸

Perhaps the person on this continent who most closely shared the spirit of Robert Burns was no poet at all. Mark Twain often made reference to Burns in his works and in 1880 addressed the Burns Night gathering in Chicago. Walt Whitman also shared many of the attributes of Burns. In *November Boughs*, an essay written between 1886 and 1888, he mused:

Dear Bob! Manly, witty, fond, friendly, full of weak spots as well as strong ones—essential type of so many young men—perhaps the average—of the decent-born young men...not only of the British Isles, but America too. North and South, just the same. I think, indeed, the best part of Burns is the unquestionable truth he presents of the perennial existence among the laboring classes, especially the farmers, of the finest latent poetic elements of their blood.⁹

⁷Letter to Mrs. S. A. Ayres of Keokuk, Iowa, dated 19th Aug. 1874. See *Jefferson Davis: Private Letters 1823-1889*, ed. Hudson Strode (New York, 1966), p. 399.

⁸Hudson Strode, *Jefferson Davis Tragic Hero; The Last Twenty-Five Years 1864-1889* (New York, 1964), pp. 349-50.

⁹Walt Whitman, *Complete Prose Works* (New York, 1915), pp. 397-8. Henceforth *Prose Works*.

Whitman dismisses “Dear Bob’s” attempts at philosophy or morality, but affirms:

Only when he gets at Poosie Nansie’s celebrating the ‘barlee bree’ or among tramps, or democratic bouts and drinking generally (Whiskey and freedom gang thegither) do we have in his own unmistakable color and warmth, those interiors of the rake-helly life and tavern fun...jolly beggars in highest jinks...brawny amorousness, outvying the best painted pictures of the Dutch School, or any school (*Prose Works*, p. 399).

Vastly popular in his day, James Whitcomb Riley wrote in the many dialects of nineteenth-century America—Italian, German, Negro, Irish, Scot. Often humorous, he grew sentimentally serious when addressing Robert Burns in a stanza form made famous by him:

Sweet Singer that I loe the maist
O’ony, sin’ wi’ eager haste
I smacket bairn-lips ower the taste
 O’ hinnied sang,
I hail thee, though a blessed gaist
 In Heaven lang!

For, weel I ken, nae canty phrase
Nor courtly airs, nor lordly ways,
Could gar me freer blame, or praise,
 Or proffer hand,
Where “Rantin’ Robbie” and his lays
 Thegither stand.

* * *

Wi’ brimmin’ lip and laughin’ e’e,
Thou shookest even grief wi’ glee,
Yet had nae niggart sympathy
 Where sorrow bowed,
But gavest a’ thy tears as free
 As a’ thy gowd.¹⁰

Burns lives in public monuments in obscure and prominent spots of cities all over the nation. Steel-magnate-turned-philanthropist Andrew Carnegie did his bit to promote the memory of his native soil’s great poet. It is said that in each of the 2,500 or so public libraries he endowed he placed a bust of Burns. Fame and appreciation are fleeting, however. My informal survey of several Carnegie-funded libraries revealed no knowledge of such artifacts.

¹⁰James Whitcomb Riley, “To Robert Burns,” *The Complete Poetical Works of James Whitcomb Riley* (Bloomington, IN, 1993), pp. 160-61.

Joel Chandler Harris, creator of the Uncle Remus stories, claimed a second-hand influence from our poet. He drew a parallel between Burns and Irwin Russell, a southern writer who died in 1879, but not before he pioneered the genre Harris was to make famous. Russell, he claimed, was the first writer to "appreciate the literary possibilities of the negro character," and he acknowledged Burns as his master. Russell saw in the slave a folk figure whose simplicity and unrestrained response to life were similar to those of Burns.

James Kennedy had served in the kilt-wearing 79th New York Highlander Regiment during the War Between the States. Both his poetry and his use of Doric speech drew unstinted praise from the Scottish press. But when the Burns Statue was unveiled in Central Park he couched his tribute in standard English and urged the Bard to:

See where thronging thousands stand
 In reverence to thee:
 The witching charm—the magic wand—
 The matchless minstrelsy!

They see in monumental bronze
 Thy manly form and face;
 They hear in music's sweetest tones
 They spirit's grander grace.

And though from many lands they came,
 To brotherhood they've grown,
 By thee their pulses throb the same,
 Their hearts are all thy own.¹¹

The 1896 centenary of the death of Burns brought forth a renewed adoration for the poet. Fresh editions of his poems were published. Across the country new Burns Clubs sprang up in many cities—including ours in Atlanta. At the turn of the century two "world's fairs" in the United States paid tangible tribute to Burns. A replica of the poet's birthplace was constructed of spack and timber for the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. Dismantled, it was shipped to Portland for the Lewis and Clark Expo the following year. There it disappeared, probably swept out without ceremony among all the other temporary structures.

Burns clubs all over this continent have had their poets of local note. Some doubtless enjoyed the ephemeral flash of true brilliance. Most probably warmed to the applause of their fellows assembled, mellowed with the glow of fellowship and of John Barleycorn. The Burns Club of Atlanta, a hundred

¹¹James Kennedy, "To the Shade of Burns," *The Complete Scottish and American Poems of James Kennedy* (New York, 1920), p. 9.

years old in 1996, has had its share—perhaps more—of local bards. Two especially deserve mention.

Journalist Frank Lebbey Stanton was the first Poet Laureate of Georgia—indeed his was the first time that title had been granted to anyone in this nation. His work, saccharine and sentimental by today's standards, was popular in both books and daily press for several decades. Some, such as "Mighty Lak a Rose," was set to music, recorded and widely sung. Stanton's "A Night With Bobby" was his birthday tribute at the Atlanta Club's Burns Night in 1898.

Stanton's friend, ex-Confederate major, writer, musician, artist, bibliophile, Charles Hubner, went so far as to publish a small volume of his poems in praise of Burns. On page one is the poem he read November 5, 1910. It was at the cornerstone laying ceremony for America's most ambitious memorial to the poet, the National Register replica of the Burns Cottage, the beloved home of the Burns Club of Atlanta.

Here, henceforth, will be holy ground,
A consecrated spot,
A shrine for pilgrims, far renowned;
For here in true similitude,
As if in Ayr it stood,
The lowly peasant cot
Under whose roof, one golden morn,
Burns, the world's best loved bard, was born.

Here will his loyal lovers meet,
Upon his natal day
To lay their love gifts at his feet,
To listen to his matchless lay,
In speech and song to sound his praise,
And wreath his brow with bay,
And hail, each heart with pride aflame,
The starlike splendor of his name.

Great son of Fame! Crowned King of Song!
Show, then, thy Heavenly powers;
In spirit come to join the throng
Who meet to keep thy memory green.
Sit in their midst, felt, though unseen,
And grace the festal hours;
Stay with them, till Dawn's golden gleam
Dispels the glamour of their dream.¹²

¹²Mary Hubner Walker, *Charles W. Hubner: Poet Laureate of the South* (Atlanta, 1976), p. 120.

For 85 years his prophecy has proved correct. In 1928 93-year-old Major Charles William Hubner was named "Poet Laureate of the South."

Moving on through the twentieth century we can pause at St. Louis, where in 1923 a member read the poem Edgar Lee Masters wrote especially for the Burns Club of St. Louis. It opens:

Robert Burns was poor, Robert Burns was proud,
Robert Burns knew love and hate.
Robert Burns was a brave man who was bowed
Under the bludgeon blows of fate.
And changeable as air was Robert Burns:
He saw that everything had many sides,
Truth as the wind, and soul the vane that turns,
And love the ebb and return of tides.¹³

Masters suspected his audience might find those and the following lines less inspired than his "Spoon River." The covering letter with the poem read:

Not up to the standards of "Spoon River"! Well, who in hell ever wrote a poem for a dinner, an occasion, that was inspired? I make no claims to distinction...for these verses...but just send them to you...with the hope...they will add to the event.

The same comments might have been made by Lowell, Riley, Holmes and other composers of occasional poems. But for true inspiration, try this:

*That hero my allegiance earns
Who boldly speaks of Robert Burns.*¹⁴

So wrote Ogden Nash in "Everything's Haggis in Hoboken or Scots Wha Hae Hae":

*I have an inexpensive hobby—
Simply not to call him Bobbie.
It's really just as easy as not
Referring to Sir Wally Scott,
But many, otherwise resolute,
When mentioning Burns go coy and cute.
Scholars hip-deep in Homer and Horace
Suddenly turn all doch-an-dorris;*

* * *

¹³Edgar Lee Masters, "Robert Burns," *St. Louis Burnsians: Their Twentieth Anniversary and Some Other Burns Nights* (St. Louis, 1924), p. 56.

¹⁴Ogden Nash, *The Private Dining Room and Other Verses* (Boston, 1952), p. 104.

*Conventioneers in littered lobby
Hoist their glasses in praise of Bobbie;
All, all Burns-happy and Bobby-loopy,
They dandle him like a Scotian kewpie.
I'll brush away like gnats and midges
Those who quote from Bobbies Southey and Bridges;*

* * *

*I'd even attempt to save from drowning
Maidens who dream of Bobbie Browning;*

* * *

*But of Robert Burns I'm a serious fan,
He wrote like an angel and lived like a man,*

* * *

*Well, I'm off, before I break the law,
To read Tommy Hardy and Bernie Shaw.¹⁵*

What is the difference between our feelings for Burns and for the other great poets of the English language? Surely we admire the beauty of Keats' and Browning's poetry. We marvel at the unmatched word-play of Shakespeare. But it is the work we praise, not the worker. Burns is different. He struck the right chord with a cocky young nation, glorying in its emphasis on individual freedom. Burns above all the figures of literature is "one of us."

Walt Whitman came close to the answer: "Robert Burns remains in my heart as almost the tenderest, manliest, and (even if contradictory) dearest flesh-and-blood figure in all the streams and clusters of by-gone poets" (*Prose Works*, p. 407).

But it took a humorist, a popular composer of light verse, to boil down to its essence the reason Robert Burns captured America:

"He wrote like an angel—but he lived like a man."

That might be a good place to wrap up this American love affair with Rab the Rhymer. But I want you to go back with me almost a century and a half to a Burns Night supper as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow rises to recite his composition for the occasion:

I see amid the fields of Ayr
A ploughman, who, in foul and fair
Sings at his task
So clear, we know not if it is

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.

The Laverock's song we hear,
Nor care to ask.

* * *

Touched by his hand, the wayside weed
Becomes a flower; the lowliest reed
Beside the stream
Is clothed with beauty; gorse and grass
And heather, where his footsteps pass,
The brighter seem.

He sings of love, whose flame illumines
The darkness of lone cottage rooms;
He feels the force,
The treacherous undertow and stress
Of wayward passions, and no less
The keen remorse.

* * *

But still the music of his song
Rises o'er all elate and strong;
Its master-chords
Are Manhood, Freedom, Brotherhood,
Its discords but an interlude
Between the words.¹⁶

The final stanza is the reason I saved Longfellow until last. It might well have been both invocation and benediction for each session of this amazing bicentenary conference:

His presence haunts this room to-night,
A form of mingled mist and light
From that far coast,
Welcome beneath this roof of mine!
Welcome! this vacant chair is thine,
Dear guest and ghost!¹⁷

Atlanta

¹⁶“Robert Burns,” *The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston and New York, 1894), p. 397.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

Luiza Lobo

The Reception in Brazil of the First Portuguese Translation of Robert Burns

In 1976-77, as a Ph.D. student of Comparative Literature at the University of South Carolina under the supervision of Prof. Ashley Brown and working as a Research Assistant for Prof. Ross Roy, I had the opportunity to study the work of Robert Burns. As a result of my search for primary and secondary sources related to the poet and my frequent discussions about his importance and his work with Dr. Roy, I became very involved in Scottish literature. A graduate course on Victorian poetry and poetics with Prof. Patrick Scott, which included the reading of Tennyson, Swinburne, Browning, and Arthur Hugh Clough, among others, helped develop my interest in English literature in general, especially when it dealt with different reactions to the milieu according to a sense of national literature, a common tendency in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. My book *Teorias poéticas do Romantismo* also reflects this interest, and it brought into the Portuguese language, in some cases for the first time, the main poetic theories on Romanticism written by the European Romantic writers themselves, each one advancing one point of view that had something to do with his country's contextual and cultural peculiarities.¹

The novels, short stories, essays and encyclopedia entries that I had translated mostly from English, over the years, have also contributed to my developing a strong interest in English and Scottish literatures. Of about thirty

¹See Luiza Lobo, ed., *Teorias poéticas do Romantismo*, with introd. and notes. (Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre, 1987). Henceforth *Teorias*.

books that I have translated, among which the most important authors were Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, Katherine Mansfield and Edgar Allan Poe, one of my favorites is *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, the "Ettrick Shepherd" by James Hogg (1770-1835). Hogg, like Burns, cherished Scottish national values, rustic verse, and the Scottish land.² To me, his book immediately became a symbol of the merits of the Scottish people and literature, and, like Burns's poetry, also appeared to be tinted with some Gothic trait, which I associated with the Scottish climate while visiting Burns's dwelling places, Burns Societies and Burns Clubs in Scotland in 1993.³

During our discussions on Robert Burns, Dr. Roy spoke of his admiration for the poet's inventiveness in his use of folklore and local habits, and his ingenious use of sophisticated rhyme and meter. He showed his admiration also for his daring recourse to his local spoken language, to convey, in the manner of Dante, the feelings that he held for his loved ones, as opposed to using an artificial, official language derived from books and grammars, but not from the heart.

My interest in Robert Burns's poetry increased for me when Dr. Roy informed me that the poet had never been translated into Portuguese—except for three songs published by Luiz Cardim in a booklet in Portugal.⁴ According to Baldensperger's *Bibliography of Comparative Literature*, a "Burns Night" was once held in Portugal, in the nineteenth century, when English citizens read poems by Burns in the Scottish language, but there is no mention of any translation of his poems into Portuguese. According to Egerer, Burns had been translated into twenty-six languages by 1965, including Chinese, Gaelic, Icelandic, and Afrikaans; in some cases there were only selections, in other cases his complete poems. The Afrikaans translation is dated 1888, and the first French one dates from 1826, followed by others in 1843 and 1874. In German there were eighteen translations, some of them reissued several times, between 1839 and 1937. In contrast, until my translation came out in 1994, only the above-mentioned songs had been translated into Portuguese. "Auld Lang Syne," sung in farewell situations in many countries, exists in an adaptation into Portuguese by Francisco Alves, as "Canção da despedida": "Adeus, amor, eu vou partir, para bem longe daqui..." In the past, it was sung in moments of

²James Hogg, *Memórias e confissões íntimas de um pecador justificado*, trans. Luiza Lobo (Rio de Janeiro, 1969).

³I owe the great opportunity of these visits to Professor David Brookshaw, who solicitously intervened in the concession of a travel grant by the Royal British Academy for my traveling to the Hispanists' Association in St Andrews, and organized trips to several Burns sites, and the Burns Federation in Kilmarnock in March 1989.

⁴Luiz Cardim, *Horas de fuga* (Porto, 1952). See J. W. Egerer, *A Bibliography of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh and London, 1964), entry 1229.

parting as travelers left by train or by boat, when such intense farewells still took place (*bota-fora*), before the era of the jet plane. In the book, I did a literal translation of the song.

In many countries, Japan included, there are Burns Societies and Clubs, where the celebration of Burns Night every year on January 25th marks the poet's date of birth. Traditionally his poem "To a Haggis" is recited and this spicy meat pudding is served for dinner. In Brazil, I was informed, when my translation came out on Christmas 1994, that the Saint Andrew Society, which is part of the British and Commonwealth Society, had been celebrating Burns Suppers in Rio and São Paulo for ninety years!⁵

My initial interest in Burns's poetry grew as I drew analogies between his life, work and struggles and that of the Romantic Brazilian poet whom I chose as a topic for my Ph.D. dissertation: Joaquim de Sousa Andrade.⁶ The latter was also very inventive with his verse, and a man who also publicized the values of nature in his northern province of Maranhão and its local customs to the far-away court in Rio de Janeiro and later to the international scene, in cities like Paris and New York. He was a man who transformed his passion for politics, and his aversion to monarchy and its lack of freedom (the country was then ruled by the Portuguese monarch Dom Pedro the Second) into some of the most original and daring poems ever written in the Portuguese language. It was on the strength of the similarities between Burns and Sousa Andrade that Dr. Roy, in 1978, suggested that I should translate Robert Burns into Portuguese. At the time, I did not anticipate that it would end up being one of the longest projects of my life, and that only in 1994 would the book be published, that is, sixteen years after I decided to commit myself to it.

The popularity of Gregório de Matos e Guerra, a poet of the Baroque age, in Bahia, during the time of the Portuguese domination, also contributed to my developing an admiration for Burns. Gregório de Matos e Guerra, like Burns, employed the lyric, the sacred, the comic and the bawdy as modes for his daring poetry, filled with political hubris, a tendency which eventually forced him into exile in Africa. Matos e Guerra often used the traditional Spanish popular meter, consisting of eight syllables, influenced by Góngora and Quevedo, whom he translated or adapted into Portuguese. The same oral and popular verses are found in the lively stanzas of some of Burns's poems, such as in his lyrics to songs, "A red red Rose," "The Banks o' Doon," as well as in his "Tam Glen," "Song" (Thou lingering Star with lessening ray); in poems which

⁵In a telephone conversation David Daiches said to me, "Incredible as it may seem, Burns is well known in Russia and in the English- and German-speaking countries, but I don't know of any translations into Spanish or Portuguese." See André Luiz Barros, *Jornal do Brasil* (27 Dec. 1994), p. 6. In fact there was a Spanish translation in 1954.

⁶This dissertation was published in Brazil, with the title *Épica e modernidade em Sousaândrade* (São Paulo, 1986).

combine eight and six syllables, such as “I love my Jean” (Of a’ the airts the wind can blaw), “John Anderson my Joe,” “O once I lov’d” [a bonnie lass]; or poems which combine eight and seven syllables, such as “Ode to Spring,” “Song—For a’ that and a’ that” and others with the same or with different metric combinations. However, as Juri Lotman states in *The Structure of the Poetic Text*, metrics over-determines content, or, in this case, the theme, which in both cases derives from the poet’s land and customs.

In the Introduction to *Robert Burns: 50 poemas*, I present the Scottish poet to the Brazilian public.⁷ The many notes to the poems are based on discussions I had with Dr. Roy when I returned to South Carolina, from December 1983 to March 1984, in order to develop this project. Later I completed them with information contained in Maurice Lindsay’s *The Burns Encyclopedia*⁸ and other encyclopedias. The notes are extremely important for the appreciation of the book, given that Scottish history, legends and folklore are not well known in Brazil.

