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Editorial: Burns and the World[1]

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In the spring of 1786, Robert Burns was preparing to venture into in 'guid, black *prent*' as he readied his first book of poems for the press.[2] As a local farmer in his twenties, Burns was an unknown quantity, and so the work was to be published by subscription: prospective buyers would sign up in advance to pay their three shillings. A subscription bill for the volume carried the following declaration:

> As the author has not the most distant *Mercenary* view in Publishing, as soon as so many Subscribers appear as will defray the *necessary* Expence, the Work will be sent to the Press.

As was often the case when discussing his own work, Burns was being a little disingenuous here. Certainly when the profits rolled in, the poet had a definite '*Mercenary* view' in mind: he needed the money to emigrate. Nine guineas of his profits from *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* would go to pay his passage to Jamaica.

When Burns booked his passage to the Indies in the summer of 1786, 'his life was falling apart'.[3] The farm he leased with his brother Gilbert was failing. His girlfriend, Jean Armour, was pregnant. Though Burns mooted marriage, Jean's horrified parents spurned him as a 'worthless rake' and packed Jean off to stay with relatives in Paisley. The kirk, whose ire he had roused through a string of biting anticlerical satires, saw its chance for revenge; the fornicator Burns would have to mount the cutty stool. If 'the holy beagles, the houghmagandie pack'[4] were snapping at Burns's heels, they were shortly joined by 'the merciless legal Pack' (*Letters*, I, 145), when Jean's parents took out a warrant to ensure that Burns stumped up for his unborn offspring.[5] At the same time, the poet had gotten embroiled in another messy love affair, with a servant girl, 'Highland Mary' Campbell. Small wonder that when Burns sought a 'grand cure' (*Letters*, I, 39) for his troubles, it was the familiar Caledonian panacea: he would get the hell out. Specifically, he would take a job

as an overseer on a West Indian plantation managed by a fellow Ayrshireman, Charles Douglas. As a young man, Burns had watched with envy as his well-to-do friends headed off to make their fortunes in 'the east or west Indies' (*Letters*, I, 136), and Jamaica, where a third of the white population was Scots, would give Burns his chance.[6]

Before he had published a word, then, the man who would be Scotland's National Bard had decided to leave the country. In the event, though Burns was 'fix'd as Fate' (*Letters*, I, 45) to go, he stayed. Two factors seem decisive here. First, Jean Armour bore him twins, a boy and a girl, and the 'feelings of a father' (*Letters*, I, 58) inclined Burns to stay in Scotland. Second, his book – published on 31st July in an edition of 612 copies – proved a spectacular success. Suddenly the nation's literati were canvassing ways of keeping 'this Heaven-taught ploughman' in Scotland. Instead of sailing for Jamaica, Burns travelled to Edinburgh to prepare a new edition of his poems. And though his removal to the capital was a displacement in some ways comparable to emigration ('At Edinr. I was in a new world', *Letters*, I, 145), Burns stayed in Scotland. The man who so nearly became the laureate of the Scottish Diaspora embarked on his career as 'Caledonia's Bard'.

But you don't have to leave to imagine leaving. Through the spring and summer of 1786, Burns made a lasting mark on Scotland's literature of emigration. From 'Lines written on a Bank-note' ('For lake o' thee I leave this much-lov'd shore, / Never perhaps to greet old Scotland more!', K 106, I, 251) to 'The Farewell' ('What bursting anguish tears my heart', K 116, I, 272), Burns obsessively pictures himself decamping from 'old Scotia'. He bids tearful adieus to former sweethearts, Masonic buddies and the Ayrshire landscape: 'The bursting tears my heart declare, / Farewell, the bonie banks of *Ayr*!' (K 122, I, 292). In his songs of this period, the surging billows and raging seas of the Atlantic are rivaled only by the poet's free-flowing tears. These songs have the self-pitying, lachrymose mood of Burns's sentimental Jacobite pieces, the mood in which Burns paints himself, in one of his letters, as 'exil'd, abandon'd, forlorn' (*Letters*, I, 44).

But Burns was a poet of many moods, and as well as these tearful valedictions he wrote a ballsy, rollicking poem 'On a Scotch Bard Gone to the West Indies' (K 100, I, 238). Here, with the 'bottle-swagger' of his verse epistles, Burns imagines how a grieving drinking buddy might describe His Bardship's departure:

> He saw Misfortune's cauld *Nor-West*
> Lang-mustering up a bitter blast;
> A Jillet brak his heart at last,
> Ill may she be!
> So, took a birth afore the mast,

An’ owre the Sea.

To tremble under Fortune’s cummock,
On scarce a bellyfu’ o’ *drummock*,
Wi’ his proud, independant stomach,
Could ill agree;
So, row’t his hurdies in a *hammock*,
An’ owre the Sea.

…

Fareweel, my *rhyme-composing billie*!
Your native soil was right ill-willie;
But may ye flourish like a lily,
Now bonilie!
I’ll toast you in my hindmost *gillie*,
Tho’ owre the Sea! (37-48, 55-60)

The poem is an example of the old Scots genre of the mock elegy, a genre that dates back to Robert Sempill’s seventeenth-century poem, ‘The Life and Death of Habbie Simpson, the Piper of Kilbarchan’. In choosing this form, Burns is implying not just that death might be the upshot of emigration, either on the hazardous voyage (‘My voyage perhaps there is death in’),[7] or else in the torrid climate of the Indies, but that emigration itself is a variety of death.[8]

Several of these works – ‘On a Scotch Bard’, ‘The Farewell. To the Brethren of St. James’s Lodge, Tarbolton’, ‘From thee, Eliza, I must go’ – feature in *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, so that this volume, the most influential book of poems ever published in Scotland, is in part a book about leaving the country. In the same period, Burns composed a poem on emigration that was too inflammatory to be included in his debut volume – indeed, was not published until 1818, long after the poet’s death. ‘Address of Beelzebub’ (K 108, I, 254) has its origin in a newspaper report describing a meeting of the Highland Society of London, at which the Earl of Breadalbane and Mr Mackenzie of Applecross discussed methods of preventing 500 Glengarry Highlanders from emigrating to ‘the wilds of CANADA, in search of that fantastic thing – LIBERTY’. The speaker of the ‘Address’ is Beelzebub, and he commends the lairds’ infernal plan for keeping the Highlanders in thrall. Allow them to escape to North America, says Beelzebub, and the Highlanders might imbibe the dangerous tenets of the American Revolution and imagine themselves entitled to the rights of human beings:

Faith, you and Applecross were right
To keep the highlan hounds in sight!
I doubt na! they wad bid nae better
Than let than ance out owre the water;
Then up amang they lakes an' seas
They'll make what rules an' laws they please.

Some daring Hancocke, or a Frankline,
May set their HIGHLAN bluid a rankling;
Some Washington again may head them,
Or some MONTGOMERY, fearless, lead them;
Till God knows what may be effected,
When by such HEADS an' HEARTS directed:
Poor dunghill sons of dirt an' mire,
May to PATRICIAN RIGHTS ASPIRE…
THEY! An' be d-mn'd! what right hae they
To Meat, or Sleep, or light o' day,
Far less to riches, pow'r, or freedom,
But what your lordships PLEASE TO GIE THEM?
(7-20, 27-30)

This is the other side of the emigrant coin: emigration, figured not as weary, dispiriting exile, but exhilarating freedom; freedom from the hellish conditions of feudal dependence and degradation, and freedom to shape one's own personal destiny.

In that summer of 1786, then, Burns gave voice to the two powerful organising myths of the Diaspora: emigration as exile and as liberation. But Burns continued to write about leaving even after he'd resolved to stay, and in December 1788 he sent to Mrs Dunlop a lyric that became the world's song of parting and the national anthem of the Scottish Diaspora. 'Auld Lang Syne' (K 240, I, 443) shows Burns's genius for adapting and reworking old material. The song existed in various versions, but Burns made three inspired changes. He turned a love song into a song of male friendship; he dropped a stately, stilted English for a homely, heartfelt Scots; and he transformed lofty, abstract references to 'Faith and Truth' into poignantly concrete images, nowhere more so than in the third and fourth verses, where great distances of time and space are telescoped in tight quatrains:

We twa hae run about the braes,
And pou'd the gowans fine;

But we've wander'd mony a weary fitt,
Sin auld lang syne.

We twa hae paidl'd in the burn,
Frae morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid hae roar'd,
Sin auld lang syne. (13-20)

The force of these lines is apparent, even when the idiom may be unfamiliar. There's a nicely wry moment in *David Copperfield* when Mr Micawber affirms that, in their younger days, he and Copperfield have very frequently 'run about the braes / And pu'd the gowans fine' *in a figurative sense*: '"I am not exactly aware," said Mr Micawber, with the old roll in his voice… "what gowans may be, but I have no doubt that Copperfield and myself would frequently have taken a pull at them, if it had been feasible'.[9]

Effectively, then, Burns *did* become the laureate of the Scottish Diaspora, though a week-long foray into northern England was as far as he ventured from home. His sons, however, and those of his brother Gilbert, would range far and wide. Two of the poet's sons – Colonel William Nicol Burns and Lieutenant-Colonel James Glencairn Burns – served in India with the East India Company and later retired to Cheltenham. Gilbert's eldest and youngest sons moved to Ireland, and his fourth emigrated to South America.[10] But it was Thomas, Gilbert's third son and the poet's nephew, who ventured farthest, as minister and co-founder of the Scottish settlement of Otago in the South Island of New Zealand. Six decades after Burns was booked to leave from Greenock for Jamaica his nephew embarked from the same port on the *Philip Laing*, bound for Otago.

An entry in Thomas Burns's shipboard journal records some of the emigrants' recreations during the arduous, six-month voyage. (Incidentally, here as elsewhere in the journal, Thomas Burns fails to sound much like a 'censorious old bigot', to quote Keith Sinclair's censorious old phrase.)[11]

Saturday 28th January, 1848

[Q]uite cheering to see the Emigrants all looking so like health and in such good spirits, particularly the children in their boisterous glee exerting limbs and lungs with such lively vigour on deck after their lessons are over... In the evenings on Deck we have songs in which they all join, such as Auld Lang Syne, Banks & Braes of Bonny Doon…[12]

We are entitled to assume, I think, that his uncle's words would have accrued a special resonance for Thomas Burns and the other emigrants on the *Philip Laing*: 'Thou minds me o' departed joys, / Departed, never to return'; 'But seas between us braid hae roar'd / Sin auld lang syne'.

What we see, in this vignette of life on the *Philip Laing*, is a pattern repeated throughout the Scottish Diaspora: the poems and songs of Burns become a tangible link with the Old Country, a 'symbolic focus for Scottish identity in the colonial diaspora'.[13] As James Currie, the poet's early editor, puts it, Burns's verse 'displays, as it were embalms, the peculiar manners of his country'.[14] Burns documents a Scotland on the cusp of transformation, just before the country was racked by the forces of industrialisation, urbanisation and emigration. By packing Burns's poems in your emigrant baggage, you were taking the Old Country with you. By celebrating Burns when you reached your destination, you were keeping that connection alive. Dunedin, the chief town of the Otago settlement, was special in this regard because it had the direct family connection with Burns, but even without this, there is every chance that the city would have its Burns statue, its Burnsian place names – Mosgiel [*sic*], Mount Oliphant, Grants Braes – and its Burns Club dedicated, as its first Secretary put it, to 'keep[ing] green the best parts in the national character'.[15] When the Dunedin Burns Club was founded in 1891, its motto, perhaps inevitably, was the first line of 'Auld Lang Syne'.

It was through Burns that many emigrant Scots made sense of their dislocation. The life and poems of Burns are central to the story of the Scottish Diaspora, that massive nineteenth-century exodus from the Highlands and the Lowlands to the New Worlds of North America and Australasia. Between the 1820s and the Second World War, around 2.3 million Scots left the country, a figure that represents over half the natural increase in population over this period.[16] A tradition of Burnsian (or, often sub-Burnsian) verse is shared by most of the major destinations of the Scottish Diaspora. Indeed, some of the traditions of Burnsian verse predate the major nineteenth-century movements of Scots: the corpus of Ulster-Scots poetry, modelled – though not slavishly – on the work of Burns, flourished in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (though we should note that poetry in Scots had been written in the province since at least the 1720s).[17] In the nineteenth century, Canada, the United States, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand all had their Burnsian verse traditions. Many of these writers betray a Burnsian ambivalence towards emigration. John Barr, the 'Bard of Otago', could sound the mournful note of exile ('Thy very name, o Scotia dear, / Brings saut tear to my e'e'),[18] but he wasn't slow to celebrate his new abode, measuring his current felicity against the squalor and destitution of industrial Scotland:

There's nae place like Otago yet,
    There's nae wee beggar weans,
Or auld men shivering at our doors,
    To beg for scraps or banes.[19]

In the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, many of the 'Burnsian' poets of the Scottish Diaspora were undoubtedly poor imitators and *pasticheurs*. But there were others who, as David Goldie puts it in his article in this issue, developed rather than simply mimicked the Burns tradition. One striking example of a postwar writer whose work develops the Burnsian legacy, and for whom Burns represents a 'constant presence' and 'point of reference', is New Zealand's pre-eminent twentieth-century poet, James Keir Baxter.[20]

From the juvenilia to the mature poems, a central element in James K. Baxter's imaginative mythology was the life and work of Burns. But Baxter's preoccupation with the Scottish poet seemed, quite naturally, to assume a sharper focus when Baxter returned to his hometown of Dunedin in the mid-1960s to take up the Robert Burns Fellowship at the University of Otago. That New Zealand's 'premier literary residency' should be named after Scotland's national poet is itself suggestive of the imaginative connections between the two countries. Established in 1958 to commemorate the bicentenary of Burns's birth the following year, the Robert Burns Fellowship is a year-long position, and provides an office along with a salary equivalent to that of a full-time university lecturer. Its aim is 'to encourage and promote imaginative New Zealand literature and to associate writers thereof with the University'.[21] When Baxter returned to his hometown of Dunedin in the mid-sixties to take up the Robert Burns Fellowship at the University of Otago, he had, to adapt Hoagy Carmichael, Scotland on his mind. In a public lecture entitled 'Conversation with an Ancestor', Baxter traces his whakapapa back to the earliest Scottish settlers of Otago:

> I have seen inwardly my first ancestors in this country, those Gaelic-speaking men and women, descending with their bullock drays and baggage to cross the mouth of what is now the Brighton river; near to sunset, when the black and red of the sky intimated a new thing, a radical loss and a radical beginning; and the earth lay before them, for that one moment of history, as a primitive and sacred Bride, unentered and unexploited. Those people, whose bones are in our cemeteries, are the only tribe I know of; and though they were scattered and lost, their unfulfilled intention of charity, peace, and a survival that is more than self-preservation, burns like radium in the cells of my body; and perhaps a fragment of their intention is fulfilled in me, because of my works of art, the poems that are a permanent sign of contradiction in a world where the pound note and the lens of the analytical Western mind are the only things held sacred. I stand, then, as a tribesman left over from the dissolution of the tribes.[22]

It should be clear here that Baxter is mythologising his ancestry, as poets do, and shaping his family past to suit his present purpose as an artist. It's very clearly a literary vision: 'the earth lay before them' echoes the ending of *Paradise Lost*: 'The World was all before them, where to choose / Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide'.[23] But it also echoes that plangent moment in *The Great Gatsby*, when Nick Carraway imagines the American continent encountered by the first Dutch settlers, when man stood 'face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder'.[24] Like Nick Carraway, Baxter feels that this pure, originary moment, this 'radical beginning', has been soiled by commercialism and materialism. But he views art as a means of reconnecting to that state of social and psychological wholeness which he designates as 'tribal'.

It's worth noting that Baxter's vision of Gaelic-speaking settlers privileges certain elements of his Scottish ancestry over others. The ancestors Baxter mythologises are his paternal grandparents and their kin: McColls and Baxters from Appin and the Isle of Bute, crofters and farmers, Gaelic-speaking Highlanders. He has less use for the Scottish ancestors on his mother's side, who were equally Scottish, but of a different stamp. Baxter's maternal grandfather was John Macmillan Brown, a high-achieving product of the academic culture of the Presbyterian Lowlands. Born in Irvine in Ayrshire, a staunch Presbyterian (at one stage he planned to study for the ministry), Macmillan Brown took a first in Mental Science at Glasgow University, was the Snell Exhibitioner at Balliol College in Oxford and became the foundation professor of Classics and English at the University of Canterbury.[25] As Alan Riach points out, Baxter's enthusiasm for 'the only tribe' of the Scottish Gaels may relate to his growing involvement with the 'other tribe' of New Zealand Maori:

> Privileging the tribal aspect of his family history over the academic, making so much more of his Scottish Gaelic-speaking ancestors than he did of the solid academic tradition that adhered to his mother's side of the family, was a means by which Baxter could affirm a precedent for his adoption of Maori tribalism.[26]

This is largely true, but it seems to me that Baxter found a means of negotiating and interrogating the divergent aspects of his Scottish inheritance (as well as engaging with Maori), and that he found this in the complex and ambivalent figure of Robert Burns – a Lowlander and a Presbyterian, but one whose anarchic vitality and gleeful anti-Calvinism aligned him to the 'tribal' culture that Baxter aimed to celebrate.

In another of the lectures he gave as Robert Burns Fellow, Baxter reflects on what we might call 'the predicament of the New Zealand writer' and discusses the challenge of forging a national voice in New Zealand poetry. He argues that the task of New Zealand's early poets was not to

create a national poetry from scratch, starting from some kind of aesthetic Year Zero, but to adapt the forms and modes of English and Scottish poetry:

> It would be absurd to imagine that the first poets of a new country have to create new verse forms or an entirely new literary idiom. What happened in America, Australia, and in a lesser degree Canada and South Africa, where English-speaking immigrants or their descendants began writing poetry, was a new amalgamation of borrowed forms, modified idioms and indigenous material.[27]

To demonstrate what this customising of Old World forms might look like, Baxter quotes his own father's satirical poem, 'McLeary's Lament', in which a local Otago farmer protests against the County Council's decision to drive a road through his farm:

> In all these gullies I've made bridges
> With great logs split by mall and wedges;
> I've mown the fern from off the ridges
> To make pig-bedding;
> And with great care I've nurtured hedges
> Around my steading.

The stanza form, of course, is the Burns Stanza, that deceptively simple, demanding form – a sestet of four tetrameters counterpointed by two dimeters – that challenges the ingenuity of the poet by requiring four 'a' rhymes per stanza. It's a useful stanza for comic verse; it generates a tumbling momentum, broken by the short fourth line in a way that often sets up a wry aside in the final couplet. Baxter comments as follows on his father's use of the form:

> My father's ear and nose were leading him in the right direction when he borrowed the forms and something of the language of Burns and applied them to the situation of a New Zealand farmer at war with the County Council.

This procedure – borrowing the forms and something of the language of Burns and applying them to New Zealand situations – describes the work of Baxter *fils* as well as Baxter *père*. Baxter adopts the Burns stanza (in 'The Thistle'), deploys the lexis of Burns ('The Debt'), cultivates Burnsian genres like the verse epistle ('Letter to Sam Hunt'), borrows Burns's octosyllabic couplets ('Letter to Max Harris'), alludes to Burns ('A Ballad for the Men of Holy Cross'), rewrites Burns ('Henley Pub' is a Pig Island version of 'Tam o' Shanter'), addresses Burns ('Letter to Robert Burns'), and ventriloquises Burns ('A Small Ode on Mixed Flatting'). In its ideation, imagery, technique, form and language Baxter's poetry shows a deep indebtedness to the work of the Scottish poet.

But the connection between the two poets goes far beyond the transmission of influence. Baxter himself accords Burns a special catalytic significance. Burns was the first poet Baxter encountered, absorbing his work both orally from family recitations and through the printed page. He was introduced to Burns by his father, Archibald Baxter, 'without whom I would never have come to a knowledge or practice of poetry'.[28] Whether Baxter would have become a poet without the example of Burns must remain a moot point. Certainly, the kind of poet Baxter became – a national bard, a 'tribal shaman', a writer of risky erotic verse and political satire, a pastoral poet, an exponent of avowedly popular forms like the ballad and the verse epistle – owes a good deal to the example of Burns. When Baxter wrote of Burns that

> He liked to call a spade a spade
> And toss among the glum and staid
> A poem like a hand grenade

– he might have been describing himself.[29] Burns is also, for Baxter, a great 'tribal' poet, and his engagement with Burns foreshadows and facilitates Baxter's engagement with Maori culture and spirituality in the Jerusalem period. When Baxter argues that 'The Maori is in this country the Elder Brother in poverty and suffering and closeness to Our Lord',[30] he is echoing Burns's lines on Robert Fergusson: 'O thou, my elder brother in Misfortune, / By far my elder brother in the muse' (K 143, I, 323).[31]

Baxter was more exercised than most holders by what he called 'the situation of being a Robert Burns Fellow'.[32] Indeed, he regarded the Fellowship 'more as a hair shirt than a sinecure'.[33] Believing that it is the artist's duty to criticise the 'administrative machines which embody and express the mind of Caesar' (of which the University of Otago is – in Baxter's view – undoubtedly one), and fearing that a comfortable job – 'the illusion of material security' – would be bad for his art, Baxter was nervous about accepting the Fellowship.[34] In the end, he felt able to accept it precisely *because* it was named for Robert Burns, a poet whose work could inoculate Baxter against the virus of academia:

I could accept it as if from the ironic ghost of Burns (too long loved and too well know for any misunderstanding) and keep in mind his warning against those who try to court the daimon through scholarship:

> 'A set o' dull conceited hashes
> Confuse their brains in college classes;
> They gang in stirks, and come out asses,
> Plain truth to speak;

An' syne they think to climb Parnassus
By dint o' Greek…'[35]

Having accepted the Burns Fellowship as somehow a gift from Burns, it was hardly surprising that Baxter should devote some of his tenure to exploring his own relationship with the Scottish poet. He did this in a series of talks, some given to the Otago English Department, and later published as *The Man on the Horse* (1967). The title essay conducts a tour-de-force exposition of the symbolism of Burns's 'Tam o' Shanter'. It also meditates on what Burns has meant for Baxter:

> To me, though I write and speak in English, he is much nearer than Shakespeare; and the reason I prefer the ranting dog of Kilmarnock to the swan of Avon is, on the face of it, easy to find. Before I was six years old, I knew *Tam o' Shanter* by heart, and portions of other poems by Burns, having received them orally from my father; and when a small white book, the first book of verse I remember seeing, was put into my hands, it was a selection from Burns, a tribal gift, the book by which I could communicate with the dead and myself understand the language of the daimon. It was also a protective talisman. The society into which I had been born – and indeed, modern Western society in general – carried like strychnine in its bones a strong subconscious residue of the doctrines and ethics of Calvinism; and in Burns's poems the struggle of the natural man against that inhuman crystalline vision of the rigid holiness of the spirit and the total depravity of the flesh was carried out with superb energy, precision and humour.[36]

For Baxter, Burns's poems provide the *antidote* to the spiritual and social 'strychnine' of Calvinism that the Scottish settlers brought to New Zealand. The active element in Burns's work, the force that will repel the deadening effects of Calvinism, is, for Baxter, bawdry: 'Burns is alone among the great post-Reformation poets in his capacity for genuine bawdry'.[37] Through his erotic verse, Burns acts as a 'kind of tribal shaman', helping Calvinistic Scotsmen and their Pig Island descendants reconnect with a 'lost folk heritage'.[38]

Baxter's vision of Burns as the poet who 'cracked the wall of Calvin's jail'[39] was given vivid currency in 1967 when the Burns Fellow intervened in the local dispute over 'mixed flatting'. The University of Otago had forbidden male and female students from cohabiting, and Baxter weighed into the debate with a poem co-opting the bawdy Burns as the spiritual forbear of the mixed flatters:

King Calvin in his grave will smile
To know we know that man is vile;
But Robert Burns, that sad old rip

From whom I got my Fellowship
Will grunt upon his rain-washed stone
Above the empty Octagon,
And say – 'O that I had the strength
To slip yon lassie half a length!
Apollo! Venus! Bless my ballocks!
Where are the games, the hugs, the frolics?
Are all you bastards melancholics?
Have you forgotten that your city
Was founded well in bastardry
And half your elders (God be thankit)
Were born the wrong side of the blanket?
You scholars, throw away your books
And learn your songs from lasses' looks
As I did once – '[40]

When Baxter's 'Small Ode on Mixed Flatting' was first published, it carried a ribald illustration by Jim Gorman, in which the vaginal V-sign of Robert Burns confronts the phallic forefinger of John Knox, as the nude mixed flatters face the staid professors.

Jim Gorman's illustration for 'A Small Ode on Mixed Flatting' *NZPPTA Journal*

From W.H. Oliver, *James K. Baxter: A Portrait* (Wellington: Port Nicholas Press, 1983)

The image nicely dramatises Baxter's state of mind in this Dunedin period. Baxter took these oppositions seriously. Indeed, even before he took up the Burns Fellowship, Baxter had decided that bawdry was the weapon to wield against Otago's emasculating academics. He wrote to Kevin Ireland in 1965: 'The only way to stuff them is to speak bawdy on all occasions, on and off the stage…'.[41] There was, therefore, a talismanic significance to the copy of *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, a collection of bawdy songs featuring many by Burns, which was one of the few books Baxter kept on the shelves of his Varsity office.[42] While in Otago, Baxter not only spoke and read but wrote bawdry. The Baxter notebooks in the Hocken Library in Dunedin contain a 'great quantity'[43] of unpublished erotic poems, many written while Baxter held the Burns Fellowship, and it seems likely that further research will uncover more 'Burnsian' bawdry in the Baxter archive.

That bawdry should be one of the bonds between Burns and a poet separated from him by two centuries and twelve thousand miles is hardly surprising. As Jeffrey Skoblow notes in his essay for this issue, the 'politics of Baudy situates itself underneath all other politics: Scots and English, in fact everyone on earth, all share *these* lords and devils'. The other essays in this issue of *IJSL* share Skoblow's global scope, showing not merely that there is life in Burns Studies beyond the 250th anniversary jamboree in 2009, but that the practice of confining Burns to his Scottish contexts – 'Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners' in Matthew Arnold's dismissive formulation – has been firmly set aside. Gerard Carruthers' article explores Burns's 'slippery relationship to things Irish', showing how the poet's Irish allusions represent important 'portals' on his poetry. Fiona Stafford discusses the 'unexpected power of "low" language' in Burns, and assesses Burns's significance for his 'Lancashire follower', the Victorian dialect poet Samuel Laycock. Gilles Soubigou charts Burns's catalytic impact on nineteenth-century French art, from the rural 'manners-painting' poems that made Jean-Francois Millet 'wish more ardently than ever to express certain things which belong to my own home, the old home where I used to live', to the great 'wild ride' narrative that inspired Eugène Delacroix's three versions of *Tam o' Shanter*. David Goldie's thoughtful, wide-ranging study reviews the invocations of Burns in the popular press during the global conflagration of 1914-18, which saw Burns co-opted both as pacifist and militarist, Scottish nationalist and British unionist. With a tighter focus but no less ambition, Alex Watson's essay interrogates Burns's glossaries to illuminate the 'important role paratexts play in negotiating power-relations between different cultures', suggesting that Burns is 'not only of importance to Scotland, but to the world'. In her account of the 'diasporic figure' of James Currie (also treated in Corey Andrews's piece), Leith Davis discusses Burns as a 'global celebrity'. Another global celebrity, Walt Whitman, viewed Burns as a strong precursor, and the links between these 'bards of democracy' form the basis of Jeffrey Skoblow's article. In its own way, each of the essays in this issue of *IJSL* confirms Skoblow's contention that, for Burns 'there is no

contradiction between Scotland and the World'. As Ralph Waldo Emerson insisted, Burns's songs are not Scotland's alone: 'They are the property and solace of mankind'.[44]

NOTES

[1] I am grateful to Dr Christine Prentice and Dr Thomas McLean for their comments on an earlier draft of this editorial.

[2] Robert Burns, 'To J. S****', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. by James Kinsley, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), Poem 79, I, 179. All further references to Burns's poems and songs will be from the Kinsley edition, abbreviated as 'K', and will give poem number as well as volume and page number.

[3] Robert Crawford, *The Bard: Robert Burns, A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), p. 212.

[4] *The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. by J. De Lancey Ferguson, 2nd edn, rev. by G. Ross Roy, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), I, 37. All further references to Burns's letters will be from this edition, abbreviated as '*Letters*'.

[5] 'Her parents…got a warrant to incarcerate me in jail till I should find security in my about-to-be Paternal relation'; Robert Burns, letter to Mrs Dunlop, 10th August 1788 (*Letters*, I, 293).

[6] Crawford, *The Bard*, p. 205.

[7] 'Extempore – to Mr Gavin Hamilton' (K 99, I, 237).

[8] Compare Thomas Pringle, who in his poem 'On Parting with a Friend Going Abroad' envisions a boatful of emigrants as 'parting spirits' who 'look to earth once more… / From the dim Ocean of Eternity!'; *Thomas Pringle: His Life, Times, and Poems*, ed. by William Hay (Cape Town: J. C. Juta, 1912), p. 161.

[9] Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. by Jeremy Tambling (London: Penguin, 1996), pp. 387-8.

[10] Ernest Northcroft Merrington, *A Great Coloniser: The Rev. Dr. Thomas Burns, Pioneer Minister of Otago and Nephew of the Poet* (Dunedin, NZ: The Otago Daily Times and Witness Newspapers Co., Ltd, 1929), p. 35.

[11] Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959), p. 90.

[12] Transcript of Journal of Rev. Thomas Burns on the 'Philip Laing', Hocken MS – 440/18.

[13] Nigel Leask, 'Scotland's Literature of Empire and Emigration, 1707-1918', in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature, Volume 2: Enlightenment, Britain and Empire (1707-1918)*, ed. by Ian Brown, Thomas Owen Clancy, Susan Manning and Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 153-62 (p. 157).

[14] James Currie, *The Works of Robert Burns with an Account of his Life and a Criticism on his*

Writings to which are Prefixed Some Observations on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry, 8th edn, 4 vols (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1820), I, 31-2.

[15] William Brown, letter to the Hon. Sec. of the Bathurst Branch of the Highland Society of New South Wales, 6 July 1892, Letterbook of Dunedin Burns Club, Hocken MS – 2047.

[16] T. M. Devine, 'Introduction: The Paradox of Scottish Emigration', in *Scottish Emigration and Scottish Society: Proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar, University of Strathclyde, 1990-91*, ed. by T. M. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1992), pp. 1-15 (pp. 1-2).

[17] Liam McIlvanney, 'Across the Narrow Sea: The Language, Literature and Politics of Ulster Scots', in *Ireland and Scotland: Culture and Society, 1700-2000*, ed. by Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), pp. 203-26. See also *Revising Robert Burns and Ulster: Literature, Religion and Politics, c. 1770-1920*, ed. by Frank Ferguson and Andrew R. Holmes (Dublin: Four Courts, 2009), reviewed by Gavin Falconer in this issue.

[18] John Barr, 'The Yellow Broom', *Poems and Songs, Descriptive and Satirical* (Edinburgh: John Grieg & Sons, 1861), p. 83.

[19] John Barr, 'There's Nae Place Like Otago Yet', *Poems and Songs*, p. 62. Alan Riach traces New Zealand's Burnsian verse tradition in 'Heather and Fern: The Burns Effect in New Zealand Verse', in *The Heather and the Fern: Scottish Migration and New Zealand Settlement*, ed. by Tom Brooking and Jennie Coleman (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2003), pp. 153-71.

[20] Dougal McNeill, 'Baxter's Burns', *ka mate ka ora: a New Zealand journal of poetry and poetics*, 8 (2009), www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko/08/ka_mate08_mcneill.asp

[21] *Nurse to the Imagination: 50 Years of the Robert Burns Fellowship*, ed. by Lawrence Jones (Dunedin, NZ: Otago University Press, 2008)

22 [22] James K. Baxter, 'Conversation with an Ancestor', *The Man on the Horse* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1967), p. 12.

[23] John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. by Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1957), p. 469.

[24] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, ed. by Ruth Prigozy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 143. In his reference to his people's 'bones' being 'scattered and lost', Baxter is also, of course, echoing Ezekiel 37.