Out of a first edition of 3,000 copies, 1,500 were sold in a year, which is certainly a great performance for a book published in Brazil. These days most editions consist of 1,000 copies only. The reading public in Brazil, a country with 150 million inhabitants, in spite of Portuguese being the fifth most widely-spoken language in the world, is unfortunately very small.⁹ The rate of literacy is low; those who can appreciate literature are a minority. In this group, only a few will actually buy books of poetry, or have an interest in a poet who is not well known such as Robert Burns.

The publishers did their very best to circulate the book. However, nowadays, with the competition of television and the printed media, books remain unsold on bookshop shelves for years, until they are remaindered. Elsewhere, I made a brief historical summary of the contextual characteristics of the great economic power of Brazil (it is the eighth economy in the world today), during the colonial and imperial times and throughout the first and second Republics, which explains why it is not a country with a widely-read population as it might be, given other circumstances.¹⁰ The immigrants who came from Portu-

⁷Luiza Lobo, *50 poemas de Robert Burns*, edição bilingüe, seleção e colaboração de Ross Roy (Rio de Janeiro, 1994).

⁸Maurice Lindsay, *The Burns Encyclopedia*, rev. edn. (London, 1987).

⁹Although the minimum wage is about \$100 per month many Brazilians are paid half that. Only one percent of the population goes to university and academic standards are generally low.

¹⁰See Luiza Lobo, “The First Translation of Robert Burns into Portuguese,” in *Proceedings of the 12th Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, Space and Boundaries (Munich, 1988), IV, 266-71. I also spoke on my project of translating Burns and

gal to the colony aimed only at making money and never intended settling there, and the different races (the Portuguese, the Africans and the native Indians) who inhabited it at the time were of such different cultural levels that the development of the country was based on a strong class division and class exploitation, a situation that continues to this day.

About 1,000 copies of the book were sold in the first six months, which is certainly very rewarding for any translator or publishing-house, and especially when one considers that Burns is a poet whom only a few university lecturers in English literature in Brazil had ever heard about before. It is unfortunate that this translation cannot cross the ocean to other Portuguese-speaking countries of the world, such as Portugal, Angola, Mozambique, Cabo Verde, Guiné-Bissau. Slight differences in glossary and spelling make the export and the interchange of books between Brazil and Portugal rare (perhaps an unavowed jealousy or commercial protection of each country's own market), while the other countries cited do not have a prolific literary life, given their oral traditions. Another factor that hinders the export of such books is the fact that so many people can read English, which makes them consider a translation unnecessary—although people are normally unaware of the strong differences existing between the Scottish language as used by Robert Burns and present-day English.

Rather than chronicle reviews of the translation I have noted these in an Appendix to this article.

One could say that Brazilian readers responded well to Burns's poetry due to his political criticism, which Burns directs towards the established church and the monarchs who, in his Jacobite view, betrayed his Scotland and the Stuarts. This feeling of betrayal is still present in Brazil, directed against our Portuguese colonizers. Readers could also empathize with the poet's comic writings on the trivialities of everyday life: a louse on a lady's bonnet in church, the mock elegiac praise of a haggis, or the half-comic, half-lyric dialogue between a rich and a poor dog, as though in a Latin fable. The identification of Brazilian readers with Burns can be explained by the "Carnivalized" nature of Brazil (in the Bakhtinean sense), a country that is continuously revising its codes because it does not have a well-defined identity as a result of the fact that it was formed by a patchwork of cultures: Indians, Europeans, and Africans, and it has never become a well-orchestrated social group. Thus Brazilian readers identify with Burns, because his irreverence, his sense of humor, and his courage in criticizing everything and everyone strikes a familiar note. The same type of humor is present in the English limerick, in the earlier Brazilian Baroque poetry of Gregório de Matos, even in the samba lyrics of a country that is constantly celebrating an eternal Carnival—perhaps a symbol of its everlasting pre-capitalistic structure.

his relation to the Brazilian scene in several symposia in Brazil and at a lecture at the University of Edinburgh, on January 29, 1993.

With respect to the translation itself, I tried to find a corresponding word in Portuguese as close as possible to the original, which sometimes made the matching of rhyme, rhythm and meter impossible. I resisted the idea that meaning had to be sacrificed to rhyming or to rhythm, which was often done in the past, as can be seen in French or Spanish translations of Burns. I was certainly aware that poetry, and especially Romantic poetry, can only exist through its sound and music. However, as I provided the reader with a great number of footnotes explaining the Scottish geographical, cultural and linguistic context of the process, it seemed to me inadequate to present him/her with a loose, imprecise translation just for the sake of preserving the beauty of the musicality of Burns's verses. Thus, I admit that sometimes I had to sacrifice musicality for the sake of a more technically exact translation. In the past, translators would adapt the poem to another topic or develop the topic with other words in order rigidly to maintain the same rhyme scheme as in the original.¹¹ I did not go as far as totally discarding rhyme, rhythm and meter, presenting the poetry in prose, as one finds in some translations nowadays—I sought a balance between rhyme, rhythm and precision in meaning. Necessarily, original rhymes often appear as assonances in the translation because of the priority given to meaning or the complexity of some of the meters and rhyme, as in the case of the so-called “Burns stanza.”¹² Enjambment, inversions in syntax (*hyperbata*), plain sheer blank verse, dislocation of rhymes to other points of the poem, shortening or lengthening of verse were introduced. Most of the original rhyme combinations were ignored in Portuguese, given the impossibility of maintaining them with words having the same meaning.

In relation to the length of lines, Portuguese, like all Latin languages, is wordier than English in expressing an idea. Portuguese has a greater abundance of vowels, which makes words naturally longer, and words are more slowly pronounced in Brazil, than in the Portuguese from Portugal. It suffices to examine the word “Orthodox!,” which occurs in the famous first line of “The Kirk of Scotland’s Garland.” This short three-syllable word in English, with a strong stress on the first one, becomes a slow, four-syllable word in Portuguese: “Ortodoxo!” Thus the need to make most lines longer in the translation of the poems by Burns. See, for example, “To daunt me,” where instead of eight syllables there are ten in Portuguese; this was the result in almost all of the poems translated. However, strictly speaking, no poet is totally

¹¹Sebastião Uchoa Leite, in one of the essays in his book *Jogos e enganos* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996), states, in relation to his translation of the French poet Villon, that translating is the recreation of a poet in the translator’s own time and frame of mind. Therefore, a translation is always tied in to a certain period or fashion, but its main aim is to reestablish the pulse existing in the original text. See “O paradoxo da Tradução poética,” pp. 9-45; especially pp. 9, 10, 12, 13 and 15.

¹²Actually Standard Habbie, a stanza form going back to the mid-seventeenth century.

mathematical in the counting of syllables in his own language. In this poem, for instance, the chorus has eight (1st line) and nine syllables (2nd line), and the last line of the poem (stanza III) has nine instead of the ten syllables of the last lines of the two other stanzas. A line may be lengthened by the placement of exclamations such as "O!" ("Mary Morison"), or "Ha!" ("To a Louse"), which would correspond to the pause of the *kiraji* in the Japanese haiku, employed as resources of intonation and pause, as derived from music, in order to obtain an exact or approximate balance with the other lines.

"Tam o' Shanter," "The Kirk of Scotland's Garland," "The Holy Fair," and "Address to the Deil" are long narrative poems, and therefore the most difficult to translate in terms of meter, rhyme and rhythm, but they were the ones that gave me more pleasure; "To a Haggis," and the song "A red, red Rose," although short, were also a difficult task. "To a Haggis" concentrated, in the comic mode, a lot of intensely comic and disruptive ideas at one time. To provide a Brazilian reader with a good definition of what a haggis is without his/her tasting it is almost impossible. I myself could only understand it when I savored it in Edinburgh, strangely enough while discussing soccer (a subject in which I am far from being an expert).

Some liberty was taken with the Portuguese norm for the sake of musicality, as in "To a Louse" where I placed the pronoun before the verb in the third line of the final stanza: "Nos livraríamos." This pronoun-verb position only began to appear in literary texts after the 1920s, due to the efforts of the Brazilian Modernist writer Mário de Andrade to adapt the norm of Portuguese to the spoken language of Brazil. The prescribed form would be "Livrar-nos-íamos," a heavy compound of infinitive-pronoun-suffix which was used in Brazil until the nineteenth century, and even then only among the higher classes of the Portuguese administration or under their influence. However, in the previous line of that stanza I used the prescribed form, "Vermo-nos," instead of placing the pronoun before the verb, as is commonly done in Brazil, because it fits my rhyme and does not seem so heavy and anti-poetic to me.

One should also remember that there are no dialects in the Portuguese language in any of the countries where it is spoken, only "speeches," that is, different pronunciations corresponding to different regions. There is only correct or incorrect Portuguese, according to the norm; people from lower layers of society will fail to employ the plural form in nouns or to employ the correct conjugation endings in the verbs, or they will mispronounce words, but none of these cases applies to Robert Burns's verse.

As I pointed out in the "Introduction" to the edition of the *50 Poemas*, Walter Scott was the best known Scottish writer in Brazil during the nineteenth century and until recently, standing beside Balzac, Zola, Flaubert and Stendhal, or Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Scott's popularity in Brazil was due to the fact that all of his Waverley Novels were translated into French during the nineteenth century, and thus he could be read either in French or in Portuguese transla-

tions, when the latter existed. His narrative poems were much less known, even in France.

Either French authors or authors translated into French were the most widely read in Brazil from the end of the colonial period, in 1815, and throughout the period of Romanticism, until recently, because of a change of taste in the colony from books imported or approved by the metropolis of Portugal to books brought from France. The arrival of Don John the Sixth and the Royal Family totally changed the Brazilian scene. He had fled Portugal in 1808 to escape the threat of Napoleon's invasion, and brought the first printing press to be installed in Brazil on his fleet, making Brazil the only country in the Americas with a resident emperor.¹³

Brazil was a colonial country, lacking a cultural identity of its own, whose elite read Portuguese, and which began to read French during the Romantic Period, introducing a second dominant culture. This lasted until around 1950, when people turned to English, another source of direct influence and domination. During the colonial period, poets imitated the Portuguese Camões, during Romanticism the Indian spoke like Chateaubriand's North American Indians, or according to this French writer's Romantic imagination, as a Medieval knight.

This phenomenon of displacement/misplacement of cultural sources and values—that is, deriving ideas from Europe—was called by Roberto Schwarz “idéias fora do lugar,” which actually consists of imitating other nations' values and codes without a sense of belonging to a valuable culture.¹⁴

However, Burns's poems, such as “Love and Liberty” (not included in my anthology), “The Cotter's Saturday Night,” “The Twa Dogs,” “The Holy Fair,” “Tam o' Shanter,” “On the Late Captain Grose's Peregrinations thro' Scotland,” all of which are narrative poems, or even his comic, intense compositions, such as “To a Haggis,” “Address to the Deil,” “Tam Glen,” “Galloway Tam,” “The Kirk of Scotland's Garland,” the lyric poem “My heart's in the Highlands,” as well as many others give rise to the idea that Burns's durability as a poet in so many modes and genres—the comic, the lyric, the elegiac, the bawdy and the epistolary—have some peculiarity in relation to other poets who may have excelled in one of these modes or genres, but who today are seldom read or appreciated, as is the case with much poetry nowadays. This may be the case of much of the production of Walter Scott as a poet, or, the case of James Hogg as poet.

In my view, Burns's attraction exerted on readers of all beliefs and cultures, from all points of the globe, from all classes and intellectual levels, stems

¹³See Nelson Werneck Sodré, *História da imprensa no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1966).

¹⁴See Roberto Schwarz, “As idéias fora do lugar,” in *Ao vencedor, as batatas* (São Paulo, 1977), pp. 13-25.

from his strong attachment to the local. As in many other famous writers—Faulkner, for example—it is the union between the local and the universal that brings the writer his fame. In Burns, one finds a poetry with a perfect command of the rural customs of his Ayrshire, as well as of his language and way of life. This close detail existing in his poetry is due to the fact that in this respect he is a realist, a pre-Romantic poet, and therefore does not fall into the trap of generalizing on topics related to nature, as did other Romantic poets such as Byron, Lamartine, or Musset. In the bicentenary of his death Burns still carries on a dialogue with us because, as in his time, he departs from the local, the oral, the folklore, the music, that is, from the popular to achieve the universal, the norm. In spite of the great and growing complexity of a globe that is being more and more ruled by the media, the Internet and the Babel of computer speeches and languages that never really intertwine, we, inhabitants of cosmopolitan centers where we would never meet by chance, are able to direct our attention to the minute description of *locale*, *topoi*, metaphors, and places that have disappeared from Scotland because of its social progress and development, but which are brought to our minds in space and time by the power of his poetry. Only he can perform this imaginary miracle within us—no other poet of his time can.

As Peter Burke, author of the classical *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, states while discussing the importance of “the ‘poetics’ of the everyday,” in Juri Lotman’s expression,¹⁵ a new history should depart from the idea of authors such as Antonio Gramsci, that a low or a popular culture, seen from below can substitute for a history seen from the top or interested only in facts (*histoire événementielle*). History should abandon the ideological paradigm that facts related in history depict what really happened. This new history, beginning with Le Goff, Braudel, De Certeau and Erving Goffman, would turn to the private lives of people, however difficult it is to define this term, according to Norbert Elias.¹⁶ It should lean on a microhistory, according to Giovanni Levi, and find symbolic models for the expression of the human experience of reality, which only ritual, myth, and art can provide.¹⁷

This new history is constructed as anti-Kantian and anti-Hegelian paradigms. These originated in European pre-Romantics, such as Rousseau and Montesquieu, who inspired liberal ideas about a nation emphasizing the importance of celebrating one’s own people, one’s own rural setting and the popular, oral flavor of one’s own language. This perspective is present in Burns’s belief that he incarnated the spirit of nationalism by singing his locality

¹⁵Quoted in Peter Burke, “Overture: the New History, its Past and its Future,” in Peter Burke, ed. *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, PA, 1992), p. 11.

¹⁶Cited in Burke, p. 11, n. 35.

¹⁷Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory,” in Burke, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

and land in the Scottish idiom. Nowadays, the existential feeling of our post-modern society is that eighteenth-century Utopias are dead and that we have forever sunk into an era of deconstruction, of disbelief in society, and in history of the elites. This feeling leads us to think that we can only understand the meaning of nationalism through contact with the popular, the local and the oral, the specific instances with which, perhaps narcissistically and in a self-centered way, we can still identify—a feeling that we certainly share with Burns. In other words, there would be a death of the Utopias.¹⁸ On the one hand, we can see that the work of art, as well as the theoretical discourse that tries to explain it, is constantly denying itself and thus rebuilding itself; on the other hand, Jean-François Lyotard defines the work of art as being a replacement for the position of a philosopher, since it is not written in obedience to established rules and canons, or according to fixed common categories common to the text or to the work.¹⁹

In truth, the commotion that the poems of Burns provoked in Edinburgh, and which made him reside there for a year, implies that his was not a simple, conventional book. With his work, he introduced a peculiar approach to private life according to the everyday poetics of the humble and of the poor, that would be integrated into English Romanticism as expressed by Wordsworth a few years later, in the Introduction to the second edition of his *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800. It would also be connected with the revolutionary ideal of a poetry based on humble and rustic life directed to the people from the countryside and from the city.²⁰ Thus rather than Coleridge's ideal of a supernatural Romanticism directed to the imaginary, Wordsworth, preceded by Burns, aimed at the trivialities of our lives which give them a common core, an existential concreteness that makes them different and individualized in relation to all the other lives around us. Burns's work was perhaps not a philosophical work of art as are so many attempts in modern times, but it was surely a coherent compound of poems which can still give us the same pleasure that it gave his contemporaries, and which can still provoke the same lively reception in Brazil that it did in Scotland in the eighteenth century.

Thus, I think that this first translation of Robert Burns in Brazil brings about three major results. The first is in the field of the theory of reception, where it brings to our attention interrelationships between eighteenth-century Scotland and the Brazilian poets of the past within the perspective of present history. The second is that it builds a bridge between an author who an-

¹⁸See Linda Hutcheon, "Teorizando o pós-moderno: rumo a uma poética" in *Poética do pós-modernismo: história, teoria, ficção* (Rio de Janeiro, 1991), p. 24.

¹⁹Philosophy functions as a mere discourse of legitimation, not as truth. See J. F. Lyotard, "Introdução," *O pós-moderno*, 2nd edn. (Rio de Janeiro, 1986), pp. xv-xvii.

²⁰See Lobo, *Teorias*, p. 171.

nounced himself as writing for “himself and his rustic compeers...in his and their native language,”²¹ now become part of the literary canon of the English-speaking people, and his Brazilian readers, a people much dominated by an oral tradition and culture, with a limited reading public. Finally, I hope that the edition, through the media, may impose itself in a literature now usually written in a matter-of-fact, journalistic style, aimed at becoming a best-seller on the international market. Therefore the interest shown in this first translation into Portuguese of the Scottish bard can only be welcomed, notwithstanding the errors or shortcomings of the translation.

Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

Appendix

The following reviews of *50 poemas de Robert Burns* have appeared:

André Luiz Barros, “O poeta dos beberrões, Edição pioneira traz ao Brasil os versos do escocês Robert Burns,” *Jornal do Brasil* (27 Dec. 1994, p. 6). Barros’s article draws upon David Daiches’ book on Burns: “His time was particularly profuse with good drinkers, he was not an isolated case....[however] He did not die from excess of drinking, but from a rheumatic fever, for having worked with a plough when he was too young and for the responsibility for maintaining his family.”

Sérgio Augusto’s article “Editora resgata poesia de Robert Burns,” *Folha de São Paulo* (São Paulo, “Ilustrada,” 31 Dec. 1994, p. 5-7), presents parts of the translations of the poems “Dusty Miller,” and “Auld Lang Syne,” and this journalist explains that the Relume-Dumará edition, with the help of Teacher’s Scotch, celebrates the 500 years’ existence of scotch. *Zero Hora* (Porto Alegre), recommended the book for reading (clipping without date); so did the column “Livros,” in *Folha de São Paulo* (clipping without date).

A note in the column “Livros” (no signature), in the small newspaper *Cataguases* (Cataguases, M.G., 24 Sept. 1995, clipping with no page) states, that “The book...has marvelous moments, when Robert Burns tells of the simple life of his people, as if he were the chronicler of his time”; *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, Caderno B, 17 Dec. 1994, column “Sofisticado,” no signature, clipping with no page) recommends the reading of the book. Both these notes state that the book is being sold in a box which contains a miniature bottle of scotch given by the Brazilian distributors of Teacher’s; *Jornal do Brasil*,

²¹Preface to the first edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Kilmarnock, 1786), p. iii.

Caderno B, column "O que eles estão lendo," presents a picture of the City Secretary of Culture, Helena Severo, with her comment on the "sensitive translation of Robert Burns by Luiza Lobo" (RJ, 4 Feb. 1995, p. 6); the magazine *Caras*, an unsigned page entitled "Poesia," presents three complete poems, "Landlady, Count the Lawin," "Galloway Tam," and "Auld Lang Syne," followed by a short biographical note on Burns (Rio de Janeiro, 64, clipping with no date or page); in [*Zero Hora?*], Segundo Caderno, Jerônimo Teixeira quotes Harold Bloom, for whom only William Blake and Robert Burns, in eighteenth-century Scotland, can equal his predecessors Dryden and Pope (Porto Alegre, 28 Feb. 1995, clipping without the name or page of the newspaper); in *Tribuna da Imprensa*, section Tribuna Bis, (Rio de Janeiro, 23 Jan. 1995, p. 1), Dalma Nascimento has the longest and most serious review of the book, which rated an entire page of this newspaper with color reproductions of the poet, an essay on Burns and the Dionysian tradition and an interview with the translator. A review by Ashley Brown is forthcoming in *Studies in Scottish Literature*.

Robert Hay Carnie

Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Burns and the Burns Federation

Alan Bold characterized Hugh MacDiarmid in the Introduction to his edition of the poet's letters as "a great poet, an indefatigable propagandist, and a prodigious and remarkable man of letters."¹ I am not concerned here with either the first or last of these judgments, both of which I happen to agree with. I am chiefly concerned here about the quality of MacDiarmid's pronouncements about Burns and about the Burns movement—pronouncements made partially in verse, but mostly in prose, and made throughout the whole of MacDiarmid's life as a writer. These dicta are very much the product of MacDiarmid's pugnacious and irascible temperament, and of his extreme sensitivity to perceived critical neglect in Scotland of his *own* extraordinary poetical genius. They are not, in my opinion, carefully considered literary, historical and critical judgments of Robert Burns and the Burns cult. Much of what MacDiarmid says on this topic is writing of the kind I would characterize as propaganda, lacking the objectivity and neutrality generally associated in this century with serious literary and historical writing. By propaganda I mean writing that propagates a particular viewpoint or creed, to the exclusion and outright rejection of the validity of opposing viewpoints or creeds. Propaganda, as opposed to history or criticism, usually tells the reader as much about the propagandist and *his* literary, political, philosophical and social perceptions, as it does about those of the subject the propagandist is writing about. MacDiarmid made the interesting

¹*The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. with Introd. Alan Bold (London, 1984), p. vii. Henceforth *Letters*.

claim in one of his letters to R. E. Muirhead (of Nov. 5, 1928. *Letters*, pp. 296-8) that his poetry and his propaganda on behalf of Scottish nationalism are "part of each other."

In his relentless pursuit of Scottish nationalism, MacDiarmid frequently attacks Scottish cultural institutions of which one might have expected him to approve. These included the Saltire Society, the Scottish Text Society, the National Gallery, the Scottish universities, BBC Scotland, and, of course, the Burns Federation. He attacks these institutions for not being Scottish enough, or for not living up to his perception of what they should be or what they might have been. In his attacks on the Burns movement, attacks which began in 1920 when he was 28 years old and went on to 1959 when he was 67, MacDiarmid adopted a propagandist posture, and made little or no effort to be objective about, or fair to, a movement of which he was for so many years a part, choosing to ignore most of the established and accepted conventions concerning literary and cultural discourse in the twentieth century. I think it is true to say that these conventions, while not discouraging the use of satire and irony, deplore the use of personal lampoon, travesty and the misrepresentation of publicly available fact. There has been a widespread belief amongst literary men of our century that excessive use of the rhetoric of polemic is counter-productive; and that prejudicial misstatements of fact are too easily exposed to encourage a serious literary historian or literary critic to base his analyses upon such misrepresentations. Common as the lampooning approach had been in the eighteenth century, particularly in the satiric wars involving Dryden, Pope and Grub Street, twentieth century criticism, especially that conducted in academia and in literary journals, avoids excessive emotionalism, prefers to appeal to reason, and "middle of the road" positions, and has aspirations towards "fairness," to both the individuals and the institutions being discussed. I certainly believe personally that this is the most effective mode of literary and cultural debate. I am also aware that the tone of critical debate is often as much determined by the medium in which it is conducted as by the personality of the writer. Much of the debate about Burns in particular, and Scottish poetry in general, in the period 1920 to 1960, was carried on *not* in the pages of academic journals, but in the pages of a wide variety of general journals and newspapers. MacDiarmid was expert in the propaganda techniques of this kind of literary journalism. He was a newspaperman for most of his early working life.² Both MacDiarmid and his opponents, in their long-lived debates about the utility of the Burns movement, or about related literary topics such as the

²Among the newspapers that MacDiarmid worked for were the *Clydebank and Renfrew Press* (1912), *The Forfar Review* (1913) and *The Montrose Review* (1921-29). In the same period he founded and edited his own journals *The Scottish Chapbook* (1922-23) and *The Northern Review* (1926). He also contributed to and was later literary editor of *The New Age* (1923).

widely canvassed arguments on the relative merits of synthetic and enriched Scots as opposed to "pure" regional dialects, attacked individuals by name, stressing personal attributes and "class" or "regional" characteristics as part of the polemical technique. Dismissive phrases such as "London Scotties,"³ or the drunk man's: "(Or less than human to my een / The people are in Aiberdeen)" (ll. 1994-5) reflect not only Grieve's anger at the attacks on his Lallans verse in an Aberdeen newspaper, but also his enjoyment of flyting. MacDiarmid's personal attack on his former friends Edwin and Willa Muir, published in *The Voice of Scotland*,⁴ using Barbara Niven's savage cartoon of a large muscular female zealously protecting a Larry the Lamb pet with Edwin Muir's features, and captioning the cartoon "Willa and Edwin," is a further example of such excesses, so often found in the heated arguments about the future of Scottish culture in editorial leaders, letters to the editor, commissioned special articles and so on. MacDiarmid and his friend and collaborator, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, enjoyed more than most the pleasures of flyting.

As further examples of propaganda in MacDiarmid's journalism, consider the following two examples. *The Montrose Review*, whose reporter was C. M. Grieve, gave prominent space to MacDiarmid's address at a Burns Supper held by the Glasgow Branch of the Scottish National Movement, in January 1928. R. E. Muirhead was in the chair.⁵ The speaker reported and the reporter were of course the same person. The address was called "Burns from the National Standpoint"; the theme was the difficulties involved in reviving the Scottish vernacular; the villain was the predominantly English legislature which "ever since Union of Parliaments, had spent enormous sums annually on the teaching of English language and literature, but would not devote a penny piece to the teaching of Scots language and literature" (*Review* [Jan. 27, 1928], p. 2). Now this is pure anglophobic propaganda. MacDiarmid knew very well that the

³The phrase "crouse London Scotties" is used by MacDiarmid in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, ed. Kenneth Buthlay (Edinburgh, 1987), l. 45. All readers of MacDiarmid are indebted to Buthlay's annotated edition. Further references to this poem will be to this edition.

⁴In the issue of the *Voice of Scotland* for September-November, 1938. (Vol. I, No.2). See also *Letters*, p. 124, where MacDiarmid tells of Helen Cruickshank's "clip on the lug re the Muir cartoon." Although he reported that "it had affected quite a number of people the same way," MacDiarmid remained impenitent about its viciousness.

⁵*The Montrose Review* (Jan. 27, 1928), p. 2. Henceforth *Review*. I am grateful to Mr. John Doherty, Librarian, Montrose Public Library, for his kindness in sending me a photocopy of this review. The number also contained an editorial commentary on the stir created by MacDiarmid's remarks, and makes the comment: "While the general consensus of opinion is on the whole unfavourable to Mr. Grieve's criticisms of the National Bard, a large proportion of those who have expressed their opinions share his view that the Burns Movement ought to have done a great deal more to promote the interests of Scottish literature."

connection between Parliamentary budgets and the specific budgeting in individual schools for literature and language teaching was very remote indeed, and that whole battalions of *Scottish* educational officials employed by local authorities would in fact make such specific decisions. It was propaganda of the “let’s blame the English for everything that is wrong with Scottish education” variety. The notice ends with the passage: “With regard to Burns, the best thing Scotland could do—to give it a chance of realising the aims for which Burns had wrought—was to deliberately set themselves to forget, for the next quarter of a century at least, that he (Burns) ever existed” (*Review* [Jan. 27, 1928], p. 2). This was the sentiment which, according to MacDiarmid himself, led to his expulsion from the local Burns Club, and he adds “for years after I was treated as a leper in Burnsian circles.”⁶

My second example involves J. M. Bulloch, the Aberdeen-born London journalist, president of the Vernacular Circle of the Burns Club of London, and one of MacDiarmid’s opponents and one of his favorite targets in journalistic literary debate in the 1920s.⁷ Bulloch (1868-1937) learned his trade as a journalist with the *Aberdeen Free Press*. In 1889 he went to London as assistant editor of *The Sketch*. He moved to *The Graphic* in 1909, and in 1924 he was principal literary critic of the Allied Newspapers group, reviewing 500 to 600 books a year. It was in this latter capacity that he reviewed *Scottish Scene, or the Intelligent Man’s Guide to Albyn* (London, 1934) written by MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassic Gibbon, under the wonderful headline “Two Playboys of the Northern World”! Bulloch, a prominent London Scot, had been in the chair when MacDiarmid had addressed the Vernacular Circle of the Burns Club of London on “Unexpressed Elements in Scottish Life.” The content of the talk was summarized in the *Burns Chronicle*.⁸ Almost as interesting as the summary itself, is the conclusion of the report: “Dr. Bulloch in moving the thanks of the meeting to Mr. Grieve, combatted certain statements made by the lec-

⁶MacDiarmid provides this commentary on the effect of his 1928 speech in his essay *Burns Today and Tomorrow* (Edinburgh, 1959), p. 39.

⁷Almost all my information on Bulloch, an influential and neglected minor Scottish journalistic writer, is derived from contemporary obituaries, photocopies of which were kindly sent to me by Mr. Iain Beavan of the University Library, Aberdeen. In view of the nature of his relationship with Bulloch and William Will in the 1920s, MacDiarmid’s reference in *Lucky Poet* (London, 1943) p. 32 to “my friends Mr William Will and the late Dr. J. M. Bulloch” and his praise of their work on behalf of the Scottish vernacular movement within the Burns Federation seems curiously benign, and perhaps ironic.

⁸*Burns Chronicle*, 33 (1924). This volume contains a full report of the work of the Vernacular Circle of the Burns Club of London, pp. 118-124, reviewing lectures by Lord Aberdeen, J. M. Bulloch, and W. A. Craigie, as well as the critical account of MacDiarmid’s paper.

turer, and discussed contradictory views advanced. The lecture provoked greater criticism than any other lecture delivered to the Circle" (p. 123).

MacDiarmid found it hard to forgive Bulloch, or his fellow journalist William Will, another Aberdeen Scot and London Burnsian, for their public opposition to his views on the future of the Scots vernacular. William Will edited the volume called *The Scottish Tongue* (London, 1924) which contained four lectures given to the Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club, including those by John Buchan and J. M. Bulloch. Grieve's lecture is conspicuous by its absence from the volume. He is also noticeably absent from Bulloch's enthusiastic account of the lecture series printed in the *Burns Chronicle*.⁹ I believe that it was MacDiarmid's highly personal sense of rejection by the Burns movement in general, and by the members of the London Burns Club in particular, that heightened the severity of both the general satiric attack on the immortal memory tradition in *Penny Wheep*, and the specific attack on the London Burns Club in the opening section of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. The poem entitled "Your Immortal Memory, Burns!" was first published under the pseudonym A. K. L. (A. K. Laidlaw) in MacDiarmid's *Scottish Chapbook* in 1923, and was re-published in *Penny Wheep* in 1926. It sticks out like a sore thumb in *Penny Wheep*, where it is the last poem in a volume containing some of MacDiarmid's most brilliant lyrics in Lallans, being one of only three poems in the volume written in English, and is palpably of poorer literary quality than the other lyrics.

The passage on the Burns Club movement at the beginning of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* also stands out in that remarkable poem because of its prominent position. The passage was apparently written in the period 1925 to early 1926, when MacDiarmid's anger with the Burns Federation and at his non-appearance in *The Scottish Tongue* was at its height. Parts of *A Drunk Man* were seen at the proof stage by the sculptor-poet, Pittendrigh Macgillivray,¹⁰ who objected to the tone of the passage, and particularly to the racist line "Some wizen'd scrunt o' a knock-knee Chinee" (ll. 38-9). Although MacDiarmid accepted a few of Macgillivray's other criticisms of *A Drunk Man*, he did not change this passage at all, and it remained intact, redolent of his anglophobia, xenophobia and class antagonism, in the published version. These two poetic attacks on the immortal memory tradition and on the Burns movement are different in scope and range. The complete poem "Your Immortal Memory, Burns!" adopts the technique of "lashing the vice and sparing

⁹*Burns Chronicle*, 2nd Series, 1 (1926), 25-30.

¹⁰There is a good account of Macgillivray's work as a reader of the proofs of *A Drunk Man* in Alan Bold's *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* (London, 1988), pp. 186-7.

the name.”¹¹ MacDiarmid uses his knowledge of hundreds of Burns suppers and immortal memories to highlight two obvious satiric targets: the Scottish common man’s rejection of all poetry save that of Robert Burns, and the “haggis and whisky” emphasis he finds at such events—“a boozy haze/ Enchants your lays.”¹² Less acceptable is his scorn of the “bourgeois” limitations of the average participant at Burns Suppers, shopkeepers, solicitors being particularly scorned for their “once a year” enjoyment of Burns’s poetry. Immortal memory speakers are accused of spilling out:

These vivid clots
Of idiot thoughts
Wherewith our Scottish life
Is once a year incomparably rife. (*ll.* 57-60, *Complete Poems*, I, 78)

The reference to Burns as “O Poet Intestinal” (presumably a transferred epithet, *l.* 12, *Complete Poems*, I, 77) blames Burns for the alleged intellectual limitations of his immortal memory admirers.

The *Drunk Man* passage shares with the earlier poem MacDiarmid’s anglophobia, and his distaste for “London Scotties,” particularly those who came from Aberdeen. The contrast of the physical bulk of the English critic G. K. Chesterton to the tiny frame of the Chinese Burns enthusiast, is presumably meant to underline MacDiarmid’s contempt for non-Scottish commentators on Burns at Burns Suppers, despite Chesterton’s skill as a critic of Burns displayed elsewhere in his writings. And lines like “and ten to wan the piper is a Cockney” (*l.* 40) display anglophobia once more. However much one may share MacDiarmid’s disapproval of the over-sentimentalism of “The Star o’ Rabbie Burns” approach in immortal memories, or feel that there may be some merit in his oft-repeated charges of comprehensive ignorance of the text of Robert Burns in Burns Supper audiences, the virulence of the satirist seems to me to be out of proportion to the venial nature of the literary sins of the Burns Club devotees. Panegyric is not my favorite art form, even when, as in immortal memory speeches, the subject is a great poet. However the immortal memory tradition seems to me to satisfy the need of ordinary people to praise and cheer a writer whose poetic work they genuinely admire. MacDiarmid’s rejection of this tradition in these two passages, and in numerous prose flytings in the same vein, seems to me to contain large elements of frustration and envy at Burns’s popularity, and a modicum of intellectual snobbery about the common man’s ability to praise his favorite poet.

¹¹From “On the Death of Dr. Swift.”

¹²“Your Immortal Memory, Burns!” *ll.* 41-2. *The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken (London, 1978), I, 78. Henceforth *Complete Poems*.

In “The Modern Scene” section of *Scottish Scene* MacDiarmid returned once more to smiting and slighting the Burns Federation. I quote:

The Burns Federation, and the Burns Clubs generally...have consistently dissociated themselves from the new creative tendencies in Braid Scots and continue to adscript themselves to a kailyaird level which is beneath intelligent consideration.¹³

The same passage also vigorously attacks the Scottish Text Society and the Scottish universities which supported it. This unnecessary and silly attack on useful Scottish literary scholarship had been stimulated by a speech by George Gordon, at that time President of Magdalen College. Gordon’s speech was made at the Jubilee celebration of the STS. Gordon, a prominent Burnsian, had suggested that the availability of well-edited texts of the earlier Scottish writers might be a source of inspiration to the new writers of the Scottish Renaissance, and had shown his familiarity with Scottish Renaissance poetry and the work of MacDiarmid. MacDiarmid found the tone of Gordon’s remarks patronizing, and comments in a surly way that he had never even seen a volume produced by the Scottish Text Society, and that he and his fellow writers could not afford to be members of such societies. It soon becomes clear that MacDiarmid’s real concern is not the availability of the STS editions, but that he detects both in Gordon’s remarks and those of Lord MacMillan, the President of STS, an effort to distinguish between cultural and political nationalism. As MacDiarmid puts it, “we are not to be fobbed off on genteel hobbies in that way; our nationalism involves every aspect of Scottish art and affairs” (p. 52). MacDiarmid will have nothing to do with the moderate approach to literary debate; he usually prefers to be where extremes meet; as editor, public contributor and sometimes pseudonymous contributor to the multitude of journals for which he wrote, he had a journalist’s keen awareness of how much a sprinkling of abusive publicity of private individuals and public institutions could help to keep a literary controversy alive. The best known example of this technique is his Montrose based journal *Scottish Chapbook* published in the early 1920s, where he appeared in its columns in three different roles—C. M. Grieve, the judicious editor writing editorial chats; Hugh MacDiarmid, the highly original poetic contributor writing in an enriched, synthetic Lowland Scots, and A. K. Laidlaw, the totally fictitious business and circulation manager of the journal writing satirical poetry about the horrors of the Immortal Memory tradition in his spare time. MacDiarmid was to do the same thing again in his short-lived illustrated paper *The Scottish Journal* in the early 1950s. There was a debate in its pages about the quality of the membership of the Saltire Society where

¹³Lewis Grassic Gibbon [James Leslie Mitchell] and Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene, or The Intelligent Man’s Guide to Albyn* (London, 1934), p. 51. The whole section (pp. 37-57) demonstrates MacDiarmid’s tendency to overstate the weaknesses of Scottish cultural organizations, when he detects in them “the imperial tide of Englishism over the Border” (p. 50).

words like “nonentities” and “mediocrities” were being thrown about. MacDiarmid denied being the author of the anonymous contribution which started the debate, although the views of this contributor strongly resembled his own. He was certainly editorial arranger of the subsequent debate in which John Oliver, the Edinburgh lecturer and editor took part, and defended the role played in that society by “nonentities” like himself.¹⁴