[25] Cherry Hankin, 'Brown, John Macmillan 1845-1935', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, www.dnzb.govt.nz/dnzb.

[26] Alan Riach, 'James K. Baxter and the Dialect of the Tribe', in *Opening the Book: Essays on New Zealand Writing*, ed. by Mark Williams and Michele Leggot (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995), pp. 105-22 (p. 120).

[27] James K. Baxter, 'The Innovators', Hocken MS – 0739/009.

[28] Baxter, 'The Man on the Horse', *The Man on the Horse*, p. 91.

[29] James K. Baxter, 'A Small Ode on Mixed Flatting, Elicited by the decision of the Otago

University authorities to forbid this practice among students', *The Collected Poems of James K. Baxter*, rev. edn, ed. by John Weir (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 397.

[30] Frank McKay, *The Life of James K. Baxter* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 237.

[31] On Baxter's engagement with Maori culture and spirituality, see John Newton, *The Double Rainbow: James K. Baxter, Ngati Hau and the Jerusalem Commune* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2009), and John Dennison, 'Ko Te Pakeha Te Teina: Baxter's Cross-Cultural Poetry', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 23.2 (2005), 36-46.

[32] Baxter, 'Conversation with an Ancestor', *The Man on the Horse*, p. 11.

[33] James K. Baxter, 'Conversation with an Ancestor' ('A' Draft), Hocken Library, MS – 0739/006, p. 1.

[34] 'Conversation with an Ancestor' ('A' Draft), Hocken Library MS – 0739/006.

[35] Baxter, 'The Man on the Horse', pp. 92-3.

[36] Baxter, 'The Man on the Horse', Hocken MS – 0739/013. I quote here from the typescript in the Hocken Library. In the published version – see *The Man on the Horse*, p. 92 – Baxter modifies the final sentence to have Burns struggling against the 'rigid holiness of the *elect*' (my emphasis), indicating that his target here is doctrinaire Calvinism rather than Christian spirituality.

[37] Baxter, 'The Man on the Horse', *The Man on the Horse*, p. 96.

[38] Ibid., p. 97.

[39] Baxter, 'Letter to Robert Burns', *Collected Poems*, p. 290.

[40] James K. Baxter, 'A Small Ode on Mixed Flatting', *Collected Poems*, p. 397.

[41] Letter to Kevin Ireland, 26 October 1965, Alexander Turnbull Library MS 2587, quoted in W.H. Oliver, *James K. Baxter: A Portrait* (Wellington: Port Nicholson Press, 1983), p. 103. Oliver observes that Baxter 'quite seriously believed in the magical effect of obscene words' (p. 104).

[42] McKay, p. 209.

[43] Oliver, *James K. Baxter: A Portrait*, p. 104.

[44] *The Centenary Edition of the Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 12 vols, ed. by E. W. Emerson (Boston and New York, 1911), XI, 440-3; reprinted in *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Donald A. Low (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 436.

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Robert Burns and Ireland

Gerry Carruthers

Robert Burns's relationship with Ireland is patchy (at least in terms of the poetry; the songs represent potentially a much more plentiful area of investigation beyond the scope of this essay). At the same time, it provides some interesting portals and also difficult to resolve puzzles in his poetry, politics and cultural placement generally.[1] The editors of a recent edition of Burns's works claim that in one piece he 'crucially passed commentary on Irish political affairs' during the mid-1790s.[2] The text referred to here is a lost one, the manuscript now untraced, whose existence pertains only so far as is currently known in a sales catalogue for the London auction-house of Puttock and Simpson for May 1861. Here we find a description of the manuscript for sale:

> 'No Spartan tube, no Attic shell' / Early copy of the first two verses of the poem [i.e. ('Ode) for General Washington's Birthday'], with variations and substitution of HIBERNIA for COLUMBIA. 1 page folio.[3]

The attempt to present Burns as 'crucially' interested in Ireland is actually undermined by this manuscript. Obviously, Ireland had caught Burns's attention, but thereafter, clearly too, he decided to shift his focus to American affairs, reworking his 'Hibernia' text into the longer poetic version, four stanzas rather than two, 'Ode [For General Washington's Birthday]'. The Irish text, then, over-written by the American one looks almost certain to be a *cancelled* text. Why was this cancellation made by Burns? Was it because America simply provided more fruitful material for him, or did he fear fully to produce, let alone publish, a work that in diagnosing 'tyranny' in Ireland might be seen to be dangerously seditious?[4] Burns writes his Irish and American texts in 1794 at a time of abundant revolutionary tension and when he is a crown employee in the Excise service, and so his discretion here might well make career sense. However, the 'Ode for Washington' was never published by Burns himself, nor did it even appear soon posthumously, being completely absent from James Currie's first collected edition of the work of the poet in 1800. Currie almost

certainly had in his possession the holograph, but for many years it only ever appeared in subsequent editions in its minor excerpted form by dint of the appearance of the last nineteen lines as quoted by Burns himself in a letter to Frances Anna Dunlop of 25th June 1794.[5] As a result the text, in so far as it was known in its published form, for most of the nineteenth century was transformed into a piece discussing only the Scottish Wars of Independence of the fourteenth century without the more awkward nuances of the revolutionary 1770s-90s, such as are to be found in the complete four stanzas of the 'Ode for Washington'. Remarkably, the full text does not surface in published form until 1874.[6] Prior to its sale in the same lot as the 'Hibernia' ode at the London sale in 1861, some Burns scholars, though possibly not all (probably depending on their access to Currie's papers) had sight of the 'Ode for Washington' and seemingly decided not to publish it, and so it is clear that not only the rightly cautious Burns himself, but his editors for many decades after remained worried by, in some cases perhaps wished to censor, its political sentiments. In other words Burns's American text, with all its wider nuances of the 1790s, is as potentially compromising and uncomfortable as his Irish one. The logical conclusion, therefore, is that Burns was simply more interested, or at least thought his material worked better, in the context of American revolutionary republicanism. Burns's comment on Ireland, then, however sincere in its initial textual drafting is certainly not 'crucial'.

Another item in Burns's radical C.V. concerns Ireland, or at least one of her most famous political sons. This is the poet's squib on Edmund Burke:

> *On Mr. Burke by an opponent and a friend to Mr. Hastings.*
>
> Oft have I wonder'd that on Irish ground
> No poisonous Reptile ever has been found:
> Revealed the secret stands of great Nature's work:
> She preserved her poison to create a Burke!

Since being first printed in the *Burns Chronicle* for 1932, Burns's editors have routinely accepted the attribution of this text to the poet.[7] However, my recent researches have discovered the following text from the London periodical, *Politics for the People*[8]:

> *EPIGRAM*.
>
> I'VE often wonder'd that on Irish ground
> No poisonous reptile yet was ever found;
> But nature soon or late completes her work.
> She sav'd her venom to create a Burke![9]

Most likely, then, Burns is not the originator of the epigram. Though not certainly ruled out as its author, the cautious Burns would have been most unlikely to have sent this text to the periodical but, more plausibly, instead saw it in *Politics for the People*, learned it and recited it to John Syme, his friend in whose hand the manuscript is found along with other such items that Burns had not necessarily written but admired.[10] If this conclusion is seen to be a disappointment for those who wish the pro-revolutionary voice of Burns to sound clarion clear, in fact it ought not to be. Burns's pleasure in an anti-Burke stance in his interest in this text is obvious enough. Also, one might well wonder how Burns came to catch sight of such an outspokenly radical publication as *Politics for the People* edited by that uncompromising proponent of reform, Daniel Isaac Eaton. Probably unanswerable are several questions. Did Burns come across the largely London-centred publication in the course of his official duties in the south west of Scotland, perhaps seeing, or even being party to, its seizure as seditious literature? Might Burns's knowledge of *Politics for the People* actually be suggestive of the poet's mixing in radical affairs and even societies? A third, though probably less likely, possibility: was the epigram on Burke a well-travelled squib, maybe orally transmitted, that Burns knew without having seen Eaton's publication?

Burns's slippery relationship to things Irish becomes more pronounced as well as more seriously contentious in a third example, his 'The Dumfries Volunteers'. As with the texts already mentioned this song belongs to the period of the mid-1790s, a time for Burns of certainly veiled, but perhaps also vexed, allegiances. 'The Dumfries Volunteers' might appear, on the face of things, a loyalist patriotic song written for the local volunteer militia that Burns, along with at least one other friend of previous reformist, pro-French sympathies, the aforementioned John Syme, had joined at the end of January 1795. Burns's text was published first of all in the Edinburgh *Evening Courant* in May amidst the spring-time fears of French invasion. As Liam McIlvanney shows in his path-breaking work on Burns's relationship to Ulster, however, strong reaction against the text surfaced when it was published in the *Belfast News-letter* for 16th-19th October 1795, followed by a reprinting in the *Northern Star* for 29th October-2nd November where poetic response from that United Irishmen organ was furiously condemnatory.[11] A text placed immediately following 'The Dumfries Volunteers' accused Burns of dipping 'th' dish wi' slee D[unda]s' [Henry Dundas even more than William Pitt, in the government administration, being seen as having war-mongered with France and as being particularly opposed to democratic reform by those on the radical left]. The same text accused the poet of betraying the democratic legacy of the already iconic Scottish lawyer, Thomas Muir, who had been transported to Botany Bay for sedition in 1794. Burns's fall from grace in Ulster radical circles, then, could not have been more resounding, though McIlvanney argues persuasively that 'The Dumfries Volunteers' was written in such a way as to be 'completely consistent with the Real Whig ethos of British radicalism'.[12] Certainly the song's opening line, 'Does haughty Gaul invasion threat' sees France

in its old, pre-1789 imperial garb of long British memory and the text also suggests that Great Britain should bring about any necessary political reform internally: ‘For never but by British hands/Must British wrongs be righted’.[13] It also perhaps proposes the merits of limited monarchy as it ends:

> Who will not sing, GOD SAVE THE KING,
> Shall hang as high’s the steeple;
> But while we sing, GOD SAVE THE KING,
> We’ll ne’er forget THE PEOPLE![14]

With that final cry of ‘THE PEOPLE’ it is perhaps not too difficult to imagine Burns and his friend William Maxwell, who had been present at the execution of King Louis XVI in Paris and the one notable man in Dumfries reformist circles who had refused to join the volunteers but remained Burns’s close friend, singing a very different, highly subversive version of the song’s final stanza in their cups and behind closed doors.[15] However, there is no actual evidence for any such occasion and McIlvanney’s defence of Burns’s song as showing his more moderate reformism is the most that can be done to dissociate Burns from the taint of a (usually supposed to be) reactionary loyalism.

What McIlvanney’s treatment also does, however, is interestingly propose that loyalism (encompassing perhaps a ‘Real Whig’ branch) in the 1790s might be more nuanced and less monolithic than some accounts of the period have hitherto suggested. Even so, what should be clear is Burns’s recoiling, perhaps following his earlier retreat if we take his cancelled Irish ode into account, from the idea of all-out ‘anti-British’ rebellion, aided and abetted from outside. By contrast, however, the United Irishmen were to retain their amenability to French intervention and the idea of the British Isles becoming divided into three democratic republics. Clearly, even if Burns’s loyalism has previously been over-read, there is cold blue water between the reformism of Burns and that of the United Irishmen, and this disjunction between the two turns out to be a very useful way of placing Burns’s political complexion by 1795.[16] An interesting aside in addition here is that Burns’s ‘Real Whig loyalism’ as adduced for ‘The Dumfries Volunteers’ might also throw into doubt his long disputed authorship of ‘The Tree of Liberty’. During the 1790s this emblem famously became associated with the oath pledged by the United Irishmen, ‘to dethrone all kings and plant the Tree of Liberty.’[17] Most commentators agree that ‘The Dumfries Volunteers’ and ‘The Tree of Liberty’ are from around the same time, and so between the two it is a case of Real Whig pro-monarchism versus out-and-out radical republicanism. Can these texts of very different sentiment both be by Burns? If they are can we ever fix the poet’s politics with any certainty? One Scottish poet who certainly did use the liberty tree poetically with all its revolutionary connotation was Alexander Geddes (1737-1802) in his ‘Ode to the German

Despots, on their burning the Tree of Liberty' from the mid-1790s.[18] Geddes remained utterly outspoken and unwavering in his support for revolutionary France and was also interestingly expressive on Irish affairs, in a way that counterpoints Burns's near-silence. The London-based Geddes penned in this period 'The Irish ça ira', 'Ode to Hibernia' and 'Ode to the Hon. Thomas Pelam', all poems which complain of Ireland's abject colonial subjugation by Britain.[19] Geddes, then, might be taken as a gauge of Burns's more moderate reformist involvement of the 1790s so far as the British Isles, in which Ireland is such a touchstone, are concerned.

If the 1790s are sparse but intriguing regarding Burns's engagement or lack of it with Ireland, the rather different atmosphere of the mid-1780s provides, arguably, no clearer a point of contact. Appearing first in *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), 'The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer, to the Right Honorable and Honorable, the Scotch Representatives in the House of Commons' opens:

> Ye Irish Lords, ye knights an' squires,
> Wha represent our Burghs an' Shires,
> An' dousely manage our affairs
> In Parliament,
> To you a simple Bardie's pray'rs
> Are humbly sent.[20]

One of the manoeuvres rather too little noticed in the 'Kilmarnock' edition of 1786 is the way in which Burns's bardic persona is employed to counterpoint an unnecessarily complicated (because corrupt) polity. In this vein, 'The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer' refers to the representation of some Scottish seats in parliament by Irish Protestant peers. To a large extent a legacy of Jacobite times when certain Scottish peers were not to be trusted, this situation was also conveniently carried on through the ensuing decades of the eighteenth century as a means of curtailing what was believed to be anyway the over-dominating presence of the Scots in British politics. The text is one of several in the 'Kilmarnock' edition that diagnoses institutional corruption in the British polity. Specifically, in this poem Burns is complaining against parliament's Wash Act (1784) which had effectively raised taxes paid by Scottish distillers who were making strong incursions in the English market at this time so as to allow English (gin) distillers to reclaim a more competitive platform. As a result, according to Burns, the Scottish whisky industry is actually unfairly hampered with its more difficult reach towards its southern market. Leaving aside the complexities of this rather technical economic debate, we might simply notice that Burns's poetic response was to propose that 'Freedom and Whisky gang thegither', and that this represents a part of Burns's positive engagement with the Scottish highlands, a project carried through much more extensively across his career than in any previous lowland writer.[21]

‘The Author’s Earnest Cry and Prayer’ in its typical (pseudo-drunk) digressiveness notices Scottish highland troops from the 1760s fighting for the Hanoverians, specifically alluding to their military service in the previous colonies in North America with the implication that they might as well return there or otherwise emigrate from a despoiled Scotland. The reader is reminded of the service rendered to King George by these men, fierce and buoyed up only by a ‘highlan gill’.[22] If not quite an incitement to rebellion, the text suggests that the Scots might easily become disillusioned by the British project of the eighteenth century. Particularly interesting amidst all of this is Burns’s rehabilitation of the highland soldier. For his Scots poetry predecessor, Robert Fergusson, only a decade and a half before in the early 1770s, the Scottish Gael in martial service to the Sassenach and his whisky (helping bring about the grotesqueness of his appearance), is a figure of abject ridicule.[23] Burns’s poem counterpoints the power-grubbing, British parliament including in keynote fashion Irish aristocracy, versus the simply virtuous, hardy highland soldier. Albeit that the poem is interested in a specifically Scottish situation, it is perhaps odd to modern eyes that Burns does not make connection between the (actually more pertinent) Irish Protestant ascendancy over the Gaelic speaking Catholic Irish (to say nothing of their same over-lordship to Irish dissenters). Such a Gaelic connection would have been rather easy to make since down to Burns’s time and beyond the ‘Erse’ speaking peoples of Ireland and Scotland were often treated by Anglophone (lowland Scottish as much as anywhere else) culture as essentially continuous and as one and the same thing. Burns’s re-usage of the highlander, then, might be said to be ultimately Hanoverian-centric as it reminds us of the great service of the post-Jacobite highland soldier, where by contrast Fergusson saw the Gaelic police force of Edinburgh drawn from former soldiers to represent a debased figure (because now standing volte face towards a Stuart loyal culture that had been largely extirpated in the Gaelhealtachd). What we also see is Burns, as would be the case later *a propos* his American and Irish odes, passing by the more specifically pertinent Irish connection with regard to corrupt political and cultural imbalances in the British body polity.

Like many post-eighteenth century writers, Burns’s relation to authentic Celtic culture, whatever that may be, and whether Scottish, Irish or anything else, is an entangled area. Seamus Heaney draws some very interesting conclusions with regard to Burns’s ‘The Vision’ (1785), remarking that ‘[t]his is Burns’ *aisling*, and its transcultural allegiance to the Gaelic heritage of Scotland is made clear by his calling each section of it a *duan*.’[24] It might or might not be an objection to say that Burns did not have any direct knowledge of the aisling of Ireland (its overwhelmingly predominant locus), or indeed any possible Scottish form of the same. It is true enough that the dream-vision of Ayrshire, complicatedly past and present, granted by his muse Coila to the narrator in the poem is one of the weirdest, most mystical moments in Burns’s canon. There is clearly some act of ‘transcultural’ Celtic-bardic status being conferred in the text and so Heaney is right to make sense of it in such general terms. We come back to the question, however, of

particular authenticity. Burns derives his idea of what a duan is from his reading of James Macpheron's Ossian, as his own note to the poem tells us, and Macpherson's usage of Ulster Gaelic materials in his work can be read with much justification as an act of cultural colonialism.[25] Is Burns, like perhaps many another Anglophone writer, merely a later part of the aggressive post-eighteenth century British appropriation of Gaelic culture? Alternatively, does he fruitfully rework and re-implicate something that might genuinely be called 'Celtic' in Scottish or Irish terms? As with the hyphenated culture of Ulster-Scots writing, which has so often looked to Burns, Celto-British literary identity in Burns and many other writers might either be seen to be contaminated in its readily assumed instability, or alternatively its hybridity might be accepted as a proper state of being. More work needs to be done on the cultural politics of all this, on Burns and 'Celticism', on Burns and Britishness, as well as on Burns and Ireland and Ulster (including reception studies). For a poet whose certain cultural ownership has been more vehemently attested than most, Burns still poses crucial and largely unresolved questions in British, Irish and Celtic history and identity.[26]

NOTES

[1] A small example, though one that is often over-read by the modern, novice reader of Burns is to be found in his 'Death and Dr Hornbook' (1785). The lines, 'the Deil's in hell,/Or Dublin city' (James Kinsley (ed.), *Burns: Poems and Songs* (London, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 60), represent for readers a puzzle, though editors have not, so far as I am aware, attempted to elucidate the cultural significance here, if any, of the Irish city. It sounds as though there might be some reference, perhaps, to a traditional song, but such cannot easily be found. The most likely explanation turns out to be the old Scandinavian name for Dublin of 'Divelin[a]', as a piece of antiquarian lore that Burns, with his extensive interest in the diabolic across his oeuvre, has come across. Perhaps *a propos* also, is the legend that if one walks around St Mary's church in Dublin at midnight the Devil will appear.

[2] Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg, *The Canongate Burns* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), p. 820.

[3] *Sales Catalogue for Puttock and Simpson* (May 1861), 'First Day's Sale', p. 24.

[4] See the lines 'No more the Despot of Columbia's race./A tyrant's proudest insults braved' (ll.10-11) in Kinsley, p. 580, where 'Hibernia's race' in the cancelled text would seemingly savour the thought of revolutionary uprising in Ireland as had previously been accomplished in America.

[5] Published first in R.H. Cromek (ed.), *Reliques of Robert Burns* (London: Cadell & Davies, 1803), pp.156-8; see *The Letters of Robert Burns* Vol. II [1790-1796] edited by J. De Lancey Ferguson; 2nd edn. edited by G. Ross Roy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 297-8.

[6] *Notes & Queries* 5th March, 1874, pp. 242-3.

[7] Frederic Kent, 'Burns Epigrams Garnered by John Syme' in *Burns Chronicle*, 2nd Series, VII, 1932, p. 11.

[8] See Gerard Carruthers, 'Robert Burns's Epigram on Edmund Burke published in *Politics for the People*, October 1794' in *Studies in Scottish Literature* XXXIII-XXXIV (2004), pp. 469-471.

[9] *Politics for the People*, II, No. XVIII (1794), p. 286.

[10] See *Studies in Scottish Literature* XXXIII-XXXIV, pp. 470-71.

[11] Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2002), pp. 238-40.

[12] McIlvanney, p. 237.

[13] Kinsley, p. 604.

[14] Ibid., p. 605.

[15] See Robert D. Thornton, *William Maxwell to Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1979), pp. 177-9.

[16] I am grateful to Carol Baraniuk, in her usual insightful way, for this point; see her 'Ulster's Burns? James Orr, the Bard of Ballycarry' in *Review of Scottish Culture* No. 19 (2007), pp. 54-62, for a reading of Burns's relationship to Ulster-Scots poetry that begins to bring out Orr, and by extension other writers of the period, from under Burns's all too indiscriminately read shadow.

[17] I am grateful to Norrie Paton for this point. See Kinsley, pp. 721-3 for the poem; see also Gerard Carruthers & Norman Paton, 'Did Burns Write "The Tree of Liberty"?' in Johnny Rodger & Gerard Carruthers (eds.), *Fickle Man: Robert Burns in the 21st Century* (Dingwall: Sandstone Press, 2009), pp. 242-56.

[18] See in Essex County Records (Chelmsford) D/DP Z.57

[19] For the first two poems, see manuscript copies in Essex County Records (Chelmsford) D/DP Z.57; *Ode to the Hon. Thomas Pelham, Esq.* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1795).

[20] Kinsley, p. 149.

[21] Ibid., p. 154.

[22] Ibid.

[23] See especially Robert Fergusson's poem 'Leith Races' (1773), stanzas VIII-X.

[24] Seamus Heaney 'Burns's Art-Speech' in Robert Crawford (ed.), *Robert Burns & Cultural Authority* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 231.

[25] Kinsley, p. 80.

[26] For a typically erudite and thought-provoking recent essay in the area see Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Burns and Ireland' in Rodger & Carruthers (eds.), *Fickle Man*, pp. 267-308.

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Lice, Mice, Bumclocks, Grubs: The Challenge of Regional Language and the Legacy of Robert Burns

Fiona Stafford

Burns's preface to the Kilmarnock edition emphasised that his *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* had been composed 'amid the toils and fatigues of a laborious life' and begged readers, accordingly, to 'make every allowance' for his humble 'Education and Circumstances of Life'.[1] It is not surprising, then, that the early responses to Burns's work were conditioned by thoughts of agricultural labour and cultural limitation.

The brief notice in the *New Annual Register* struck the keynote when it observed that Burns's *Poems* were 'the productions of a man in a low station of life', for the *Monthly Review* ran a piece that dwelt on Burns's situation, 'born in a low station, and following laborious employment', while the *Critical Review* began with general recollections of 'poetical productions written by persons in the lower ranks of life'.[2] As Donald Low, whose own name may have sensitised him to this recurrent feature of the early critical reception, observed, 'the subject most often under discussion was not a body of poetry but a socio-literary phenomenon'.[3] Once Henry Mackenzie had published his famous review in *The Lounger*, 'Burns' became virtually synonymous with 'ploughman', while his literary brilliance was attributed, ironically enough, not to his own careful labour but to Heaven.

The powerful image of the ploughman poet, prompted by the full titles of poems such as 'To a Mouse, on turning her up in her Nest with the Plough, November 1785' or 'To a Mountain-Daisy, on turning one down, with the Plough, in April 1786' did much to determine attitudes to Burns's language. To many, the use of Scots seemed both a natural aspect of his low birth and an obstacle to those unfamiliar with rural Scotland. James Anderson, for example, regretted that the poems had been composed in what would be, for many readers, 'an unknown tongue', and thought that their constant reference to the 'life, opinions, and ideas of the people in a remote corner of the country' rendered them obscure to those from anywhere else.[4] Even William Cowper, one of the first English readers to recognise Burns's innate genius, was still troubled by

the use of Scots, observing that in order to achieve even greater success, Burns needed to 'divest himself of barbarism and content himself with writing pure English'.[5] Cowper's logic is clear – Burns's origins 'in the lower rank of life' were irrelevant, since his genius needed no special pleading. Why, then, did he persist in using the language of the farmyard? 'Barbarism' was only one stage above 'savagery', according to eighteenth-century assumptions about the advance of civilisation[6], so Burns, whose refined sensibility was abundantly apparent in his work, should surely be striving for correct English compositions?

Behind most of the early reviews lay an assumed equation between low social rank and an inability to compose in pure English. That a poet of Burns's ability might actually *choose* to write in Scots for particular literary purposes seems to have occurred to no one. Nor is this surprising, given that, in 1786, the drive to standardise language, adopt correct grammar and purge Scottish publications of 'Scotticisms' had been underway for thirty years.[7] Although the 1780s saw a growing interest in colloquial or 'vulgar' language, the antiquarian impetus behind such collections only reinforced the assumption that no contemporary writer would employ traditional, provincial language for serious modern poetry.[8] Poems such as 'Halloween' played directly into the increasingly widespread association between rural life, outmoded beliefs and dialect, so even though Burns's poem also had a freshness and immediacy quite unlike a museum piece, its pseudo-antiquarian notes and introductory emphasis on the 'remains' of an ancient culture worked against any idea of literary experimentation (K, 73, I, 152). If Scots was coming to be seen as the language of a vanishing way of life, or even as a connection to 'Human-nature in its rude state', Burns's exciting new voice was in danger of seeming doomed to the half-life of costume drama. Paradoxically, Burns's admirers often regarded his poetry as triumphant *in spite of* its language.

Burns was well aware of the contemporary prejudices concerning language, education and literature that would inform the early responses to his work. The 'Epistle to J. L*****k', for example, is especially robust in its attitude to the 'Critic-folk', who might cock their nose at a simple bard, and proclaims the superiority of 'nature's fire' over the laborious attainment of Latin or Greek (K, 57, I, 87). The use of Scots is essential to the verse epistle's disdain for the emasculated university students who '*gang in* Stirks, and *come out* Asses', in their misguided attempts to climb Parnassus. Despite the declared preference for 'ae spark o' Nature's fire', however, Burns still acknowledged the prevailing admiration for pure English by emphasising the inevitable obscurity of the rural bard. The conscious projection of the poet in his russet coat, content to rove among the busy ploughs rather than hope for 'Laurel-boughs', which can be found in poems such as 'To J. S****' (K, 70, I, 180), emphasises the difficulty of finding approval for poetry in Scots among the critical circles of Edinburgh. In his very assertion of obscurity, however, Burns was declaring his independence from contemporary critical convention. If a poet

were not aiming for public accolades, then failure to find favour could have little effect. Burns made plain in 'The Vision' that the wreaths that mattered most were those bestowed by his local Muse, which rendered the opinions of self-appointed judges in Edinburgh or London largely irrelevant. Though somewhat disingenuous, perhaps, it was a startling stance for an avowedly low-born poet to assume in his first publication and one that posed a powerful challenge to the received wisdom about correct English and literary decorum. Burns's radicalism was not merely a reflection of contemporary politics, but rather a literary impulse to overturn the conventional hierarchies and establish a new republic of letters where voices of every social sector would be free to speak out.

This essay explores Burns's deft treatment of the late-eighteenth century tendency to associate non-standard English with the lower stations of life, his fascination with images of lowness, and his development of literary strategies that enabled an elevation of the low – or deflation of the high. Such strategies had strong appeal for later poets whose familiar modes of speech remained outside the linguistic domain of Standard English and so Burns's legacy can be seen throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in poems that chose to incorporate 'non-standard' language. Burns, as a self-styled 'dialect' poet and only too aware of others' perceptions of his humble position, demonstrated the huge literary advantages of remaining close to the ground by revealing the unexpected power of 'low' language and by finding significance in the small and conventionally unlovely. As he played with scale and presented the world from a deliberately unelevated angle, Burns showed how poets might use non-standard language to reveal new dimensions in the familiar world. His use of dialect was anything but an exercise in nostalgia.

Lice, mice, bumclocks, grubs

Burns, whose example inspired countless later writers to believe in their own value irrespective of social position, was persistently drawn to the apparently unremarkable. In poems that insistently recalled the spoken word, addressed to mice, daisies or dead sheep, he focussed on everyday objects in order to overturn entrenched opinions and force his readers to reassess their assumptions about the world. The best example of this strategy is 'To a Louse, On Seeing One on a Lady's Bonnet in Church', because it is difficult to think of a less obvious subject for a poem, especially in a period when the rural muse still generally seemed to inspire thoughts of nymphs and swains with unlikely neoclassical names. Burns's awareness of contemporary tastes is abundantly evident from the opening stanzas, which play on the horror provoked in sensitive bosoms by the thought of a louse:

> Ye ugly, creepan, blastet wonner,
> Detested, shunn'd, by saunt an' sinner
> (K, 83, I, 193)

Squeamishness about parasites is by no means a bi-product of the modern obsession with hygiene, judging from the tone adopted in standard Natural Histories of the eighteenth century. Goldsmith, for example, in *Animated Nature*, began his chapter on the louse with a survey of human phobias, which built up to an apparently universal revulsion for the humble louse:

> The antipathies of man are various; some considering the toad, some the serpent, some the spider, and some the beetle, with a strong degree of detestation; but while all wonder at the strangeness of each other's aversions, they all seem to unite in their dislike to the louse, and regard it as their natural and most nauseous enemy.[9]

If anything, insects were viewed with even more distaste in the eighteenth century than today, as Keith Thomas found when researching his history of human attitudes to the natural world: 'reptiles, insects and amphibians were especially detested, though the reasons for this loathing were seldom clearly articulated'.[10] According to anthropologists, deep suspicion was provoked by the anomalous state of certain creatures, which moved 'ambiguously' between earth, water and air, laying eggs and possessing too many or too few legs.[11] Insects were at once unlovely and uncontainable. The old Chain of Being, which ordered creatures from highest kinds to lowest had largely relegated the most unappealing insects to the bottom rungs of existence and while Linnean classifications contributed to the general shift in man's assumed dominion of the earth during the eighteenth century, the dislike of insects and especially the louse seemed entrenched. Even Buffon, generally distinguished by his seriousness and objectivity, quickly betrayed the influence of more popular prejudices when it came to describing the louse: 'in examining the human louse with a microscope, its external deformity first strikes us with disgust'.[12] What emerges from the Natural Histories is an underlying fear of infestation. As Buffon dwelled on the louse, he commented, 'there is scarcely any animal that multiplies so fast as this unwelcome intruder… a louse becomes a grandfather in the space of twenty-four hours'.[13] He even recalled that Linneaus had introduced a louse into his garden in order to observe its behaviour only to discover that, within a few weeks, every garden in the city had been overrun with lice. Natural histories were offering a kind of micro-sublime, staggering their readers with visions of modern man being overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of tiny, sucking insects.

For Goldsmith, the louse represented the most odious enemy of man, because it preyed on those already suffering: 'wherever wretchedness, disease, or hunger seize upon him, the louse seldom fails to add itself to the tribe, and to increase in proportion to the number of his calamities'.[14]

Goldsmith presented the lice almost in terms of a Biblical scourge, erupting out of nowhere to afflict helpless humanity. His well-meant horror nevertheless reveals a further widespread association – for the louse was not only deemed disgusting, but also most virulent among the poor. By 1785, when Burns composed 'To a Louse', his subject had become almost symbolic of wealthy aversion to the poor after the well-publicised explosion of George III, on finding a louse on his plate. The king's anger led first to an order that all his servants should have their heads shaved and subsequently to a host of satirical responses, most notably by John Wolcot, whose mock-heroic *The Lousiad* appeared in 1785 and was a runaway success.[15] Deep-rooted human anxieties and contemporary class prejudices combined to provide a powerful context for Burns's poem: evidently, his choice of topic was every bit as audacious as the little insect in his poem.

In 'To a Louse', the speaker's indignant rebuke clearly reflects contemporary assumptions about the natural habitats of lice:

> How daur ye set your fit upon her,
> Sae fine a *Lady*!
> Gae somewhere else and seek your dinner
> On some poor body. (7-12)

What can this louse be doing, daring to approach a fine lady, when he should be confined to the bodies of the poor and unwashed? Here are all the contemporary fears of infestation, predation, disorderliness, ugliness, poverty and indifference to rank, condensed into a matter of lines. The little louse is breaking proper bounds, usurping an environment that properly belongs to another species, refusing, in fact, to take any notice of the social norms of his day. The poem's comedy relies on the widespread revulsion towards lice, but almost at once, the use of the direct address prompts an unexpected strain of admiration for the insect. As the poem unfolds, the speaker's obvious relish in the louse's progress through the elaborate bonnet, with its lace and ribbons, reveals the compelling appeal of a creature so untroubled by human constructions of rank. It may be ugly and appalling, but it is also wonderful.

From the very first stanza, the alternative perspective encouraged by the behaviour of the louse is apparent, as the speaker, observing the way it struts rarely 'Owre gauze and lace', comments, 'faith, I fear ye dine but sparely, / On sic a place'. This is the same voice that could express such ready sympathy for the plight of birds in winter ('A' day they fare but sparely' (K 200, I, 389) and which startles the reader into sharing the louse's perspective on the situation. For a hungry blood-sucking insect, fine trimmings cannot offer much satisfaction. While the idea of the louse working its way to a more satisfying dinner underneath the bonnet is decidedly unappealing, by the end of

the poem the self-deluding vanity of wealth and beauty seems rather less attractive than the little insect which merely follows its natural instincts.

Despite this striking inversion of conventional attitudes, the poem still manages to avoid either the puritanical condemnation of human vanity or the heavy satire on luxury, which were both prevalent in eighteenth-century culture and so often masks for misogyny. Burns's poem is much lighter in touch than many contemporary conduct manuals, sermons or indeed, satires, which routinely castigated young women for their love of frills and finery.[16] Though somewhat Swiftian in its fascination with ideas of high and low, tiny and outsized, the humour in 'To a Louse' is marked by its inclusiveness, especially in the stanza where the moral is made obvious:

> O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
> *To see oursels as others see us!*
> It wad frae monie a blunder free us
> An' foolish notion:
> What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us
> And ev'n Devotion! (43-8)

If readers were expecting an accusatory finger to be pointed at the kind of young ladies who are more interested in their appearance than their souls, what they found instead was a wry comment on human behaviour, which included the reader and the speaker as well as the Lady in the poem. 'To a Louse' had, after all, been gently mocking the speaker throughout, by revealing that his attention was not on the sermon but rather on the pretty young woman in front of him – and hence, perhaps, its appeal to female readers from the earliest days. Dorothy Wordsworth, for example, who read the Kilmarnock edition soon after its publication, singled out 'To a Louse' for special commendation, when enthusing over the volume to her friend, Jane Pollard.[17] The poem may begin with an act of observation, but the speaker also has an internal spectator, of whom Adam Smith would approve, and thus recognises his own shortcomings rather than condemning those of others.[18] Seeing ourselves as others see us is also a means of removing motes from our own eyes, and therefore not such an inappropriate prayer to offer during a church service, whether or not it was prompted by the text for the day.

In 'To a Louse', Burns's admiration for the louse's ability to get beneath the coverings of the rich and expose essential truths about humanity finds perfect expression in his energetic deployment of Scots. Colloquial language, in his skilled hands, was a means to cut through the blinds of social convention and reveal the world as it really was, rather than as it sometimes pretended to be. Just as the louse homed in on what really mattered, irrespective of layers of finery, so the self-styled 'dialect' poet was able to transform abstract ideas into living human situations. His

allusion to Adam Smith is a translation of moral philosophy into the everyday world, in terms that not only made Smith's ideas accessible to everyone – but also far more memorable. Burns's poem seems free to draw on modern philosophy, Christian doctrine and wry first-hand observation of life, but the different elements fuse successfully because it also recreates the tone, rhythm and language of everyday speech.

Burns's levelling humour in 'To a Louse', as in his volume as a whole, works to bring everyone together. Though often directed satirically at those who assume superiority over their fellow men, its sole purpose is not to debunk the rich, as is clear in the poem that preceded 'To a Louse' in the Kilmarnock edition, 'A Dedication to G**** H******** Esq'. In this poem, the wealthy Hamilton is projected imaginatively into the grip of 'That iron-hearted Carl, *Want*', but only as a condition for the poet to pledge his lasting devotion, irrespective of personal advantage:

> If friendless, low, we meet together,
> Then, Sir, your hand – my FRIEND and BROTHER.
> (K 103, I, 246)

Burns was pointing out that if Hamilton's good fortune should ever fail, the unhappy turn of events would actually enable him to see those around him more clearly – in other words, that the low perspective is the truer, more reliable one. Burns was expressing his affection for Hamilton as a friend rather than a patron, but as he did so, he emphasised the ultimate superiority of an unelevated situation. At the same time, his self-deprecating humour which presents Hamilton being made 'as poor a dog as I am' (124), precluded any hint of pious poverty or satisfied envy in the prospect of the rich man's descent.

As often in the Kilmarnock volume, an apparently simple turn of phrase works to connect different poems and so the idea of being 'as poor a dog' as the poet recalls 'The Twa Dogs', with its pet's-eye view of the social divide. From the very beginning of the volume, Burns had offered a fresh perspective on life by adopting a vantage point close to the earth. Without resorting to the satiric contrivances of Voltaire or Goldsmith, who imported fictional foreigners to comment on contemporary European manners, Burns achieved a surprising defamiliarisation through the use of the local and familiar.[19] He had an immediate model in Robert Fergusson's 'Mutual Complaint of Plainstanes and Causey', but was also drawing on first-hand, habitual observation of canine behaviour to create a comically convincing presentation of the view from the ground. The dogs' surprise at human arrangements is so plausible that it encourages readers to reconsider things that might otherwise go unquestioned. The Newfoundland's comment on his master's habit of feeding his dogs better than his tenants, for example, is strikingly matter-of-fact:

Our *Whipper-in*, wee, blastiet wonner,
Poor, worthless elf, it eats a dinner,
Better than ony *Tenant-man* (K 71, I, 139)[20]

This deadpan conversation between the dogs is far more effective as social comment than a strident denunciation of social injustice, because its comedy is disarming rather than aggressive. A wealthy reader could hardly be offended by a dog's view of the world, but might well be engaged by its witty couplets.

'The Twa Dogs' stands as an appropriate introduction to *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, and finds an echo not only in the 'poor dog' of 'To Gavin Hamilton', but also in the poem that follows. The rhyme of 'wonner' and 'dinner', which appears in the first stanza of 'To a Louse', is a clear recollection of 'The Twa Dogs' and thus reinforces the reader's association between lice and poverty. Unlike some of the natural historians of his day, however, Burns considers the connection with a characteristic blend of profound sympathy and a sense of the absurd. In the Kilmarnock edition, Burns created speakers with a capacity to laugh and sympathise at the same time, a feature crucial to his treatment of the conventionally lowly. Rather than looking down on his subject matter, the inclusive tone transformed the most unlikely objects into something vital and often admirable. His use of the address – 'To a Louse', 'To a Mouse', 'Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet', 'Guid-Mornin to your Majesty!' – suggests equality, whether the recipient is someone who might normally be deemed higher or lower. Almost everything that is addressed in the collection seems 'as poor a dog as' the poet, a refreshingly egalitarian approach that helped ensure Burns's appeal for later writers whose language might be deemed, in some quarters, incorrect.

Crucial to Burns's bringing together of high and low was his use of Scots. In 'The Twa Dogs', nonstandard language seems perfectly natural for canine conversation.

He ca's his coach; he ca's his horse;
He draws a bonie, silken purse
As lang's my *tail*. (K 71, I, 139, 55-7)

Rather than emphasising his distance from the interlocutors, however, the narrator reveals his own kinship with the dogs in vivid, onomatopaeic descriptions:

Wi' social *nose* whyles snuff'd an' snowcket;
Whyles mice and modewurks they howcket. (39-40)

Though apparently worlds apart in language and social sphere, Burns's narration anticipates Austen in its approach to free indirect style, for the speaker's voice becomes so close to that of his canine subjects as to be almost indistinguishable. Though Burns toned down some of the poem's physicality after its initial publication, changing such lines as 'Till tired at last with mony a farce / They sat them down upon their arse' to 'Untill wi' daffin weary grown, / Upon a knowe they sat them down' (43-44), the dogginess of his dogs and the narrator's canine camaraderie remained.

By the end of the poem, the poet himself is figured playfully as a droning bee, his kinship with fellow creatures underlined by the detail of the 'bumclock', a local word for a humming beetle, which helps connect the insect to the weary dogs who had been portrayed sitting down on their arses in the original version of 'The Twa Dogs'. But the dogs have now finished their conversation and it is time to start behaving like dogs again, rather than conforming to the pastoral fantasy of settling down in harmony with their surroundings:

> By this, the sun was out o' sight,
> An' darker gloamin brought the night:
> The *bum-clock* humm'd wi' lazy drone,
> The kye stood rowtan i' the loan;
> When up they gat, an' shook their lugs,
> Rejoic'd they were na *men* but *dogs*;
> An' each took off his several way,
> Resolv'd to meet some ither day. (231-8)

Burns had chosen to introduce his volume with a poem that at once recalled and resisted eighteenth-century polite traditions of rural representation. The dogs shaking their lugs is reminiscent of eighteenth-century imitations of Milton, whose uncouth swain concluded his elegy by twitching his mantle and heading for fresh woods and pastures new, but in echoing 'Lycidas', Burns was also pointing to the artificiality of much neoclassical pastoral[21]. His own collection, with its tributes to Poor Mailie, made the author's familiarity with real sheep very plain, but the challenge to contemporary notions of pastoral is obvious from the opening poem. Both Gray's 'Elegy, written in a Country Churchyard' and Collins's 'Ode to Evening' are recalled humorously in the closing lines of 'The Twa Dogs', their familiar details naturalised by the use of Scots, which re-energises the cattle from a quietly 'lowing herd' to 'rowtan' kye on their way down the 'loan' or farm track, presumably on their way to being milked. Similarly, Collins's beetle who 'winds / His small but sullen horn' in the twilight has become a humming 'bumclock', whose 'drone' has an additional meaning in Scots that continues the joke on bums and arses. Unlike Gray's meditation on the 'rude forefathers', or Collins's delicate personification of Evening, there is no sense in 'The

Twa Dogs' of lofty distance – Burns's carefully chosen words create a kinship between speaker and subjects, and in doing so, include the reader. Like the anomalous insects that troubled admirers of well-ordered hierarchies of being, Burns's language had the capacity to move between different levels of existence, often infusing the now over-used diction of polite poetry with a new energy drawn from more earthy sources.

As he invited his readers to view the world from unfamiliar perspectives, Burns often achieved the most startling effects through his careful choice of vocabulary. His ability to combine dialect words with Scots, English and Latinate language gave his poetry a flexibility and range that facilitated unexpected juxtapositions, elevations and deflations. 'To a Louse' was the twenty-sixth poem in the Kilmarnock edition, so by the time the reader encountered it, Scots was already firmly established as the natural voice of a poet who had been carefully constructed through the preceding sequence. In 'To a Louse', it is therefore the most obviously *unScottish* words that stand out as somehow odd and out of place. The crucial stanza is the sixth, where the louse is once again called on to explain its choice of food:

> But Miss's fine *Lunardi*, fye!
> How daur ye do't? (35-6)

Lunardi is the only word in the poem, other than the Scots vocabulary, for which English readers require a gloss – and it leaps from the page.

The Lunardi, as most modern editors note, was a kind of bonnet named after the Italian diplomat and pioneering balloonist, Vincenzo Lunardi, who had made a number of flights in Scotland in 1785. Burns could hardly have chosen a better detail for his social comedy, in which those who consider themselves somewhat loftier than others are brought firmly back down to earth. Not only was the Lunardi the height of fashion in 1785 when the poem was composed (and therefore calculated to surprise any readers who might consider rural Ayrshire rather remote from *le beau monde*), but it also combined two of the major preoccupations of the day – balloons and extravagant headgear. Both of these fashionable creations had become common images in the satirical discourse of the 1780s, inspiring numerous prints featuring grotesquely exaggerated hats and hairstyles, and startling ascents from the ground. By the 1790s, women's hats returned to more modest proportions, because the huge aristocratic bonnets of the 80s seemed less attractive in the revolutionary decade that followed – so Burns was ahead of his time, in his deflation of the fashionable Lunardi. Instead of using the extravagant foreign accessory as a way to attack its young owner, however, Burns refers to the Lunardi in the same matter-of-fact tone that Caesar uses to describe his master's lifestyle choices, and so the surprise belongs to the reader, not the poem's speaker. As soon as the Italian import appears in the poem, however, the

distance between the speaker and the Lady is bridged, for she ceases to be remote – 'Sae fine a Lady' – and instead is addressed directly and affectionately – 'O *Jenny*, dinna toss your head, / An set your beauties a' abread!' (37-8). As the poem reaches its conclusion, any distinctions in rank have dissolved and the Lady's pretensions have been punctured. But in the process, Jenny, no longer an object, has become a woman with a name and personality, while the poem shares its joke on human absurdity with everyone.

'To a Louse' demonstrates the victory of the low and unassuming, but in keeping with its levelling purpose, it avoids unnecessary triumphalism and ends by transforming a potential target into a friend. Burns may have drawn on the satirical traditions of the eighteenth century, but his humour was generally more forgiving, since he constantly drew attention to his own shortcomings. At the same time, the jokes against himself have none of the self-loathing sometimes apparent in Swift's harsh concluding satires on the satirist. Indeed, his frequent reminders of the frailties common to mankind, most obvious in 'A Bard's Epitaph', with its grave and grubs, make the poet persona too sympathetic a voice to resist. The colloquial language, mixing with the more polite register, enhances the reader's sense of intimacy with the poet, who has been 'laid low': in sharing his familiar phrases, we enter his being, flawed and mortal as our own. Burns's poetry is all-embracing but where 'To a Louse' emphasised the universal comedy of the human condition, 'A Bard's Epitaph' confronts a more melancholy truth.

Burns's legacy

Efforts to trace Burns's legacy in the nineteenth century often focus more on the 'Scottish' element of his collection than on the notion of 'Dialect', but Burns's clever inversions of low and high, which were at once linguistic, formal and dramatic, offered vital inspiration to numerous aspiring writers, conscious of their own situations in a 'low station of life', on both sides of the Scottish Border.[22] Far from seeming a medium exclusive to readers in rural Scotland, Burns's choice of language provided a sense of possibility to anyone who felt more at home among the non-standard and regional. One of the many poets to draw strength from Burns, for example, was Samuel Laycock, who worked in the heavily industrialised Lancashire mill-towns and began to publish poems during the Cotton Famine of the 1860s. Despite the dire economic distress of his community, his poems sold in thousands, obviously fulfilling a profound social need. Many of Laycock's poems follow patterns established in the Kilmarnock edition, addressing other local bards, such as Edwin Waugh or Samuel Bamford in an attempt to construct a band of rhyming brothers to match those of the master. Laycock followed Burns in expressing his preference for a local audience, which he emphasised directly in poems such as 'The Cricket' and indirectly in all his publications, through his use of Lancashire dialect.[23] Although Lancashire offered a less extensive vocabulary than Scots, the insistent representation of local pronunciation through the

spelling of his published poems instantly mark Laycock's poems out from Standard English poetry of the period and underline his northern attachments. Like Burns, if rather less skilfully, Laycock expressed the same deep sympathy with the poor and the hungry, using his language to assert his own authority. In poem after poem, Laycock's simple sentiments and carefully chosen Lancashire phrases demonstrate his first-hand knowledge of the people he described and addressed. If some poetry readers of the 1860s considered mill-workers beneath their notice, Laycock's poetry made plain that it was those outside industrial Oldham and Manchester who seemed unimportant to him.

Although Laycock's editor, George Milner, believed that Burns's influence was 'general rather than specific', some of the poems demonstrate a similar use of dialect as a means to challenge class divisions.[24] 'Thee and Me', for example, owes much to Burns's dialogues and epistles in its use of an obviously regionally-accented speaker exposing the shortcomings of the rich. It also continues the levelling strategies of both 'To a Louse' and 'A Bard's Epitaph' in its emphasis on the physical facts of human existence. Like the final poem in Burns's collection, 'Thee and Me' recognised that not only the poor speaker and the landowner, but also the poet and the reader would eventually be laid equally low; the tone of Laycock's poem, however, owes more to 'To a Louse'. For if Burns's louse could find nothing of value in the lacy Lunardi bonnet, so the worms in Laycock's poem are used to expose the ultimate emptiness of material possessions, on the death of the rich man:

> But deawn i'th'grave, what spoils o th' sport,
> No ray o' leet con shoine;
> An' th' worms'll have hard wark to sort
> Thy pampered clay fro' mine.[25]

Laycock's worms are no more respectful of social distinction than Burns's louse and, in its black humour, the poem posed a challenge to conventional notions of rank and power by exposing the superficiality of worldly possessions. 'Thee and Me', inspired by Burns's example, used its Lancashire accents to examine the difference between rich and poor, advising Mr Jones to 'Pack up thi albert, hoop, an' pin, / An' opera-glass an' o' before his burial, so that there would be more chance of the worms recognising his superiority. Empowered by his reading of Burns, Laycock employed dialect unapologetically to drive home its point, though as so often in *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, the final note is forgiving and conciliatory rather than contemptuous. In 'Thee and me', dialect not only levels human difference, but as in 'To a Louse', eventually directs attention on high, where 'up above, ther's One 'at sees / Thro' th' heart o' every mon', for the poem ends not with an image of both rich and poor laid low, but of ultimate friendship, 'Bi shakin' honds I' heaven!'

Dialect was crucial to Laycock's emphasis on the ultimate equality of all human clay, even as his poem acknowledged that the barrier between the two nations of rich and poor were often signalled by their distinct accents. In his insistent use of local language, Laycock refused the kind of social aspiration so often promoted by his contemporaries, celebrating rather than denigrating the world into which he had been born. In his use of dialect, he set his face against the poetic norms of his day, preferring to find favour among the ordinary northern people than in the columns of critical journals. His massive contemporary popularity still poses a challenge to academic notions about what constitutes a good poem, for he evidently delighted those living and working in industrial Lancashire, even though his work has failed to find a place in modern anthologies of Victorian poetry. The gulf between the dialect poet and the 'Critick folk' which Burns had admitted in his 'Epistle to Lapraik' was nowhere more apparent than in the case of his Lancashire follower, Samuel Laycock, and the difficulty of approaching these poems *as poems* rather than as evidence of a 'socio-literary phenomenon' is salutary. Not only does it raise questions about aesthetic and formal judgments, but it also turns us back to Burns and the desire among his modern admirers to praise his poems for their ability to transcend their original audience and location.

Laycock's ability to unsettle modern readers is abundantly evident in the work of Simon Armitage, who grew up in Marsden, the Pennine village in which Laycock was born. Armitage has written a poetic response to Laycock, but in his own version of 'Thee and Me', with its additional pairing of the two poets as well as the rich and poor men of the original – 'The Two of Us (*after Laycock*)' – he avoids Laycock's distinctive contractions and dialect spellings, relying instead on colloquial phrasing: 'You sat sitting in your country seat', 'Me stewing turnips, beet, one spud'. In the last stanza, however, where he revisits Laycock's list of the wealthy possessions with a bravura catalogue of modern consumer items ('Opera glasses, fob-watch, fountain-pen, a case of fishing flies, / a silver name-tag necklace full-stopped with a precious stone / a pair of one pound coins to plug the eyes…'), Armitage still employs Yorkshire dialect with great economy – and power. For after advising the rich man to make sure that he is buried with an appropriate selection of worldly goods (in contrast to the poet, who will be laid out in whatever he happens to be wearing), he observes:

> That way, on the day they dig us out
> They'll know that you were something really fucking fine
> and I was nowt.
> Keep that in mind,
>
> because the worm won't know your make of bone from mine.[26]

The word 'nowt' demolishes the great pile of status symbols with simple force. It is a very knowing use of dialect, in a poem that reflects on the differences and continuities between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as on rank and language, and recognises the undiminished power of the non-standard to surprise and discomfort. ‘Nowt’ is the linguistic equivalent of the worm, which Armitage inherits from Laycock, and ultimately from Burns, – the tiny, but at the same time, great leveller, capable of bringing down an enormous pile of empty extravagance.

While ‘The Two of Us’ acknowledges the power of dialect words, it also works to bring Laycock within the pale of acceptable, standard English – a deadly deracination for the dialect poet, which suggests that Armitage's homage to Laycock is somewhat double-edged. As Armitage admitted in a drily self-mocking account in *All Points North*, local pride in Laycock, which is symbolised by a statue in the centre of Marsden, has always been a cause of considerable irritation, not least because his own reception, though critically favourable, has never given rise to the phenomenal sales figures achieved by the nineteenth-century dialect poet. Laycock may seem an unlikely candidate as a strong poetic predecessor, but his popularity has led to a localised anxiety of influence, prompting Armitage to observe that: 'There's only room for one poet in a village the size of Marsden, which makes Laycock someone to move past or knock over'.[27] Effective demolition involves taking Laycock's poems and translating them 'from whatever version of English he wrote in to whatever version of English you practice yourself', which renders 'The Two of Us' less like a tribute and more like an expulsion, because it removes Laycock's essential ties to Marsden. Ironically, the dialect that Laycock, following Burns, had used to level the rich masters in the Victorian mills, became a means to his own elevation – and hence to subsequent demolition by his poetic heir.

Although Armitage’s response to Laycock is clearly tongue-in-cheek, his rewriting of ‘Thee and Me’ does reflect a modern poet's awareness of the difficulties of presenting regional pronunciation on the page. In the case of Laycock, the problem is partly owing to the somewhat clumsy orthography, which impedes reading by demanding a kind of mental ventriloquism. Armitage’s own economical use of northern speech-forms, however, indicates his own awareness that the choice of non-standard English by a well-read writer can attract charges of sentimentality or truculence. Modern uses of dialect can only too easily appear calculated or nostalgic, and if regarded as an affectation, non-standard language loses its power to cut through social pretension and reveal essential truths. Seamus Heaney shows an acute modern consciousness of this dilemma in a sonnet recalling his mother's fear of the 'affectation' she associated with 'Pronouncing words "beyond her"'.[28] Her refusal to acknowledge her own intelligence is matched by her son’s conspiratorial denial of his own educated tongue, which he governs accordingly:

I'd *naw* and *aye*
And decently relapse into the wrong
Grammar which kept us allied and at bay.

The poet, here, is caught between opposing affectations – the assumption of received pronunciation and the pretence of reverting to childhood language. His rather heavy repetition in the sonnet's first line, 'Fear of affectation made her affect / Inadequacy', emphasises that beneath the wordplay lies a deeply-felt, or affecting, dillemma.

The self-consciousness about dialect that afflicted eighteenth-century writers took on a new complexion in the twentieth century, when non-standard speech was sometimes seen not as a sign of ignorance but of sentimentality or posturing. In the eyes of Philip Larkin, for example, William Barnes's use of the Dorset dialect was a major obstacle to potential readers, not merely because of the off-putting orthography ('Lwonesome woodlands! Zunny woodlands!'), but also because perpetuating an insistently local, rural medium seemed futile and artificial.[29] Since Barnes was an educated man, his choice of dialect struck Larkin as sentimental and perverse. Unlike Burns's early critics who saw his language as the unfortunate corollary of his low station in life, Larkin responded to Barnes with suspicion, viewing his linguistic games either as a calculated strategy or as a refusal to face up to historical change. It was perhaps the widespread tendency to regard dialect as a hallmark of authenticity that provoked such a response, since accomplished poets are rarely given to condemning fellow writers for careful rhetorical strategies. The notion of dialect being assumed seems even more troubling to some readers than the notion of donning Standard English in the pursuit of linguistic correctness.

In the last decades of the century, however, as Scottish devolution began to dominate the cultural agenda, the use of Scots ceased to smack of the kail-yard and to assume an aura of political urgency. Many highly educated Scottish poets have welcomed both devolution and the opportunity to compose serious poetry in Scots, a development which has, in turn, renewed a sense of national indebtedness to Burns. Robert Crawford's homage to Burns for the 250th anniversary of his birth is an obvious case in point, for in addition to a new biography, boldly entitled *The Bard*, Crawford also compiled an anthology of contemporary poetry, *New Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. In Crawford's preface, there are no claims about the poems being the work of ploughmen, though the endnotes reveal that most modern Scottish poets have other jobs by which to live. If any allowance is to be asked from the reader for the modern poet's 'Education and Circumstances of Life', then it is more likely to relate to their sense of distance from the land than to their low stations. Crawford's own meditation, 'Waas', presents an image of the poet cut off by walls, whose building went on undetected, which leads to the melancholy conclusion that 'Certie, bit by bit, they've snibbed me aff'.[30] For such a poet, composing in Scots

is obviously a literary decision and the language is used to express aspects of modernity: the skill may be Burnsian, but the subject is not.

The highly educated nature of those who have chosen to write in Scots is evident not just from the biographical notes and their high profiles in Scottish universities, but also from the poems themselves, which include versions of texts by Cavafy, Hölderlin, Li Po, Desnos, and allusions to Shakespeare, Homer or MacDiarmaid. To write a new poem, chiefly in the Scottish dialect, does not entail direct imitation of Burns's familiar works, even though many of his words appear in surprising new contexts. Whether Scots can have the same power to overturn hierarchical structures and prevailing conventions as it had when Burns originally deployed it, is nevertheless open to debate. As a language for literary translation, it clearly poses a challenge to the common practice of rendering foreign literature into English and often succeeds in creating both a sense of intimacy and strangeness. Whether it provides a sense of liberation for the Scottish poet is, however, more doubtful, as Jackie Kay's witty dramatic monologue, 'Maw Broon goes for Colonic Irrigation' suggests. The speaker's feeling of relief in the aftermath of the colonic procedure, 'Aw o' a sudden yer auld body is a hale new nation', has obvious connections to the idea of a free-speaking, devolved Scotland, but it is hard not to read comic irony into a poem whose subtitle reads 'Maw Broon finds a new hobby / Say cheerio to the impacted jobby'.[31]

Elsewhere in the collection, Douglas Dunn's 'English. A Scottish Essay' examines the language question explicitly and at length, but makes plain that the English language belongs to Scottish poets just as much as to those from south of the Border. Dunn rejects the kind of cultural 'Chief Constables' who hype 'a long-deceased / National Bard as the forevermore / "Authentic" measure of the way to write' – in other words, 'the Robert Burns / Syndrome', arguing firmly that his own Muse is '*not a politician*'.[32] Later in the poem, Dunn celebrates the sounds of Scots, issuing from the lips of children growing up under a new Scottish Parliament with no sense of their natural, accented voices being somehow inferior, but his strategy is to evoke the oral language rather than to represent it on the page. Among the ironies addressed in Dunn's thoughtful verse essay is that the use of the Scottish language, which Burns had used so skilfully to challenge received ideas, is in danger of becoming a new kind of imposition, forced on modern poets by prevailing cultural politics. Burns's colloquialisms and local idiom had brought down barriers and invited connections, but in the hands of patriotic modern poets, Scots can be a means to self-definition and therefore, exclusion. While many of the poets in Crawford's anthology demonstrate the rich artistic possibilities of the Scottish language, the celebratory volume also carries its own internal warning signals and shows that the challenges posed by non-standard language, though different in kind, are just as complicated in the twenty-first century as they were in the eighteenth.

NOTES

[1] Robert Burns, Preface to *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Kilmrnaock, 1786), reprinted in James Kinsley (ed.), *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), III, 971. All further references to Burns's work will be from the Kinsley edition, abbreviated as 'K'.

[2] Donald Low (ed.), *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 75, 72, 80.

[3] Ibid, 1.

[4] James Anderson, review in the *Monthly Review*, 85 (1786), in Low (ed.), 72.

[5] To Samuel Rose, 24 July, 1787, in Low (ed.), 91.

[6] For a useful introduction to contemporary theories of human progress, see R. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[7] Lynda Mugglestone, *'Talking Proper': The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[8] Julie Coleman, *A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries; Volume II: 1785-1858* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7, 14-16.

[9] Oliver Goldsmith, *A History of the Earth and Animated Nature* (1774), complete in one edition (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1845), 593.

[10] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 57.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Natural History*, abridged edn., 2 vols (London, 1792), II, 293.

[13] Ibid, II, 294-5.

[14] Goldsmith, 593.

[15] I am indebted to Jon Mee for alerting me to the significance of Wolcot's poem.

[16] See Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 75-108.

[17] To Jane Pollard, Dec. 1787, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Volume One: The Early Years, 1787-1801*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, rev. Chester Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 13.

[18] As Robert Crawford has pointed out, the stanza recalls Adam Smith, 'If we saw ourselves in the light in which others see us, or in which they would see us if they knew all, a reformation would generally be unavoidable', *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Crawford, *The Bard: Robert Burns, A Biography* (London: Cape, 2009), 207.

[19] Cf. Voltaire, *l'Ingenue* (1767), Oliver Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World* (1762).

[20] Kinsley identifies the 'whipper-in' as Hugh Andrew, huntsman at Coylfied, Tarbolton (K, III, 107), but these lines, spoken by Caesar, seem more appropriate to the huntsman's dog.

[21] For further discussion of late-eighteenth-century pastoral, see my '"Plain Living and Ungarnish'd Stories": Wordsworth and the Survival of Pastoral', *Review of English Studies* 59.238 (2008), 118-33.

[22] For a recent account of Burns's influence on Scottish autodidacts, see Valentina Bold, *James Hogg: A Bard of Nature's Making* (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).

[23] Samuel Laycock, *Collected Writings*, ed. George Milner, 2nd edn. (Oldham: Clegg, 1908), xxi.

[24] Ibid, xvi.

[25] *The Collected Writings of Samuel Laycock*, ed, George Milner, 2nd edn (Oldham and London, 1908), 48-50.

[26] 'The Two of Us, (*after Laycock*)', *The Dead Sea Poems* (London, 1995), 33-4.

[27] *All Points North* (London: Viking, 1998), 4.

[28] 'Clearances, 4', *The Haw Lantern* (London, 1987), 28.

[29] 'The Poetry of William Barnes', *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982* (London: Faber, 1983), 149-152, 149.

[30] 'Waas', Robert Crawford (ed.), *New Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Polygon: Edinburgh, 2009), 23.

[31] Ibid, 73.

[32] Ibid, 34-5.

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The Reception of Robert Burns' poems in French Art[1]

Gilles Soubigou

To paraphrase the poet himself, the name of Robert Burns had 'made a small noise' in early nineteenth-century France.[2] Small as it may have been, however, a noise remains a noise, and often echoes through time. Whereas Burns was largely unknown to the French public, to those *anglomanes* who dedicated themselves to the study of English literature his name was well-known indeed. It is among their works that one must look for texts and, as far as this article will be concerned, for images revealing an awareness of and interest in Burns's poetry.

Burns' popularity in nineteenth-century France never reached that of other Scottish writers such as David Hume, James Macpherson or Sir Walter Scott. The French even celebrated Lord Byron's Scottishness, which was considered as part of his identity, as in the engraved portrait depicting him in tartan, published in Paris and London soon after his death in Missolonghi.[3] But Burns was not part of this popular celebration of Scotland's major literary figures. The reason for this under-representation of Burns is first due to the fact that it was simply not easy to find his texts in French. French translations of Burns's works remained for a long time quite rare.[4] The first published translations, in 1824, were the work of the famous French *littérateur* and translator Amédée Pichot (1795-1877). In 1826, James Aytoun and J.-B. Mesnard published a selection of Burns's poems,[5] and in 1833 Léon Halévy (1802-1883) made available to the public an imitation of Robert Burns in his volume *Poésies européennes*, in which he mentions the existence of a complete set of unpublished translations of Burns's poems by Philarète Chasles (1798-1873).[6] Ten years later, in 1843, Halévy published his own translation of the complete poems, the first complete edition of Burns's works in French.[7]

Between his death in 1793 and the first publication of his translated poems in 1824, Burns was virtually unknown in France, and from 1824 to 1843, his works were only available as fragments. As a result, when the Romantic novelist Charles Nodier (1780-1844) published the account of his trip to the Highlands in 1821, he never mentioned the name of Burns, though he quoted one time

the name of David Hume, four times the name of Sir Walter Scott, and ten times the name of Ossian.[8] This lack of textual sources meant that Burns was doomed to be under-represented in the visual arts as well, as very few French artists could read English. However, the sources that do exist allow us to gauge his artistic reception in Romantic France. Artists developed an interest in Burns as the figure of a national poet tied to his national ground, but also concentrated their attention on the supernatural and fantastic elements in his poetry, through the huge success of 'Tam o' Shanter'.