In much of this public literary debate, conducted mostly in pamphlets and in the columns of Scottish newspapers in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee, MacDiarmid often uses what he himself called a “berserker” approach in passionately attacking both individuals and institutions who disagreed with any of his strongly held convictions about literature and society. Under the influence of George Gregory Smith, who wrote in 1919 *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence*, MacDiarmid had convinced himself that there was something particularly Caledonian or Scottish in arriving at truth through the exploration of contradictions and of extremes. This is especially true of his writings on the Burns movement, where he presented his views in an intensely personal, and often disturbingly unfair way. When I re-read this material in the 1990s, I see now what I did not see when I read much of it on its first appearance: MacDiarmid’s ego was insecure and he became angry at any public rejection of his passionately held opinions, and this insecurity had much to do with his aggressive style of presentation. Any reprinting of his collected dicta on the topic under discussion would be far more accurately adorned with a title such as “*MacDiarmid on Burns and the Burns movement*” rather than “Burns and the Burns movement—an examination.” In 1959, the bicentenary year of the birth of Burns, MacDiarmid published the long essay I have already referred to with the promising title *Burns Today and Tomorrow*. I suspect MacDiarmid meant this to be his final word on the subject. The tone of the whole piece is set in its opening paragraph:

I choose the title “Burns Today and Tomorrow” for this bicentenary essay because, having proposed the chief toast at several Burns Suppers annually for the past thirty to forty years, I have always made a point of proposing not “The Immortal Memory” but “The Future of Robert Burns,” since immortality is something outwith our com-

¹⁴*Scottish Journal*, 11 (Nov.-Dec. 1953), 5-6. This short-lived journal was printed and published by MacLellan of Glasgow. It ran for 12 numbers in 1952 and 1953. The controversy described above was only one of the provocative articles and editorial letters to be found in its columns. In No. 5 (January 1953), for example, are to be found a leader on the poor standard of Scottish journalism, a description of the menu at a Burns Night by F. Marian McNeill, and one of the usual attacks by MacDiarmid on the “Future of the Immortal Memory.” In this piece he deprecates “a deplorable concentration on Burns’ quite undistinguished love affairs and alcoholic habits for a genuine and informed concern with his poetry” (p. 3).

prehension, whereas the future esteem and influence of Burns's work is at least to some extent within our own control.¹⁵

I know who the "I" of this passage is. The sudden switch to "our" comprehension and "our" control puzzles me. Is this MacDiarmid and the individual reader? Or is it perhaps a Royal "we"? It certainly cannot refer to the Burnians as a group for much of the essay lashes out at the alleged inadequacy of the Burns movement's response not only to Burns, but to Scottish literature in general, and the Scottish Renaissance poets in particular. Let me give you from the same source a short sample before I attempt to summarize what MacDiarmid said in a whole series of such attacks in 1928, 1934, 1952 and 1959:

Burns cult, forsooth! It has denied his spirit to honour his name. It has denied his poetry to laud his amours. It has preserved his furniture and repelled his message. It has built itself up on the progressive refusal of his lead in regard to Scottish politics, Scottish literature, and the Scottish tongue. It knows nothing about him or his work—or the work that should be done in continuance of his—except the stupid and stereotyped sentiments it belches out annually. It is an organisation designed to prevent any further renaissance of the Scottish spirit such as he himself encompassed, and in his name it treats all who would attempt to renew his spirit and carry on his work on the magnificent basis he provided as he himself was treated in his own day—with obloquy and financial hardship, and all the dastardly wiles of suave Anglicized time-servers and trimmers. [Bulloch, Will & Co.?] It has produced mountains of rubbish about him, but not a single good critical study, not a single appreciation above the literary level for which a first-year Higher Grade schoolboy would be thrashed if he had so dealt with some petty English novelist or poetaster. It has failed (because it never tried—it has been numerically ample to succeed if it ever had) to get Burns or Scottish literature or Scottish history or the Scots language, to which Burns courageously and rightly and triumphantly reverted from English taught in Scottish schools.¹⁶

There is a great deal in that one passage alone, that startles any serious student of Burns, whether inside or outside the Burns movement.

The organization called "it" so roundly attacked in this passage was of course the Burns Federation, which was founded in 1885, and had published in its journal, the *Burns Chronicle*, started in 1892, a full (sometimes too full) record of all it had done to meet its established aims and objectives. Let me remind you what these aims and objectives were then and now:

¹⁵Hugh MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow* (Edinburgh, 1959), p. 1.

¹⁶*Burns Today and Tomorrow*, pp. 1-2. The passage is lifted almost verbatim from MacDiarmid's *At the Sign of the Thistle* (London, 1934), p. 169, under the title "The Burns Cult."

- a) to strengthen the bond of fellowship amongst the members of Burns Clubs and kindred societies.
- b) to purchase and preserve manuscripts and other relics associated with Robert Burns.
- c) to mark, repair and renew buildings, statues, tombstones etc. associated with Robert Burns.
- d) to encourage institutions and movements in honor of Robert Burns.
- e) to encourage and arrange competitions in schools to stimulate the teaching and study of Scottish history, literature, art and music
- f) to encourage the development of Scottish literature, art and music.

As the direction of the attacks in *Burns Today and Tomorrow* shows, MacDiarmid was fully aware of these aims and objectives, and if he ever read a volume of the *Burns Chronicle* other than those which contained his own contributions to its pages, he would have seen, however incomplete and imperfect the results, how hard and long the members of the Burns Federation worked to attain all of them. That MacDiarmid had little taste for the first four objectives is clear from what follows, and he constantly asserts that the Burns Federation failed miserably in their efforts to advance the last two.

It is worth stressing that the Burns Federation so strongly attacked in the passage I quoted is the same umbrella organization which included the Montrose Burns Club, of which MacDiarmid was a member during his ten years or so in that town. The Montrose Burns Club had joined the Federation in 1915. If the Burns Federation was the miserable failure that MacDiarmid so frequently proclaimed it to be in print, he had had apparently ample opportunity to reform it from the inside. MacDiarmid had attended the 1922 meeting of the Burns Federation as the delegate from Montrose; and had been invited to speak at the closing dinner, replying to the toast "Scottish literature." He had then a public platform for his views on the future of that literature. He also served for a number of years on the Federation's Literature Committee giving him yet another avenue to make his views and priorities known—this was a committee from which he withdrew in 1933.¹⁷ The Federation's long-time secretary,

¹⁷I am grateful to Mr. John Inglis, Past President of the Irvine Burns Club, and current Secretary of the Burns Federation, for the material he sent to me on MacDiarmid's relationship with the Federation and about his appearances in the pages of the *Burns Chronicle*. I am also grateful for the photocopy of MacDiarmid's letter of acceptance of honorary membership of the Irvine Burns Club in December 1962. The contrast between MacDiarmid's words: "I look forward to having an opportunity to visit Irvine some time and see the important Burns manuscripts and other treasures belonging to the Club" and a passage in both *At the Sign of the Thistle* (1934, p. 168) and *Burns Today and Tomorrow* (1959, p. 1), urging the making of "a

Thomas Amos, had praised, in his annual reports in the early 1920s, MacDiarmid's pioneer work in *Northern Numbers* and *Scottish Chapbook*; the Federation had employed its member from Crieff Burns Club, one Robert Bain, to write reviews of contemporary Scottish poetry—reviews which included enthusiastic accounts of both *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*.¹⁸ Despite obvious provocation, the Burns Federation continued to speak kindly of MacDiarmid's published work in their official journal, the *Burns Chronicle*, even though there was a bad patch in the relationship from 1934 to the 1950s. Robert Bain, writing in 1933, said of him: "When pure poet, he seems to me incontrovertibly right in all he says; while as a critic he appears to me to be as a mass of prejudices and personal antipathies."¹⁹

MacDiarmid's best known attack on the Burns Movement is the essay published under the title "The Burns Cult" in the volume called *At the Sign of the Thistle*, already noted. It was written shortly after MacDiarmid withdrew from the Scottish Literature Committee of the Burns Federation. It starts with a mildly amusing fable in which an imaginary Burns Federation expert called "Charlie Crichton" confides a great secret to the author of the essay. MacDiarmid attempts to legitimize this fictional Burnsian by associating him in the first paragraph with actual Burnsians like Duncan McNaught, long-time President of the Burns Federation, Thomas Amos, equally longtime Secretary of the organization, and John Muir, a well-known student of Burns antiquities. MacDiarmid mocks the Federation's third objective—their concern with Burnsian monuments and buildings—by announcing that Crichton had told him long before anyone else, about "The Last Great Burns Discovery." The key satiric passage is that in which MacDiarmid says:

The Burns Movement had fallen on lean years; and there was a ridiculous attempt in certain would-be-clever quarters to switch it off its traditional lines and concentrate attention on highbrow stuff and nonsense like the "intellectual content" of the poems, the verbal texture, the rhythms, stanzaic forms, and the like. Crichton put an end to that.²⁰

bonfire of all the worthless, mouldy pitiable relics that antiquarian Burnsians have accumulated at Mauchline, Dumfries and elsewhere" is truly striking.

¹⁸*Burns Chronicle*, 2nd Series, 1 (1926), 53-5; and 2nd Series, 2 (1927), 63-5.

¹⁹*Burns Chronicle*, 2nd Series, 8 (1933), 84. Bain briefly reviews *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, *To Circumjack Cencrastus* and *First Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems*, along with the work of other Scottish Renaissance poets. Despite the anti-Burns passage analyzed earlier in this paper, Bain clearly thinks very highly of *A Drunk Man*.

²⁰*At The Sign of the Thistle: A Collection of Essays* (London, 1934), p. 165. Henceforth *Thistle*.

Charlie Crichton's last great Burns discovery was the supposed finding of a little ruined old dry closet close to Burns's cottage. MacDiarmid scorns Burnsian antiquarianism by mock-heroically treating the alleged discovery of the convenience that Burns himself had used, as a moment of supreme mystical communion between the Burns movement and the poet that the movement existed to celebrate.

In the second part of this well-known essay MacDiarmid repeats his assertion that the Burns Movement must be killed stone dead. He contrasts what he thought a world-wide Federation of Burns Clubs *might* have been, with what he saw as the pitifully ineffective reality. The objects of his attacks are extremely familiar. I have already quoted his scorn for "Burnsiana"—what he calls "the worthless, mouldy, pitiable relics that antiquarian Burnsians have accumulated at Mauchline, Dumfries, and elsewhere," already noted; secondly he deplors the faulty emphasis on "the mere man and his uninteresting love affairs" (*Thistle*, p. 168); thirdly, and he had done this first in 1923, he thunders about the intellectual poverty of the Immortal Memory tradition, and what he calls the

witless lucubrations of the horde, of bourgeois "orators" who annually befoul his memory by the expression of sentiments utterly anti-pathetic to that stupendous element in him which ensures his immortality (*Thistle*, p. 168).

This is followed by the passage I have already quoted, and which he repeated (unmodified) in 1959. His fourth charge in this section is that the Burns Federation had failed to give adequate financial support to the great new Scottish dictionaries. This is not true. John McVie, Secretary to the Burns Federation for many years, was the chief fund-raiser for the *Scottish National Dictionary* and helped to keep the scholarly project alive. In the final section of this essay, MacDiarmid examines the state of Burns scholarship in 1934. He rightly applauds the appearance of De Lancey Ferguson's edition of Burns's *Letters*. He regrets, as most people would, that D. H. Lawrence had not written his proposed book on Burns. He talks about the most recent biography by Catherine Carswell, a writer who had originally upset him by an attack she had made on a *Radio Times* broadcast he had given about Burns, and who had later become his friend. He stigmatizes what he calls the Burns Federation's incredible "dog in the manger" policy in regard to important documents in their possession. I do not think that MacDiarmid's highly qualified approval of Carswell's biography of Burns would go down terribly well in the 1990s amongst female critics:

...we have had...Mrs. Catherine Carswell's life of Burns—unfortunately, despite its manifold excellencies (it is far and away the best book yet devoted to Burns) a life of the man, not a study of the poet, and withal only by a Scotswoman and not by the Scotsman with whom the long-overdue task will finally lie (*Thistle*, p. 171).

The essay ends with more hits at the Anglo-Scots; more assertions that the Burns movement had become a middle-class organization that working class Scots had ceased to have much to do with. The most unsatisfactory part of this essay comes where MacDiarmid's scorn for the Burns movement spills over into a lamentably bad analysis of the literary quality of Burns's poetical writing. For serious students of Burns, it requires no further comment than the exposure of quotation:

It has been said that repetition of the same lines or phrases accounts for seventy-five per cent of Burns's work; certainly his great work is a small portion of the remaining twenty-five per cent—and not the portion most generally known. Most of his work has dated very badly; it is full of eighteenth-century conventionalism and the minutiae of dead and even at the time very local controversies. It marked the end of a phase—not a fresh start in Scots letters. It contains surprisingly little description of Scottish scenery, little concern with Scottish history, little sense of Scotland's destiny, and as to his love-songs they might all have been written to the same lay figure, for any particularity they contain. He has the typical voluptuary's aversion from realism in this respect (*Thistle*, p. 175).

It is critical rubbish of this kind that may well have sparked Edwin Muir's comments in his 1947 essay "The Burns Myth," an essay which celebrates Burns's accessibility as a poet to all readers: "a poet who has such an insight into ordinary thoughts and feelings that he can catch them and give them poetic shape, as those who merely think or feel them cannot. This was Burns's supreme art." MacDiarmid would have done well to consider Muir's warning: "When we consider Burns we must therefore include the Burns Nights with him, and the Burns cult in all its forms; if we sneer at them we sneer at Burns."²¹ MacDiarmid's passionate excess in *At The Sign of the Thistle* in attacking the Burns Movement requires some further analysis and explanation. A careful reading of the pages of the *Burns Chronicle* suggests that MacDiarmid's account of the Federation's activities and achievements is hopelessly misleading. In the volume for 1922, there is a paper on "Burns Clubs and Burns's Songs," written by a Vice-President from Glasgow which contains the following passage:

The old taunt of "Haggis and Whisky" thrown at Burns Clubs was in days gone by frequently justified, but for years past it has been a pointless and baseless jeer. The number of Clubs which have merely an annual dinner, or supper, is steadily diminishing. A large number of Scottish Clubs (also many Clubs in England, notably London) are doing splendid work of varied quality, essaying tasks at once patriotic, philanthropic, antiquarian, literary, and artistic. And I am not sorry to see

²¹*New Judgments: Robert Burns. Essays by Six Contemporary Writers*, ed. William Montgomerie (Glasgow, 1947), p. 7 (both passages). The quotation is from Muir's essay "The Burns Myth."

from the numerous syllabuses published in the *Burns Chronicle*, that Burnsians are everywhere alive to the propriety of extending their literary horizon. They include not only most Scots authors, but English and foreign ones as well. Among the subjects discussed last session are John Galt, Shakespearian Tragedy, Miss Ferrier's Novels, The Kailyarders, J. M. Barrie, Lord Byron, John Keats, Beranger, and Heine. And in addition we have numerous papers on social, political (non-party), and even religious subjects...²²

My own survey of published club syllabi for the period 1922 to 1933 confirms what Hunter says, with the important qualification that not all the federated clubs had such regular monthly programs—e.g. The Montrose Club restricted itself in this period to the annual supper, an AGM, and support of a song and reciting competition in the local schools.

All through his adult life, MacDiarmid was intensely aware of the poetry of Robert Burns, and despite his over-emotional rejection of the Burns movement, was, most of the time, a strong admirer of a poet he considered to be very different from himself. The name Burns, the impact of Burns on the cultural traditions of Scotland permeates both MacDiarmid's poetry and his correspondence. MacDiarmid is an extremely well-informed Burnsian. He is fully aware of Burns's quite extraordinary popularity over a period of more than two hundred years. This popularity persisted both with other poets and with all classes of readers, first in Burns's native Scotland, then in the English-speaking world at large, and finally, through the medium of translation, to other cultures and tongues. The translation process is one that Burns's poetry seems to survive much more successfully than the poetry of most other poets. MacDiarmid, who successfully translated or rendered into Scots a number of poets writing in European languages, is clearly fascinated by Burns translatability, and wrote an article on the theme for the *Burns Chronicle*.²³ MacDiarmid is acutely aware that this accessibility, this appeal of Burns's poems to all humanity, is in striking contrast to a common charge in his native Scotland, particularly in the literary columns of Scottish newspapers, that his own verse was difficult, and inaccessible both in respect to its themes and its choice of language. MacDiarmid gives a typical example of this level of newspaper criticism in a letter to George Ogilvie of 29 Dec. 1921, when he quotes *The Weekly Scotsman's* view of his early English poetry: "some of Mr. Grieve's sonnets are as difficult of access as the mountains which inspired them" (*Letters*, p. 69). One can see in some passages of MacDiarmid's personal correspondence how keenly he felt about the differences between Burns as the poet of all humanity, and a writer like himself, whose work was initially not generally

²²*Burns Chronicle*, 31 (Jan. 1922), 57.

²³"A Note on Some Foreign Translations of Burns," *Burns Chronicle*, 3rd Series, 8 (1959), 70-75.

popular in his own country. In a letter to R. E. Muirhead, about his activities as a Scottish Nationalist, MacDiarmid says:

In this connection it must be remembered that all my work hangs together—my poetry and my general propaganda are parts of each other: and I am unquestionably doing far more for Scotland when my activity issues in poetry rather than in any other form. Only that cannot be controlled; the spirit blows where it listeth. I have no silly personal pride; I do not write poetry—I am merely the vehicle for something far greater than myself. Without egoism therefore I know that Yeats, Mackenzie and others are right when they tell me that I am by far the greatest Scottish poet since Burns. After all what does that amount to: I may be that and still relatively negligible to Burns. In any case I know that all the best poetry I have in me is still to write. And it will take some writing—and this, too, makes me more defenceless in many ways than people not burdened with such a mission. Nor can I blame people for not recognising my quality as a poet. I stand at the very opposite pole of Scottish poetical genius from Burns: he was a great popular poet—I am essentially, and must be, an unpopular one; a poet's poet. Burns was so great in the one direction that Scotland needs a great poet now of precisely the opposite cast, and, if I am not that one (time alone can tell: my work will take another quarter of a century to estimate fairly) I shall at least have done a great deal towards preparing the way for him.

My task is to be unpopular—a fighter—an enemy of accepted things; not in any captious fashion but out of profound conviction, and while I may often mistake the promptings of my heart and be merely factitious, I have reason to know that the best of my work at all events is proving a powerful influence because it springs from the deeps of the destined (*Letters*, pp. 297-8).