Robert Burns and Scottish National Identity

How was Robert Burns perceived and understood at that time in France? For the anonymous author of a biographical article published in *Le Globe* in October 1824, Burns was the essence of the anti-homeric poet: 'Robert [Burns], a customs officer, gave an absolutely new voice to elegies and the most original grace to songs.'[9] The depiction of Burns as a self-taught poet who captured in his verses the true nature of rural Scotland was, therefore, largely adopted. That is why Léon de Buzonnière, a French aristocrat who followed Charles X of France in exile in Scotland after 1830, advised French travelers to Scotland to first read the works of Walter Scott, Burns and Hogg, if they wished to fully understand the country.[10] And Amédée Pichot wrote in 1825 that:

> Scotland is prouder of Burns than of any of her poets: Scotland is right; the poetry of Burns belongs only to her, it is the fruit of her ground, her climate, her customs… Everything [in Burns's poems] is direct and original.[11]

The perceived link between Burns' poetry and Scottishness was a truism at the time. Victor Hugo thought exactly the same, writing in June 1866 to the poet George Métivier (1790-1881), known as the 'Burns of Guernesey',[12] that there were, in his opinion, two kinds of poets, the universal poet and the local poet, Homer being the first, and Burns the second.[13]

The concept of a 'national poet' was not new, and was linked to the idea of national genius (*'génie national'*), developed in 1810 by Madame de Staël for Germany in her *De l'Allemagne*, and later by Chateaubriand, who used this notion for his study of British literature, published in 1836 under the title *Essai sur la littérature anglaise*. Chateaubriand stated that a 'national revolution' could be observed in Cowper's and Burns' works. He added that: 'The lyrical Burns and [Thomas Moore], the sailors' *chansonnier*, are both children of the British ground; they could not live, in their full energy and grace, under another sun.' By this, Chateaubriand also implied that, being so 'British', they could not be properly translated into French.[14]

The painter Francois-Alexandre Pernot (1793-1865), in his 1827 *Vues pittoresques de l'Écosse*, described how the interest of French readers towards Scotland was growing at the time, and how this interest expanded to include Burns and other lesser-known authors:

> One cannot ignore this revolution of curiosity [towards Scotland]; it was first generated by Walter Scott's novels. No longer do solely the epic ghosts of Ossian capture the attention of the literary set, nor Thomson's didactic pomp, nor Beattie's elegant inspiration, but also Allan Ramsay's pastorals, the songs both spiritual and naive of Burns, and popular ballads written in the national dialect.[15]

This knowledge of Burns's existence and this appreciation for the value of his works did not hold much influence over French artists. There is, however, an interesting exception that can be found at the Department of Drawings in the Louvre Museum. Three albums are kept there, containing 245 drawings after British eighteenth and early nineteenth-century paintings and sculptures, all executed by Charles-Pierre Normand (1765-1840). Normand was a specialist in line-engraving, and this set of drawings was meant to be a precursor for a set of steel-engravings illustrating a four volume book by G. Hamilton. The book, published between 1830 and 1832, was entitled *English School, Album of Paintings, Statues and reliefs from the most famous English Artists, from Hogarth to those Days*.[16] Among these drawings, two are copied after Scottish paintings illustrating Burns's poems. The first[17] is a copy of David Wilkie's *The Refusal*, a painting exhibited in 1814 at the Royal Academy and now kept at the Victoria & Albert Museum.[18] The subject of Wilkie's painting, as G. Hamilton explains in the accompanying commentary of the print, is taken from Burns' *Duncan Gray* (1798). The other drawing[19] is entitled *Sweet memories* ('Douces souvenances'), after John Burnet's (1784-1868) painting, *John Anderson my Jo*. It shows an old man seated in a cottage, holding the hand of an old woman. Again, the commentary written by G. Hamilton explains to the French reader the origin of the subject:

> The poet Burns described, in the dialect of his country, the innocent and peaceful life of an honourable couple. These verses, composed for one of the most beautiful national tunes of ancient Caledonia, are simple, soft and natural, and they inspired a similar feeling to the painter.[20]

This notion that Burns was the best author to read in order to understand rural life in Scotland was commonly shared at the time. In August 1827, an article signed CR appeared in *Le Globe*, comparing English and German Poetry. The article defined English poetry as essentially turned towards the true depiction of nature, in the following terms:

> Verses of good [English] poets seem to have been composed out of doors; outdoor objects are faithfully depicted, and the impression that they produce is faithfully given. The simpler feelings, those of family life so well protected by rural existence, keep all their strength and all their purity. […] Generally, none of the English poets, even those less famous, lacks this descriptive talent. It shines with the utmost brightness in Burns, in Crabbe, in Walter Scott (…).[21]

Burns' poetry also provided a new vision of Scottish landscapes, in the opinion of French literary critics, as the depiction of nature was of utmost importance in his works. In 1855, Hippolyte Lucas wrote about Burns:

> The elegiac string resonates best under the hand of the bard; he was early permeated with the charms and wonders of nature; he knows all its aspects at the diverse hours of the day. He knows what birds say one to another; as was the fairytale princess, he seems to have been taught their language.[22]

The renewal of interest in the Scottish landscape inspired by Burns' poetry can be perceived in a wood engraving executed after Edwin Toovey (1826-1906), a Belgian artist with English origins. The engraving was published in *Le Magasin Pittoresque* in 1859, accompanying an article dedicated to the Burns Monument erected near Ayr.[23] It shows the monument overlooking Brig-o'-Doon, and the depiction of the landscape could derive directly from the background of Burns's 1828 portrait by Alexander Nasmyth, kept at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.[24]

It is also interesting to note that Burns's poems were read by the French painter who most deeply embodies the period interest in peasants and rural life, namely Jean-Francois Millet (1814-1875).[25] In a letter written in Barbizon on 20 July 1863, Millet thanks his friend Michel Chassaing for sending him two books, one by Theocritus, the other one by Burns:

> I have received the two volumes which you have sent me, Theocritus and Robert Burns, and I am doubly grateful to you, both for the kindness of your thought and for the pleasure which the works themselves have given me. First of all, I must tell you, I seized upon Theocritus and did not let him go until I had devoured his poems. [...] I must, however, add that Burns pleases me infinitely. He has his own special flavour; he smacks of the soil. [...] For my part, I am working hard, and the reading of Theocritus shows me every day more and more that we are never so truly Greek as when we are simply painting our own impressions, no matter where we have received them; and Burns teaches me the same. They make me wish more ardently than ever to express certain things which belong to my own home, the old home where I used to live.[26]

It is obvious from this letter that Millet identified himself with the vision of nature and origins developed in Burns' poetry, and which he explored at that time in his own painting, such as his *Shepherdess with her Flock*,[27] a pastoral scene painted in the forest of Barbizon the same year he was reading Burns' poems. As is common in Millet's works, there is no Romantic communion with the landscape in this picture; the figure seems simply rooted in her environment. She also 'smacks of the soil', and undoubtedly the same tenderness Burns manifested for his fellow Scots can be sensed here.

Gustave Doré's (1832-1883) views of Scotland 'smacked of the soil' as well. His 1873 trip led him to Aberdeenshire and the River Dee, Lock Muick, Loch Lomond and Braemar. In the elaborate oil on canvas landscapes he produced in the following years in his Parisian studio,[28] he inserted some elements, such as stags and deer, that definitely recall Burns's poetry and evoke a kind of 'Bonnie Scotland' which was then germinating in French minds. We do not know conclusively if Doré actually read Burns, but it is very unlikely that he'd spent his time in Scotland, with his Scottish friend Colonel Christopher Teesdale (1833-1893), without having heard of Scotland's national Bard.

Therefore, from Normand's drawings to Millet's interest in Burns expressed in his correspondence, we can conclude that the rural aspects of Burns's poetry were known in France. But it was a different aspect of his work that produced the most remarkable artistic response.

A Major Artistic Response: Delacroix and Burns's 'Tam o' Shanter'

Burns's 1791 'Tam o' Shanter'[29] incited a very different reception from his previous works. Being a narrative poem, it conveyed a totally contrasted message to its European audience. As was stated in the 1859 article on Burns in *Le Magasin pittoresque*:

> As almost all [the works of Burns] were composed in the Scottish dialect, we only can know them through translations: so we hardly manage to perceive their charm. Of all the poets, the epic and the tragic are the ones which lose the least by passing through the translation process. So as simplified as they can be, as unrecognisable as they become under their disguise, they still impose themselves on our curiosity and admiration, by the power of their invention and the events they tell.[30]

This, of course, applied perfectly to Burns's 'Tam o' Shanter'. The poem was first translated in French in 1825 by Albert de Montemont (1788-1861), who added the text to his volume primarily dedicated to the translation of Samuel Rogers' 1792 *The Pleasures of Memory*.[31] The very same year, the French Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) exhibited his first of three versions of 'Tam o' Shanter'. Delacroix was a young artist – 27 at the time – who had exhibited

his works for the first time only three years earlier at the Paris Salon. The scandalous success of his *Dante and Virgil in Hell*, now kept in the Louvre, solidified his reputation. In 1824, when he was working on his second manifesto on Romanticism in painting, *The Massacres at Chios*, Delacroix wrote in his *Journal*: 'What would thus be needed to find a subject, is to open a book capable of inspiring oneself.'[32] This is precisely what he did in 1825 when he discovered Burns's tale, which he read – and this is essential to know – in the original language. Delacroix chose to illustrate the most famous episode of the poem:

> Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
> And win the key-stane o' the brig;
> There at them thou thy tail may toss,
> A running stream they dare na cross.
> But ere the key-stane she could make,
> The fient a tail she had to shake!
> For Nannie, far before the rest,
> Hard upon noble Maggie prest,
> And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle;
> But little wist she Maggie's mettle -
> Ae spring brought off her master hale,
> But left behind her ain gray tail;
> The carlin claught her by the rump,
> And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.[33]

Delacroix's first version of this subject is now kept in Nottingham.[34] It is a small oil on canvas, executed in 1825 for Mrs Dalton, a woman Delacroix met during his trip in London that same year, and who played an important part in his romantic life. She was the wife of an Irishman, a former dancer at the Opéra and an amateur painter. The painting was exhibited in Paris at the Galerie Lebrun exhibition in 1829. Delacroix painted a second version c. 1830-1831, exhibited at the 1831 Paris Salon.[35] This second version is painted on paper, and remained in possession of the artist until his death. The third version came quite late, as it was painted during one of Delacroix's stays on his property in Champrosay, near the river Seine and the forest of Sénart.[36] In his *Journal*, Delacroix noted that he had begun this work precisely in July 1849.[37] This much larger oil on canvas was never exhibited, but there is strong evidence that Delacroix gave it to his friend the art critic Charles Blanc in the early 1850s. It is now kept in Basel. Several drawings were also executed by Delacroix between 1825 and 1849 as preparatory drawings for painted versions. A beautiful drawing of Tam and his mare is notably kept in Cambridge at the Fitzwilliam Museum. It is usually dated c. 1825-1830, but we would be inclined to favor a later date of 1849.[38]

In an undated letter to an unknown recipient, Delacroix explains how he chose the subject:

> My Dear Friend, I'm sending you the painting I promised to you. I had begun it as intended for you, but it went through various states, and was consequently hung for a long time. It is a very famous Scottish ballad by Burns, the popular poet of that country: Tam o' Shanter is a farmer who one night passes near a witches' Sabbath. The witches set upon his trail, led by a young witch who pulls the tail of his horse, until the tail comes off in her in hand. I omitted this episode. Varnish it only after some time. A thousand best wishes.[39]

In another letter, written in March 1831 to his friend Félix Feuillet de Conches (1798-1867), Delacroix explained:

> I read Tam o' Shanter's story in the very ballad written by Burns, in Scots, with the local dialect – very difficult to understand – which was explained to me step by step by a person from the country.[40]

It has been proposed that Thales Fielding (1793-1837), a young British artist Delacroix shared a lodging with in 1823,[41] could be that 'person from the country'. Maybe Mrs Dalton herself, being the commissioner of the work, and the artist's lover, may have played a part in this choice too. Delacroix was likely inspired by visual examples as well. Abraham Cooper's version of *Tam o' Shanter*, exhibited at the British Institution in 1813, bears some significant resemblances to Delacroix's compositions. Cooper's painting was engraved by J. Rogers, and it is very likely that Delacroix saw the print.

What could Delacroix have found in Burns that captivated his attention up to the point that more than twenty years after his discovery of the text, he was still interested in it? Perhaps it was the dynamism of the scene, or the humour contained in it – although the French audience probably didn't catch that part – or the implicit sexual references, or maybe it brought to mind recollections from his London trip, during which he wrote to his friend Pierret:

> I am involved in riding horseback, I am in great good spirits. I have just barely missed breaking my neck three or four times – but all that builds character.[42]

Regardless, through these three paintings, showing the same scenes with just a few variations, Delacroix created a genuine and original visual response to Burns' poem. His powerful brushstrokes[43] and an intentional lack of definition provoked the critics. An interesting thing happened when these paintings were exhibited; as the critics were unfamiliar with literary subject of the works, they concentrated their observations on the formal, picturesque and aesthetic

aspects of the canvas. This stood in contrast to the usual course of critical reception of paintings, when critics focused on analysing how the painter was able – or not – to transcribe the text, the narrative, with more or less naturalism and accuracy. Consequently, the critical reception was very abrupt. The anonymous critic of the *Journal des Artistes* wrote about the 1825 version: 'If you stand far away, there is an effect, similar to decoration. If you stand closer, it is a formless scribbling.'[44] About the 1831 version, Béraud et Tardieu, in the *Annales du Musée*, wrote: 'Monsieur Delacroix exposed several "sketches", as, in my opinion, I couldn't call any of these productions a "picture". See in particular *Tam o' Shanter*, ballad by Burns, supernatural composition.'[45]

A Romantic Theme: the Wild Ride

The example of Delacroix shows us that Burns's 'Tam o' Shanter' was embraced by French Romantics as an opportunity to revive an old theme, the wild ride, of which Hector dragging Patroclus's body under the walls of Troy was a primary example. The theme of the wild ride, heavy with symbolic content, was of great interest to the Romantic artists. They viewed it as a way to express their aspiration to loosen the reins of imagination and to evoke in melodramatic, metaphysical, and metaphorical terms the creative power of the artist. At the same time, foreign literature provided fresh subjects and new stories through which this new generation of painters and sculptors could embody the theme.

Byron's 1819 *Mazeppa* was a major reference among French artists, inspiring several visual responses, such as Horace Vernet's famous 1826 painting, kept in Avignon.[46] Delacroix also illustrated Byron's poem, in a small watercolour kept in Helsinki.[47] Delacroix was also interested in Goethe's 1782 *Der Erlkönig*, with a beautiful lavish drawing executed c. 1825 and kept in Amsterdam.[48] He also read Béranger (1780-1857), the French *chansonnier* to whom Burns was frequently compared in Restoration France. His *Fuite du contrebandier* ('Flight of the Smuggler'), a lithograph edited in 1826, was executed after Béranger's ballad *Les Contrebandiers*. Gottfried Bürger's 1773 ballad *Lenor*, which was known in Great Britain thanks to Walter Scott's 1796 translation, *William and Helen*, and in France thanks to Madame de Staël's 1814 *De l'Allemagne* and Gérard de Nerval's 1829 translation, also fascinated French artists who were captivated by its visual possibilities. Tony Johannot engraved a *Lenore* c. 1830, and published it in the journal *La Silhouette*. Louis Boulanger executed c. 1831-1837 an unpublished print on the same theme.[49] Horace Vernet's 1839 *Lenore*, kept in Nantes, is probably one of the most striking images of this subject[50], while Ary Scheffer's c. 1825-30 *For the Dead Travel Fast*, which title is Bürger's ballad catch-up line, bears some clear similarities with Delacroix's composition for his *Tam o' Shanter*.[51]

Even Millet, whom we mentioned before, exemplified this infatuation with wild ride stories. He drew c. 1852 *Simon Butler, the American Mazeppa*, a scene taken from the life of Simon Kenton, alias Simon Butler (1755-1836), an American pioneer and scout who had been captured by an Indian tribe, tortured and tied to a wild horse, then set loose. Millet's drawing was lithographed by Karl Bodmer (1809-1893), for a set of four lithographs illustrating the exploits of the American pioneers and published by Goupil.[52] All these foreign subjects, usually poems and ballads, inspired French Romantic writers, and most of them entered the French scene at the same period, c. 1825-1830, precisely when Delacroix painted his first *Tam o' Shanter*.

Regarding this phenomenon, one last text is particularly interesting to us. Exactly as Victor Hugo's 1829 *Mazeppa* derived from Byron's poem, we can consider that Burns's 'Tam o' Shanter' inspired a little-known novella by Philarète Chasles, called *L'œil sans paupières* ('The Eyelid-less Eye'). This short story then inspired a lithograph by the French Romantic painter Louis Boulanger (1806-1867), who clearly drew his inspiration from Delacroix's paintings of *Tam o' Shanter*.

The Eyelid-less Eye was published in 1832 in the journal *L'Artiste*,[53] then in volume form the same year, with other stories by Balzac and Charles Rabou, under the title *Contes Bruns* ('Brown tales').[54] What is the relationship between Burns' poem and this short story? First, it takes place in Scotland. A party of young Scots is celebrating Halloween, near the ruins of Cassilis-Downans, a direct reference to Burns's poem 'Halloween'. The description of the party, which, says Chasles, could have been painted by David Wilkie himself, draws from several songs by Burns; for example the ceremony of the kail is inspired by Burns's 'Cauld Kail in Aberdeen'. The story goes on as Jock Muirland (the name is taken from Burns's 'Muirland Willie'), a farmer and a widower, famous for his jealousy, gets drunk and mocks the Spunkies, the description of whom is borrowed from Burns's 'Address to the Deil'. To the horror of all present at the scene, a spunkie materialises on Jock Muirland's shoulder. The terrified farmer jumps on his horse, and a wild ride begins. Jock tries in vain to get rid of the Spunkie, who looks like a young maiden with eyelid-less eyes – hence the title – and repeats endlessly: 'Marry me, Jock, marry me'. When Jock arrives at Cassilis kirk, he enters the ruined nave and sees a Sabbath of demons and skeletons, dancing and playing the devil's music on the bagpipe. Overwhelmed by the infernal clamour, Jock faints away. When he awakes, he finds himself in his home, surrounded by his friends, who tell him that during the night he took a new wife. Jock recognises the eyelid-less Spunkie whom he apparently married during the tragic night. The following months are hell on earth for poor Jock; his wife is intensely jealous and never sleeps. He ultimately runs away to Ohio where he finds a new home and a new wife among an Indian tribe, the Narranghansetts (an actual tribe, part of the Algonquin nation in North Carolina: it is important to remember that for the French Romantic generation, the Indian tribes of North America were the exact counterpart of the Scottish Highland clans). A few days after Jock's wedding, the Spunkie appears, having travelled all the way from Scotland to

Ohio to look for him. Jock Muirland commits suicide, drowning himself in the Ohio River. Chasles gives us the key to his tale: the eyelid-less Spunkie symbolises jealousy itself, 'The always-opened eye of the jealous woman, [being] the most terrible torture of all.'[55]

By comparing Boulanger's lithograph for Chasles' novel and Delacroix's painting, one can see the extent to which Delacroix's *Tam o' Shanter* made Burns known in France. Also, the reader should know that Delacroix and Chasles, once schoolmates, were great friends in the 1820s, which means that in this intertextual process of writing a short story inspired by Burns's poem, Delacroix's painting could have been present in Chasles' mind while writing his homage-to-Burns of a novella.

With Delacroix's picture serving again as intermediary, Gustave Moreau's *Le Cavalier écossais* ('The Scottish Rider') is probably the last visual incarnation of Burns`s 'Tam o' Shanter' in nineteenth-century French painting. This painting[56] was executed c. 1870, after several preparatory drawings,[57] all kept, as is the final oil on canvas, at the Gustave Moreau Museum in Paris. Gustave Moreau (1826-1898), a Symbolist painter, could have known Burns' poem, which was available at the time in several translations. A careful search of his private library revealed, however, that he did not own any copy of Burns's works. Regardless, the composition of *Le Cavalier écossais* shows obvious reference to Delacroix's *Tam o' Shanter*. Though Moreau had introduced a dog running alongside the rider in early versions, he ultimately erased it from his final painting, indicating that he was not aiming to make a hunting scene. His horseman wears kilt and tartan, as did Delacroix's figures, but there are no bridge, no 'Cutty Sark' and no sorcerers in this image. The mare has a Japanese-like appearance not present in the horses we previously saw, which shows how Symbolist interest for Asian art could be combined in Moreau's work with the memory of the Romantic interest towards Caledonia.

Despite these divergences, one can conclude that Moreau's large-scale painting is the last remnant of Robert Burns's influence on French artists. Burns' work embodied a certain idea of Scotland for nineteenth-century painters. Despite the fact that this ideal and fantasised country had ceased to exist with the Industrial Revolution, it remained intact in the imaginations of those in French literary and artistic circles whose hearts were, indeed, still in the Highlands.

NOTES

[1] This article develops a paper presented at the international conference *Robert Burns in European Culture* (Murray Pittock and Martin Procházka dir.), held in Prague, Universita Karlova v Praze, Filozofická fakulta, 6-8 February 2009. My deep thanks go to Anne Bast for her careful

re-reading of this text.

[2] ‘My name has made a small noise in the country’ (Letter to Dr John Moore, written at Mauchline in August 1787, London, British Library, Egerton Ms 1660)

[3] See A. Friedel’s engraving, *Lord Byron*, 1827, lithograph, 31 x 25 cm, realized after Byron’s portrait by Thomas Phillips (1814, Newstead Abbey). Friedel added a tartan plaid and the sword and helmet Byron commisioned to Giacomo Aspe in Genoa before leaving for Greece.

[4] About Byron’s artistic reception in France, see Gilles Soubigou, ‘French Portraits of Byron, 1824-1880’, *The Byron Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2008, pp. 45-55. About French translations of Burns, see Dominique Delmaire, ‘Translating Robert Burns into French: Verse or Prose?’, in *Scotland in Europe* (ed. Tom Hubbard, Ronald D.S. Jack), Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2006, pp. 169-184. See also E. Margaret Phillips, ‘Some French Translations of Burns’, *AS*, 1934, p. 53-60.

[5] *Morceaux choisis de Burns, traduits par MM. James Aytoun et J.-B. Mesnard*, Paris, Ferra jeune, 1826.

[6] Léon Halévy, *Poésies européennes, ou imitations en vers d’Alfieri, Burger, Robert Burns…*, Paris, Alexandre Johannot, 1833 (3rd edition). Another French imitation of Burns’s poems was published in 1865: *Poésies imitées de Robert Burns, par Louis Demouceaux*, Paris, J. Tardieu, 1865

[7] *Poésies complètes de Robert Burns, traduites de l’écossais par M. Léon de Wailly, avec une introduction du même*, Paris, A. Delahays, 1843. The next edition of the complete poems was published in 1874: *Burns traduit de l’écossais, avec préface, par Richard de La Madelaine*, Rouen, Impr. de E. Cagniard, 1874 (pl.). Another was published by Auguste Angellier in his PhD thesis: *Étude sur la vie et les œuvres de Robert Burns, thèse pour le doctorat présentée a la faculté des Lettres de Paris, par Auguste Angellier*, Paris, Hachette, 1892; rééd. *Robert Burns, t. 1 La Vie, t. 2 Les œuvres*, Paris, Hachette, 1893, 2 vol.

[8] Charles Nodier, *Promenade de Dieppe aux montagnes d’Écosse*, Paris, Barba, 1821. This book was quickly translated into English: *Promenade from Dieppe to the Mountains of Scotland, by Charles Nodier, translated from the French*, Edinburgh, William Blackwood and T. Cadell, 1822.

[9] ‘Le douanier Robert [Burns] a su donner une voix toute nouvelle à l’élégie et une grâce toute originale à la chanson.’, *Le Globe*, n° 22, jeudi 28 octobre 1824, article entitled ‘Robert Burns, le dernier des poëtes écossais’, p. 86.

[10] Léon de Buzonnière, *Voyage en Écosse. Visite à Holy-Rood*, Paris, Delaunay, 1832, p. 178.

[11] ‘L’Écosse est plus fière de Burns que d’aucun de ses poètes : elle a raison ; la poésie de Burns n’est qu’à elle : c’est le fruit de son sol, de son climat, de ses mœurs… Tout y est franc et original.’, Amédée Pichot, *Voyage historique en Angleterre et en Écosse*, Paris, Ladvocat et Gosselin, 1825, vol. 3, Lettre XCII, pp. 444-473.

[12] G. Métivier wrote in Guernésiais, the indigenous language (or patois) of Guernesey.
[13] 'Il n'y a pour moi que deux poëtes, le poëte universel et le poëte local. L'un incarne l'idée « humanité », l'autre représente l'idée « patrie ». Ces idées sont jointes. Homère a été l'un, Burns a été l'autre.' (Victor Hugo, *Correspondance*, Paris, Hetzel, t. II (1860-1866), p. 552).
[14] 'Le lyrique Burns (…) et le chansonnier des matelots [Thomas Moore], sont des enfants de la terre britannique ; ils ne pourraient vivre dans leur énergie et leur grâce sous un autre soleil.' (Chateaubriand, *Essai sur la littérature angloise*, 1836).
[15] F.-A. Pernot, *Vues pittoresques de l'Écosse*, Paris, Gosselin, 1826: 'Cette révolution de curiosité, on ne peut le nier, ce sont les romans de Walter Scott qui seuls l'ont produite. Ce ne sont plus uniquement les fantômes épiques d'Ossian qui occupent l'attention des littérateurs, ni la pompe didactique de Thomson, ni l'élégante inspiration de Beattie, mais aussi les pastorales d'Allan Ramsay, les chansons tour-à-tour spirituelles et naïves de Burns, et les ballades populaires, dans le dialecte national.' (p. iv-v)
[16] *École anglaise, recueil de tableaux, statues et bas-reliefs des plus célèbres artistes anglais, depuis le temps d'Hogarth jusqu'à nos jours, gravé à l'eau-forte sur acier ; accompagné de notices descriptives et historiques, en français et en anglais, par G. Hamilton, et publié sous sa direction*, Paris, Hamilton et Audot ; Bruxelles, Jobard et Londres, Charles Tilt, 1831-32, 4 vols.
[17] Charles Normand, *Duncan Gray*, pencil on paper, 15,1 x 10,3 cm (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, RF 41709). F. Engleheart's engraving after this drawing is reproduced in G. Hamilton, III, p. 160.
[18] David Wilkie, *The Refusal*, or *Duncan Gray*, 1814, oil on canvas (London, Victoria & Albert Museum, FA.226).
[19] Charles Normand, *Douce souvenance*, after John Burnet's *John Anderson My Jo*, pencil on paper, 12,1 x 10,1 cm (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, RF 41711). This drawing is reproduced in G. Hamilton, I, 6e livraison, n° 32.
[20] 'Le poète Burns avait décrit, dans le dialecte de son pays, l'innocente et paisible vie d'un honorable couple. Ces vers, composés pour un des plus beaux airs nationaux de l'ancienne Calédonie, sont simples, tendres et naturels, et ils ont inspiré au peintre un sentiment analogue.' (G. Hamilton, *op. cit.*, I, 6e livraison, n° 32).
[21] 'Les vers de leurs bons poëtes semblent avoir été composés en plein air ; les objets extérieurs y sont fidèlement dépeints, l'impression qu'ils produisent fidèlement rendue. Les sentiments simples, ceux de la vie de famille, si bien protégée par la vie champêtre, y conservent toute leur force et toute leur pureté. Les récits sont le plus souvent touchants et familiers ; ou quand ils roulent sur de grandes aventures, elles sont contées comme elles pourraient l'être dans une veillée d'hiver, devant le foyer d'un ancien château ou d'une humble chaumière. En général, le talent descriptif ne manque à aucun poëte anglais, même aux moins renommés. Il brille d'un grand éclat dans Burns, dans Crabbe, dans Walter Scott ; lord Byron, qui en a tant d'autres, n'en

a peut-être aucun à un plus haut degré que celui-là ; et jusque dans les peintures éblouissantes de Thomas Moore, on le retrouve encore : seulement Moore semble avoir vu la nature à travers un prisme, toute diaprée de couleurs brillantes mais mensongères.' (*Le Globe*, t. V, n° 62, samedi 25 août 1827, p. 327).

[22] 'La corde élégiaque est celle qui résonne le mieux sous la main du barde; il s'est pénétré de bonne heure des charmes et des magnificences de la nature ; il en connaît tous les aspects, aux diverses heures du jour. Il sait ce que les oiseaux se disent entre eux; comme la princesse des contes, il semble avoir été initié à leurs langages.' *Curiosités dramatiques et littéraires par M. Hippolyte Lucas, avec une notice sur l'auteur*, Paris, Garnier Frères, 1855, p. 327. He also gives a translation of *To a Mountain Daisy* (under the title 'À une paquerette de montagne renversée par ma charrue'), pp. 328-329.

[23] 'Monument de Burns, près d'Ayr, en Ecosse. – Dessin d'Edwin Toovey', wood engraving published in *Le Magasin Pittoresque*, vol. XXVII, October 1859, p. 345.

[24] Alexander Nasmyth, *Robert Burns*, 1828, oil on panel, 61,10 x 44,50 cm (Edinburgh, Scottish National Portrait Gallery). Nasmyth painted this long after Burns' death. The poet is standing in front of the Brig o' Doon near Alloway in Ayrshire.

[25] On Millet's readings, see Robert L. Herbert, 'Naive Impressions from Nature: Millet's Readings, from Montaigne to Charlotte Bronte', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 89, 2007.

[26] Quoted in English by Julia Mary Cartwright-Ady in *Jean Francois Millet, His Life and Letters*, New York, MacMillan, 1902, p. 246-247. A copy of this letter, by Etienne Moreau-Nélaton, is kept in Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, Donation Moreau-Nélaton, inv. A 2654. See also V. de Chillaz, *Musée du Louvre, Département des arts graphiques, Musée d'Orsay, inventaire général des autographes*, Paris, RMN, 1997, Aut. 2654, p. 311.

[27] Jean-Francois Millet, *Bergère avec son troupeau* (also called *La grande bergère*), 1863, oil on canvas, 81 x 101 cm (Paris, Musée d'Orsay).

[28] Among these works can be signaled the following: *Paysage d'Écosse* (oil on canvas, Baltimore, The Walters Art Gallery, no. 37.2625), *Paysage montagneux aux cerfs* (also called *View at Braemar*, watercolour, Paris, Petit Palais), *Loch Lomond* (oil on canvas, St. Louis, St. Louis Art Museum, no. 88.13), *Paysage des Highlands* (oil on canvas, Toledo, The Toledo Museum of Art, no. 22.108), *Un lac en Écosse après l'orage* (oil on canvas, Grenoble, Musée des Beaux-Arts, no. MG711), *Glen Massan* (oil on canvas, Glasgow, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, no. 3352). On this topic, see Robert B. Simon, 'Doré in the Highlands', *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 47 (1989), pp. 53-60.

[29] Written in 1790, it was first published in the *Edinburgh Magazine* for March 1791. In April of the same year, it appeared in the second volume of Francis Grose's *Antiquities of Scotland*, the book for which it was originally written.

[30] '[L]es œuvres [de Burns] étant presque toutes composées en dialecte écossais, nous ne

pouvons pour la plupart les connaître en France que par des traductions : aussi n'arrivons-nous guère a en bien pénétrer le charme. De tous les poètes, les épiques et les tragiques sont ceux qui perdent le moins à passer par l'épreuve des langues étrangères ; si dépouillés qu'ils soient, si méconnaissables qu'ils deviennent sous leurs travestissements, ils s'imposent encore à la curiosité et à l'admiration par la puissance de leurs inventions et de leurs péripéties.' (*Le Magasin pittoresque*, t. XXVII, Octobre 1859, pp. 345-6).

[31] *Les Plaisirs de la mémoire, poème de Samuel Rogers, traduit de l'anglais en vers français, avec le texte en regard et des notes, suivi de la Charte (de Mme Helena Williams) et d'un conte (Tam O'Shanter, ou le Paysan buveur, de Robert Burns) traduits également de l'anglais, par M. Albert Montemont*, Paris, Peytieux, 1825.

[32] 'Ce qu'il faudrait donc pour trouver un sujet, c'est d'ouvrir un livre capable d'inspirer.' (Eugène Delacroix, *Journal (1822-1863)*, Paris, Plon, 1996 [Dimanche 11 avril 1824], p. 64).

[33] Robert Burns, 'Tam o' Shanter', in Francis Grose, *The Antiquities of Scotland*, London, Samuel Hooper, 1789-1790, vol. II, p. 201.

[34] *Tam o' Shanter, ballade de Burns* (also called *Tam o' Shanter poursuivi par les sorcières*), undated [c. 1825], oil on canvas, 26 x 30,8 cm (Nottingham, Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery).

[35] *Tam o' Shanter, ballade de Burns*, undated [c. 1831], oil on paper affixed on canvas, 25,6 x 31,7 cm (Zurich, coll. Mrs Charlotte Bührle).

[36] A house Delacroix rented for the first time in 1844. His friend Villot lived nearby.

[37] *Tam o' Shanter poursuivi par les sorcières*, undated (c. 1849), oil on canvas, 38,5 x 46,5 cm (Basel, Kunstmuseum).

[38] *Tam o' Shanter*, undated (c. 1849?), pencil on paper, 17,5 x 22,3 cm (Cambridge, The Fitzwilliam Museum).

[39] 'Mon cher ami, Je vous envoie la peinture que je vous ai promise ; je l'avais commencée à votre intention, mais elle a passé par toutes sortes d'états, et a été par conséquent longtemps accrochée. C'est une ballade écossaise très célèbre de Burns, le poète populaire du pays : Tam o' Shanter est un fermier qui passe la nuit près du sabbat des sorciers. Ceux-ci se mettent à ses trousses et en tête une jeune sorcière qui prend la queue du cheval jusqu'à ce que la dite queue lui reste en main : j'ai omis cet épisode. Ne le vernissez que dans quelques temps. Mille amitiés et dévouement.' E. Delacroix, *Correspondance générale*, vol. I, 1936, p. 264 (undated letter).

[40] 'J'ai lu l'histoire de Tam o' Shanter dans la ballade même de Burns, écrite en écossais avec le patois très difficile à comprendre, qui m'était expliqué à mesure par une personne du pays' (E. Delacroix, *Correspondance*, vol. I, 1936, p. 277-278, letter to Feuillet de Conches, dated March 1831).

[41] Delacroix shared a lodging in Paris with Thales Fielding in October 1823 at No. 52, rue Jacob.

[42] Letter to Pierret, August 1st, 1825, quoted in English by Frank A. Trapp, *The Attainment of Delacroix*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1970, p. 54.

[43] See *Journal des Artistes et des Amateurs*, 12 July 1829 and 26 July 1829.

[44] 'De loin, effet à la manière des décorations. De près, barbouillage informe. Voyez (n° 44) une Sorcière qui arrache la queue d'une jument.' *Journal des Artistes et des Amateurs*, 12 juillet 1829, p. 19 et 26 juillet 1829, p. 62.

[45] 'M. Delacroix a exposé plusieurs autres esquisses, car, dans ma conviction, je ne saurais donner le nom de tableau à aucune de ces productions. Ce sont : (…) *Tam o' Shanter*, ballade de Burns, composition fantastique ; (…)' (Béraud et Tardieu, *Annales du Musée et de l'Ecole moderne des Beaux-Arts*, Paris, Bureau des 'Annales', 1831, p. 47).

[46] Horace Vernet, *Mazeppa aux loups*, 1826, oil on canvas, 100,5 x 139,5 cm (Avignon, Musée Calvet).

[47] *Mazeppa* [also called *Mazeppa attaché au cheval sauvage lancé au galop*], undated [c. 1824], watercolour on paper, 22,9 x 31,5 cm (Helsinki, Ateneumin Taidemuseo).

[48] At the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

[49] At the 1834 Paris Salon he exhibited a lost painting on the same subject. Felix Cottrau also exhibited a *Lénore ou les morts vont vite* at the Paris 1831 Salon (n. 403).

[50] Horace Vernet, *La Ballade de Lénore*, 1839, oil on canvas, 61 x 55 cm (Nantes, Musée des Beaux-Arts).

[51] Ary Scheffer, *Les morts vont vite*, c. 1825-1830, oil on canvas (Lille, Musée des Beaux-Arts). He painted another version in 1830, oil on canvas, 56 x 98 (Paris, Musée de la Vie romantique).

[52] Karl Bodmer was a Swiss artist who also resided in Barbizon, and probably associated Millet with the project. Four lithographs were issued in 1852, entitled *Rescue of the Daughters of Daniel Boone and James Callaway*; *Capture of the Daughters of Boone and Callaway*; *Simon Butler, the American Mazeppa* and *The Leap of Major McColloch*. The published editions, bearing legends in both French and English, were printed by Lemercier for Goupil and copyrighted in the United States by William Schaus the same year 1852.

[53] Ph. Chasles, 'L'oeil sans paupières', in *L'Artiste*, vol. II, 25e livraison, 1831, pp. 255-262. Boulanger's lithograph illustrating this text is published on p. 254.

[54] *Contes bruns, par une tête a l'envers* (Honoré de Balzac, Philarète Chasles et Charles Rabou), Paris, Urbain Canel, 1832. A pirated edition was published in Bruxelles, J.P. Meline, 1832.

[55] '[L]'œil toujours ouvert de la femme jalouse, le plus terrible des supplices.' , Ph. Chasles, *op. cit.*, p.262).

[56] Gustave Moreau, *Le Cavalier écossais*, c. 1870, oil on canvas, 145 x 145 cm, (Paris, Musée Gustave-Moreau, Cat. 209).

[57] Four preparatory drawings are kept at the Musée Gustave-Moreau (Des. 53, Des. 407, Des. 416 and Des. 7470).

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Robert Burns and the First World War

David Goldie

The Great War of 1914-1918 was the United Kingdom's introduction to total war – the first international war to be contested by a whole, mobilised population rather than a representative army. It was also the first European war that the nation would fight with a universally-educated and literate population. The Education Acts of 1870 (in Scotland 1872) had ensured that every British person had undergone a compulsory primary education and might reasonably be expected to be able to read and write and be on nodding terms, at least, with the literary tradition and its canon of great writers.

The Great War also had the distinction of being the last major conflict before the era of mass radio and television broadcasting and the sound film. The cinema was in its infancy in 1914 and was still largely considered to be a novel medium of entertainment rather than one of art or information. Radio, similarly, was a technology in search of a wider popular purpose, which it would only discover with the establishment of the BBC in 1922. Broadcast television would, of course, arrive only later in the mid 1930s.

Given such circumstances, it is clear that the written word had a reach and a significance that it had never had before and that it would never have again. The printed word was the primary means for the transmission of information and ideas, whether that was through the mass circulation daily newspapers such as the British *Daily Mail* or Scottish *Daily Record and Mail*; weeklies like the *People's Journal*; or in the pages of books by popular authors such as Marie Corelli, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, or Annie S. Swan.[1] Writing mattered, and as commentators such as Paul Fussell, Peter Buitenhuis, Modris Ecksteins, and Samuel Hynes have shown, it offered forms and narratives through which the war's multiple confusions and absurdities might be understood and rendered comprehensible; a conceptual grid for the calibration of the mental and moral compass.[2]

Poetry had a particular place to play in this, especially in the early years of the war when there was a sustained effort to endow the conflict with an elevated sense of purpose and moral strenuousness. Poems such as Wordsworth's 'Happy Warrior' and Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade' were taken off the shelf and dusted down by anthologists and newspaper editors in order to show off the historically-superior qualities of British courage, while the poems of more recent writers – among them, Rudyard Kipling's 'Recessional', Henry Newbolt's 'Vitaï Lampada', and Rupert Brooke's 'The Soldier' - were trailed through various media in the attempt to cement in the public mind the idea of a peaceable folk roused to righteous and glorious action in the defence of their time-honoured values and national sense of mission. This was not merely an establishment imposition, but seemed rather to be the manifestation of actual consensus. The war created not just an active readership for poetry, but also a burgeoning writership. Newspapers in Britain, as in continental Europe, were deluged in the early months of the war by enthusiastic amateurs prompted into verse by the recent events.[3] The *Daily Mail* estimated in 1915 that more poetry 'had found its way into print in the last eleven months than in the eleven preceding years', while newspapers as diverse as the *Westminster Gazette* and the trench paper the *Wipers Times* began actively to discourage what the latter described as the 'hurricane of poetry' that they found blowing their way.[4]

Scotland was no exception to this trend, with all newspapers, from the thundering establishment dailies like the *Scotsman* and *Glasgow Herald* to popular weeklies such as the *People's Friend* and *People's Journal* and local papers such as the *Paisley Daily Express* and *Kilmarnock Standard* publishing a markedly increased number of poems in response to the early-war crisis, and turning for reassurance to its traditional writers. In most practical terms this, of course, meant Robert Burns.

Burns had been the subject of various forms of national celebration since his death, from the monument-makings, statue-raisings, and bust-unveilings of the Victorians, through the many national and international Burns Clubs that became the Burns Federation in 1885, to his continuous presence in a wide range of printed books and popular newspapers.[5] Burns's legacy was for all this time much contested, with diverse groups and individuals claiming the bard for their own particular brand of political, or social, or recreational opinions.[6] But for all this contestation, and perhaps because of it, Burns occupied a prominent and distinct place in Scottish culture, becoming in the nineteenth century what Alex Tyrrell has called a 'lieu de mémoire': an object of public memory widely understood to be, and consecrated as, 'the quintessence of a nation'.[7] Such an attitude can certainly be seen in the comments of the doyen of *Blackwood's*, 'Christopher North', who assured his readers in 1829 that to Burns 'the Genius of Scotland points in triumph as the glorious representative of her people'.[8] Principal Shairp likewise, though a little less elevated in his diction, said much the same thing when he asserted in

1879 that Burns had restored a sense of national pride to Scotland and that 'in looking up to him, the Scottish people have seen an impersonation of themselves on a large scale'.[9]

One of the consequences of being writ large in the culture in this way, was that Burns was a ubiquitous figure in both high and low culture. The Establishment continued to pay its respects publicly to the Burnsian memory in its biographies, editions, and monuments. One of the most solid pillars of its Liberal wing, the Earl of Rosebery, had, for example, among many other activities unveiled the statues of Burns at Dumfries in 1882, on the Thames Embankment in 1884, and in Paisley in 1896. He had unveiled the bust of the poet in Westminster Abbey in 1885 and led the Centenary celebrations at Dumfries in 1896. He was the patron of a Burns club founded in 1885 that had been named in his honour and continued to play an important part in the annual celebrations of Burns's birth.[10] This was most visible perhaps in Glasgow where he helped, along with other grandees such as the Earl of Aberdeen, to finance the elaborate annual garlanding and floral decoration of Burns's statue in George Square. Rosebery was an honorary president of the Burns Federation, whose active presidents included eminent public men such as the Burns scholar and editor of the *Glasgow Herald*, William Wallace, and the long-time editor of the *Burns Chronicle*, Duncan McNaught. Bodies such as the London Burns Club made sure that the Scottish bard's reputation was bruited forth in the British metropolis, while prominent expatriates, among them Andrew Carnegie, spread the Burnsian evangel further afield – in Carnegie's case by unveiling a bronze statue of Burns in Schenley Park, Pittsburgh in November 1914.[11] Scottish suffragettes granted Burns perhaps the ultimate accolade as a symbol of the masculine establishment by attempting, in one of their last violent interventions, to blow up the Burns Cottage in Alloway in July 1914[12].

This often high-minded attention to the Burns legacy was augmented by a more vulgar fascination with the bard in Scottish popular culture. Nowhere was this better seen than in the *People's Journal*, a newspaper that had by 1914 long defaulted on its obligations as the 'ploughman's bible' of nineteenth century north-eastern Scotland to become a rather typical product of the new journalism, feeding stories of crime, sport, and human interest to its largely urban population across Scotland.[13] Like many other papers of the new journalism the *People's Journal* sought occasionally to interest its readers in high culture, but typically did so in a way that simplified and sentimentalised: from one point of view facilitating culture, from another simply rendering it facile.

This could be seen in its response to the annual Burns celebrations in January of 1914, the year war broke out. This was an era in which popular newspapers commonly gave out free gifts and supplements, so it is not surprising that the *People's Journal* for the last week of January appeared with a free gift book, *Scotland's Immortal Bard: Songs and Poems by Robert Burns*.

This offered a predictable selection of the more popular Burns poems, a Burnsian populism that was also reflected in what the paper referred to as its 'Burnsettes'. These were competitions within the paper that invited readers to make out the titles of well-known Burns poems from picture clues and which offered substantial cash prizes and '100 Beautiful Busts of Scotland's Immortal Bard (in Antimony) and 100 Burns Ash-trays as Consolation Gifts'. In the same month the paper began a serial story that purported to be a tale from Burns's life, but was in fact the pretext for a typically sensational piece of romantic fiction. The serial, 'The Star o' Robbie Burns: Or the Wooing of Bonnie Jean', featured Burns in a somewhat improbable plot involving false weddings, gypsy camps, kidnappings, smuggling, and the bringing to book of an aristocratic villain.[14] In addition to this, regional editions of the paper ran their own separate accounts of the ways in which Burns had impacted on the local historical legacy. On 17 January 1914, the Aberdeen edition of the paper ran a feature, 'Aberdeen in Burns' Day' which recounted what Burns had thought of the city on a visit there – a similar feature, on what Burns had made of Dundee, appeared in the Dundee edition of the paper on the same day.[15]

Burns in Wartime

Whether Burns was seen from on high as a pliable quietist, the author of 'The Cottar's Saturday Night' who might reconcile the poor to their lowly estate, or from lower down the social scale as a kind of poetic Robin Hood, the author of 'A Man's a Man' set on redistributing the common wealth of esteem to all social classes, he was undoubtedly an attractive figure. He had been famously no lover of system, and was recognised as one of the great proponents of individual liberty (in both senses of that term), so when war came he fitted in well with a mood, actively promoted by the authorities, in which the British saw themselves as plucky everymen cheerfully facing with their volunteer army the inhuman efficiencies of Teutonic militarism. The continued celebration of Burns throughout the war, then, could be seen at its most basic as a way of keeping up morale and stressing continuities with the British and Scottish past. The garlanding of the George Square statue in Glasgow continued and remained, judging from the pictures in the press, an elaborate affair.[16] The civic ceremony of placing a floral tribute on the mausoleum at Dumfries likewise persisted, the *Scotsman* noting in 1915, in fact, a larger than usual attendance.[17]

Though the vigour of their activities was increasingly attenuated by a range of pressures, from the demands of war work that diluted the available male population right through to a reported shortage of haggis, there was still considerable activity throughout the war among Burns clubs and enthusiasts.[18] Although most Burns clubs suspended many of their activities during wartime, the number of clubs actually grew: the Burns Federation had numbered 227 affiliated clubs at the beginning of 1914, by the end of 1918 this had grown to 254. What activity there was in wartime included several significant events, among them the unveiling of the Stirling Burns

statue in September 1914, the completion in October 1915 of a seven-volume Braille edition of Burns's poems and the preparation of a Moon-type edition for blind readers (completed 1917), and in 1915 the inauguration of the refurbished Burns House at Mauchline by the Glasgow and District Association of Burns Clubs. Burns club concerts and celebrations continued, too, often in relation to troop entertainment and charitable fund raising, making considerable sums of money for medical charities.[19]

Apart from official Burns club events the poet also continued to be visible at a popular level. The *People's Journal* marked his birthday in January 1915 by running a 'Burns Telegrams to the Kaiser' competition in which readers were invited to compose a short message from the dead Bard to the German emperor. The Journal's sister paper the *People's Friend* had Burns offering useful support for those fighting the war in an article 'Burns the Patriot: Some Seasonable Sayings'.[20] Partick Thistle FC sponsored an annual 'Burns Nicht' at the Empress Music Hall in Glasgow throughout the war. More soberly, the Glasgow Abstainers Union continued its own annual Burns Concerts in the Glasgow City Halls. As with the Burns club events, these could raise substantial sums for war charities: a 'Rabbie Burns Matinee' at the Glasgow Pavilion in 1918, for example, was reported to have raised over £1,000 for the Princess Louise Limbless Sailors and Soldiers Hospital at Erskine.[21] There were Burns nights too in rather more unexpected places. British prisoners set up their own unofficial club in the internment camp at Ruhleben near Berlin and entertained themselves and the other inmates with Burns songs and events.[22] There were many Burns nights too at the front. A Church of Scotland chaplain recounted with considerable national pride such an evening in a YMCA hut in France in *The Scotsman* in 1918:

> Of course there were many Englishmen there, and almost as eager listeners as the Scots. 'Everyone is interested in Burns,' said an English officer, and one recognises with pleasure that, perhaps, more than ever to-day is our national poet coming into his own.[23]

Burns the Volunteer

There could be no denying Burns's popularity, then, but what he and his legacy actually meant to those who employed his name is more problematic. For anyone with a point to make about the war, the multi-faceted Burns seemed to have an opinion that offered them support. Before the war, the accounts of Burns's attitudes to war and aggression had often been fairly balanced. In a typical piece published in the *Burns Chronicle* in 1912, Andrew McCallum had recognised the poet's sometimes aggressive and militaristic impulses while noting his more sustained opposition to the wars of his time. McCallum's approach was sensitive to the poet's humane opposition to

warfare but was perhaps rather more typical of the contemporary Burns establishment when it came to Burns's politics. According to McCallum,

> when we find him writing on peace and war we must not think of him only as the National Poet of Scotland, giving expression to national sentiments and aspirations, but as one of the great forces of the British empire, in shaping the destinies of which he felt that he must take some part.[24]

With the advent of war, much of this balance disappeared, although the emphasis on Burns's role as a moulder of national and imperial opinion remained. For the great majority who actively supported war, especially in its early stages, Burns offered a personal and literary example of the ways in which British liberty defends itself from foreign tyranny. The *Daily Record and Mail*, for example, was quick to emphasise the way Burns would have responded to the aggressive instincts of the Central Powers. Its correspondent mused, 'we can imagine what Burns would have said about German militarism and the crimes it has perpetrated, The Kaiser and the hordes of the disciples of "Kultur" would have been satirised in words as keen as a rapier.'[25] The British Parliamentary Recruiting Committee similarly recognised Burns's appeal by issuing in 1915 a poster that sought to use him as a recruiting officer. The poster featured a pictured cameo of Burns: its heading reading 'What Burns Said – 1782 Still Holds Good in 1915'. Beneath the poet's likeness was printed the first stanza of 'I'll Go and Be a Sodger' and in large type the admonition 'Take His Tip'.[26]

It was perhaps predictable in this context that one of Burns's more rousing martial poems 'Scots Wha Hae' would come to be employed as a call to war. Martial anthologies became very popular, especially in the first two years of the war before the debacle of the Battle of the Somme cooled many people's ardour, and 'Scots Wha Hae' quickly found itself included in the proliferation of anthologies of martial verse, among them Oxford University Press's *Poems of War and Battle* (1914).

When virtually the whole of Glasgow's Tramways department enlisted together to form the 15th Battalion of the Highland Light Infantry in 1914 they were sent off to war with Burns's words ringing in their ears. In a speech reported in the *Glasgow Herald*, Bailie Kirkland, convener of the Glasgow Tramways Department, counselled the newly-enlisted soldiers to take their inspiration from Burns and quoted some familiar words:

> “Lay the Proud usurpers low,
> Tyrants fall in every foe,
> Liberty’s in every blow,
> Let us do or die.”[27]

This was far from untypical, as can be seen in an article from the *People’s Journal* in early 1915 with the telling title, ‘Robert Burns as Recruiter: The Inspiration of His Songs’:

> A verse from his famous war-song has become the battle-cry of the nation – it is blazoned on many of our public buildings, and has sounded throughout the country from Maidenkirk to John o’ Groats.

The *Daily Record* similarly hailed the song in 1915 as ‘at once the most warlike and the most patriotic national anthem ever composed’. It continued,

> The patriotism which he instilled is having its glorious fruition. ‘Liberty’s in every blow,’ and, fighting for our national existence, we cannot but recall that fervent utterance of love of country and love of kind which makes Burns at once the greatest of all democrats and the greatest of all patriots who have sung. Our soldiers are falling, and their ‘latest draught o’ breathing’ is of the very spirit which animates Burns’s great hymns of war.[28]

Those who wanted their Burns to be an ardent militarist were also able to point to his membership of the Dumfries Volunteers. For many, among them Alexander Mutch, Burns was a shining example, not simply for writing about going to be a Sodger but for actually doing it – for having the gumption to take his own tip.

> When Burns became a soldier, it was an hour in the history of his native land when no man who really loved peace could stand aside, and he showed he was willing to strike [. . .] Scotland is proud of her Patriotic Bard, and the British Army finds an abiding honour in once having had the name of Robert Burns on the roll of the Royal Dumfries Volunteers.[29]

This sentiment was sustained by the Volunteers themselves. At a smoking concert held in Burns’s honour at Elgin in 1915 a Colonel of Volunteers lauded the poet for his ‘manly invincible spirit’ and ‘love and pride of country’, and celebrated the fact that Burns had ‘immortalised the corps and helped the nation by his glorious song to the Volunteers, “Does Haughty Gaul Invasion Threat?”’.[30]

The Burns that emerges here is the sentimentalised official Burns, the man who was to be lamented for the occasional lapse in his morals and for his occasional dalliances with radical ideas, but who, when push came to shove would always come through as solid respectable citizen defending the values of nation and empire – the drawing-room rather than the tap-room Burns, perhaps. From this point of view, Burns could be used to endorse virtually anything, including war finance. When the corporation of Leith was taking part in the selling of War Saving Certificates in the fevered Tank Bank drive of early 1918, Sir Richard Mackie invited a large audience gathered round the base of Queen Victoria's statue to 'buy one certificate for Rabbie and one for themselves'.[31] The irony that Burns had died in poverty, begging for loans of money seemed to have been rather lost in all this.

It was this misremembered, sentimental Burns that John Buchan invoked when he invited the wartime American Ambassador, Walter Page, to the 1918 London Burns Club dinner, suggesting to him how appropriate it was,

> that the representatives of the Allies should be asked to assist in the celebration of the birthday of Robert Burns, for it was he who first in the history of the world gave lyrical expression to the desire for that universal brotherhood which the alliance of four-fifths of the world, against military oppression is helping us to consummate.

The inappropriateness of such enthusiastic bardolatry was implied in the Ambassador's response: he replied coolly, and perhaps sensibly, that 'it is not quite clear to my mind how a man can work in a speech about the Allies on a Robert Burns background'.[32] Buchan's own Immortal Memory address to the Club on that occasion, however, showed little of this caution. For Buchan, Burns was the 'poet of our common patriotism' as well as author of 'one or two of the classic war songs of the world':

> No man has ever preached more nobly the duty of the citizen, who, whatever his quarrels with his country, is bound to help to close up the ranks when his country is threatened. If you wish for a statement of the Allies' War Aims you will find it through the poetry of Burns. Freedom, tolerance, sympathy in the State; devotion, courage, sacrifice in the citizen – it is all there.[33]

Such attempts to enlist Burns to the war party were opportunistic and stretched their readings of his works near to breaking point. There were occasionally others that appeared to go even further. One, instigated in a letter to the *Scotsman* by George Hope Tait of Galashiels, attempted to impute to Burns an active hostility towards the enemy by mistakenly interpreting a letter to Rev. Dr McGill of Ayr, in which Burns had invoked 'a withering curse to blast the Germans of their

wicked machinations'.[34] A similarly bellicose interpretation of Burns came from the Reverend Donald Macmillan in an address 'Burns and the War: His Message to the Nation' given to the Glasgow and District Burns Association in 1917. Many British soldiers complained during the war of the bloodthirstiness of the clergy, and especially its more elderly members, who often seemed willing to sacrifice the young and set aside Christian principles in the support of the war, and Macmillan's is perhaps a classic example of this.[35] For Macmillan, 'Scots Wha Hae' 'is the greatest War ode in the world' and the ideal counter to a Germany driving Europe 'back to Barbarous Ages'.[36] Macmillan believed Burns to be 'one of the great triumvirate, of which Wallace and Knox are the other two', and it is perhaps Knox's sense of Justification rather than Burns's humanism he is really invoking when he sounds his own trumpet blast against the monstrous regiments of the German army:

> It is because all those principles for which Burns contended and whose praises he sang, and which, we know, lie at the very foundation of human society, are being scouted and trampled under foot, that we, as a nation, have risen in our wrath, and are determined to sacrifice our very dearest and our best on their behalf. We seem to hear to-day the clarion notes of our great poet calling us to arms, and his message is to fight, to the last, in defence of what we, in our inmost souls, know to be more precious than life itself.[37]

One thing that might strike contemporary readers as rather strange in all this is the way Burns's Scottish patriotism had become identified, apparently unproblematically, with a rather jingoistic British nationalism – as if Burns had never said all those things about a parcel of rogues, or had never had qualms about the House of Hanover and the British state. It is, in fact, one of the paradoxes of the war that these kinds of assumptions were accepted almost universally. This was partly the legacy of a nineteenth-century Anglo-Scottish criticism that had tended to follow Carlyle in asserting Burns's status as a British, rather than merely a Scottish writer. In his oft-cited review of Lockhart's *Life of Robert Burns* Carlyle had noted Burns's particular role in restoring national self-consciousness to Scottish culture but insisted on reading Burns as not only 'a true British poet, but as one of the most considerable British men of the eighteenth century'.[38] It was perhaps, too, a more sustained legacy of what has been called the Unionist Nationalism of Victorian Scotland, and an example of the complex intertwinings of nationalist and unionist ideologies that had, as Colin Kidd has convincingly argued, been fundamental to Scottish political thought for centuries.[39]

Such a complex intertwining could be seen in the ways that recruiters drew on examples of Scottish independence to support the British war effort. On the face of it, 1914 might have been a tricky time for those committed to the Union and its wars as it marked the six hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn – the high point of Scotland's independent resistance to

its southern neighbour. But the opposite was in fact the case. The economic successes of Unionist Scotland, bolstered by literary works such as John Davidson's *Bruce: A Chronicle Play* (1886), had fostered a widely-held view that the heroes of Scottish independence were not the enemies of the union but rather the builders of its strong foundations.[40] By safeguarding Scotland and maintaining it as a strong, free country, so this thinking went, they had, when the proper time for union arrived, ensured that the nation would enter that union as a proud equal partner and not a submissive junior member. As a consequence the Wars of Independence were not forgotten in 1914 but were in fact trumpeted forth. The *People's Journal* chose to emphasise its support for the recruiting effort in August 1914, for example, by publishing a cartoon that celebrated Bannockburn explicitly. The cartoon featured Robert the Bruce in the foreground, standing alongside a superimposed copy of Lord Kitchener's leaflet calling for his first hundred thousand volunteers. Behind the Bruce stands Britannia, with union flag, exhorting a crowd of willing volunteers; beneath her raised sword, the key dates '1314-1914'. Just in case the symbolism is lost on the *Journal*'s readers, the caption at the bottom reads 'Shades of Bruce – The Same Spirit Still Lives'.[41] This spirit, which had once crushed an English army, appears now to be uncontentiously identical to the one that will see Scots fight side by side with the English against a common foreign enemy. This kind of conflation helps explain, perhaps, why the perceived nationalism of a writer like Burns posed no problems to unionists, and why recruiting rallies, such as the one convened by Lord Rosebery in Broxburn in September 1915, could close with rousing renditions of the apparently antithetical National Anthem and 'Scots Wha Hae'.[42]

Burns and the Radicals

This was Burns the patriot. But what about Burns the radical? Much had been said of Burns's humanity, honesty, love of liberty etc. when he had applied them to a celebration of nation, but what about all the occasions when he used the same qualities to pillory the authorities in the name of the people – as he had done in the aftermath of the American and French Revolutions? Where was this bolder figure who was not afraid to speak truth to power?

This was the Burns who had appealed so strongly to the socialist movement before and during the war, and who would continue to inspire them afterwards, the Burns to whom socialists such as Keir Hardie, Robert Smillie, Willie Gallacher, J. R. Campbell, and John S Clarke looked for literary expression of their political values.[43] When one of the war's leading socialists, Thomas Johnston, editor of *Forward* and future secretary of state for Scotland, declared in 1916 that 'Scots Wha Hae' was the 'national anthem' of the Scottish Socialist movement, he was not only trying to rescue Burns from the clutches of the war-mongers but was also attempting to reaffirm the song's place in the radical canon.[44] A century before, 'Scots Wha' Hae' had been such 'a rallying call for radicals' that Paisley magistrates considered making it an offence even to tap out

the tune on a drum.[45] More recently, it had been a favourite song of Scottish Suffragettes.[46] It was to these radical interpretations of the song, rather than to its assertions of patriotism, that Johnston and his ilk appealed.

To readers of this kind the proper emphasis lay less with ‘Scots What Hae’ or ‘I’ll go and be a Sodger’ and more on songs that dwell on the separations and hardships caused by poverty or war, or in the documented accounts of Burns’s antipathy to war. Both these were instanced by David Lowe in a pamphlet of 1915, ‘Burns, Poet of Peace and War’. This rather idiosyncratic work seeks to ally Burns with Eastern mysticism (‘The sages of Inde, guided by the lore of the Vedas, in their reverence for all forms of life, were equalled by the Scots peasant poet’) and omits to mention his more aggressive and nationalistic qualities. Lowe chooses instead to focus on Burns’s ‘compassion’ and his anti-war sentiments, quoting passages from ‘Logan Braes’ and from the letters, among them his deprecation of war in the letter to Mrs Dunlop of 2 January 1793: ‘misery and ruin to thousands are in the blast that announces the destructive demon’.[47]

An article in *Forward* in 1918, offered a similar, if rather more conventionally political interpretation of Burns. This was by the Scottish organiser of the Independent Labour Party, and future biographer of Keir Hardie, Willie Stewart. It started with the sardonic observation that Burns was the poet of liberty, alcoholic conviviality, and freedom of speech – all things the government was currently clamping down on in the name of national security (*Forward* had itself been suppressed for a time at the end of 1915 and the beginning of 1916). Stewart, like Lowe, emphasised Burns’s many anti-war pronouncements before noting piquantly that it was ‘strange that these kinds of quotations are so unanimously overlooked by Burns orators and Burns dinners’. According to Stewart, a peaceful resolution to war is:

> lang, lang in coming. And still, on Logan Braes, and on many thousand braes the wide world over, bereft and desolate women folk cry for their laddies that are 'ower the seas and far awa,’ and helplessly adjure the unreachable rulers who have so ordered their destinies.

For Stewart this is the truth about the war, and the truth about Burns that establishment thinking has conveniently misrepresented or ignored: ‘I cannot help but think if [statesmen] had ranted of Burns less and imbibed his spirit more, it had been better for us all to-day.’[48]

Burns and Contemporary Poetry

Burns was of course not only a personal example but also a poetic one. A genuinely popular poetry such as Burns’s naturally encourages emulation and pastiche at any time, so it not

surprising to discover that when war arrived writers in a wide range of publications found Burns's poetry to be a convenient reference point for their own thoughts.