This is a MacDiarmid, modest, insightful, listening to the promptings of his heart, enthused by the importance of his mission, the task of writing great national Scottish poetry that this particular Burnsian responds to. I am less at ease with the far more pugnacious, self assertive public MacDiarmid. I like to remind people that MacDiarmid published a poem in 1923 honoring Duncan McNaught, a long-time President of the Burns Federation:

Honour to him who hath established
A means to realise Burns' noblest dream
And haste the time whereof he caught the gleam
—He of the grey indomitable head
Whose service followed where the great song sped!

* * *

M'Naught, who follows you must surely try
To take his stand where, living, Burns had stood
Nor save on this foundation can he build.

(*Complete Poems*, II, 1224)

MacDiarmid also acknowledged in the dedication to the poem "Ballad of the Five Senses," first published in *Sangschaw* (1925) his appreciation of the efforts of Sir Robert Bruce, President of the Burns Federation, "to foster a

Scottish Literary Revival" (*Complete Poems*, I, 36). One could wish that this positive note in MacDiarmid's writing about Burns and the Burns movement had been more sustained, and that his later ambivalence and negativism about the poet and the movement much less prominent.

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Serge Hovey and the Others

PARDON! For me to write of Serge Hovey's edition of the songs of Robert Burns will make more sense if I begin with something of myself. When I graduated with a B.A. from Wesleyan University in 1939, I received the accolade of High Distinction in English by having submitted an honors thesis on the reading of Robert Burns. This Honors College study under the direction of Homer E. Woodbridge, Kittredge-trained at Harvard, made me certain that I should enter graduate study for the M.A. in English as a means of further developing my interest in Burns. In 1939 such purpose pointed in three directions: towards Northwestern University with Franklin Bliss Snyder, towards the University of Maryland with Robert Paysan Fitzhugh, and towards Western Reserve University with John DeLancey Ferguson. All three universities extended teaching fellowships; I chose Western Reserve mainly because I had spent so many hours with Ferguson's Oxford edition of the Letters where my attention had been upon the subject of the reading of Robert Burns as revealed in his letters.

The M.A. year under Professor Ferguson gave me the chance to submit several various studies in lieu of a formal thesis; all these studies centered upon Burns. One was continuance of widening the study of Burns's reading; another was my first serious regard for the songs. To pursue the latter, Ferguson, who like most Burns scholars knew nothing of music, sent me over to the College of Music where I was bound apprentice to a second mentor, Melville Smith, immeasurably gifted Professor of Harmony trained by Nadia Boulanger and *Prix du Disque* organist. Basically, with both Ferguson and Smith as my guides, I was to determine as exactly as possible the music to which Burns

composed his songs. What tune had he hummed over and over again before he started to write his lines? Even what version of what tune?

At year's end—over a straight scotch—Ferguson commanded, “Get out of here, go get a good Ph.D.” In his leaning towards Harvard, he pointed out that the Chairman of the Department of English in Cambridge was George Sherburn, like myself a Wesleyan alumnus. Professor Ferguson, moreover, was certain that if I chose to write my doctoral dissertation on Robert Burns, Sherburn would permit me to continue under the wings of Ferguson himself and of Smith. I did, indeed, matriculate in Cambridge; and Chairman Sherburn not only offered me a teaching fellowship but also enthusiastically supported the proposal that Ferguson direct my thesis.

Interrupted for more than four years by World War II, during which I served overseas as a Japanese Language Officer in Naval Intelligence, my dissertation on twentieth-century scholarship relating to the songs of Robert Burns was not completed until 1949, the year Harvard granted me her doctorate in Philology. By 1950 I was publishing articles on Burns's songs as an Assistant Professor at the University of Colorado. Six years later I published an essay titled “Sixteen Years with Robert Burns.” The next year I published the song-book titled *The Tuneful Flame: Twenty-five Songs of Robert Burns As He Sang Them*. Several years later my Riverside Burns published some forty more songs set to the music for which they had been written. By 1957 I had changed direction somewhat by accepting Mel Smith's offer to prepare ten or more Burns songs for a new Cambridge Record: these songs, one full side of the record, would be sung by the Metropolitan tenor Thomas Hayward with Smith at the harpsichord. Before this disc was marketed, Serge Hovey had sought me out.

Around 1958 Hovey had brought his rich background of musical composition to a new interest: the songs of Robert Burns. In that year he composed his “Robert Burns Rhapsody” and began *The Robert Burns Song Book*. New to the Burns game, Serge looked about for assistance. Naturally, he turned to DeLancey Ferguson; but Ferguson had recently died. Not unnaturally, the widow recommended that he get in touch with me. By then, Melville Smith was in Cambridge as the recently appointed Director of the prestigious Longy School of Music.

Early on I obliged Serge not only by looking over material for the song-book but also by accepting his request that I write the introduction to the work. Later on I lent a hand with the early Philo recordings for which Jean Redpath sang Burns songs as arranged by Serge Hovey. Such assistance extended through the years 1958 to 1973, the year Hovey completed his manuscript of the songs. Herein he had placed all 324 of Burns's lyrics matched to what he, Serge, had decided to be the variant of the tune intended; for each tune he had composed an accompaniment for the piano. What is more, he fully intended that his new book would be generously illustrated, would contain research notes, and would offer an historical background.

As early as 1969 Serge had been diagnosed as being afflicted with Lou Gehrig's disease. Eventually this malady deprived him of all movement and speech before it took his life in 1989. During his last years I tended to lose track of him: his family close to Los Angeles, mine close to New York. I remained fully aware, however, that the Redpath-Hovey records were still coming out irregularly, just as I was vaguely aware that *The Robert Burns Song Book* remained unpublished. A second union arrived in 1993, when Serge's widow Esther wrote me a long letter.

Dr. Esther Hovey had just retired from a forty-three-year career in higher education. Her B.S. in Music Education had been taken at Hunter College; her Ph.D. in Early Childhood Education had been conferred by the University of Southern California. Her retirement from a professorship at the California State University in Long Beach had been triggered by Serge's death. Both Esther and her son Daniel regarded this loss as a challenge to promote Serge's music. High on their list of objectives was the publication of the songs.

As a college undergraduate Esther had majored in Music. Daniel had been granted his degree in Music by the California Institute of Arts. Independently he had studied piano, computer systems, digital keyboards, and recording. It had been he who had kept the Redpath-Hovey recordings moving along. At Serge's death Esther and Daniel had founded the Hovey Music Company; being himself a composer, arranger, and archivist, Daniel had been named Musical Director of the new company. Esther's long letter had been written not only to bring me up to date, but also to ask if, once again, I would be willing to lend a hand.

The mother and son had already approached several publishers, such as Oxford, the University of Aberdeen, and the University of Edinburgh, to determine if any one of them would undertake publication of the songbook. No matter the publisher addressed, the answer was much the same: first, commendation for a very impressive manuscript; second, rejection on the ground that publication of so much music represented prohibitive cost. The Hoveys found answer to their dilemma in the question, "Why not print the book ourselves?" They purchased a Power Mac, Hewlett-Packard Laser Printer, the sophisticated Finale Music Notation Program, and the Soutane Font.

Originally, Serge had left a manuscript of eight chapters. In the first two, he wrote upon Burns's method with songs and upon *The Scots Musical Museum*. Chapters three through eight presented the 324 songs of Burns with Serge's pianoforte accompaniments. Otherwise the papers included a preface, commentaries, detailed suggestions for copious illustrations, research notes, and a separate volume titled Additional Notes, a volume full with other research notebooks, scholarly data, findings, and wishes for final publication. On all sides one recognizes how carefully Hovey studied and analyzed primary and secondary sources including music manuscripts and works by Dick, Kinsley, Barke, Daiches, Keith, and many another. Any reader would remark how closely Serge had examined the music in such collections as the Bremner,

Gow, Thomson, Oswald, Craig, etc., and how clearly he had referenced all sources, taking time to compare them with one another and then to explain his rationale for the conclusions he drew regarding the variants of the tunes and words which he finally chose for his vocal-piano arrangements.

It had been Serge's intent to create an attractive Burns songbook for a broad audience, a songbook with playable, singable arrangements. The spirit of the whole was intended to be in marked contrast to the customary scholarly mode. Most of the songs in the manuscript are presented on two pages: Serge's arrangement in his beautiful musical calligraphy on one page; the lyrics, an illustration, and a sentence or two of enlightenment, such as an excerpt from a letter or another bit of colorful information, on the other page.

Both with a background in music, mother and son are fully capable of preparing and proofreading the music for the edition contemplated. But what of the notes? Systematically inclusive of all data, they had been typed or hand-written and then pasted on 8½ x 11-inch paper where they were intertwined with direct quotations from sources as well as with Serge's analyses, conclusions, feelings, etc. as to how each song should be treated musically. Whereas Esther and Daniel felt themselves thoroughly competent to handle the music, they felt the need of asking somebody to check out the commentary. So it was that Serge's wife approached me.

"Do you want the job?" This initial question was followed by a host of others. Would I assist with the research notes? Would I suggest and correct throughout the manuscript? Would I do the bibliography? Would I work on the glossaries? the indices? Would I bring my Introduction up to date? In short, would I serve as Consulting Editor of the work in hand? I returned answer with my agreement to aid however I might.

More detailed information arrived before and after the package of the first five songs. Volume I (Country Life) would begin with a Foreword by Esther. This volume would continue with my Introduction followed by the first eighty-five songs with their piano accompaniment. Volume II (The Lasses) would present seventy songs; Volume III (High Society) would have eighty-seven songs; Volume IV (Friends), eighty-two songs and an Index describing alphabetically by first line all 324 songs and their place in the edition. Tentatively, the first volume would appear in 1996; the second and third, in 1997; the last, in 1998.

Most recently came word that each song is to be numbered before its title; marginal glosses are to appear within the text; and a complete glossary and bibliography are to conclude Volume IV. This last volume will also offer four indices, one of which will include Serge's references to his sources for the lyrics and the tune set forth in a system of codes and abbreviations that refer to the bibliography; the other three will give titles of songs; names of tunes; first lines of verse.

Basic decisions beyond these had to be made. What types? What size fonts? How to use italics? As these were being decided upon, Daniel added

last endings for the piano where needed, while Esther checked the sequence of verses and chorus on the lyric page so that singer and pianist would be together. She also edited the background commentaries which Serge had placed under the song titles, this editing consisting primarily of shortening or making other minor revisions.

A final arrangement for the printing could not be determined until Esther and Daniel had hired Mr. Ron Hess, a music copyist. Under mutual agreement, Esther and Daniel would start by reviewing Serge's original manuscript and his research notes for the song in question; then Daniel would proofread initially the music and add second endings as required. Esther in the meantime would proofread the lyrics and notes for corrections and inconsistencies. Then Ron would transfer both music and lyrics to a computer disc using the Finale Notation Program and the Soutane Font. Next Esther and Daniel would do the fine proofreading—every word, comma, dot, dynamic—so that Ron might incorporate the same on the computer. At this stage, all would be express-mailed to me for suggestions before being returned. Finally, a copy would be made on "good" paper. Hopefully, by then, a publisher would have been found, one with both enthusiasm and imagination, ready to sit down to discuss design, where to place words and music and illustrations appropriately.

Having just returned the first five songs to California, I can speak of the joy it is to be part of this unique enterprise. Serge Hovey is one of four authors to make a major book of the songs of Robert Burns, the other three being James C. Dick, James Kinsley, and, most recently, Donald A. Low. Neither Kinsley nor Low reveals any ability to deal understandably with music. On the other hand, both Dick and Hovey knew music, were musicians; of the two, Hovey, a pupil of Arnold Schoenberg, had the deeper, wider knowledge as well as the gift to compose. These two musicians could approach Scottish song as Robert Burns did: with the music, to be hummed over and over again before any thought was given to the words. Dick wrote of his edition in the Preface to his 1903 landmark:

[The airs] form an epitome of Scottish music which probably would have been more attractive to the general reader with pianoforte accompaniments. But this is not a music book in the modern sense, only a quarry for the constructive composer and for the student of folk-song.¹

The difference between Dick's work and Hovey's is that Dick offers a research book to benefit the Burns scholar bent over an oak table in any university library, whereas Hovey offers the very book which Dick seems so wistfully to turn his back upon: a music book in the modern sense, an attractive song-book with the complete songs of Robert Burns. It may well be that James Dick

¹James C. Dick, *The Songs of Robert Burns* (London, Edinburgh, Glasgow & New York, 1903), p. xxi.

knew his limitations, that he could not compose the arrangements necessary. Obviously, Hovey could and did.

First and foremost, the five songs of Hovey present simple, sympathetic, meaningful piano accompaniments; conversely, Dick, Kinsley and Low present only the bare melodic line without even that suggestion for harmony offered by James Johnson's *pedal bass* in *The Scots Musical Museum*. Hovey's manuscript, in the main, consists of 324 tunes with suitable accompaniment for the piano; Dick includes 319 tunes with an additional four tagged "Unknown." Parenthetically, nobody has identified them still. Kinsley gives 356 tunes; Low, only 303.

In his Preface Kinsley acknowledges the help of some twenty-eight authorities; amongst the names, those of persons like Cedric Thorpe Davis stand out as individuals qualified in music. How many such authorities aided Kinsley or to what extent Kinsley had to depend upon them is never made clear. The same may be said for Low whose own Preface is filled with acknowledgment of similar indebtedness to such individuals as Ruzena Wood of the National Library of Scotland's Music Room, to Dr. David Davidson for help with "difficult problems," and to Dr. David Johnson as "musical copy-editor." Dick had no need to recognize such aid; neither did Serge Hovey.

To get a closer look at Hovey's standing among his predecessors, we might base our comparisons upon the early Burns song "There was a lad was born in Kyle," the first of the five songs sent me from California. What can we say of the music?

Since Hovey's volumes are for the pianist as well as the singer, they will rest easily where they belong: on the piano rack. None of the other publications—the Dick, the Kinsley, the Low—does. Hovey's print for both music and words is black and clear; the accompaniment, not difficult. Dynamics, terms of performance, and terms of procedure are where expected and more than adequate. "Pace," for example, is indicated by the customary mark pointing out quarter notes per minute (here 120), not merely with a Kinsley "Brisk" or a Low "Lively."

Daintie Davie is the tune to which Burns set his "There was a lad." Dick and Kinsley found the music in William McGibbon's *A Collection of Scots Tunes* (Edinburgh, 1746); Low found it in Johnson's *Museum*. Hovey's editors have not as yet got to the point of copying out sources; however, in this instance, the source appears to have been McGibbon, perhaps as taken indirectly from Dick.

The two pages of Hovey's accompaniment for *Daintie Davie* everywhere bear traces of a professional composer committed to a goal: to offer whoever opens the book what he requires to be able to enjoy a Burns song fully. So each word of the lyrics is handled carefully, precisely by syllables, each to a note or notes of music; so a second ending is composed for the last stanza of "There was a lad," this ending encompassing some five extra measures.

The same care is evident throughout all five of the songs in question. Permit me to mention one or two other examples. Hovey works out everything to a "T." He heightens both the ease and the pleasure of the performer. Regard the last stanza, for instance, of "A sun is sunk in the west." Do you note the additional "O, whither" of the first line? What a jolt any singer would receive were he to be singing this line as given by Dick, Kinsley, or Low! Such gasping in despair for more tune! Not with the Hovey, though. For his final stanza, he thoughtfully adds ten measures to the tune, more than enough to accommodate the extra words.

Again, for "The Ploughman" Hovey and Kinsley provide music for the chorus. Dick and Low do not. In addition, Low seems to have omitted mistakenly the key signature of E^b. As a last example of Hovey's genuine desire to make all enjoyable, one might turn to "My father was a farmer." Dick and Low offer no music for the chorus whatsoever; indeed, neither so much as suggests that the song has a chorus. Kinsley offers no music, but he does offer, after the first stanza of the poetry, the words "Chorus Row de dow &c." "Row de dow &c.": nothing else for the nine full measures of music belonging to the chorus alone. What a long, what a vague "&c.!" Is it not like the "&c." of the chorus for the first song of *Love and Liberty* with its "Lal de daudle &c." followed by nothing else for seven and more measures of music; or like the "&c." for the seven measures following the second song's only guide to the chorus: "Sing, Lal de lal &c." Knowing Hovey, one has no surprise for his having worked out a complete, fun-loving example of nonsense founded upon the mere suggestion "Row de dow &c." of James Kinsley, an engaging pattern that requires nine more measures of accompaniment as well as several more handfuls of gobbledygook.

If there is any one aspect of the Hovey music which this singer, at any rate, is thankful for, it is the sensible tessituras of the arrangements. Hovey's songs are pitched where the typical singer lives. Compare the range of his "There was a lad" with Kinsley's. Again and again, Kinsley devilishly summons up from the vasty deep a tessitura fit only for a Metropolitan Opera coloratura or a eunuch standing tiptoe on the kitchen stool and singing falsetto. Why does Kinsley make his Burns songs so unsingable? Perhaps—to be as kind as possible—in order to reflect the fact that tune after tune comes from a book of tunes without words, dance tunes like reels calling not for a voice, but for a violin or, so very often, a German flute. High registers are nothing for either of these two instruments. Playford, Oswald, McGibbon, Bremner, Peacock, Aird, all specify either violin or German flute, sometimes both. All served as Burns's sources. So, quixotically, Kinsley takes the voice right off the top of the page. Just as quixotically, he otherwise delights in switching keys, in transposing so as to gain height and to be different from every other modern editor of the songs; moreover, he characteristically patches the lyrics from several different sources.

Let's get along. Now, what of the poetry for all this music that Burns hummed over and over until he knew every nuance by heart?

Of course, Dick, Kinsley, Low, and Hovey edit with differences; obviously, for example, when it is a matter of punctuation. Hovey, more interested in providing a songbook which everybody can enjoy rather than one more scholarly edition which another scholar may or may not consult, can afford, as Dick, Kinsley, and Low cannot, to be up to date by relying principally upon standardized punctuation of the Freshman English variety. Kinsley of those editors under consideration comes closest to reproducing the various, idiosyncratic flourishes typical of the eighteenth-century manuscript.

Dick presents the Burns songs by means of eleven categories; Hovey orders them by means of four. Kinsley and Low try their best to place them by date of composition.

For "There was a lad," Dick, Kinsley, and Low give Cromek's *Reliques* as their source; Hovey, generally, follows the Cromek of Dick. All four specify *Daintie Davie* as their tune, placing the ascription underneath some form of the title, every one different from every other. Only Cromek and Hovey have no number before the title, Hovey merely because his work awaits final disposition of a publisher. Numeration of lines is in accordance with each editor's preference. Cromek and Dick number neither lines nor stanzas. Hovey numbers by stanzas; Kinsley and Low by every fifth line. Dick and Kinsley offer no glosses with the text; Low glosses at the foot of the last page of a song's text. Most effectively of all, Hovey glosses marginally to the left of the pertinent verse. Low provides, roughly speaking, a third of a page of notes after his glosses. Dick and Kinsley comment copiously and significantly: Dick at volume end, Kinsley in a complete separate volume, the 663-page Volume III of the Oxford Edition. Hovey for this same "There was a lad" gives only a meager twenty-five words, relevant and illuminating, but not primary to purpose.