Needless to say, 'Scots Wha Hae' was a poem that attracted many varieties of pastiche and adaptation. Some, like this by G. A. Bell of Bearsden and printed in Glasgow's *Evening Times*, blithely ironed out the poem's political and linguistic complexities and turned it into a celebration of the British state and monarchy tinged only with the politest hint of Scottish nationalism:

> Scottish sons of gallant sires
> Britain's King your aid requires,
> To fight for all that love inspires,
> And for liberty.
>
> Now's the time to prove that you,
> To your father's memories true
> Fight as only Scotsmen do —
> Fight for liberty.[49]

A similar form of polite co-option can be seen again in '"Sons of Britain": A Georgetown War Song. Tune, "Scots Wha Hae"', published in the *Georgetown Gazette*, the factory newspaper of the vast Georgetown munitions complex in Renfrewshire in 1917:

> Sons of Britain! far and near,
> Hark! the call of battle clear,
> Strike for home and altar dear,
> And for liberty.
> See the eagle's pinion's spread,
> Hear the Prussian's boastful tread,
> Rouse thee, Lion, from thy bed,
> Save posterity.[50]

Poems such as these are not only bad pastiches, putting Burns's forceful phrasing through the mincer of Edwardian verse rhetoric, they are also verbal equivalents of the *People's Journal* cartoons, serials, and competitions, playing fast and loose with Scottish history and reducing Burns's complexity of feeling and power of expression to a few formulaic and easily-recognisable gestures. The form of Burns's poetry may be emulated here but not its beating heart.

Other writers of verse attempted to rework Burnsian satire in the light of contemporary events. One such, an anonymous writer in the *People's Journal*, had the excellent idea of adopting the

monologue of ‘Holy Willie’s Prayer’ for the German Kaiser, another Willie currently being held up for ridicule for his perceived hypocrisy:

> Gott, Gott, dear Gott, attention please,
> Your bardner Vilhelm’s here
> Und has vord or two to say
> Indo your brivate ear:
> So durn avay all udders now
> Und listen vell to me,
> For vat I say concerns me much,
> Meinself und Shermany.
>
> You know, dear Gott, I vas your friendt,
> Und from mein hour of birth
> I quietly let you rule de Heffen
> Vile I rules o’er de earth;
> Und ven I told mein soldiers
> Of bygone battle days,
> I gladly split de glory
> Und gave you half de praise.[51]

The Burnsian humour perhaps hits the mark here, although in the final analysis the conception is probably better than the delivery. A slightly cruder pastiche (although it was the winner of the *People’s Journal* ‘Burns Telegrams to the Kaiser Competition’ in 1915) can be seen in Mrs D. Campbell of Melrose’s adaptation of ‘To a Haggis’, written in a popular-cultural climate in which the Germans were almost always represented as a race of sausage-eating waiters:

> Deil tak’ yer ugly squirmin’ face,
> Great savage o’ the sausage race;
> Sune may yer carcase fin a place
> In some au’d midden.[52]

This is entertaining as pastiche and as light verse but like virtually all the Burns-inspired poetry of the war it plainly fails to take him seriously as a poetic model. Using Burns in this way confines him to a kind of venerable ludicrousness – a position in which he is valued only for his light mockery and not for his intelligence and his sometimes agonistic and heterodox instincts. This was the complex, radically oppositional figure who had, in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, influenced and inspired the many ‘people’s poets’ of Scotland and Ulster

who took him as their model.[53] It was an influence that could be felt, too, in a poet such as James Young Geddes who, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, had shown how a Burnsian radicalism might be melded with a diversity of other influences, particularly that of Whitman, to create a Scottish poetry that developed the Burns tradition rather than simply mimicked it and emptied it of vitality.[54] But such attempts to develop a living tradition from the example of Burns were rare by the time of the war. The result, as it was expressed by William Stewart in the article in *Forward* quoted earlier, was that in wartime 'we have no modern poets who will even try to tell the truth about public affairs or about social conditions' – no poets able or willing to take on Burns's more quizzical and anti-authoritarian stance in their own voices. And there were even fewer like Burns, who did so in a distinctive Scottish voice.

There were notable attempts to keep alive, and indeed revive vernacular poetry duing the war, the most visible being the Doric revival of North East Scotland which featured among others the work of Violet Jacob, Charles Murray, and J. B. Salmond.[55] John Buchan, too, wrote vernacular poetry of the war that owed much to Burns's example. This has been rightly praised, and Jacob, Murray, and Buchan wrote quite movingly of what Wilfred Owen would characterise as the 'pity of war' in poems such as Jacob's 'The Field by the Lirk o' the Hill', Murray's 'When will the War be by?', and Buchan's 'On Leave'. But while such poems capture the kinds of rural stoicism and simple piety sometimes found in Burns, they tend to lack that other radical, bawdy side of the bard. Most of all, and this is perhaps rather contentious, what they lack is the sense manifested in Burns's work of a poet writing about people very much like himself. Most of the poets of this revival were émigrés like Murray or, like Jacob and Buchan, members of the Anglo-Scottish elite – people who were less like Burns and rather more like the polite folks of Edinburgh who had welcomed, enjoyed, and condescended to him. While they embody an admirable commitment to local cultural traditions these poets are perhaps too self-conscious in their defence of a tradition from which they are in fact estranged, leading them into the ways of nostalgia and the idealisation of their subjects.

As it happened, however, very little of the poetry published anywhere in Scotland – in newspapers, pamphlets, or books – was written in the Scots language. The poetry of the folk, it appears, was no longer that rich Scots that Burns had done so much to promote in his own work and collect in the work of others. It was instead a fairly bland imperial Edwardian English. This is immediately obvious when one opens up the poetry pages of any wartime newspaper, even those previously committed to the vernacular like the *People's Journal*, and is reinforced if one looks through an anthology such as Hilda Spear and Bruce Pandrich's *Sword and Pen*. This selection of poems from Dundee newspapers in 1915 contains one hundred poems, of which only nine use dialect in any sustained way.[56]

One of the most disappointing examples of this, perhaps, concerns the 'people's poet' of Dundee Joseph Lee. Lee was an editor on the *People's Journal*, and a frequent and popular contributor to its poetry pages. He was a genuine and committed advocate of Burns, befriending Burns's great-granddaughter Jean Armour Burns Brown, and contributing a number of Burns-inspired poems to the *People's Journal* and the *Burns Chronicle*. One of the most celebrated being 'The White-Washin' o' Robbie Burns' – for which he also produced an illustration.[57] This poem lamented the indignities to which Burns had been put over the years by his so called celebrants and supporters – illustrated here by the metaphor of workmen crawling all over his statue in Dundee. But what is salutary about Lee's career as a war poet, is the way he moved away from Burns as an exemplar during his war service. The two collections he published during the war, *Ballads of Battle* (1916) and *Work-A-Day Warriors* (1917) show him moving further and further away from a Burnsian vitality to a more terse poetry in standard English that showed the influence of popular imperial poets like Rudyard Kipling and Henry Newbolt. Indeed, in many he swaps his Scottish voice for the kind of cockney (or mockney) found in Kipling's *Barack-Room Ballads* and in Kipling imitators like Robert Service and Patrick MacGill to the extent that there are more poems in cockney English than in Scots in *Work-A-Day Warriors*.[58]

Burns the Survivor

Burns's popular reputation survived the war and was, if anything, perhaps enhanced by it. But there was little sense that this was based on anything more particular, or more directly relevant, than the pull of his poetic persona. Byron was not the first, nor the last to comment on Burns's variousness, when he talked of Burns's 'antithetical mind', nor was Carlyle alone in lamenting 'the want of unity in his purposes, of consistency in his aims'.[59] In wartime Burns appealed, as ever, to conservatives, liberals, and socialists; to Christians and atheists; to drinkers and abstainers; moralists and amoralists: militarists and anti-militarists. Perhaps this is to his credit. It is not the poet's job to apply a consistent message, but rather to explore where words, feelings, and ideas might lead. W. B. Yeats had written in 1917 that 'we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry'.[60] In this sense Burns was almost always a poet before he was a rhetorician. This is perhaps why he seems to fit so awkwardly in the attempts of recent critics to pin him down to specific ideological positions. But it is maybe also why he offered little assistance to wartime writers in search of literary models: this was a moment at which, in the public sphere at least, there was a greater demand for literary rhetoric and displays of rectitude than for scepticism and the free play of poetic heterodoxy.

John Buchan had suggested to the loud applause of the London Burns Club in 1918 that 'we can ask no better gift from the gods than that some second Burns should arise to embody in immortal verse the spirit of the British soldier to-day as a legacy to the unborn generation'.[61] But in the

Scottish context at least, the gods didn't seem to be listening and no such figure was forthcoming. What was coming was a Renaissance, embodied in the very different figure of Hugh MacDiarmid, which would have, especially in its initial stages, very little time for Burns and his legacy. MacDiarmid's castigations of the Burns cult are well known and are amply demonstrated in his poem 'Your Immortal Memory, Burns!' in *Penny Wheep* (1926).[62] His desire to cut Burns out of the Scottish tradition and return instead to Henryson and Dunbar reflects a general disillusionment about the vulgar misappropriation to which Burns had been subject throughout the nineteenth century, but is also perhaps driven by a particular sense that his legacy had been tried and found wanting in the war. Buchan had been quoted as saying 'that the time of war was a time to turn to poetry, for the poet wrote for the great moments of life'.[63] By this standard, Burns and his followers had failed.

What was perhaps particularly disappointing is that so few poets found Burns's intelligent scepticism or his defiant stylistic panache applicable to the war's particular circumstances. Those who professed themselves influenced by Burns rarely got beyond pastiche or, like Joseph Lee, found themselves moving away from his influence and modelling their work on exemplars more fitted for the times. The martial influence of Bruce and 'Scots Wha Hae' perhaps lived on, but the questioning, probing, antithetical spirit of Burns had been effectively suspended for the duration. The Whitewashin' o' Robbie Burns had continued, and had done Burns little service.

NOTES

[1] The *Daily Mail* had achieved daily sales of over one million within four years of its inception in 1896, while at the turn of the century the *People's Journal* was claiming a readership of a million based on weekly sales of a quarter of a million. See *How a Newspaper Is Printed: Being a Complete Description of the Offices and Equipments of the Dundee Advertiser, People's Journal, Evening Telegraph, and People's Friend* (Dundee: John Leng & Co, n.d. [1898]), 18-19. For an authoritative account of the extent of popular book publishing, see Philip Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[2] See, Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975). Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda 1914-18 and After* (London: Batsford, 1989). Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London: Bantam, 1989). Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: The Bodley Head, 1990).

[3] For the international perspective, see 'They All Write Poetry', in Elizabeth A. Marsland, *The*

Nation's Cause: French, English and German Poetry of the First World War (London: Routledge, 1991), 1-32.

[4] Twells Brex, 'A Serious Outbreak of Poets', *Daily Mail* (23 June 1915), p. 11; 'Notice', *The Wipers Times or Salient News* 2/4 (20 March 1916), unpaginated. Both quoted in George Walter, ed. *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (London: Penguin, 2006), ix-x.

[5] See Edward Goodwillie, *The World's Memorials of Robert Burns* (Detroit: Waverley Publishing, 1911). Johnny Rodger, 'The Burnsian Constructs', in Johnny Rodger and Gerard Carruthers, eds., *Fickle Man: Robert Burns in the 21st Century* (Dingwall: Sandstone Press, 2009), 50-79.

[6] See R. J. Finlay, "The Burns Cult and Scottish Identity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *Love and Liberty, Robert Burns: A Bicentenary Celebration*, ed. Kenneth Simpson (East Linton: Tuckwell, 1997). I'm grateful to Professor Christopher A. Whatley for supplying me with a pre-publication version of his forthcoming essay '"It is said that Burns was a Radical": contest, concession and the political legacy of Robert Burns, c. 1796-1859' from which I have also drawn here.

[7] Alex Tyrrell, "Paternalism, Public Memory and National Identity in Early Victorian Scotland: The Robert Burns Festival at Ayr in 1844," *History* 90. 297 (2005): 43. Tyrrell draws here on Pierre Nora's *Lieux de Mémoire* (1984).

[8] [Professor John Wilson], *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, May 1829, reprinted in John D. Ross, ed. *Early Critical Reviews on Robert Burns* (Glasgow and Edinburgh: William Hodge,1900), 212-55 (p. 14).

[9] Though Shairp was careful to add that what Burns offered Scots was an impersonation of 'themselves, both in their virtues and in their vices'. Principal Shairp, *Robert Burns* (London: Macmillan, 1887), 196.

[10] See James Angus, *The Rosebery Burns Club Glasgow: A Short Sketch of Its Origin and Growth* (Glasgow: W. & R. Holmes, 1906).

[11] Carnegie had unveiled the Burns statue in Montrose in 1912. See "Mr Andrew Carnegie on Burns," *Burns Chronicle* 22 (1913): 69-82. Perhaps more significantly, he also arranged that every Carnegie Library in the United States had a bust of Burns.

[12] See Leah Leneman, *A Guid Cause: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*, Revised ed. (Edinburgh: Mercat, 1995), 204-6.

[13] See William Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland: Language, Fiction and the Press* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), 145-50. David Goldie, "The British Invention of Scottish Culture: World War One and Before," *Review of Scottish Culture* 18 (2006): 139-45.

[14] See *People's Journal*, 17 January 1914, p. 2. The *Journal* followed this with another travestied version of Scottish history in the serial 'Scots Wha Hae: A Romance of Bruce and Bannockburn' that began on 11 April 1914.

[15] These editionised copies of the *People's Journal* are available at Dundee Central Library.

[16] See, for example, *Daily Record and Mail*, 25 January 1916, 8.

[17] "The Mausoleum at Dumfries," *The Scotsman*, 26 January 1915, 6.

[18] See "No Haggis: War Time Dinner of London Burns Club," *The Times*, 26 January 1918, 3.

[19] See "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Burns Federation," *Burns Chronicle* 28 (1919): 141.

[20] Ian Farquhar, "Burns, the Patriot: Some Seasonable Sayings," *People's Friend*, 25 January 1915, 78.

[21] Walter Terry, "The Year in Variety," in *The Era Annual 1918* (London: Era, 1918), 44.

[22] See "A Burns Club in Germany," *Scotsman*, 15 January 1915, 6. "A Burns Celebration in a German Prison," *Scotsman*, 12 May 1915, 14. Joseph Powell and Francis Gribble, *The History of Ruhleben: A Record of British Organisation in a Prison Camp in Germany* (London: Collins, 1919), 187.

[23] J.A.M., "A Nicht Wi' Burns at the Front: From a Church of Scotland Chaplain," *The Scotsman*, 11 February 1918, 6.

[24] Andrew McCallum, "Burns on Peace and War," *Burns Chronicle* 21 (1912): 34.

[25] "If Burns Were Alive," *Daily Record*, 25 January 1918, 2.

[26] See http://vads.ahds.ac.uk/large.php?uid=29282&sos=1.

[27] "Tramwaymen's Noble Response," *Glasgow Herald*, 8 September 1914, 7.

[28] "Burns and the Sodger Laddie," *Daily Record and Mail*, 25 January 1915, 4.

[29] Alexander Mutch, *Robert Burns from a Soldier's Standpoint* (Aberdeen: Rosemount Press, 1915), 22.

[30] "Private Robert Burns," *The Scotsman*, 26 January 1915, 6.

[31] "Leith Tank Bank," *The Scotsman*, 26 January 1918, 6. Burns's memory would be again prevailed upon later in the year, when Scots were invited to contribute funds to 'War Weapons Week'. See "Scots Wha Hae," *The Times*, 8 April 1918, 13.

[32] This correspondence is quoted in Janet Adam Smith, *John Buchan: A Biography* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1965), 210-1.

[33] ""The Immortal Memory": An Extract from the Proceedings of the Annual Birthday Celebration of the London Burns Club (Now the Burns Club of London) on 25 January 1918," *John Buchan Journal* 30 (2004): 6.

[34] G.H.T., "Robert Burns on the Germans," *The Scotsman*, 28 October 1914, 8.

[35] See, for example, Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SMC Press, 1996), 109-19.

[36] Donald Macmillan, *Burns and the War; His Message to the Nation: An Address Delivered before the Glasgow and District Burns Association, in St. George's Parish Church, on 28th January, 1917* (Glasgow Glasgow and District Burns Association, 1917), 3, 8.

[37] Ibid., 3, 7.

[38] Thomas Carlyle, *Burns* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1854), 43-8, 7.

[39] Graeme Morton, *Unionist-Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, 1830-1860* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999). Colin Kidd, *Union and Unionisms: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[40] Davidson makes this very clear by portraying a Wallace whose actions are explicitly a strategy to ensure that 'we, free Scots, / May one day be free Britons'. John Davidson, *Plays* (London: Elkin Matthews & John Lane, 1894), 168.

[41] *People's Journal*, 15 August 1914, 4. See Goldie, "The British Invention of Scottish Culture," 137.

[42] See "War of the Nations: Lord Rosebery on the Crisis of Our Fate," *The Times*, 7 September 1914, 2. David Goldie, "Scotland for Ever? British Literature, Scotland, and the First World War," in *Ireland (Ulster) Scotland: Concepts, Contexts, Comparisons*, ed. Edna Longley, Eamonn Hughes, and Des O'Rawe (Belfast: Queen's University Belfast/Cló Ollscoil na Banríona, 2003), 113-20.

[43] See T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950* (London: Fontana, 1987), 256. Ramsay McDonald had famously written of Keir Hardie that he 'had got more Socialism from Burns than from Marx'. 'Introduction' to William Stewart, *J. Keir Hardie: A Biography* (London: Cassell, 1921), xxiii. John S Clarke, a leading light in the Socialist Labour Party and joint editor of the paper *The Socialist*, would become Labour MP for Maryhill and, from 1943-6, President of the Burns Federation.

[44] Graham Walker, *Thomas Johnston* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 37.

[45] Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950*, 237.

[46] Notwithstanding their attempts to blow up his childhood home, of course. See Leneman, *A Guid Cause: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*, 117, 204-6.

[47] David Lowe, *Burns: Poet of Peace and War* (Blebo Craigs, Fife: Craigwood House, 1915), 16 & 14.

[48] William Stewart, "Robert Burns on Current Politics," *Forward*, January 19 1918, 1.

[49] G. A. Bell, "Here and There," *Evening Times*, 8 September 1914, 2.

[50] "Sons of Britain: A Georgetown War Song, Tune "Scots What Hae"," *Georgetown Gazette*, October 1917, 30.

[51] "The Kaiser's Prayer," *People's Journal*, 26 December 1914, 3.

[52] Mrs D. Campbell, "What Burns Would Have Said to the Kaiser," *People's Journal*, 23 January 1915, 5.

[53] See Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2002).

[54] Valentina Bold, "James Young Geddes (1850-1913): A Re-Evaluation," *SLJ* 19.1 (1992): 18-

27.

[55] Colin Milton, "A Sough O' War: The Great War in the Poetry of North-East Scotland," in *Northern Visions: Essays on the Literary Identity of Northern Scotland in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David Hewitt (East Linton: Tuckwell, 1995), 1-38.

[56] Hilda D. Spear and Bruce Pandrich, eds., *Sword and Pen: Poems of 1915 from Dundee and Tayside* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press,1989).

[57] Poem and illustration had also appeared in the *Burns Chronicle* (January 1913), 66-8. See, in addition, his 'Robert Burns to Robert Bridges', *Burns Chronicle* (January 1915), 80-81.

[58] Fuller accounts of Lee's wartime poetry can be found in Bob Burrows, *Fighter Writer: The Eventful Life of Sergeant Joe Lee, Scotland's Forgotten War Poet* (Derby: Breedon Books, 2004), 63-127. See also David Goldie, "Was There a Scottish War Literature? Scotland, Poetry, and the First World War," in *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, ed. Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 161-5.

[59] Leslie A. Marchand, ed. *Alas! The Love of Women*, vol. 3: 1813-1814, Byron's Letters and Journals (London: John Murray,1974), 239. Carlyle, *Burns*, 78. For an excellent recent discussion of this variousness and the troubled question 'What was Robert Burns?' see Murray Pittock, 'Nibbling at Adam Smith', in Rodger and Carruthers, eds., *Fickle Man: Robert Burns in the 21st Century*, 118-31.

[60] W. B. Yeats, *Mythologies* (London: Macmillan, 1959), 331.

[61] ""The Immortal Memory"," 6.

[62] See Alan Riach, "MacDiarmid's Burns," in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, ed. Robert Crawford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 198-215.

[63] "No Haggis: War Time Dinner of London Burns Club," 3.

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The Genius of Scotland: Robert Burns and His Critics, 1796-1828

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Of all people to comment publicly on the death of Robert Burns in 1796, perhaps the least-qualified made the most lasting impression. J. DeLancey Fergusson has claimed that the obituary of the poet that appeared in *The London Chronicle* (28-30 July 1796), written by George Thomson (Burns' collaborator in the *Select Songs* project), 'set the tone, long before the appearance of even Robert Heron's biography, for all the public comment on Burns's life and character'.[1] Although Thomson corresponded frequently with the poet, the two never met and frequently did not see eye to eye. This fact shows in the overall tone and character of Thomson's obituary, which blends approbation of the poet's talents with thinly-veiled disapproval of Burns' lifestyle.

On the surface, Thomson's obituary is largely admiring, with clear approval of Burns' distinctive national character. For example, Thomson remarks that although the poet 'was literally a ploughman', he was 'neither in that state of servile dependence or degrading ignorance which the situation might bespeak in this country'.[2] Instead, Burns 'had the common education of a Scottish peasant, perhaps something more, and that spirit of independence, which, though banished in that country from the scenes of aristocratic influence, is sometimes to be found to a high degree in the humblest classes of society'.[3] Along with such marks of distinction, Burns' singular difference from other Scottish peasants is emphasised by Thomson: Burns was 'a man who was the pupil of nature, the poet of inspiration, and who possessed in an extraordinary degree the powers and failings of genius'.[4]

Thomson's critical vocabulary echoes many previous eighteenth-century formulations of genius, though his stress on the 'failings' of genius becomes a constant refrain in the nineteenth-century critical reception of Burns. It is genius alone that individuates and validates Burns and his works, though at a considerable cost. Thomson remarks that Burns' genius was the undeniable and primary source of his appeal: 'proofs of such uncommon genius in a situation so humble, made

the acquaintance of the author eagerly sought after'.[5] However, this genius also conveyed a fatal weakness: 'his nights were devoted to books and the muse, except when they were wasted in those haunts of village festivity, to which the Poet was but too immoderately attached in every period of his life'.[6] Along with such behavior, Burns' posthumous reputation gains further notoriety by references to his eventual profession as an excise collector and his unseemly conduct among the gentry. Although the poet was 'everywhere invited and caressed', Thomson bluntly states that 'probably [Burns] was not qualified to fill a superior station to that which was assigned him. We know that his manners refused to partake the polish of genteel society'.[7]

In Thomson's eyes Burns appears as a driven, untoward prodigy whose demise was largely self-inflicted: 'his talents were often obscured and finally impaired by excess …. Such, we believe, is the character of a man, who in his compositions had discovered the force of native humour, the warmth and tenderness of passion, and the glowing touches of a descriptive pencil'.[8] Despite the bitter ending of such talent, Thomson asks readers to pay 'a tribute of respect to the genius of a Poet'.[9] The initial cast of Burns' posthumous reputation can be found within this obituary; following Thomson's lead, many later critics regarded Burns' 'genius' as a source of both power and weakness. That such views of the poet had little correspondence with his actual life and character is worth noting. As Ferguson indignantly remarks of this obituary, the view of Burns as a 'dissipated' character 'was first given publicity by a man who had never met Burns, who had never been in Dumfries, and whose statements were hotly resented by some Dumfriesians who knew Burns best'.[10]

Despite its lack of biographical veracity, Thomson's testimony of Burns' 'genius' set the standard for critical responses to the poet and his works beginning immediately after his death. This essay provides a survey of these responses from 1796 to1828, revealing a consistent pattern of critical reception. The primary critical approach to Burns and his work involved the application of 'genius' theory; the continuum of critical responses demonstrates the fluid nature of this concept throughout the late eighteenth and mid nineteenth centuries. As Ronnie Young has noted, 'the genius myth itself can help us understand something of Scottish criticism in the late eighteenth century and the crucial role this tradition played in facilitating Burns's rise to fame'.[11] However, attention to the poet's reception history also shows that while the concept underwent significant moderation as an aesthetic category, its association with moral failings was almost uniformly expressed by Burns' critics. The ties between genius and biography, particularly in Burns' case, became increasingly knotted as later commentators attempted to understand the poet's life and works. Young is certainly correct to assert that Burns' early reviews were 'a damaging blend of myth-building and moralising'.[12] This essay will demonstrate that the process of 'myth-building and moralising' surrounding Burns continued unabated during this period, particularly as critics assayed the poet's nationalist iconicity while attempting to diminish the relevance of moral failings

wrought by his ‘genius’. Burns' fame still highlights this tension between his undeniable poetic gifts and his messy personal life, between his poetic aspirations and his complicated desires.

After Burns' death, the process of interpreting the poet’s cultural and national significance began quickly, with certain key features becoming prominent in each account. Assessments of Burns' body of work continued to herald his ‘original poetic genius’ as an overriding character trait, a source of both power and weakness. This was also prominent in defenses of the poet written in response to misrepresentations of Burns' life and character, such as that seen in George Thomson’s obituary. One of the first, written by the poet’s friend Maria Riddell (writing under the pseudonym ‘Candidor’), was a character sketch of Burns in the *Dumfries Journal* of August 1796. In the estimation of Burns' late nineteenth-century editors W.E. Henley and T.F. Henderson, Riddell’s defense of Burns' character was ‘the best thing written of him by a contemporary critic’.[13] Her sketch offers a contrary view that seeks to rebut the ‘injustice done to Burns's character’ seen in other responses to the poet’s life, death, and body of works.[14] More specifically, Riddell claims that it is an ‘injustice’ that Burns is ‘generally talked of, and considered, with reference to his poetical talent *only*: for the fact is, even allowing his great and original genius its due tribute of admiration, that poetry (I appeal to all who have had the advantage of being personally acquainted with him) was actually not his *forte*’.[15] This estimation of Burns’ talents, so contrary to other discussions of the poet, reveals Riddell’s principal motivation to use personal acquaintance as the ultimate source of her critical authority.

Her asides to those ‘who have had the advantage of being personally acquainted with [Burns]’ form the basis of a retort to those who would impugn Burns’ character. The following comment is characteristic of her approach to her subject: ‘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; nor was any man, I believe, ever gifted with a larger portion of the “vivida vis animi”’.[16] Personal knowledge of Burns allows Riddell’s account to focus on how the poet’s character was revealed by and through his person, particularly how the singularity (or strangeness) of his appearance made his differentiating traits manifest to his acquaintances. She writes that ‘though his appearance and manners were always *peculiar*, he never failed to delight, and to excel’.[17] Notwithstanding such abilities, Burns ‘seemed rather moulded by nature for the rough exercises of agriculture, than the gentler cultivation of the Belles Lettres’.[18] In a passage that seems highly influenced by the theory of physiognomy, Riddell further anatomises Burns’ character by studying the meanings of his features, his face, and his voice:

> His features were stamped with the hardy character of independence, and the firmness of conscious, though not arrogant, pre-eminence; the animated expressions of his

> countenance were almost peculiar to himself; the rapid lightnings of his eye were always harbingers of some flash of genius, whether they darted the fiery glances of insulted and indignant superiority, or beamed with the impassioned sentiment of fervent and impetuous affections. His voice alone could improve upon the magic of his eye; sonorous, replete with the finest modulations, it alternately captivated the ear with the melody of poetic numbers, the perspicuity of nervous reasoning, or the ardent sallies of enthusiastic patriotism.[19]

Burns emerges from such an combination of striking traits like a character drawn from a eighteenth-century sentimental novel, attractive yet forbidding, peculiar yet strangely appealing.

Riddell further alludes to Burns' 'dangerous talent' for satire with which nature 'had endowed him with a portion of the most pointed excellence'.[20] Riddell asserts that Burns' 'darts of ridicule were frequently directed as the caprice of the instant suggested, or as the altercations of parties and of persons happened to kindle the restlessness of his spirit into interest or aversion'.[21] Such actions also confirmed Burns' outsider status, based as much upon his self-aware class difference as that of his interlocutors. Burns' ability to cause discomfort in this way is a frequent refrain in remembrances of the poet; Riddell suggests that 'he paid for this mischievous wit as dearly as any one could do'.[22] She also exposes another key element in the mythology surrounding Burns by debunking the poet's 'heaven-taught ploughman' persona as a necessary fiction.[23] Acknowledging that Burns had 'an extreme impetuosity of feeling', Riddell nevertheless insists that 'the history of the Ayshire ploughboy was an ingenious fiction, fabricated for the purposes of obtaining the interests of the great, and enhancing the merits of what in reality required no foil'.[24]

Riddell concludes by examining the poet's 'genius', expounding upon the 'irregularities' that must be accorded, acknowledged, and allowed to men of genius like Burns. Claiming that she is no 'apologist of the irregularities even of a man of genius', Riddell insists that 'it is certain that genius was never free from irregularities'.[25] Though she does not elaborate upon these 'irregularities', it is fairly clear that she is referring to the notoriety surrounding Burns' character that is more explicitly described in Thomson's obituary. Riddell's defense of Burns' genius anticipates the fervor with which Romantic poets were drawn to Burns' posthumous character; she writes that 'the eccentric intuitions of genius too often yield the soul to the wild effervescence of desires, always unbounded, and sometimes equally dangerous to the repose of others as fatal to its own'.[26] Claiming 'a literary critique I do not aim at', Riddell describes her task in her character sketch of Burns as desiring to 'delineate any of those strong traits which distinguished him'.[27] Riddell ends her brief sketch by declaring a hope for the future national fame that will immortalise Burns' genius: Scotland should grant recognition of 'those talents which raised him from the

plough, where he passed the bleak morning of his life, weaving his rude wreaths of poesy with the wild field flowers that sprung around his cottage'.[28] Such recognition would finally grant Burns the 'enviable eminence of literary fame, where Scotland will long cherish his memory with delight and gratitude; and proudly remember, that beneath her cold sky a genius was ripened, without care of culture, that would have done honor to climes more favorable to those luxuriances'.[29]

The next major assessment of Burns' posthumous reputation eschews the elliptical niceties of Riddell's account. In his *Memoir of Burns* (1797), Robert Heron directly explores the effects of Burns' genius upon his life, particularly the role it played in leading to his untimely death. Though Heron's memoir has been criticised by almost all subsequent biographers for its many errors and misrepresentations, his analysis of Burns' poetic legacy is actually much more nuanced and subtle than has often been credited.[30] Like Thomson and Riddell, Heron isolates Burns' genius as the *modus vivendi* of his life; although such genius imbues Burns with exceptional poetic ability, it also makes him prey to considerable moral failings. Heron describes his endeavor in the *Memoir* as 'an honest though humble tribute to the merits of illustrious genius', which seeks 'to recommend that steady VIRTUE, without which even genius in all its omnipotence is soon reduc'd to paralytic imbecility, or to maniac mischievousness'.[31] Along with examining the 'disadvantages' of genius, Heron also repeatedly stresses Burns' growth as a poet, resisting the impulse to promote him as a fully-formed, untutored poet from the very beginning. Looking at the material conditions of Burns' upbringing in rural Scotland, Heron discusses the influence of the local parish schools upon the young poet: 'The establishment of PARISH-SCHOOLS; but for which, perhaps, the infant energies of this young genius might never have received that first impulse by which alone they were to be excited into action; is one of the most beneficial that have been ever instituted in any country'.[32] He further claims that

> [Burns] returned from labour to learning, and from learning went again to labour; till his mind began to open to the charms of taste and knowledge; till he began to feel a passion for books and for the subjects of books, which was to give a colour to the whole thread of his future life. On nature, he soon began to gaze with new discernment and with new enthusiasm.[33]

These statements are an accurate account of Burns' early exposure to and 'passion' for books, evidenced in the letters and biography.[34] Heron also offers a pragmatic estimation of the results of such exposure upon any young person, genius or not: 'It is impossible, that there should not be occasionally some souls among them, awakened to the divine emotions of genius, by that rich assemblage which these books present, of almost all that is interesting in incidents, or picturesque in imagery, or affectingly sublime or tender in sentiments and character'.[35]

Like Riddell, Heron insists upon the fictitiousness of the 'Ayrshire ploughboy' persona, remarking that '[Burns'] pieces, the true effusions of genius, [were] informed by reading and observation, and [were] promoted by its own native ardour, as well as by friendly applause'.[36] Further, Heron identifies key texts and authors that contributed to the poet's development, suggesting that such reading was common currency in Burns' birthplace: 'The Seasons of Thomson … the Grave of Blair, the far-famed Elegy of Gray, the Paradise Lost of Milton, the wild strains of Ossian, perhaps the Minstrel of Beattie were … commonly read, even among those with whom Burns would naturally associate'.[37] Accordingly, 'with such means to give his imagination a poetical bias, and to favour the culture of his taste and genius, Burns *gradually* became a poet. ... He slowly and unconsciously acquired a poetical temper of soul, and a poetic cast of thought'.[38] Besides Burns' solid grounding in literary culture, Heron isolates 'genius' as the poet's key differentiating trait. Alluding to Burns' 'native strength, ARDOUR, and delicacy of FEELINGS, passions, and affections', Heron lists and describes the attributes of the poet's genius: 'it is originality of genius, it is soundness of perception, it is delicacy of passion, it is general vigour and impetuosity of the whole mind'.[39] Without such a poetic sensibility, Burns would not have been able to provoke such acclaim from his readers:

> Never could Burns, without this delicacy, this strength, this vivacity of the powers of bodily sensation, and of mental feeling, which I would here claim as the indispensible native endowments of true genius; without these, never could he have poured forth those sentiments, or pourtrayed those images, which have so powerfully impressed every imagination, and penetrated every heart.[40]

Burns' difference resides not only in his extraordinary sensibility but also his skills in execution: 'what with Burns awes or fascinates; in the hands of others, only disgusts by its deformity, or excites contempt by its meanness and uninteresting simplicity'.[41] In addition, Burns was also furnished with 'extraordinary intelligence, good sense, and penetration', which made him a 'master of powers of language, superior to those of almost any former writer in the Scottish dialect'.[42] This leads Heron to suggest that 'what appear to me to have been Burns's real merits, as a poet and as a man' were found in his 'enlarged, vigorous, keenly discerning, COMPREHENSION OF MIND'.[43]

Along with such impressive powers and 'the studious bent of his genius', Heron adds another demonstrative character trait: 'a lofty-minded CONSCIOUSNESS of his own TALENTS and MERITS'.[44] This engineers (or underwrites) the powerful impact of Burns' poems upon readers which allows them to witness and experience the operations of 'genius': 'He exalts, for a time, the genius of his reader to the elevation of his own; and, for the moment, confers upon him all the

powers of a poet'.[45] For such reasons, Heron insists that Burns not be classified as a novel anomaly but as a 'genuine' poet:

> Shoemakers, footmen, milk-maids, peers, stay-makers, have all written verses, such as deservedly attracted the notice of the world. But in the poetry of these people, while there was commonly some genuine effusions of the sentiments of agitated nature, some exhibition of such imagery as at once impressed itself upon the heart; there was also ever much to be excused in consideration of their ignorance, their want of taste, their extravagance of fancy, their want or abuse of the advantages of a liberal education. Burns has no pardon to demand for defects of this sort. He might scorn every concession which we are ready to grant to his peculiar circumstances, without being, on this account, reduced to relinquish any part of his claims to the praise of poetical excellence.[46]

Accordingly, Burns is an exceptional poet among exceptional poets: 'He touches his lyre, at all times, with the hand of a master. He demands to be ranked, not with the Woodhouses, the Ducks, the Ramsays, but with the Miltons, the Popes, the Grays'.[47] Heron states that Burns is 'not a merry-andrew in a motley coat, sporting before you for your diversion: but a hero, or a philosopher, deigning to admit you to witness his relaxations; still exercising the great energies of his soul: and little caring, at the moment, whether you do, or do not, cordially sympathize with his feelings'.[48] At the same time, however, Heron describes the practical problems facing Burns: 'It seemed to be forgotten, that a ploughman thus exalted into a man of letters, was unfitted for his former toils, without being regularly qualified to enter the career of any new profession'.[49] For Heron, the poet's 'CONSCIOUSNESS of his own TALENTS and MERITS' made it impossible for him to live within the confines of his class, and his genius was thus 'reduc'd to paralytic imbecility, or to maniac mischievousness'.[50] Despite its high praise of the poet's literary accomplishments, Heron's biography is now remembered largely for its inaccurate, negative portrayal of Burns' 'dissipation'.

Though not as notorious as Heron, James Currie occupies a similar position as a promulgator of negative stereotypes of Burns.[51] However, Currie's 'Criticism of the Works of Burns' from his edition of *The Works of Robert Burns* (1800) offers a complex description and analysis of the poet's 'genius'. Although not as admiring of Burns' poetic talents as Heron, Currie also sees Burns as a poet conscious of the models and methods intrinsic to his craft. He states that Burns had 'a genius which comprehends the human mind', while admitting that 'in approaching him, the first impression is perhaps repulsive: there is an air of coarseness about him, which is difficultly reconciled with our established notions of poetical excellence'.[52] Such ambivalence about the subject of his study runs throughout Currie's account of Burns, tempering the representation of Burns' 'genius' yet never forsaking it altogether. Currie is also determined to keep Burns within

his class boundaries; Burns may be more than a novelty, but that fact still does not fully legitimise the poet as in Heron's account. Currie writes of Burns that 'his poems, as well as his letters, may be considered as the effusions of his sensibility, and the transcript of his own musings on the *real incidents of his humble life*'.[53] Expanding upon this point by noting that 'the incidents which form the subjects of his poems, though some of them highly interesting and susceptible of poetical imagery, are incidents in the life of a peasant who takes no pains to disguise the lowliness of his condition', Currie occasionally seems astounded that 'real incidents of humble life' can be transformed into the subject matter of great poetry.[54] After a discussion of 'To a Mouse' and 'To a Mountain Daisy', he plainly admits that 'to extract out of incidents *so common*, and seemingly *so trivial* as these, so fine a strain of sentiment and imagery, is the surest proof, as well as the most brilliant triumph, of original genius'.[55] When Burns occasionally transcends his subject matter (the 'real incidents of his humble life'), Currie finds that Burns is 'carried on to exert the higher powers of imagination'.[56] The wording here is instructive; Burns is passively 'carried on' almost by accident to exert higher reserves of imagination. 'In such instances', Currie writes, '[Burns] leaves the society of Ramsay and of Fergusson, and associates himself with the masters of English poetry, whose language he frequently assumes'.[57]

Currie's descriptions of Burns' 'genius' are frequently conditional, seen as 'marks of uncommon genius' that 'impress' upon various rural subjects 'the stamp of his understanding'.[58] Occasionally he is absolute in his depiction of Burns as a 'man of genius', whose 'temperament of devotion, and the powers of memory co-operated … with the sensibility of his heart, and the fervor of his imagination'.[59] Despite such praise, Currie is resolute in containing Burns' 'genius' within the strict confines of his class, locale, and language. For example, Currie remarks on the difficulty of Burns' Scots usage, claiming that 'the greater part of his earlier poems are written in the dialect of his country, which is obscure, if not unintelligible to Englishmen'.[60] This invites criticism of Burns' class status, for Currie remarks that although the Scots dialect 'still adheres more or less to the speech of almost every Scotchman, all the polite and ambitious are now endeavouring to banish [it] from their tongues as well as their writings'.[61] Currie cannot pardon Burns' lack of 'grace', but acquits the poet for other temperamental excellencies: 'if he is deficient in grace, he is distinguished for ease, as well as energy; and these are indications of a higher order of genius'.[62] This 'higher order of genius' is on display in such poems as 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'; Currie's lavish praise of this work set the critical standard for much later nineteenth-century adulation of the poem.[63] Currie claims that this poem is 'an original and truely interesting pastoral. It possesses every thing required in this species of composition'.[64] Remarking upon the lack of other works similar to 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' in Burns' oeuvre, Currie claims that 'it is to be regretted that Burns did not employ his genius on other subjects of the same nature, which the manners and customs of the Scottish peasantry would have amply supplied'.[65] Remarking that 'out of such materials have been reared the fairest and the most

durable of the monuments of genius', Currie thus promotes a severely circumscribed depiction of Burns' 'genius' by suggesting that it was best expressed in 'appropriate' subjects and styles.[66]

Other nineteenth-century editors and critics employ similar terminology in assessing Burns' posthumous reputation. Francis Jeffrey's influential review of R.H. Cromek's *Reliques of Robert Burns* (1808) in the *Edinburgh Review* of January 1809 blends appreciation with acerbic wit to measure the worth of Burns' poetic achievement, with much attention paid to Burns' place among labouring-class as well as mainstream poets.[67] Noting that 'Burns is certainly by far the greatest of our poetical prodigies – from Stephen Duck down to Thomas Dermody', Jeffrey insists that such judgments diminish the scope of Burns' poetry: 'so much indeed are we impressed with a sense of his merits; that we cannot help thinking it a derogation from them to consider him a prodigy at all; and are convinced he will never be rightly estimated as a poet, till that vulgar wonder be entirely repressed which was raised on his having been a ploughman'.[68] Jeffrey finds the poet to have been neither 'uneducated or illiterate' and compares his learning to that of Shakespeare: 'He had as much scholarship, we imagine, as Shakespeare, and far better models to form his ear to harmony, and train his fancy to graceful invention'.[69] This strain of thought leads to Jeffrey's articulation of a key critical conundrum facing many other critics of Burns: how to gauge his poetic genius despite the glaring presence of the poet's supposed moral weaknesses. Jeffrey recognises those weaknesses and offers a strident judgment that is typical of the critical approach to Burns in the early years of the nineteenth century:

> The leading vice in Burns's character, and the cardinal deformity indeed of all his productions, was his contempt, or affectation of contempt, for prudence, decency, and regularity; and his admiration of thoughtlessness, oddity, and vehement sensibility;—his belief, in short, in *the dispensing power* of genius and social feeling, in all matters of morality and common sense.[70]

The notion here of the 'dispensing power' of genius is a fascinating variation on the concept's eighteenth-century connotations; whereas genius had formerly been solely the source of both power and weakness, for Jeffrey it also offers license to offend: 'men of the highest genius have frequently been hurried by their passions into a violation of prudence and duty'.[71] For this reason genius must be simultaneously praised and condemned, forcing critics to fully separate the life from the work. Thus, there is no contradiction in Jeffrey's judgment that Burns is 'entitled to the rank of a great and original genius'.[72]

Such a critical judgment might lead one to suspect that Burns has been validated as a leading British poet. Nothing could be further from the truth; in Jeffrey's review, Burns is venerated only as a Scottish poet writing in Scots. Jeffrey writes of the difficulties facing non-Scottish readers of

Burns' poetry: 'All his best pieces are written in Scotch; and … it is impossible … to form any adequate judgment of their merits, without a pretty long residence among those who still use that language'.[73] Burns is an acquired taste, fully savored only by native Scots. This is nothing for Scottish readers to be ashamed of, Jeffrey insists, but it is nevertheless an 'infantile' taste:

> This Scotch is not to be considered as a provincial dialect, the vehicle only of rustic vulgarity and rude local humour. It is the language of a whole country,—long an independent kingdom, and still separate in its laws, character and manners. It is by no means peculiar to the vulgar; but is the common speech of the whole nation *in early life*.[74]

Although a 'great and original genius', Burns appeals primarily (or perhaps, only) to those Scots who have not progressed beyond 'early life'. Jeffrey's review ends by negating the premise he had established at the opening; although Burns' achievements are diminished by envisioning him as a labouring-class 'prodigy', nonetheless this is the best way to appreciate him. Jeffrey states this quite plainly: 'It is impossible to read the productions of Burns, along with his history, without forming a higher idea of the intelligence, taste, and accomplishments of the peasantry, than most of those in the higher ranks are disposed to entertain'.[75]

In his unsigned review in the first number of *Quarterly Review* from February 1809, Walter Scott offers another influential interpretation of Burns and his body of work. Unlike Jeffrey, Scott begins with the worst of Burns and describes the effects of the poet's moral failings: 'The extravagance of genius with which this wonderful man was gifted, being in his later and more evil days directed to no fixed or general purpose, was, in the morbid state of his health and feelings, apt to display itself in hasty sallies of virulent and unmerited severity'.[76] In Scott's view, Burns suffered from the excessive 'dispensing power' of his genius, which led him to injure those around him. Due to such displays of errant temper, Burns needed 'the *pious care* with which the late excellent Dr. Currie had performed the task of editing the works of Burns'.[77] In Scott's estimation, Currie's editorial emendations and censorship were necessary post-mortem operations that the poet required in order to preserve and present a suitable literary reputation. Owing to the fact that Burns had 'the character of one of the most singular men by whose appearance our age has been distinguished',[78] he was not an ordinary (or even extraordinary) labouring-class 'prodigy', as Jeffrey had noted. Following this line of thought, Burns was exceptional in a different way: 'Burns was in truth the child of passion and feeling. His character was *not simply* that of a peasant exalted into notice by uncommon literary attainments, but *bore a stamp* which must have distinguished him in the highest as in the lowest situation of life'.[79] Scott examines the 'lowness' of Burns' origins in order to postulate a transhistorical theory that would accommodate a genius such as the poet. He writes that

> The dignity, the spirit, the indignation of Burns was that of a plebeian, of a high-souled plebeian indeed, of a citizen of Rome or Athens, but still of a plebeian untinged with the slightest shade of that spirit of chivalry which since the feudal times has pervaded the higher ranks of European society. ... The lowness of his birth, and habits of society, prevented rules of punctilious delicacy from making any part of his education.[80]

Burns' 'plebeian' status, along with his genius, accounted for his unruly behavior as well as his thoroughly emotional responses to the world around him. Where Heron had praised Burns' 'delicacy' of feeling, Scott finds only excessive, embarrassing, plebeian excess. Of the poet's politics, Scott dismisses them out of hand by noting that 'the political predilections, for they could hardly be termed principles, of Burns, were entirely determined by his feelings'.[81]

As in Jeffrey's review, Scott assesses the poet's language choices and prefers the Scots productions. His view of Burns' verse in English is more nuanced than Jeffrey's, suggesting that there is a paucity in English itself that prevented Burns' genius from being expressed in that language:

> There are a few attempts at English verse, in which, as usual, Burns falls beneath himself. … His use of English was *voluntary*, and for a short time; but when assumed as a primary and indispensable rule of composition, the comparative penury of rhimes, and the want of a thousand emphatic words which his habitual acquaintance with the Scottish supplied, rendered his expression confined and embarrassed.[82]

It is partly his lack of facility that causes Burns' English verse to fall below expected standards, but the verse also fails due to the linguistic inflexibility of the English language.[83] This is a subtle nationalist gesture on Scott's part, where Scots is implicitly promoted as a prime vehicle for poetic expression. Scott does not expand upon this point, but he valorises Burns' facility in Scots by praising 'the character of this wonderful and self-taught genius'.[84] Suggesting that Burns is an autodidact allows Scott to firmly situate Burns within Scottish literary history alone, apart from 'foreign' influences that would allow the poet to be appreciated and understood by those beyond Scotland's borders.[85]

The last major critical examination from this period, Thomas Carlyle's unsigned review of John G. Lockhart's *Life of Burns* in the *Edinburgh Review* from December 1828, takes the representation of Burns' genius in a different direction. Claiming that Burns 'appears not only as a true British poet, but as one of the most considerable British men of the eighteenth century',[86] Carlyle examines the notion of Burns as a poetic prodigy in order to account for his continuing popularity. He writes that

> Burns first came upon the world as a prodigy; and was, in that character, entertained by it, in the usual fashion, with loud, vague, tumultuous wonder, speedily subsiding into censure and neglect; till his early and most mournful death again awakened an enthusiasm for him, which, especially as there was now nothing to be done, and much to be spoken, has prolonged itself into our time.[87]

For Carlyle, Burns can only be apprehended fragmentarily, owing to the shortness of his life and the nature of his genius. In highly poetic imagery, Carlyle writes that 'shrouded in such baleful vapours, the genius of Burns was never seen in clear azure splendour, enlightening the world: but some beams from it did, by fits, pierce through; and it tinted those clouds with rainbow and orient colours, into a glory and stern grandeur, which men silently gazed on with wonder and tears'.[88]

The emphatic quality of such recognitions of Burns suggests that the poet's influence results from a complex association of life story, character, and literary accomplishment. Within this representation of Burns, his biography is magnified by reference to tragedy, constructing an image of the poet as doomed, tragic hero: 'He was often advised to write a tragedy', Carlyle writes, 'time and means were not lent him for this; but through life he enacted a tragedy, and one of the deepest'.[89] No longer solely prodigy or plebeian, Burns becomes (in Carlyle's view) a flawed yet imposing genius of the first order, one who is accessible only in fragmented glimpses of what might have been: 'All that remains of Burns, the Writings he has left, seem to us … no more than a poor mutilated fraction of what was in him; brief, broken glimpses of a genius that could never shew itself complete'.[90] Carlyle's assessment – apprehending the 'genius' of Burns through 'incomplete glimpses' – illuminates the constant and fragmentary process of reputation-building surrounding Burns in the early nineteenth century, a process that closely tied the poet's life, language, and nation together in a complex bond that shows little sign of breaking.

NOTES

[1] J. DeLancey Ferguson, 'The Earliest Obituary of Burns: Its Authorship and Influence', *Modern Philology* 32.2 (1934), 179-84 (p. 184). For a discussion of Thomson's relationship to Burns, see Carol McGuirk, 'George Thomson and Robert Burns: With Friends Like These', *Eighteenth-Century Scotland* 9 (1995), 16-20.

[2] Donald A. Low, ed. *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 99. This edition remains an essential compendium of Burns' early critical reception.

[3] Low, 1974, p. 99.

[4] Ibid., p. 100.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 99.

[7] Ibid., p. 100.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 101.

[10] Ferguson, 1934, p. 184. Ferguson's article persuasively debunks the 'dissipated' character imputed to Burns in Thomson's obituary.

[11] Ronnie Young, 'Genius, Men, and Manners: Burns and Eighteenth-Century Scottish Criticism', *Scottish Studies Review* 9.2 (2008), 129-147 (p. 129). For further discussion of Burns and 'genius', see Thomas Crawford, 'Burns, Genius, and Major Poetry', in *Love and Liberty: Robert Burns, A Bicentenary Celebration*, ed. Kenneth Simpson (East Linton: Tuckwell, 1997), 341-353. For the relationship between genius theory and class, see Tim Burke, 'Ann Yearsley and the Distribution of Genius in Early Romantic Culture', in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth*, ed. Thomas Woodman (New York: St. Martins Press, 1998), 215-32.

[12] Young, 2008, p. 129. For further discussion of the 'myth-building' surrounding Burns, see the entry on Burns in *Scottish Literature in English and Scots*, ed. Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan, and Allan MacGillivray (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2002), 46-169.

[13] Quoted in Low, 1974, p. 101.

[14] Low, 1974, p. 102.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid. The phrase translates as 'lively force of mind'.

[17] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., pp. 102-3.

[20] Ibid., p. 103. Walter Scott also refers to the poet's disarming, often offensive satirical wit in mixed company (see Low, 1974, pp. 261-2).

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid. It seems likely that Riddell is alluding here to the notorious 'Rape of the Sabine Women' incident that occurred at her home with Burns; see Catherine Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns*, 1930 (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1990), 328-31.

[23] This phrase refers to Henry Mackenzie's famous encapsulation of Burns in his *Lounger* review of the poet's works: 'with what uncommon penetration and sagacity *this Heaven-taught ploughman*, from his humble and unlettered station, has looked upon men and manners' (Low, 1974, p. 70. Emphasis mine).

[24] Low, 1974, pp. 104, 104-5.

[25] Ibid., p. 106.

[26] Ibid. On the appeal of such characterizations of genius to Romantic poets, see Marshall Brown, *Preromanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 82-112.

[27] Ibid., p. 107.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Edward Cowan made this point in a keynote lecture entitled 'The Philosopher, The Physician, The Fanatic, The Fraudster, and the First Secretary: the "Doonhame" Creation of Robert Burns' at the Robert Burns at 250: An International Conference at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina on April 2, 2009.

[31] Robert Heron, *A Memoir of the Life of the Late Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, 1797), p. 3.

[32] Ibid., p. 4.

[33] Ibid., p. 5.

[34] For analysis of Burns' reading habits, see John Robotham, 'The Reading of Robert Burns', in *Critical Essays on Robert Burns*, ed. Carol McGuirk (London: Prentice Hall, 1998), 281-97.

[35] Heron, 1797, p. 6.

[36] Ibid., p. 15.

[37] Ibid., p. 9.

[38] Ibid., pp. 9, 10. Emphasis mine.

[39] Ibid., pp. 47, 50.

[40] Ibid., p. 49.

[41] Ibid., p. 50.

[42] Ibid., p. 10.

[43] Ibid., p. 45.

[44] Ibid., pp. 10, 52.

[45] Ibid., p. 50.

[46] Ibid., pp. 46-7.

[47] Ibid., p. 47.

[48] Ibid., pp. 53-4. This is the earliest mention I have found of Burns as a 'hero' in early criticism of the poet.

[49] Ibid., p. 33.

[50] Ibid., p. 3.

[51] For an extended analysis of Currie's relationship to Burns, see Robert D. Thornton, *James Currie, the Entire Stranger, and Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1963). See also Jeffrey Skoblow, 'Dr. Currie, C'est Moi', *Studies in Scottish Literature* 30 (1998), 109-15, Leith Davis, 'James Currie's 'Works of Robert Burns': The Politics of Hypochondriasis', *Studies in Romanticism* 36.1 (1997), 48-66 and Carol McGuirk, 'James Currie and the Making of the Burns Myth', *Selected Essays on Scottish Language and Literature*, ed. Steven R. McKenna (Lewiston:

Edwin Mellen, 1992), 149-62.

[52] Low, 1974, pp. 135, 133.

[53] Ibid., p. 132. Emphasis mine.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., p. 140. Emphasis mine.

[56] Ibid., p. 135.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., p. 133. The imagery of the 'stamp' or 'impression' of 'genius' is frequently found in the early critical responses to Burns.

[59] Ibid., p. 144.

[60] Ibid., p. 133.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., p. 153.

[63] See Andrew Nash, 'The Cotter's Kailyard', in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, ed. Robert Crawford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 180-97 for a detailed examination of the legacy of 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'.

[64] Low, 1974, p. 143.

[65] Ibid., p. 144.

[66] Ibid., p. 153.

[67] Jeffrey's role in constructing and disseminating 'standards of taste' by means of the *Edinburgh Review* has been well-documented; see for instance Philip Flynn, *Francis Jeffrey* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1978), and D. Nichol Smith, ed., *Jeffrey's Literary Criticism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1910). For a more general account of the influence of the Edinburgh periodicals, see Charles A. Knight, 'The Created World of the Edinburgh Periodicals', *Scottish Literary Journal* 6.2 (1979), 20-36.

[68] Low, 1974, p. 178.

[69] Ibid., p. 179.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid. p. 182.

[72] Ibid., pp. 184-5.

[73] Ibid., p. 186.

[74] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

[75] Ibid., p. 194. Burns is frequently praised as an exemplar of 'hardy' Scottish peasants who excel all others. This tendency may owe to the desire to 'naturalise' labouring-class populations as a sentimentalized, non-threatening class.

[76] Ibid., p. 196. Along with Jeffrey's, Scott's review influenced many nineteenth-century perceptions and representations of Burns. For an account of Scott's importance as a critic, see

Caroline McCracken-Flesher, *Possible Scotlands: Walter Scott and the Story of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3-28.

[77] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

[78] Ibid., p. 198.

[79] Ibid., p. 199. It is worth again to highlight the use of the metaphors of 'stamping' and 'impressing'.

[80] Ibid., p. 201.

[81] Ibid., p. 203.

[82] Ibid., p. 208.

[83] Scott's complaint about the English language is a somewhat unique statement in nineteenth-century criticism of Burns. See J. Derrick McLure, *Language, Poetry and Nationhood* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2000) for more on Scottish views of English during this time.

[84] Low, 1974, p. 209. For more on Burns as a 'self-taught' poet, see Juliet Prandi, *The Poetry of the Self-Taught: An Eighteenth-Century Phenomenon* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 13-38.

[85] In his *Life of Burns* (1828), John G. Lockhart follows his father-in-law Scott's lead in envisioning Burns as a solely Scottish poet. Writing that 'the poetry of Burns has had most powerful influence in reviving and strengthening the national feelings of his countrymen', Lockhart suggests that the poet's primary role was the promotion of nationalist unity (Low, 1974, p. 345). In Lockhart's view, following this cause caused Burns to sacrifice himself for his country: 'Whatever genius has since been devoted to the illustration of the national manners, and sustaining thereby of 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' (Low, 1974, p. 345). For more on Lockhart's views of literature and the nation, see Thomas C. Richardson, 'John Lockhart's Burns: Stirring "National Enthusiasm"', *Studies in Scottish Literature* 30 (1998), 157-66. See also Peter F. Morgan, 'Lockhart's Literary Personality', *Scottish Literary Journal* 2.1 (1975), 27-35.

[86] Low, 1974, p. 351.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid., p. 352.

[89] Ibid., p. 353.

[90] Ibid., p. 355.

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Thirteen Ways of Glossing 'To a Haggis':
Disputing the Borders of Robert Burns' Paratexts

Alex Watson

'We have read Burns too much through glossaries and not enough through dictionaries' announced Murray Pittock at the *Robert Burns Conference* in January 2009.[1] In his paper, Pittock drew attention to the multiple meanings of the Scots words in Burns' 'To a Louse', arguing that – by relying too frequently on glossaries – critics and readers have shut themselves off from the poem's rich polysemy. Pittock's statements are of considerable importance for the future of Burns studies, given that he is one of the main authorities involved in the construction of the new Burns critical edition and a key player in recent calls to put Burns at the centre of the British literary canon. But they are also of significance for their recognition of the key role played by the glossary in mediating between reader and Burns' text.

From the glossary Burns himself created for his debut 1786 Kilmarnock edition onwards, his poetry has frequently been accompanied by a paratextual lexicon, translating his Scots into English: from John Cuthbertson's eccentric, encyclopaedic 1886 *Complete Glossary*; to James Kinsley's careful annotations to the 1968 critical edition; to Clark McGinn's verse translation of 'To a Haggis' in his 2008 *The Ultimate Guide to Being Scottish*. As I will show, while readers are likely to consult only one glossed version of the poem, their reading experience can differ depending on the edition they choose. Importantly, as soon as Burns' first collection was published, reviewers claimed the glossary was an essential aid for English and even Scottish readers struggling with Burns' Scots. In his famous 1786 review, the Edinburgh writer and reviewer Henry Mackenzie reported that '[e]ven in Scotland, the provincial dialect which … [Burns has] used, is now read with a difficulty which greatly damps the pleasure of the reader; in England it cannot be read at all, without … a constant reference to a glossary'[2]. As I will show, by translating Scots into English, the glossary also negotiates the relationship between Scots and English culture.

In this article, I seek to challenge Pittock's claim that the glossary restricts Burns, and demonstrate the vital avenue it can offer for inventive appropriations and creative interventions. But, more importantly, I wish to use his comments as a starting point for a discussion of the complex and ambivalent role played by the glossary in Burns' reception and dissemination. In one sense, the fluid nature of the glossary renders Burns' work vulnerable to quasi-colonial editorial interventions. But in another, it enables the poet and his readers to cross cultural and linguistic boundaries in ways that transcend and evade editors' narrow interpretative parameters.

Crucially, Gérard Genette omits glossaries from *Paratexts: Thesholds of Interpretation* (1987: trans 2001), his study of those elements of the book – such as titles, forewords, epigraphs and footnotes – that mediate between reader and text. I argue that considering the glossary as a paratext can enrich and complicate Genette's model. I will make frequent reference to Burns' editors' additional paratexts – especially dedications, introductions and prefaces – in order to show how they use their glossaries as part of co-ordinated campaigns to frame his work within a specific reading. But I have chosen to focus on the glossary because it enables editors to go one step further, and intervene directly within reading process. In so doing, I seek to show how the example of Burns' glossaries challenges Genette's insistence that 'the implicit creed and spontaneous ideology of the paratext' is always 'the authorial point of view'. On the contrary, this example demonstrates that, far from being 'an undisputed territory',[3] the paratext is a zone of often confrontational transactions between different forms of textual and political authority. At the same time, Burns and his editors' translations of Scots terms into English highlights the important role paratexts play in negotiating power-relations between different cultures.

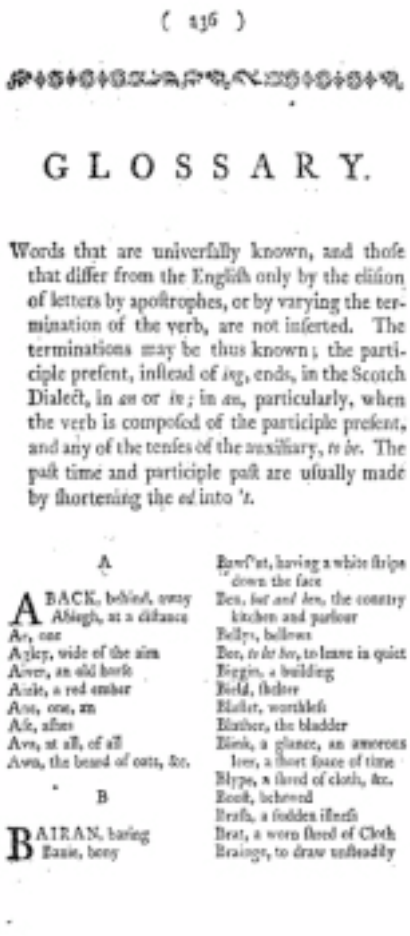
In recent years, scholars working in a variety of periods have drawn attention to the key role played by paratexts in literature written in Scotland. Susan Manning has investigated how Scott interrupts the linear narrative of the *Waverley* novels with antiquarian annotation, claiming: 'Scott's novels used notes deliberately to "withdraw" the reader's sympathetic engagement from the narrative towards competing arts of narration and sources of authority'.[4] Kevin Halliwell has highlighted the nineteenth-century novelist John Galt's use of paratexts to provide 'a veneer of authentication' within his novels about North America, *Lawrie Todd* (1830) and *Bogle Corbet* (1831).[5] And Glyn White has explored the footnotes created by the fictional annotator Sidney Workman in the 'Epilogue' of Alasdair Gray's experimental novel *Lanark* (1981), describing this section as 'a typographical crescendo, in which the established layout of the text is altered, gradually and progressively, as descriptive running heads, footnotes and marginal notes enclose the linear narrative'.[6] In this article, I wish to switch the focus of this discussion, from questions of authentication and narration to issues of cultural translation. At the same time, I seek to demonstrate how an attention to this paratextual apparatus can complicate the idea of a 'Scottish' literature.

In the first section, I will provide an account of how different editors have utilised their own versions of Burns' glossary to enclose his work within different nationalist and imperialist ideologies. In the second, I will return to Burns, and show how the glossary highlights aspects of the poet's work that have been obscured by his editors' efforts to position him as Scotland's National Bard. I have chosen to present my examination of editorial glossaries before my exploration of Burns because – as I will show – this discussion provides a lens through which we can better appreciate the complexities of Burns' broader paratextual practice.

In particular, my claims draw on a close inspection of thirteen different versions of Burns' 1787 poem 'To a Haggis'. I have chosen this poem because, as I will show, its position within the Burns Supper exemplifies the same egalitarianism and openness to creative participation that marks not only Burns' glossary, but his work and legacy as a whole. Moreover, the fact that it was not printed in Burns' first edition means that it usefully highlights the changes Burns made to the glossary when he revised the collection for its second publication. Given that Burns wrote a huge number of poems, and that there are over two thousand editions of the poet in existence, this is obviously a small aspect of Burns' textual history. I have deliberately kept my focus limited, because I wish to demonstrate how these glossaries offer a revealing case-study in how even the tiniest nooks and crannies of texts bear the traces of struggles between individuals and discourses. In order to engage with the major editorial developments, I have inspected the key critical editions of Burns' work. I have also consulted a number of popular versions, so as to sketch some of the alternative ways in which his work has been glossed.[7]

Marginalising Scots: Editorial Interventions in Burns' Glossary

The glossary can be an extremely subtle form of editorial intervention. Editors tend to follow the model of the glossary Burns himself placed at the back of his debut collection (see Illustration One), which is neatly arranged into two columns, with Scots terms printed alongside mostly one-word English entries:



(236)

GLOSSARY.