Not Dick, not Kinsley, not Low follow exactly his source of Cromek's *Reliques*, only in small measure because Cromek begs correction of several obvious mistakes and substitutes four asterisks for Burns's bawdy phrase of two words.

One might develop his comparison by beginning textually with the song's chorus, which Cromek presents italicized after both the first and last stanzas. Dick and Low place the chorus first. Kinsley, like his source, places the chorus after the first stanza. Cromek or no Cromek, not Dick, not Kinsley, and not Low, as twentieth-century editors, place the chorus *after* the last stanza. On the other hand, Hovey calls for the chorus to be repeated not only after the sixth and last stanza, but also after the second and fourth stanzas as well.

Punctuation-wise we get our anticipated disagreements. A case in point is in the chorus of "There was a lad." All, like Cromek, italicize throughout. Dick, however, offers not a single one of the nine apostrophes in Cromek. Kinsley offers all nine. Low omits the four in line 2 and the one in line 3, but strangely includes the two in line 4. One may best understand Hovey's reliance

upon an extra comma here and there if he keeps in mind that Hovey, unlike any of the others, accepts the responsibility of making his version as singable as possible. His aim is to entertain; by the way, so was Robert Burns's.

It is in the third stanza that one comes upon direct discourse which lasts, off and on, right down to the final word of the last stanza. Only Hovey, meaningfully, according to current usage, sets off this direct discourse throughout. Kinsley and Low omit all quotation marks as did Cromek; Dick uses them like Hovey until the very last stanza where he goes it alone by committing the mistake of forgetting that he was "in" direct discourse.

Low, alone, commits the mistake of printing "core" for the correct word "score" in line 2 of stanza 5. Kinsley, alone, introduces controversy by using "Stir" instead of "Sir" as the last word in stanza 1, line 1; in so doing, he passeth all human understanding.

Finally, with respect to the words of "There was a lad," Hovey has not so much as a blush in restoring the words "lie aspar" to the line "Ye'll gar the lasses lie aspar," (with legs wide apart). Like the other three editors, he has no place for Cromek's bashful asterisks.

My enthusiasm is unbounded for the opportunity of having a bit to do with moving this Hovey family venture along to publication. After all has been said and done, when all four volumes are on the market, due justice will have been given, finally, to the songs of Robert Burns and to the memory of Serge Hovey. Can anyone name any other tribute more befitting this bicentenary than such promise of merry sunshine?

SUNY, Emeritus



I have heard the mavis singing —
A Gray 1994

Esther Hovey

The Genesis of Serge Hovey's
The Robert Burns Song Book

The question is often asked: Why would a twentieth-century American composer become so involved with the songs of Robert Burns?

Serge Hovey (b. 1920, New York; d. 1989, Los Angeles) was an accomplished composer who studied under Arnold Schoenberg and Hanns Eisler. He was the musical director for the American premiere of Bertolt Brecht's *Galileo* in Hollywood in 1948. His ballet music *Fable* was performed by The Philadelphia Orchestra in 1949 and Hovey was well on his way to being accepted into the "serious" musical establishment of that time. But then he became interested in what he called "the cultural roots of American music." He became imbued with the notion that American music is comprised of the sounds and rhythms of the people who came to this land.

It is possible that his quest for these roots reflected his personal desire to establish his own cultural identity. His family traces back to Colonial days in Massachusetts and his father, Carl, was the editor of an early twentieth-century progressive magazine, *The Metropolitan*, which served as a spring-board for writers such as John Reed, Walter Lippman and Sinclair Lewis. His mother, Sonya Levien, was a Russian-Jewish immigrant who became a lawyer and a suffragist and then a successful screenwriter, working with George Gershwin and Will Rogers.

Hovey's first works in a classical-ethnic style grew out of his own cultural heritage: the music for the plays *The World of Sholem Aleichem* and *Tevya and His Daughters*, both based on Jewish folk tales. He continued to compose original orchestral works such as *African Ballet Suite*, *Weekend-USA*, *A Little*

New York Music, Symphony No. 1, and also worked on scores for documentary films.

When Serge Hovey became interested in ethnic music, that meant total immersion. His insightful theories on music history and ethnomusicology were developing constantly as he spent many hours in the communities of people whose music he was trying to interpret as an American composer. In a letter to Hamish Henderson (September 14, 1972), Hovey described his early involvement with the songs of Robert Burns:

My interest in Burns's songs, from the musical angle, started about twenty years ago. At the time I was living in New York, very much involved with Jewish music and off-Broadway theatre. I knew next to nothing about Scots songs. Then a friend, a Burns enthusiast, kept after me on a point of curiosity, i.e., what in the world were all these little tune indications under the titles of Burns's songs? He showed me, opening up the Barke edition to page 584: THE TAILOR and asked, what did that mean: "Tune: *The Drummer*?" Or page 600: O, THAT I HAD NE'ER BEEN MARRIED, "Tune: *Crowdie*?": Did these notations refer to tunes that still existed? Or tunes that had disappeared? Were they folk tunes? Or what? It's hard to recapture the state of total innocence and naivete with regard to the music for Burns's songs that I had then or, for that matter, most people in the United States (I won't speak for Scotland!) still possess. Most people? Most U. S. scholars as well, even in "English" departments of great universities! Sheer curiosity led me to *The Scots Musical Museum* and Thomson's *Scottish Airs* but once I realized that the tunes were still extant, that they were mostly Scots folk songs and, above all, that they sounded marvelous in conjunction with Burns's lyrics, then I was hooked.

From that point on, Burns songs became my hobby; I spent every spare minute arranging the songs. This was the magnetic attraction and still is: what could be done harmonically with these challenging, entrancing melodies?

In an autobiographical letter (August 11, 1982), Hovey wrote:

By 1973, I had completed the manuscript of *The Robert Burns Song Book*. The project is concerned with the re-creation and contemporary American interpretation of over 300 songs created or remodeled by the Scottish poet. The traditional tunes to which Burns either wrote lyrics or revised folk verses were largely lost, forgotten or scrambled in the years that followed his death. Many of these songs were brought to the New World by the early Scottish immigrants. The Burns and Scottish tunes worked their way into the bloodstream of American music. The aspirations of early Americans found many forms of cultural expression and, together with the writings of Paine and the spirit of the Enlightenment, we also find the songs of Burns.

Jean Redpath was introduced to Serge by Hamish Henderson in 1972. Between the years 1976 and 1989 they recorded eighty-eight Burns songs as arranged for small instrumental ensembles. These seven albums have recently

been re-released on four CDs by Rounder Records in the USA and by Green-trax Recordings in Scotland.

The Robert Burns Song Book contains 324 voice/piano arrangements presented with background notes and illustrations. The notes are summaries of the extensive research conducted by the composer/author on Burns's own sources and the extent to which traditional materials were retained or changed by the poet. This Burns bicentennial year has special significance for the Hovey family. For more than twenty-five years, they received polite letters of rejection from publishers who, while fascinated with the songs, were intimidated by the scope of the songbook. There is now an agreement with Mel Bay Publications of St. Louis, Missouri, that will finally bring this work to fruition in a four-volume edition to be produced in consecutive years.

The manuscript is being edited by Esther Hovey in collaboration with her son Daniel and music-copyist Ronald W. Hess. Continuing a relationship which began in 1968, Professor Robert D. Thornton is working with the Hoveys by proofreading and double-checking all the music, text and research data for each song. As Serge Hovey stated in his letter to Henderson (September 14, 1972):

Thornton contributed to my book in a major way, not only with that intangible but vital factor, encouragement, but with numerous concrete actions. He has examined every page with minute attention, making immensely helpful comments and criticisms. Recently, he contributed an excellent introduction.

Upon completion *The Robert Burns Song Book* will stand with Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* and Thomson's *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs* as a major source for Robert Burns and his songs, making them available to twentieth—and twenty-first—century singers, musicians and scholars as the earlier did for enthusiasts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Pacific Palisades

I am delighted to be able to announce that arrangements have been made for the Hovey archive to be transferred to the G. Ross Roy Collection upon completion of the research for the publication of The Robert Burns Song Book. This collection at the University of South Carolina contains one of the world's greatest assemblages of works by and about Burns, and the Hovey archive will materially enrich its research potential. I am most grateful to Dr. Esther Hovey for this splendid gift.

GRR



The Deil came fiddlin
through the town
A Gray 1996

James A. Mackay

New Developments in Burns Biography

When I was approached by Mainstream Publishing of Edinburgh to write a biography of Burns, my first question was “What can I possibly say that has not been said—many times—before?” Heaven knows, there has been an ample sufficiency of books about him. The Mitchell Library in Glasgow has over 900 biographies of Burns, or books which have a substantial biographical introduction to the songs and poems. Indeed, since my book was published in October 1992 there have been at least a dozen others. Only two so far appear to have any real merit, I am sorry to say: John Weir on Burns and freemasonry (an aspect of the poet’s life which has had rather scant coverage recently) and Gavin Sprott’s *Robert Burns, the Life, Times and Legacy*, which places Burns fairly in the context of his time and place. Most, though not all, of these recent books make use of some of the startling facts which I uncovered.

I could very easily have fallen into the trap which has beset almost every biographer since Dr. James Currie put pen to paper in 1800. Currie at least had the excuse that, apart from the brief hatchet-job by Robert Heron in 1797, not long after the poet’s death, he had not one before him; but everyone who came after Currie followed in his footsteps. Cromek, though dismissed by DeLancey Ferguson and Snyder as a liar and a cheat, deserves to be singled out for having done what no one did before him, that was to travel to the Burns country and interview the friends and relatives of the poet. As a result, his *Reliques* of 1808 contain much that is original, if unsystematic.

Lockhart (1828) and, above all, “Honest Allan” Cunningham (1834) set the trend for biographical writing that embellished the fact and thought nothing

of filling the gaps with the figments of their imaginations. Many subsequent writers trod in their footsteps, adding here and garnishing there, each adding his tuppence worth. The low point was reached in 1856 with the first edition of what came to be known as *The National Burns*, cobbled together by the Rev. George Gilfillan. Though Gilfillan subsequently toned down his worst excesses, sufficient remained to muddy the waters for many years and, indeed, much confusion has continued down to the present time.

Burns himself wrote: "Some books are lies frae end to end"¹ and, sadly, this has proved all too true of many of the books about him. Even worse, such works of popular reference as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* have served to convey the wrong impression about Burns: "The years in Dumfries were a period of dissipation and decay." That sentence appeared in the *Encyclopaedia* until David Daiches re-wrote the entry on Burns in 1974; yet these words were actually written by John Nichol in 1876—almost a century earlier.

In 1800 Currie wrote that the particulars respecting the illness and death of Burns were furnished by Dr. William Maxwell, the physician who attended him. This statement appeared as a footnote to a passage dealing with the poet's last illness, in July 1796; but later biographers misinterpreted it and assumed that Maxwell was the source of the entire seven preceding pages dealing with his health in general.

Thus Currie's assertion that Burns had been confined to the house by an accidental complaint from October 1795 to January 1796 was erroneously assumed to have derived from Maxwell, and was therefore incontrovertible. Not until the minute-book of the Royal Dumfries Volunteers came to light in 1902 did Burns's attendance at parades give the lie to this. So when we get to the passage dealing with Burns's exposure to the elements after a late-night boozing session, the fun begins. Currie's words were:

He dined at a tavern and returned home about three o'clock in a very cold morning, benumbed and intoxicated. This was followed by an attack of rheumatism which confined him about a week.²

Although the story of returning home from a late-night carousal may well be correct—we have ample testimony regarding the lateness of the hour when such parties broke up—it was exaggerated by later biographers, who claimed that Burns had fallen asleep in the snow—the fate which actually befell "Holly Willie" Fisher. McDowall (1867) could actually point authoritatively to the very spot, at the head of the Globe Inn Close, where the poet collapsed in the

¹"Death and Doctor Hornbook," *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 79. Henceforth *Poems*.

²*The Works of Robert Burns*, ed. James Currie. 4 vols. (Liverpool, 1800), I, 219-20.

snow.³ George Gilfillan went further and stated that after leaving the Globe Inn, Burns went to a brothel and there behaved so disgracefully that he was forcibly ejected, stumbled into the hedge opposite, and fell asleep in the snow.⁴

That story has remained more or less unaltered right down to the present day. Fortunately, I remembered having studied the diaries of William Grierson, now preserved in the Dumfries Museum. Grierson kept a meticulous record of the weather in Dumfries, day by day. The very full details in his manuscript volume show that there was no frost, and absolutely no snow, in Dumfries in January or February 1796. In fact, the weather that winter was remarkably mild, though often accompanied by high winds. So that gives the lie to that particular story!

It was quite by chance that William Grierson's diaries have been preserved. So, too, with the day-book of Surgeon Charles Fleeming which was discovered in the eaves of the house at 49 Kirkgate in Irvine where he had practiced medicine between 1757 and 1798. This book was discovered in 1955 and is now in the care of Irvine Burns Club. The fact of its existence does not appear to have been publicized, but I am indebted to my very good friend John Inglis for having brought it to my attention.

Under November 1781 it contains a number of very interesting entries concerning one, Robert Burns, lint-dresser. It will be remembered that this was the period when Burns was living in Irvine, learning the craft of flax-dressing. From the poet's letters we know that he suffered a serious illness during the Irvine period, but its precise nature has long been a matter of speculation.

In the first place, for Burns to have called in a doctor at all is evidence of the seriousness of his illness. Fleeming visited his patient five times in eight days. The day-book records these visits and the medicine prescribed: first of all, on November 14, ipecacuanha and sacred elixir—a violent emetic and an equally powerful laxative. Purging and vomiting were then regarded as the preliminary treatment for “black bile”—or severe depression. At the second visit, on November 19, Fleeming prescribed an anodyne, probably an opiate employed as a painkiller or astringent. He returned on November 20, 21 and 22 to prescribe massive doses of cinchona, the dried bark of a South American tree which contained quinine in its raw form. This was the standard treatment for a high fever.

This could have been smallpox. Marion Hunter and Gilbert Baird asserted years later that Burns was pockmarked, but such scarring may have been

³William McDowall, *History of the Burgh of Dumfries, with Notices of Nithsdale, Annandale, and the Western Border* (Edinburgh, 1867), pp. 725-6.

⁴*The National Burns, Including the Airs of all the Songs...With an Original Life of Burns*, ed. George Gilfillan. 2 vols. (London, Edinburgh and Glasgow [1886]), I, xci. This work was issued at various dates, in parts, in 2 volumes, and in 4 divisions, but this passage always appears on the same page.

merely acneous. Had Burns contracted smallpox he would surely have mentioned it to Moore in his Autobiographical Letter. This was a townsman's disease which seldom infected country people, mainly because they usually contracted cowpox early in life.

Incidentally, although Edward Jenner did not publish his theories on vaccination till 1796, the belief that smallpox and cowpox were mutually antagonistic was widely held in country districts, and Burns himself was an enthusiastic advocate of some primitive form of inoculation, as testified by several of his letters. It seems reasonably safe to conclude that, whatever caused his high fever, it was not smallpox.

Similarly malaria, a disease often associated with seaports at this period, may also be ruled out because of its recurrent character—and Burns never mentioned such attacks in later life. The other disease that was more or less endemic in seaports at the time was typhoid. But in this illness fever attains its peak about the eighth day, which certainly does not tie in with Fleeming's visits from November 20 to 23. As Fleeming did not visit Burns after the latter date it must be assumed that Burns showed a marked improvement on that day—well before the usual signs of recovery in even mild typhoid cases.

It is unfortunate that Fleeming did not note down in his journal the actual ailment he was treating; but an examination of the other entries around the same date show that there was no typhoid in Irvine at that time. This leaves us with severe morbid depression—in other words, a complete physical breakdown brought on by psychosomatic causes. Against this background, therefore, we may read Burns's letter to his father, dated December 27, 1781, the only extant letter from the poet to William Burnes. In this, Robert says

The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind that I dare not, either review past events, or look forward into futurity; for the least anxiety, or perturbation in my breast, produces most unhappy effects on my whole frame.⁵

And in his first *Commonplace Book*, Burns later wrote of a period when his spirit was broken by repeated losses and disasters: "My body too was attacked by that most dreadful distemper, a Hypochondria, or confirmed Melancholy."⁶

One of the canards in recent years—indeed, the novel *The Clarinda Conspiracy* by Alastair Campsie was based on it—is that the second set of twins born to Jean Armour in March 1788 did not die at or soon after birth, but survived, and moved to Ellisland with Jean and Robert, Junior. That, as a consequence, Burns lied to his Excise superiors, and obtained his post under false pretenses. The Excise regulations stipulated that candidates, if married, must

⁵*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), I, 6.

⁶March 1784. *Robert Burns's Commonplace Book, 1783-85*, reproduced in facsimile, ed. James Cameron Ewing and Davidson Cook (Glasgow, 1938), p. 10.

have no more than two children. Actually, Burns was technically a bachelor at the time of his application, but even if his irregular marriage to Jean had been recognized, only Robert, the survivor of the first set of twins, was still living.

Campsie's proof that Burns lied is an extract from an Excise document listing the officers of the Dumfries Collection in 1789, wherein the number of people in the poet's family is given as six. By that time Burns and his wife had two sons—Robert and Francis—and Campsie assumed that the other two were the second set of twins, despite the fact that they are nowhere referred to in the poet's letters, nor are their names known to posterity. In fact the two others in the Burns household in 1789 were the poet's young cousins John and Fanny—a fact mentioned by Burns in a letter to James Burness of Montrose dated February 9 that year.

The mystery surrounding the second set of twins arose from the statement of Robert Chambers (1851): "The birth of these infants is not recorded in the parish registers of Mauchline—probably because they did not live to be baptised."⁷ Chambers has had the reputation of being a reliable biographer and no one ever thought to question this statement until recently. But following the assertion by Campsie that the twins lived and moved to Ellisland, I checked the matter with the records preserved in Register House, Edinburgh.

I found that, contrary to accepted belief, the burial register of Mauchline (p. 304) contained two identical entries of "Jean Armour, Child unbaptized," one on March 10 and the other on March 22. No charge was made for burial in either case, apparently the normal practice for stillbirths and burials of unbaptized infants. Putting this matter in perspective, it should be noted that this page records 19 burials between February 11 and May 11, and of these no fewer than seven were of unbaptized, new-born infants.

Because the doctrine of retrospective baptism of ancestors is central to Mormon faith, the Latter-day Saints have performed the Herculean labor of transcribing and microfilming all the parish registers of births and marriages, and computerizing the data which is now available on microfiche. I have found this to be a most helpful tool—a powerful magnet for drawing needles out of innumerable haystacks, sometimes with very surprising results. A few examples will suffice.

Burns's earliest composition, "O once I lov'd" (also known as "Handsome Nell," *Poems*, I, 3) is said to be a tribute to Helen Kilpatrick, daughter of the blacksmith of Parclewan, Dalrymple. In his Autobiographical Letter Burns does not identify the girl, but says that she was a year younger. The Dalrymple birth register, however, shows that Helen Kilpatrick was barely three weeks younger than Burns—so there appeared to be a discrepancy here. Subsequently I discovered that, following correspondence in *The Scotsman* in 1828, Helen

⁷*The Life and Works of Robert Burns*, ed. Robert Chambers; rev. William Wallace. 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1896), II, 310.

Blair was named as the heroine, and she is given in the editions of Burns between that date and 1851, when Chambers altered the name to Helen Kilpatrick, on the basis of information supplied by Isobel Burns, the poet's youngest sister. But Isobel was then eighty and was recalling an event which had occurred when she was only three or four (and could therefore have had no real, first-hand knowledge). Helen Blair, in fact, satisfied Burns's description to Moore, so I feel that she must be re-instated.

Actually, quite a number of the new facts dug up by Chambers, and accepted unquestioningly from 1851 till now, came from Isobel Burns and likewise have not stood up to critical examination. The most glaring example is Alison or Ellison Begbie, the mysterious recipient of the A and E letters of 1781. Chambers got the first name from the poet's song "Bonie Peggy Alison"⁸ and asked old Isobel some very leading questions. The five letters sent to "My dear E"⁹ were explained by the probability that Burns's enamorata was familiarly known as Ellison—though no one thought to question the likelihood of a young lady, as highly literate as she obviously was, spelling her name phonetically. This was only a suggestion by Isobel, but Chambers transmuted it into a hard fact.

Isobel could tell Chambers that the young lady was the daughter of a small farmer near Galston, that she was the housekeeper at Carnell when Burns courted her, and that he had written the song of similes, "The Lass of Cessnock Banks" in her honor. A search of the Ayrshire birth registers revealed that Alison, as a Christian name, did not come into fashion till the 1830s, and Ellison was equally conspicuous by its absence. An examination of the Galston registers revealed not a single family named Begbie, though it was a common name in the adjoining parish of Kilmarnock. On the other hand, there were three families surnamed Gebbie—same six letters but a slightly different arrangement. Alexander Gebbie and his brother Thomas had daughters named Elizabeth, born in November 1761 and July 1762 respectively.

I subsequently traced the careers of both girls and eliminated the elder of the two. Elizabeth the younger was born at Pearsland, a small farm near Galston village. Burns's last letter to "My dear E" hints that she had chosen someone else and was about to leave the district. The marriage registers show that Elizabeth Gebbie married Hugh Brown at Newmilns in Loudoun parish on November 23, 1781. Newmilns is, in fact, about a mile north-east of Pearsland. Hugh Brown was a man of more mature years, seven years older than Burns, and a stocking-maker to trade. To an ambitious girl who had not

⁸"And I'll kiss thee yet, yet," *Poems*, I, 406, where the name Peggy Alison appears.

⁹Of the five letters in this group only the first is known in MS, and was originally published by William Scott Douglas in 1877; the other four were first published by James Currie in 1800. Only the third and fourth bear the salutation "My dear E."

yet reached the age of twenty, he must have seemed a more dependable prospect than the son of Auld Lochlie.

Hugh and Elizabeth had two daughters in Loudoun parish, but then they vanish. Where did they go? With a surname like Brown the quest seemed hopeless. But now, enter Richard Hartley Cromek, whose *Reliques* were published in 1808. Cromek, though much maligned by later scholars, did a considerable amount of legwork and in one instance tracked down the lass of Cessnock Banks¹⁰ to Glasgow where she was then residing. He, in fact, was the first to publish the song, taken down from the lady's own lips. Burns never published it in his lifetime, and it did not appear in a wholly accurate version, from a manuscript of the poet, until 1839.

Cromek thus pointed me in the direction of Glasgow, and here I found Hugh Brown who, in the 1807 directory, was a stocking-maker at 74 King Street. A search of the Glasgow registers revealed Elizabeth, Junior, born in 1789 and Hugh, Junior in April 1791. Elizabeth Gebbie died in 1823, by which time Hugh was a very considerable hosiery manufacturer. Hugh, Junior, who inherited the business, moved to a splendid mansion in Park Circus, Kelvingrove, in 1856. Clearly Elizabeth Gebbie had been a shrewd judge of character—or business sense at least—when she chose Hugh Brown and rejected Robert Burns.

Miss Gebbie was probably known familiarly as Betty or Lizzie, but in the early summer of 1781 Burns was under the spell of *A Sentimental Journey*, and we may assume that he bestowed on her the name of Sterne's heroine Eliza. Then "Eliza Gebbie" could easily have been garbled into "Ellison Begbie" in Isobel's memory—her own married name was Begg, which may have helped to confuse her.

This identification also solves another mystery, the heroine of the song which opens, "From thee, Eliza, I must go" (entitled "Song," *Poems*, I, 15) which previous editors have associated with either Elizabeth Barbour or Elizabeth Miller in Mauchline, without ever having reconciled the discrepancy of the song having been composed before 1782 (on Burns's own admission to Moore)—three years before either of these girls swam into his ken, and ignoring brother Gilbert's comment that the new song was one of Robert's earliest compositions. Certainly the two stanzas would fit Burns's mood at the time Miss Gebbie turned him down. The five letters appear to have survived only as drafts, so the identity of the recipients can only be confirmed if and when the actual letters are discovered. Hitherto it has been assumed that all five were addressed to the same girl, but it must now be supposed that the first letter was, in fact, written to someone else.

¹⁰"Song," *Poems*, I, 17. The title varies. Sometimes it is called "The Lass of Cessnock Banks," although that phrase does not appear in the song.

The Mormon microfiche enabled me to clear up numerous other mysteries. Some of them were of minor or peripheral importance, such as the full names of Andrew Whelpdale, husband of Jean Lorimer; the date of the marriage of Gilbert Brown and Agnes Rainie (maternal grandparents of the poet) and the details of Gilbert's two subsequent marriages and numerous progeny; the details of Margaret "Peggy" Thomson, daughter of Robert Thomson, baptized in November 1762; details concerning Samuel Peacock of Irvine and his wife Agnes McDowgal; and the birth and marriage of Richard Brown of Irvine. Light is now shed on the antecedents of Ann Park and her subsequent history; and May Cameron, whom Burns once referred to as "my Peggy" now turns out to be Margaret Cameron, who did not actually bear Burns a child, and in fact married her cousin Mungo Forbes.

The parish registers reveal that Jean Gardner of Irvine, sometimes regarded as one of the poet's mistresses, was thirteen years older than him, having been born in September 1746. Even Agnes Craig, Mrs. MeLehose, who gave the impression in later life that she was younger than Burns, was actually a year older—we have records of both her birth and baptism in the Glasgow registers.

But the most dramatic discovery is that concerning the rather shadowy young lady known to posterity as "Highland Mary." There has been more mystery surrounding this girl, and more arrant nonsense written about her, than she really merits. The maiden pure, divine, whose love redeemed Burns from his baser nature, the Beatrice to his Dante, was the byewoman at Coilsfield and, on the testimony of John Richmond, was "kept" for a time by Captain James Montgomerie. Indeed, as will become clearer in a moment, she may well have been the heroine of the song known as "Montgomerie's Peggy" ("Fragment," *Poems*, I, 28).

All that was definitely known of this girl until now was that she was born at Dunoon, the daughter of Archibald and Agnes Campbell, and that she moved with her family to Campbeltown. From the outset, she seemed quite an enigma. Archibald and Agnes had eight children (according to Robert Chambers, 1851), or five (Catherine Carswell, 1930), or four—Mary, Robert, Annie and Archibald (all other writers). Mary was the eldest (all writers except Archibald Munro, 1896, who says Robert was the eldest). Most writers say that she was born at Dunoon, but Cunningham (1834) gave Ardrossan and William Gunnyon (1865) says Ardentinnny.

She was born in 1763 (Hilton Brown, 1949, Maurice Lindsay, 1954, and most writers since 1950), 1764 (some 19th century writers), 1768 (Chambers, though with some reservation). The ever-cautious Franklyn B. Snyder (1932) merely gives her dates as ?–1786, and other biographers, such as George Gilfillan (1856), do not hazard a guess at all.

Some authors give the move to Campbeltown as taking place in 1776, but Munro says specifically that the family moved at Whitsun 1773. Munro even had a deposition from Archibald Mains saying that he had known Janet Clark,

a schoolmate of Mary's in Dunoon who remembered her as good at her school-work and a very gentle girl.

It seems strange that Chambers, or his informants, had taken the trouble to examine the Dunoon parish register for the marriage of Archibald and Agnes in June 1762, but that none of the nineteenth-century biographers had examined the register of births. Or did they? The doubt expressed by Chambers over 1768 implied that a search was made and nothing was found that tied a Mary Campbell to Archibald and Agnes. To be sure, there *was* a Mary Campbell born in Dunoon that year, on October 23, to be precise, but her parents were an Archibald Campbell and Janet Brown. Still, the father's name was right enough, therefore this must be Highland Mary—hence the 1768 date so positively accepted by Archibald Munro who wrote a very substantial biography of her.

I examined the Dunoon register of births and was puzzled to find that only three Mary Campbells had been born in the parish in the course of a decade—two in 1759 (too old) and the other in 1768; the parents in none of these cases accorded with Archibald and Agnes. A systematic search from 1762 onwards, when the couple got married, revealed an entry of a baptism dated March 18, 1766, of one Margaret Campbell, lawful daughter of Archibald Campbell and his spouse *Anne* Campbell.

Doubtless this entry was overlooked, or ignored, because the baby's name was wrong and the mother's name did not accord with the Agnes of the marriage entry. But the fact that both parents had the same surname ought to have been a clue, even in Argyll, the Campbell clan country. No other entries for Archibald and Agnes or Anne Campbell appear in the Dunoon registers. Although the girl died in October 1786, the death registers of Greenock have not survived.

The birth register of Campbeltown parish, however, reveals that Robert was baptized on February 3, 1769, the parents being named as Archibald Campbell and Agnes Campbell. This proves that the move to Campbeltown must have taken place before that date, and therefore Highland Mary could not have been the Mary Campbell that Janet Clark remembered from her school days.

Two other entries in the Campbeltown register were Ann, daughter of Archibald and Ann Campbell (1772) and Archibald, whose parent were similarly named (1778). From this I deduce that Agnes was commonly known as Annie, hence the confusion over these baptismal entries. Her second daughter was habitually known as Annie and was clearly meant to be named after her.

Since writing my biography of Burns, I have been pursuing the ancestry of Agnes Campbell in order to prove, or disprove, the legend that Highland Mary worked for one David Campbell, a relative of Agnes, who was allegedly minister of Lochranza in the Isle of Arran. Aside from the fact that David Campbell did not go to Arran till the 1790s, I did discover that Agnes's mother was

called Margaret, and in accordance with the custom of the period, therefore, Agnes had named her first-born after her own mother.

So now we shall have to get used to calling this girl "Highland Margaret." How or why did the girl's name get changed? The likeliest answer is the Scottish habit of a casual approach to names. Margaret in Gaelic is Maighread (pronounced Myrat), while Mary is Mairi (Marry). The similarity, to Lowland ears, may explain how Margaret Cameron also came to be known as May.

Cromek (1808) was the first to identify the heroine of the songs "Highland Lassie O" and "Highland Mary" with a girl called Campbell, and naturally assumed her name was Mary. Burns himself was unusually reticent on the subject, and even deliberately altered the chronology of the affair to put others off the scent. The name Mary, first adopted merely to give euphony to the song which begins "Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary" ("Song," *Poems*, II, 656), sung to the tune "Ewe Bughts Marion," may have enabled him to exorcise the painful memory of a girl whose death he felt responsible for.

Two other mysteries surround this girl. Did she marry Burns, and did she die in childbirth?

Regarding the first, we have a rather bland statement by Burns to Robert Riddell, that they took a fond farewell on May 14, 1786. Cromek is the source of the tale of the farewell by the River Faile, and the curious business about the exchange of Bibles over the purling brook, much embellished by Cunningham and later writers, and a popular subject of sentimental Victorian paintings. But even in high summer, the Faile is far too wide for people with the longest arms to reach across and touch each other, a fact ignored by the Burns devotees who erected a monument nearby in 1921. Just as the document written by Burns and given to Jean Armour has been held to be a valid certificate of marriage, so too the exchange of Bibles, and the inscriptions on their fly-leaves, might be crucial evidence of such a binding contract.

No Bible given by the girl to Burns has survived. If it ever existed, I do not doubt that he would have prudently got rid of it when he settled down with Jean. The pocket Bible he gave the girl was a tiny two-volume set and much has been made of the biblical quotations and Masonic marks on the fly-leaves, which some scholars regard as tantamount to a marriage promise.

I was anxious to examine the Bibles, as some early accounts stated that the names of the contracting parties appeared on the fly-leaves, but had been defaced by the girl's family. Through the good offices of John Inglis and Sir Bryce Knox, Lord Lieutenant of the county, I was able to take the Bibles to Strathclyde Police Laboratory. Below Burns's name the inscription appeared to be the girl's name—M.....ll. I hoped to clear up the mystery of Mary or Margaret, but the answer turned out to be something completely different—"Mossgavill," the archaic spelling of Mossgiel.

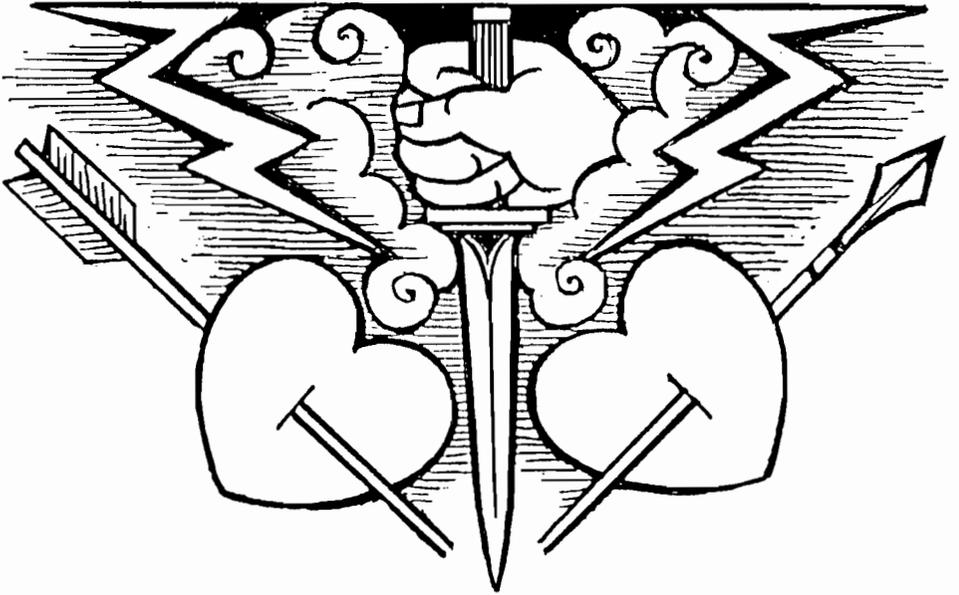
That, in itself, was an interesting discovery. Burns only used this spelling in his letters during the early part of 1784; from then onwards he always used Mossgiel. This spelling, underneath his own name, put the inscription of name

and place in 1784—two years before he met the girl. Turning the pages of the little Bible, we discovered three blank pages at the back of one volume and faint pencil marks, which had been subsequently erased, were discerned. Using the technology now available to forensic science it was possible to read the pages in the unmistakable handwriting of Robert Burns. Without the ESDA technique (available in Britain only to the Metropolitan Police in London), it was not possible to read the full text, but sufficient remains to indicate that the pages were covered with random jottings of a laundry-list nature, made over a considerable period.

In other words, what has till now been regarded as a Bible purchased specifically to give to Miss Campbell as a parting gift, and perhaps a marriage pledge, turns out to be nothing more than the poet's own pocket Bible, purchased in 1784 and carried around for the better part of two years, before he gave it to her. Her own name does *not* appear on it, far less any statement which, by any stretch of the imagination, could be taken as a declaration of marriage.

The mystery that is as yet unresolved concerns the remains of an infant found in Highland Mary's grave when she was disinterred in 1920. It would require a further disinterment to examine whatever is in that coffin and do a DNA match with some article of clothing belonging to Burns—the sweatband of his hat or a lock of his hair—to do a genetic comparison. Perhaps some day a desire to satisfy universal curiosity will overcome a natural reticence about disturbing the dead, and settle this controversy for once and for all.

Glasgow



severed hearts
A Gray 1996

Jep C. Jonson

Out of Ellisland, Into *The World*

Professor Ross Roy has placed yet another item of interest into the hands of Burns scholars. In this case, he has obtained at auction Burns's own copy of the second volume of *The World* for inclusion in the Roy Collection at the University of South Carolina. The volume is substantially—but not lavishly—annotated in Burns's hand. As is typical of Burns's annotations, he has expressed his approval with economy. He seems to need an element of disapproval, if not scorn, to fuel expansive comment (a trait that contributed, no doubt, to his success as a satirist), and his comments in this volume are all in praise. In addition to the annotations by Burns, the volume has an interesting history in its own right, having passed through the libraries of actor Edmund Kean and noted Burns collector John Gribbel, the Philadelphia manufacturer who gave the Glenriddell Manuscript to Scotland in 1914.

The breaking up of Burns's library after his death, without precise records of its contents, makes it difficult to ascertain what became of the first and third volumes of this edition of *The World*, but it seems likely that he did own all three volumes. He commissioned his friend, the Edinburgh bookseller Peter Hill, to buy him a cheap copy in February 1790,¹ and it is unlikely that Hill would have provided Burns with an incomplete edition. Furthermore, at the end of each number Burns has written the author's last name, presumably from the list appearing at the end of volume three. However, the annotations on the

¹Letter to Peter Hill, 2 February 1790. *The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), II, 9-10. Henceforth *Letters*.

flyleaf of this volume indicate that the set had probably been broken up by 1834, when it was auctioned as part of Edmund Keane's estate. Otherwise, the annotation on the flyleaf that it was "The property of the Late Edmund Kean Bt. at the Sale 17 June 1834 at Robin's Rooms" would most likely appear in the first volume, as would the signatures of various owners. That the edition is not listed in the catalogue of the auction complicates piecing together the history of the other volumes, but it may also indicate that Burns's reputation was not then firmly established since the catalogue does describe other volumes autographed and annotated by Keane.² By July 1907, when the *Book Auction Record* indicates this volume was sold alone as part of the estate of Stuart M. Samuel, M. P., the set was no longer together.

Gribbel bought the volume some time after the 1907 auction. Whether it was then auctioned with the rest of his collection in 1940, 1941, and 1945 is also difficult to ascertain. It does not appear specifically in the auction catalogues, although it may have been part of a larger lot of books. It does not reappear in the *Book Auction Record* until 1993, when it was bought at Roy's direction.

The World was published weekly in 209 issues from 4 January 1753 until 30 December 1756. Begun by London publisher Robert Dodsley, possibly as an employment scheme for his friend Edward Moore,³ it appeared under the pseudonymous editorship of "Adam Fitz-Adam." Although Moore wrote the first five issues himself, thereafter he sought out other contributors among influential friends and, as George Winship puts it, "other members and hangers-on of the world of wit and fashion."⁴ Among more than thirty contributors were Horace Walpole and Lord Chesterton, and it was in *The World* (Nos. 100 and 101, 28 November and 5 December 1754) that Chesterton published his two essays praising Samuel Johnson's dictionary, thus provoking Johnson's famous squib about the encumbrance of patrons.⁵

Like other periodicals of the day, *The World* was serialized with the intention of later publication in book form. Dodsley published the collected numbers in multi-volume editions as early as 1755, and by the time Burns commissioned Hill to purchase a copy in 1790, at least three editions had been published in Edinburgh. Burns's is the 1774 Edinburgh edition, published in

²Facsimile of catalogue in James Fullerton Arnot, ed., *Actors*, vol. 12 of *Sale Catalogues of Libraries of Eminent Persons*, gen. ed., A. N. L. Munby (London, 1975), pp. 367-78.

³John Homer Caskey, *The Life and Works of Edward Moore* (New Haven, 1927), pp. 89, 135.

⁴George P. Winship, Jr., "The Printing History of *The World*," *Studies in the Early English Periodical* (Chapel Hill, 1957), p. 187.

⁵Letter to Peter Hill, 18 July 1788. *Letters*, I, 296.

three volumes by Alexander Donaldson. This second volume contains numbers 69-140. Other than listing the names of the authors, Burns made no annotations after number 84, which might imply that he read only the first fifteen numbers with any care. But if he did own the full set, that he is still making detailed annotations well into the second volume indicates more than casual reading.

When Burns commissioned *The World* from Hill in February 1790, he had been ordering books through Hill for some months, both for himself and for the Monkland Friendly Society, a circulating library he and Robert Riddell had organized among local farmers. Burns had stipulated to Hill that for his own library he only wanted the least expensive copies to be found, saying, "I want only, Books; the cheapest way, the best; so you may have to hunt for them in the evening Auctions...the veriest ordinary copies will serve me.—I am nice only in the appearance of my Poets." On 2 February 1790 he asks Hill to find him "a cheap Copy of, THE WORLD" (*Letters*, II, 9-10), and within a month he requisitions copies of Mackenzie's periodicals and novels for the Monkland Friendly Society, characteristically steering the Society's acquisitions towards areas of his own interest. Thus he asks Hill for "the following books which you are to send us [the Society] as soon as possible—The Mirror—The Lounger—Man of Feeling—Man of the world (these for my own sake I wish to have by the first Carrier)."⁶ Hill seems to have been quick in satisfying these requests; Burns received the copy of *The World* by 6 March,⁷ and by April he was writing Mrs. Dunlop:

[I] have just now...enjoyed a very high luxury in reading a paper of the Lounger.—You know my National Prejudices.—I had often read & admired the Spectator, Adventurer, Rambler, & World, but still with a certain regret that they were so thoroughly & entirely English.—Alas! have I often said to myself, what are all the boasted advantages which my Country reaps from a certain Union, that can counterbalance the annihilation of her Independance, & even her very Name!⁸

Clearly Burns's interest in *The World* fits within the larger patterns of his admiration for the English periodical tradition, his determination that Scotland should have a parallel but separate tradition, and Mackenzie's ongoing influence in Burns's literary judgments.

Burns's interest in *The World*, and his annotations in this copy, reflect his alliance to Mackenzie's "sensibility" faction of the Scottish Enlightenment.

⁶Letter to Peter Hill, 2 March 1790. *Letters*, II, 19.

⁷*The Life and Works of Robert Burns*, ed. Robert Chambers; rev. William Wallace. 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1896), III, 230.

⁸10 April 1790, *Letters*, II, 23-24.

Although modeled on Johnson's eminently sensible *Rambler*, *The World* appealed to a broader audience and proved more popular, selling between two and three thousand copies weekly, compared to the *Rambler's* five hundred.⁹ Although the predominant tone in *The World* is ironic and satirical, it is an irony with a soft core of sentimentality. In satirizing the foibles of the fashionable, *The World* upheld a simpler, less sophisticated native morality as Mackenzie was wont to do in *The Mirror* and *The Lounger*. *The World* may have followed *The Rambler* in format, but in subject matter and sentiment, it was, like Mackenzie, much closer to Addison than Johnson.

Judging by his annotations, it was this sentiment, and the style in which it was expressed, that seems to have attracted Burns's attention. His annotations betray no interest in the London fashions being lampooned, but concentrate on the "beauty" of expression and the presence of "native" poetic genius. As such, they indicate that however much Burns was "careful to foster" the "'unlettered plowboy' tradition" started by Sibbald's and Mackenzie's reviews of the Kilmarnock edition, he was not entirely disingenuous or calculating in doing so. Undoubtedly, as Ferguson and Snyder have pointed out, Burns was shrewd enough to exploit for his own advantage Mackenzie's portraying him as a "heaven-taught ploughman."¹⁰ But however much Burns knew and acknowledged the role of wide reading in refining the poetic sensibility, his annotations indicate how much it was part of his credo that poetic genius itself was, in fact, native.

He comments specifically on only three numbers of the magazine, annotating two poems and an allegorical parable. His first comment appears above a Mr. Parrat's "Ode to Night" in number 74 (30 May 1754), where Burns writes: "A most beautiful Poem: the work of native genius.—" The exact identity of Mr. Parrat is not known, possibly William Parratt, author of *Carmen Seculare* (London, 1735) and *An Ode to the Rt. Honorable Robert Walpole* (London, 1739). Since this poem is not readily available, I include the full text:

Ode to Night

The busy cares of day are done;
In yonder western cloud the sun
Now sets, in other worlds to rise,
And glad with light the nether skies.
With ling'ring pace the parting day retires,
And slowly leaves the mountain tops, and gilded spires.

⁹Winship, pp. 186-90; Caskey, pp. 135-6.

¹⁰Franklyn Bliss Snyder, *The Life of Robert Burns* (New York, 1932), p. 155. Introduction to *Letters*, I, xlviii.

Yon azure cloud, enrob'd with white,
Still shoots a gleam of fainter light:
At length descends a browner shade;
At length the glimm'ring objects fade;
Till all submit to NIGHT's impartial reign,
And undistinguish'd darkness covers all the plain.

No more the ivy-crowned oak
Resounds beneath the woodman's stroke.
Now silence holds her solemn sway;
Mute is each bush, and ev'ry spray:
Nought but the sound of murm'ring rills is heard,
Or from the mould'ring tow'r, NIGHT's solitary bird.

Hail sacred hour of peaceful rest !
Of pow'r to charm the troubled breast !
By thee the captive slave obtains
Short respite from his galling pains;
Nor sighs for liberty, nor native soil;
But for a while forgets his chains, and sultry toil.

No horrors hast thou in thy train,
No scorpion lash, no clanking chain.
When the pale murd'rer round him spies
A thousand grisly forms arise,
When shrieks and groans arouse his palsy'd fear,
'Tis guilt alarms his soul, and conscience wounds his ear.

The village-swain whom Phillis charms,
Whose breast the tender passion warms,
Wishes for thy all-shadowing veil,
To tell the fair his lovesick tale;
Nor less impatient of the tedious day,
She longs to hear his tale, and sigh her soul away.

Oft by the covert of thy shade
LEANDER woo'd the THRACIAN maid;
Through foaming seas his passion bore,
Nor fear'd the ocean's thund'ring roar.
The conscious virgin from the sea-girt tow'r
Hung out the faithful torch to guide him to her bow'r.

Oft at thy silent hour the sage
Pores on the fair instructive page;
Or, wrapt in musings deep, his soul
Mounts active to the starry pole:
There pleas'd to range the realms of endless night,
Numbers the stars, or marks the comet's devious light.

Thine is the hour of converse sweet,
 When sprightly wit and reason meet:
 Wit, the fair blossom of the mind,
 But fairer still with reason join'd.
 Such is the feast thy social hours afford
 When eloquence and GRANVILLE join the friendly board.

GRANVILLE, whose polish'd mind is fraught
 With all that ROME or GREECE e'er taught;
 Who pleases and instructs the ear,
 When he assumes the critic's chair,
 Or from the STAGYRITE or PLATO draws
 The arts of civil life, the spirit of the laws.

O let me often thus employ
 The hour of myrth and social joy !
 And glean from GRANVILLE's learned store
 Fair science and true wisdom's lore.
 Then will I still implore thy longer stay,
 Nor change thy festive hours for sunshine and the day.
 (*The World*, II, pp. 29-31).

It seems safe to conclude that Burns was more interested in the descriptive passages in the poem than in the formulaic praise of the concluding stanzas.

The next issue with substantial annotation is number 82 (25 July 1754), containing a poem by Edward Loveybond (also spelled Lovibond, 1724-75) entitled "The Tears of Old May-Day." Again, Burns seems most taken with the well-turned, poetic phrase and shows little concern with the overall (and decidedly unpoetic) subject of the poem: the institution of the new style calendar, bringing Britain into conformity with the calendars used in Europe. In a poem of 31 quatrains, Burns marks with brackets four concluding couplets and five entire quatrains. He notes "Bon" beside two of the couplets and one of the quatrains, and "Pretty" beside another three quatrains. The remaining brackets he leaves to speak for themselves. Since the poem is reprinted in Chalmers's *Works of the English Poets*,¹¹ I include only the lines annotated by Burns:

Stanza Lines

1	Blushing she rose, and blushing rose the flow'rs, That sprung spontaneous in her genial ray.	}	Bon
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¹¹Alexander Chalmers, *The Works of the English Poets, From Chaucer to Cowper* (London, 1810), XVI, 286-287.

- | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|
| 2 | With ev'ry shifting gleam of morning light
The colour shifted of her rainbow vest. | } | Bon |
| 11 | SPACE in her empty regions heard the sound,
And hills, and dales, and rocks, and vallies rung;
The sun exulted in his glorious round;
And shouting planets in their courses sung. | } | Bon |
| 22 | Do lillies fairer, vi'lets sweeter blow?
And warbles Philomel a softer strain? | } | [Marked by
Burns but without
comment] |
| 23 | Do morning suns in rudier [<i>sic</i>] glory rise?
Does ev'ning fan her with serener gales?
Do clouds drop fatness from the wealthier skies,
Or wantons plenty in her happier vales? | } | Pretty |
| 24 | Ah! no : the blunted beams of dawning light
Skirt the pale orient with uncertain day;
And CYNTHIA, riding on the car of night,
Thro' clouds embattled faintly wins her way. | } | Pretty |
| 25 | Pale, immature, the blighted verdure springs,
Nor mounting juices feed the swelling flow'r;
Mute all the groves, nor Philomela sings
When SILENCE listens at the midnight hour. | } | Pretty |
| 26 | Is she not sprung of APRIL's wayward race,
The sickly daughter of th' unripen'd year? | } | [without
comment] |
| 27 | With show'rs and sunshine in her fickle eyes,
With hollow smiles proclaiming teach'rous peace;
With blushes harb'ring, in their thin disguise,
The blast that riots on the SPRING's increase. | } | [without
comment] |

(*The World*, II, 69-72)

Burns's final annotations come in Number 84 (8 August 1754), an allegorical parable of Prosperity and Adversity, written by William Duncombe and praised by Burns as "A beautiful Allegory." In the allegory Prosperity and Adversity, daughters of Providence, marry the two sons of Velasco, a merchant of Tyre. Prosperity is married to Felix and proves his undoing; he dies "wretched and in exile." Adversity is married to Velasco's other son, Uranio, and proves to be the proverbial blessing in disguise. Burns marks off with crosses a segment of the speech in which Adversity discloses to her husband that she is "sent...by the gods to those alone whom they love" in order to

train them up by my severe discipline to future glory, but also prepare them to receive with a greater relish all such moderate enjoyments as are not inconsistent with this probationary state. + As the spider, when assailed, seeks shelter in its inmost web, so the mind which I afflict, contracts its wandering thoughts, and flies for happiness to itself. + (*The World*, II, 81-2)

What events in Burns's life caused such a minor chord to resonate must be a matter of conjecture, since it is impossible to know precisely when Burns read this passage. But, assuming he read it in the spring of 1790, shortly after he received *The World* from Peter Hill, then, at least on the surface, Burns was struck by the passage while he was enjoying a success that had been a long time coming. He was finally established in his farmhouse at Ellisland; his business as an Exciseman was thriving; the intellectual friendship his wife could not provide him was being supplied by friendships with Robert Riddell and Mrs. Dunlop; and his correspondence with "Clarinda" had been renewed after the breach over his marriage to Jean. But it was also the time in which his thoughts returned to Mary Campbell, he began his affair with Anne Park, and, as Snyder comments, he "was constantly being called upon to give aid and counsel to his youngest living brother, William," who died in July of that year.¹² He had also just endured a hard winter plagued with ill health and the efforts of running his farm and riding on "Excise matters at least 200 miles every week."¹³ In a letter to his brother Gilbert in January of 1790, he had complained, "My nerves are in a damnable State.—I feel that horrid hypochondria...pervading every atom of both body & Soul.—This Farm has undone my enjoyment of myself.—It is a ruinous affair on all hands.—But let it go to hell! I'll fight it out and be off with it."¹⁴

Burns had also been contemplating the role of Adversity in both his life and his art; in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop, written on 25 January 1790, he quotes eight lines from an unidentified ballad, commenting on the plangent final line. The second quatrain and the comment read:

"O that the Grave it were my bed;
 "My blankets were, my winding sheet;
 "The clocks & the worms my bedfellows a';
 "And O, sae sound as I would sleep!"

I do not remember in all my reading to have met with any thing more truly the language of Misery than the exclamation in the last line.—Misery is like Love; to speak its language truly, the Author must have felt it (*Letters*, II, 7).

¹²Snyder, pp. 272, 305-310, 313.

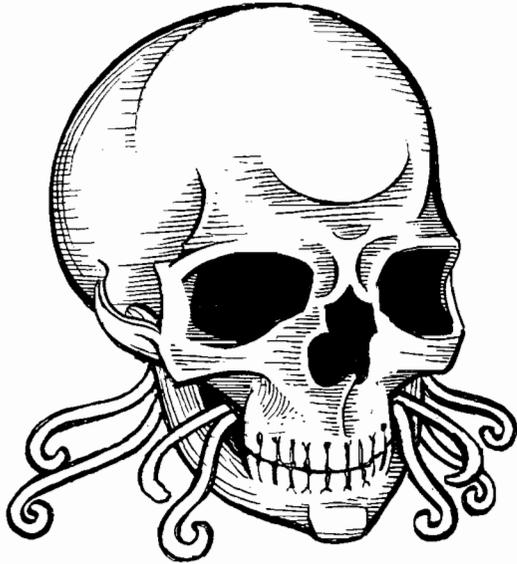
¹³Letter to William Dunbar, 14 January 1790, *Letters*, II, 4.

¹⁴Letter to Gilbert Burns, 11 January 1790, *Letters*, II, 3.

As a poet of sensibility, Burns relied on this inward response to adversity, the ability to turn inner suffering to poetic use, as a stock in trade. Of course Burns was not merely a poet of sensibility, and his power to transcend the narrow sentimentality to which sensibility is prone has kept his name from dying along with those of other men of feeling. But his annotations in *The World* show that Mackenzie's influence on Burns's aesthetics was both profound and long-lasting. That in otherwise mediocre material Burns does find elements of poetic merit is a vindication of his poetic discernment, sentimental or not.

Although studying Burns's annotations is not likely to revolutionize the way scholars see Burns, it does provide a glimpse of the poet's mind interacting with other poetry, and it does show clearly how Burns was both of his time and beyond his time. Certainly no startling revelations there, but the revelation is not so much in the product as in the process, and seeing Burns's annotations develop over the course of a poem or a volume brings the scholar closer to the poet's process than anything short of seeing the working drafts of poems. It is a pity that, given the attention lavished on Burnsiana, more specific note is not taken of his library and the records of his thought buried in the margins of books he read.

University of South Carolina



Death and any maiden.

A Gray 1996

Contributors

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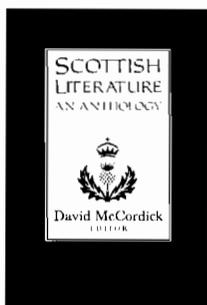
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Bibliography of Robert Burns in Translation: An Appeal

Few poets have been as widely translated as Robert Burns or have exercised as profound an influence on other national poetic traditions. His translators have included some of the major world poets of the last two centuries. To date, however, no bibliographical source exists which provides a comprehensive guide to translations of Burns. The standard bibliographies list the most important book-length translations but give little indication of the mass of material published in journals, anthologies, and songbooks.

In 1996, BOSLIT (Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation), an externally funded project based at the National Library of Scotland, began compiling an online bibliography of this scattered material to mark the bicentenary of the poet's death. The aim was to provide an invaluable research tool for scholars, translators, publishers, performers, and the reading public through an Internet-accessible database.

Translations were sought in national bibliographies, library catalogues, and indices to journals and anthologies, and through letters of inquiry to research libraries, institutes of literature, and university departments. To date, BOSLIT has recorded almost 3,000 translations of Burns into 51 languages ranging from Afrikaans to Ukrainian, from Albanian to Tatar. The earliest dates from 1795, the latest from autumn 1997.

In addition to the discrete Burns project, BOSLIT has recorded over 14,000 post-1945 translations of Scottish writing since its inception in 1994. The combined database may be viewed at: <http://www.nls.uk>.

BOSLIT is currently looking for new funding to permit work on the bibliography of Burns translations to continue. It is seeking a sum between £15,000 (\$24,750) and £20,000 (\$33,000) in order to complete the bibliography by the Millennium.

We should welcome all suggestions, advice, and assistance which might permit us to obtain the needed funding. Please contact:

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