Words that are univerſally known, and thoſe that differ from the Engliſh only by the eliſion of letters by apoſtrophes, or by varying the termination of the verb, are not inſerted. The terminations may be thus known; the participle preſent, inſtead of *ing*, ends, in the Scotch Dialect, in *an* or *in*; in *an*, particularly, when the verb is compoſed of the participle preſent, and any of the tenſes of the auxiliary, *to be*. The paſt time and participle paſt are uſually made by ſhortening the *ed* into 't.

A

ABACK, behind, away
Abeigh, at a diſtance
An, one
Ayley, wide of the aim
Aiver, an old horſe
Ainle, a red ember
Ane, one, an
Ase, aſhes
Ava, at all, of all
Awn, the beard of oats, &c.

B

BAIRAN, baring
Bairn, bony
Bawl'ſt, having a white ſtripe down the face
Ben, *but and ben*, the country kitchen and parlour
Bellys, bellows
Bee, *to let bee*, to leave in quiet
Beggin, a building
Beild, ſhelter
Blellet, worthleſs
Blather, the bladder
Blink, a glance, an amorous look, a ſhort ſpace of time
Blype, a ſhred of cloth, &c.
Bonk, bulwerk
Braſh, a ſudden illneſs
Brat, a worn ſhred of Cloth
Braing, to draw raſhneſſly

Illustration One: Robert Burns, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Kilmarnock, 1786), p. 236.

Frequently, editors repeat Burns' exact phrasing. For example, Burns' use of the English phrase 'by and by' (p. 346) to translate 'belyve' (line 21) is also deployed in five other editions.[8]

Nonetheless, if we place the glossaries alongside one another, differences in layout and content quickly emerge. In the recent Canongate edition, we can see that Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg place 'To a Haggis' within a line-by-line gloss. And Sydney Goodsir Smith opts to save the reader the trouble of flipping to the back of the volume by presenting definitions at the bottom of the page. In the glossary provided in the *Burns Country* website 'sonsie' is cheerful and easy-going: 'pleasant, good-natured, jolly'[9]; in the Edinburgh edition it is twinklingly flirtatious: 'having sweet, engaging looks'.[10] Moreover, while forty-four of the terms in 'To a Haggis' appear in the glossary in Burns' Edinburgh edition, sixty-two of the Scots terms in the poem were glossed at least once in the volumes I have consulted.

In keeping with the often-elusive nature of these mediations, Burns' editors tend to represent their glosses as innocuous attempts to alleviate the difficulties of Burns' Scots. John Cuthbertson claims he is 'removing a single stumbling-block from the path of the readers of the Ayrshire Bard'.[11] Or as Clark McGinn put it, when I interviewed him earlier this year: 'The gloss is only an apparatus. We're not saying Burns is incomprehensible or that you need a beastly ministration between him and people. By and large people get by – they just need a little help to get started'.[12] By presenting such interventions as impartial activities, such editors obscure the extent to which they inevitably engage in interpretation and appropriation.

For instance, if we compare James Kinsley's 1968 critical edition with the more recent Canongate version, we can recognise how different glossaries present divergent readings. James Kinsley provides an exhaustive glossary of 'Scots words', 'English words which are obsolete', 'terms of art peculiar to Scotland', 'Scottish forms and spellings of English words', 'colloquialisms' and 'cant terms'.[13] And in his commentary on 'To a Haggis', Kinsley also presents extracts from eighteenth-century recipes and later Burns biographies as evidence for his claim that the haggis 'owed its status … to the complexities of its preparation, and to the limited supply of livers and sheep-stomachs … on small farms'.[14] In contrast, as well as providing a line-by-line gloss, Noble and Hogg add a long endnote to the poem in which they claim that 'Burns portrays the haggis as causative of the virility of the Scottish common people'.[15] While Kinsley locates Burns' work as an artefact of philological and ethnographic interest, Noble and Hogg present the poem as an example of Burns' robust democratic nationalist sensibility.

Such differences become more marked if we place them within Noble and Hogg's broader editorial framework. In the brief 'Editor's Preface', Noble describes Kinsley as 'a conservative eighteenth-century scholar with neither patience nor understanding of Romantic radical poetics'.[16] In so doing, he positions the Canongate edition as reclaiming Burns as a strikingly modern 'radically dissenting democratic poet'.[17] In the conclusion, I will return to the political and national significance of Noble and Hogg's framing. For the moment, I wish to focus on how they use these strident, polemical interventions to further set their version in opposition to what they see as the sedate traditionalism of Kinsley's edition.

As many Burns specialists have noted,[18] an important problem with the Canongate edition is that its editors eschew Kinsley's carefulness as well as his conservatism. Noble accuses Kinsley of producing 'overladen commentary' in order to demonstrate his 'exhibitionist erudition'.[19] However, not only does the Canongate contain significant textual errors, but the sheer size and acrimonious tone of the editors' annotation and glosses have the effect of eliding the boundary between text and paratext. As Burns' recent biographer Robert Crawford comments, 'in the Noble and Hogg version the hierarchy between poem and commentary tends to blur: the sometimes

senseless prose boxes in the poems, and at other times even bullies them'.[20] The Canongate edition therefore shows that the glossary acts as a clandestine site of conflict, in which different editors advance competing versions of Burns to assert the primacy of their own edition. But it also reveals how the glossary enables such editorial warfare to trespass into the text itself.

Such rivalry approaches its apogee in the 1835 edition edited by James Hogg and the Glasgow poet and ballad collector William Motherwell. In the 'Preface' to the edition, the duties of each editor are clearly separated: Hogg is to provide literary criticism ('Critical Comments and Elucidations') and Motherwell contextual material ('literary, biographical and anecdotal information').[21] The two editors write notes individually, marking them with their initials ('H' for 'Hogg; 'M' for 'Motherwell').

But there is an obvious struggle between them. Motherwell emphasises Burns' 'powers of imagination',[22] portraying him as an isolated Romantic genius that the readers can only fully appreciate by familiarising themselves with his biography. Hogg instead stresses Burns' local peasant origins in order to draw a direct line of continuation between 'the Ayrshire bard'[23] and himself, the Ettrick Shepherd. Each adopts a contrasting image of Burns that places their partner on the periphery and their own contributions at the centre. On several occasions, these different approaches burst into battle. In his note to Burns' anti-kirk satire 'The Holy Fair', Motherwell quotes approvingly Currie's claim that the poem 'degenerates into personal satire'.[24] Hogg instead takes the edge off Burns' vituperation, celebrating the poem as 'singularly ludicrous and laughable', and defending its harsh tone by claiming that 'Burns knew not the power of his own whip-hand'.[25] Such competing views disprove the assertion that editorial commentary simply provides impartial explanation, revealing the extent to which it is the product of professional rivalry.

Moreover, the apparent ideological neutrality of the glossary also provides editors with an opportunity to enforce a specific construction of Burns' political and literary identity – at the same time as concealing that they are doing so. As we saw with the Canongate edition, the gloss can form a discrete part of a co-ordinated campaign within an editor's paratexts. Similarly, in the first critical edition of Burns, the four-volume 1800 version, the physician and author James Currie scarcely alters Burns' original gloss, except to add a few variations of Scots taken from his own first-hand encounters with people and places in Ayrshire. For instance, as well as including Burns' definition of 'feckless' ('puny, weak, silly'), Currie adds 'Feck' and 'Feckfu'' ('many, plenty' and 'large, brainy stout').[26] When considered in isolation, such additions appear insignificant. But when read alongside the lengthy 'Dedication' and 'Prefatory Remarks' Currie presents at the opening of the first volume, we can recognise their broader importance.

In these introductory paratexts, Currie presents a quasi-anthropological image of Burns as 'a Scottish peasant'.[27] In so doing, he seeks to render the radical poet innocuous for polite readers, announcing: 'to secure the suffrage of…[generous] minds, all topics are omitted…that have a tendency to awake the animosity of party'.[28] Far from depoliticising Burns, however, Currie's image of the peasant poet enables him to frame the poet's work within a conservative image of rural Southern Scotland. Currie informs us that '[t]he information and the religious education of the peasantry of Scotland, promote sedateness of conduct, and habits of thought and reflection'.[29] Currie's Lowlands is not only a praiseworthy model of religious piety and political passivity, but a society undergoing cultural dissolution:

> Since the Union … their manners and dialect are undergoing a rapid change. Even the farmers of the present day appear to have less of the peculiarities of their country in their speech, than the men of letters of the last generation.[30]

In his references to 'manners and dialect', Currie utilises the language of anthropology to legitimise the Lowlands' disintegration. According to him, the disappearance of a distinctive way of life is a necessary standardisation of 'peculiarities': an inevitable part of the beneficial process by which the Union has brought modernity to Scotland.

In keeping with this analysis, Currie categorises Burns' poetry as the elegiac expression of a dying Scotland: 'a monument … to the expiring generation of an ancient and once independent nation'.[31] In Currie's view, Burns' poetry is, at once, the most intense cultural expression of Scottish national identity and the marker of its necessary absorption within a broader Britishness. And Currie deploys this construction to suggest that the poet's radicalism and Jacobite sympathies can be safely overlooked because they no longer have any relevance to the present. As such, Currie's edition offers a vivid illustration of the fact that the representation of Burns as an exemplar of a Scottish literary tradition need not be wedded to either a Scottish nationalist politics or a broader sympathy with marginalised societies – a point I will return to in the conclusion. Given that Currie's edition arguably remained the dominant version until James Kinsley's version,[32] his critical construction has had an enormous influence on Burns' reception. While the glossary plays a small part in Currie's broader paratextual manoeuvres, we can recognise that its apparently neutral interventions form part of Currie's deliberate attempt to frame Burns within an ethnographic gaze and thereby contain the poet within a conservative British nationalist ideology.

Other editors deploy the glossary in a more overtly ideological manner. In his *Complete Glossary*, Cuthbertson places Burns at the centre of the English canon, glossing him beside parallel passages from Chaucer, Shakespeare and Swift, and extracts from both dictionaries of middle and old English and glossaries of provincial English dialects. He claims: '[m]y endeavour has

been to show to English readers that by far the greater number of the poet's words for which a glossary is generally consulted are to be found in their own authors'.[33] By demonstrating the continued life of Burns' language within modern English, Cuthbertson could be said to challenge Currie's representation of Burns' work as the dying words of a Scottish tradition. However, such a suggestion is countered by Cuthbertson's exclusive focus on older and provincial forms of English. In so doing, he locates Scots culture in a peripheral location at a pre-modern stage of history, paving the way for its absorption within Britishness. As a result, Cuthbertson goes even further than Currie in breaking the links between Burns and his original culture.

Indeed, it is possible to argue that, in the very act of placing Scots terms in a glossary, writers and editors remove it from social reality, reducing a living language into a museum relic. For instance, by printing the English definitions in normal type – but italicising the Scots – Goodsir Smith could be said to present Scots as the exception to the English norm. And by displaying their gloss alongside the poem, Noble and Hogg subtly signal to readers the words they should and should not know, increasing their reliance upon editorial mediations and distancing them from Burns' Scots. And interestingly *none* of the glossaries I have examined choose to gloss the French terms Burns uses in the poem – 'ragoût' (25); 'olio' (26) and 'fricassé' (27) – each presuming that their readers are more likely to be familiar with aspects of French culture than Scots.

Certainly, many of Burns' editors led efforts to ostracise Scots as a vulgar tongue. James Currie, for instance, compared the 'dislike' we supposedly feel at hearing Burns' Scots to 'the species of disgust which we feel at seeing a female of high birth in the dress of a rustic'.[34] Here Currie places Scots as a peripheral, subordinate culture, which breaks through the gaze of the dominant English spectator, only to be dismissed with a shrug. In a similar fashion, Henley and Henderson introduce their glossary by portraying Scots as an obscure language, hardly known even by its speakers, speculating that 'there are Scotsmen, all the world over, who will not disclaim such help … in … realising … words which, mayhap, they have forgotten, and of others which, mayhap, they never rightly knew'. Far from seeking to stir interest in Scots, Henley and Henderson join Currie in presenting Burns as the final hot embers of a burnt-out Scots tradition, labelling the poet '*ultimus Scotorum*, the last expression of the old Scots world'.[35]

Moreover, it is easy to see that glossators frequently overlook the singularity and strangeness of Burns' Scots. For instance, in line thirty-three of 'To A Haggis', Burns refers to the 'spindle shank' of the 'auld Guidman' he addressed earlier in line twenty-three. If we glance at the *Dictionary of the Scots Language*, we can see that Burns uses the noun 'shank' to refer to the lower part of a person's leg, between the knee and ankle. But his usage is shadowed and enriched by the additional meanings of this term – as the leg of an animal or insect; a tree trunk; a stocking; the straight part of a nail; and the shaft of a column or pillar. This nexus of meanings evokes the

mindset of an agricultural society, in which the boundaries between human and animal, private and public, are fluid and interchangeable. Moreover, by adding the adjectival noun 'spindle', Burns likens this part of the man's legs to the rod that twists wool into thread, creating a vivid, cartoon-like image of them as angular stalks, spinning and revolving in a sprightly manner. However, none of the glosses I have encountered draw any attention to this metaphor. Most do not even translate the phrase – and those that do drain it of its visual and visceral power, rendering it prosaically as 'thin leg' in the 1896 Chambers[36] and the Canongate,[37] or 'skinny legs' in McGinn's translation.[38]

However, one powerful *defence* of the glossary is provided by looking at those editions that *omit* it, such as the 1861 *Works of Robert Burns*. The approach of this version is neatly encapsulated in the illustration presented on the title-page (see Illustration Two) which presents Burns on the lower left, as an ethereal Shelleyan spirit, resting his head on the lap of his dog Coila, with Tam' O Shanter behind him. Facing him are William Wallace and Robert the Bruce – who are now transformed into loyal knights of the British crown. Such an image robs Burns of his regional specificity and democratic resonance, reducing his poems to medievalist fantasies. In the 'Preface', the editor even goes so far as to present Burns as an English-language writer, claiming that 'the name of ROBERT BURNS is now familiar to all, but his memory is cherished with affectionate enthusiasm not by his countrymen alone, but by the generous-hearted of all nations, wherever the English language has penetrated, or British literature is cultivated'.[39] By presenting Burns' work as an example of the excellence of English literature, this edition suppresses Burns' Scottish origins, deploying his work to advance the spread of English, the global ascendancy of Anglophone culture and British imperial ambitions.

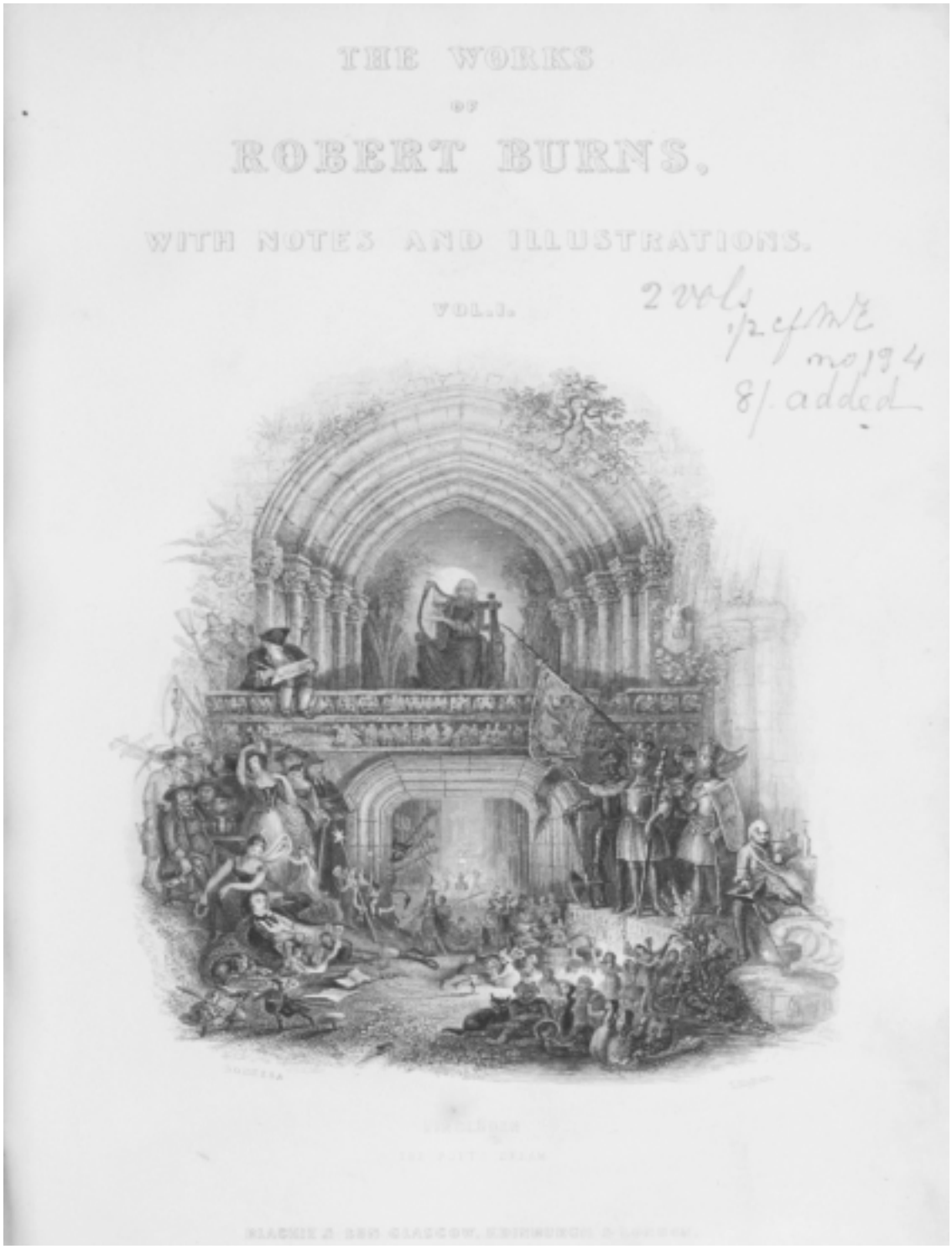


Illustration Two: Robert Burns, *The Work of Robert Burns, with notes and illustrations* (Glasgow, Edinburgh and London: Blackie and Son, 1861), p. iii.

Similarly, not only does the Hogg and Motherwell edition omit the glossary, Hogg even goes so far as to claim certain terms are utterly untranslatable. In his note to Burns' 'Address to the Deil', Hogg cheekily goads the English reader: '"Spairges" is the best Scots word in its place I ever saw. An Englishman can have no idea of the kind of ludicrous image it conveys'.[40]

Importantly, Hogg's stress on the irreducible singularity of specific Scots terms is by no means wedded to an egalitarian politics. Instead, Hogg reduces Burns' radicalism either to mawkishness – 'the kind feeling heart for any thing that is suffering' – or resentment: 'Burns' jealousy of the rich and great … indicate a bitter, scornful, malignant spirit'.[41] Hogg's insistence on the distinctiveness of Scots effectively suppresses both Scots culture and the politics that underscore Burns' depiction of it.

The examples of Hogg and other nineteenth-century editors complicate Murray Pittock's argument by demonstrating that the elimination of the gloss limits, rather than liberates, the reader. On the other hand, we have seen that Pittock is right to argue that this apparatus can impose restrictions on interpretation. If both the presence *and* the absence of the glossary have the effect of marginalising important aspects of the poetry, are there any options left for readers and editors? In order to answer this question, we must now return to Burns.

In the next section, I challenge recent critical attempts to position Burns at the centre of a Scottish national canon. For instance, in his recent biography of the poet, Robert Crawford depicts him as the Scottish equivalent to Shakespeare: 'Scotland's bard'.[42] Likewise, Hogg and Noble announce '[i]t is the primary impulse behind this edition…to make Burns available to a contemporary Scottish consciousness'.[43] I argue that such an approach breaks Burns out of one limiting interpretative paradigm, only to confine him in another. Instead, I show how there are two countervailing trends in Burns' paratexts. On the one hand, in his main paratexts, such as the 'Preface' to the Kilmarnock edition and the 'Dedication' in the Edinburgh version, Burns asserts himself as a peasant poet whose work is the expression of a Scottish 'native' culture. On the other, in more marginal locations, such as his footnotes and glossaries, Burns presents a more complex identity, as a broker between Scots and English, existing on the margins between both. As I will show in the conclusion, recovering this marginal Burns draws our attention to aspects of the poet that complicate the very idea of 'nation'. As such, Burns is not only of importance to Scotland, but to the world.

The Poet in the Paratext: The Marginal Burns

As with many of the critical editions we have inspected, Burns' glossary is part of a collection of paratexts, which included the 'Preface' to the Kilmarnock edition, the 'Dedication to the Noblemen

and Gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt' in the Edinburgh version, and the epigraphs and footnotes in both editions. The scrupulousness Burns took in proofreading both of these editions suggests he also prepared these paratexts with great care.[44] Between the two editions, the most marked change Burns made was to expand the glossary considerably, from five pages to twenty-five, at the insistence of his regular correspondent Mrs. Frances Anna Dunlop.[45] This enlargement demonstrates the poet's increased ambition to reach a wider English-speaking audience. At the same time, Dunlop's involvement alerts us to the fact that Burns' paratexts are not straightforward declarations of his authorial intention, but the results of contingency and collaboration.

Burns uses the paratexts he places at the front of the volume to fashion a literary identity as a peasant poet. In the epigraph, he announces himself as 'a Simple Bard, unbroke by rules of Art' (A1). In the 'Preface', Burns consolidates and embellishes this image, declaring '[u]nacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing Poet by rule, he sings the sentiments and manners, he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him, in his and their native language'. And in the 'Dedication' to the Edinburgh edition, Burns appears to develop the nationalist implications of this reference to a 'native language', describing himself as '[a] Scottish Bard, whose highest ambition is to sing his Country's service' (i). Burns uses these paratexts to create the taste in which he might be read. And the success of this strategy has been noted by critics and biographers. James MacKay for instance observes: '[t]he "Preface"…created the myth of the "Heaven-taught ploughman"'.[46] Far from being a naïve rhymer, however, Burns deploys these paratexts to market himself, associating his work with the eighteenth-century vogue for primitive rural purity and ingratiating himself with powerful patrons: he dedicated the edition to an association of Edinburgh noblemen and country gentlemen who had all been subscribers.[47]

Yet, if we examine the more marginal paratexts, an alternative Burns comes into view. Burns creates a series of quasi-ethnographic footnotes, which detail local language and social practices. For instance, in his notes for 'Halloween', he takes the reader through the ceremonies detailed in the poem, explaining each of the dialect terms he uses: *'tocher*, or fortune', *'yird*, or earth', *'custoc*, that is, the heart of the stem' (123). Such notes are remarkable for the intricacy and enthusiasm with which Burns describes local customs. For example, when describing the ceremony in which young men and women pick a '*Stock*, or plant of kail', he informs us '[t]hey must go out, hand in hand, with eyes shut, and pull the first they meet with: its being big or little, straight or crooked, is prophetic of the size and shape of the grand object of all their Spells – the husband or wife' (103). By presenting these linguistic and anthropological details, Burns enables the reader to view the landscape and events of the poems from the perspective of a member of the rural community in question.

As with the notes, Burns uses the glossary to take the reader inside an alternative view of reality: he informs us a '[b]reef' is an 'invulnerable charm' (237) while 'water-kelpies' are 'mischievous spirits … that haunt fords' (240). As his placing of the latter definition within its geographical setting suggests, Burns uses these entries to indicate how intimately Scots is implicated in its regional location and the agricultural labors of its inhabitants: 'Hoddan', for instance, is 'the motion of a sage country farmer on an old cart horse' (238). Here Burns' use of adjectives shows that he is not simply providing literal translations but striving to paint a vivid picture of local existence. His particular choices – 'old' and 'sage' – present the Lowlands as the embodiment of a vanishing way of life. By providing readers with an entry-point into rural mentalities, Burns seeks to contest England's growing cultural hegemony. In the margins of the text, he renegotiates the relationship between Scots and English, rural margin and metropolitan centre.

Importantly, Burns is writing twenty years before the publication of the first full Scots lexicon: Reverend John Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1808). His glossary answers to this absence. Burns formalises conventions of Scots grammar, informing us in his entry for 'mark' that '*this and several other nouns, which in English require an s to form the plural, are in Scotch like the words* sheep, deer, *the same in both numbers*'.[48] In so doing, Burns participates in a tradition of Scots writers providing lexicographical glossaries to translate and legitimise their language. Robert Fergusson's 1773 *Poems* featured a nine-page glossary; and Allan Ramsay's 1729 *Poems* included a still-more elaborate appendage, with lengthy sections on Scots spelling and pronunciation and on the connections between Scots and English. The frequency of such paratexts underline the sense in which to be a Scots poet in the eighteenth century was to live a bilingual existence, on the margins between Scotland and England. While such poets used these paratexts to disseminate information about Scots to a largely English audience, they also created an important record of a culture that was undergoing unprecedented transformation.

By aggregating the scattered details of Scots dialects and demonstrating their grammatical coherence, then, Burns presents Scots as a living archive of a disappearing society. In his 1996 work *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida claims that a 'spectral messianicity' – or intangible belief in a future to come – is 'at work in the concept of the archive'.[49] Similarly, by establishing this archive, Burns provides a foundation for a future in which the inhabitants of the Lowlands can recover their vanishing language and history and relate to the world as one among equivalent entities. His marginal paratexts constitute what the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhaba calls an 'interstitial space': a liminal location in which a minority group can reconstruct their communal identity and relation to the nation.[50]

What is crucial, however, about Burns' approach is that he urges English readers to participate in the rural practices he describes. In one, for instance, he instructs us animatedly to '[t]ake a candle, and, go, alone, to a looking-glass: eat an apple before it … the face of your conjugal partner, *to be*, will be seen in the glass' (109). We can grasp the importance of Burns' technique if we compare his notes with those of other Romantic-period writers. For instance, in the footnotes Robert Southey creates for his Oriental poetic epic *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), Southey distances himself from the fantastical details he provides, by interposing a commentary within them, in which he rejects them as superstitions. Southey, for instance, reproduces a series of snippets from Camillus Leonardus' hermetic textbook, *The Mirror of Stones* (1502) which states that *Alectoria* – a small, crystalline stone – may 'render him who carries it invisible … makes a woman agreeable to her husband … helps to regain a lost Kingdom, and acquire a foreign one' (3: 112). Southey promptly dismisses these ideas as 'a few specimens of the absurd ideas once prevalent respecting precious stones' (3: 111). In contrast, Burns asks his reader to embrace the superstitious aspects of Scots culture.

Importantly, Murray Pittock has recently argued that Burns is singular and exemplary among Romantic poets because these other writers located the alien outside themselves – in the form of Ancient Mariners, Grecian Urns, Leech-gatherers and the like. In contrast, for Burns 'the familiar and alien were comprised in himself as a subject, not located in the objects of his gaze'.[51] Burns' notes and glossary play a key role in this reorientation of the reader's sympathies. In them, Burns reverses the ethnographic gaze, speaking as a representative from *within* Scots society, *not* an observer looking upon it: referring, for instance, to Scots as 'our country-dialect' (117). In so doing, Burns decentres the English metropolitan reader, confronting them with their lack of cultural competence in an alien environment. Yet, far from excluding such readers, he seeks to involve them directly in Lowland customs. Such an approach keeps alive the friction between the two cultures, while enabling a process of mutual translation.

Burns extends these endeavours in his epigraphs for the poems, creating a dialogue between English literature and Scots traditions. For instance, he places the following lines below the title of *The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer*: 'Dearest of Distillation! Last and best!— / —How art thou lost!—' (33). This short passage is a pastiche of lines from Milton's *Paradise Lost*: '[o]f fairest of Creation, last and best … [h]ow thou art lost, how on a sudden lost'.[52] And Burns underlines this by subtitling them 'PARODY ON MILTON' (33). In one sense, Burns' epigraph answers to an 'anxiety of influence': Harold Bloom's term for the battle poets conduct with their predecessors in order to shake off their influence and create original work. By transforming Milton's lines into a snippet of a drinking-song, Burns performs what Bloom calls a 'daemonisation': a movement against a precursor's poem, towards an opposing personal voice.[53]

But Burns performs a subversive shift on English literary culture, as well as one of its greatest poets. He moves Milton from the polite world of English letters to the popular world of Scots song; and from the private scene of the printed page to the communal space of the public house. By placing Milton within a concept of poetry as a collective experience, Burns demonstrates an approach to literature that is startlingly different to the later Romantic emphasis on the private nature of the lyric voice – a point I will return to in the conclusion. In so doing, Burns also reverses the channels of cultural appropriation between English and Scots: the centre is rewritten from the margins. Yet, far from resisting English literature as an oppressive dominant force, Burns embraces it as a space for playful subversion.

In other epigraphs, the Ayrshire Orpheus places his work within an Anglophone literary tradition, comparing his own lines with parallel passages in Milton, Pope and Gray. Such actions were not lost on early respondents. In a review of 1787, John Logan remarked: 'Robert Burns, though he has been represented as an ordinary ploughman … is better acquainted with the English poets than most English authors that have come under review'.[54] As Logan points out, Burns' wider engagement with the English literary canon punctures the myth of the peasant poet. While, in Bloom's lexicon, Burns may 'daemonise' English culture, he does not demonise it. The margins reveal him to participate within it, thereby complicating critical or editorial attempts to position him as the central voice of an opposing Scottish tradition.

Instead, the complexity of Burns' position is highlighted by Burns' title: *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. This paratext demonstrates the important role titles have as markers of affiliation across literary generations: not only does Burns use it to announce his continuity with Scots writers such as Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson, but other writers and editors have in turn alluded to it to associate themselves with him: from Ebeneezer Picken in *Poems and epistles, mostly in the Scottish dialect* (1788) to Robert Crawford in this recent edited collection *New Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (2009).[55] At first glance, Burns' emphatic use of the definite article appears to position Scots as a national tongue. But this is complicated by his categorisation of Scots as a 'dialect'. In one sense, Burns could be said to subordinate Scots to English. But he could also be seen as placing himself in opposition to Scottish intellectuals who sought to eradicate Scots such as Adam Smith, David Hume and Hugh Blair.[56] With the title, Burns engages in a complex act of poetic self-construction: it has the declarative force of a statement, yet it leaves open the question of the status of Scots.

The intricacy of Burns' paratextual negotiations is in part necessitated by his complicated linguistic situation. He was part of a 'diglossic' society: a term the linguist Charles A. Ferguson coined to refer to a community that uses two languages – one a low-status mother tongue used as an everyday vernacular (Scots), the other held in high esteem and deployed for written and

formal communication (English).[57] Yet, as we have seen, far from opposing Scots and English, Burns highlights their inter-relation and presents them as part of a continuum. Moreover, as scholars such as Thomas Crawford and Carol McGuirk have pointed out, Burns' diction is, in fact, a synthesis of a variety of different archaic and vernacular strains of Scots and English.[58] By singing in a mixed tongue, Burns contests the linguistic divide that perpetuated the social inequality between Scots and English. This is why his title for the collection is in many ways deceptive: rather than create a separate Scots in opposition to English, he draws different languages together. In so doing, as I will show in the final section, Burns creates an important legacy for current investigations of the role of paratexts in colonialism and for contemporary understandings of global cultural politics.

Burns and the Politics of Marginality

How might we respond to Pittock's claim that 'We have read Burns too much through glossaries and not enough through dictionaries'? In the first place, Pittock's statement leaves open the question of audience: does 'we' refer to the audience for his paper; the readers of the *International Journal of Scottish Literature*; the academic Burns industry; Burns' readers in Scotland, Britain, or the World? Secondly, we might also query whether we simply 'read' Burns – what about his manifestations in performance, song, or translation? Furthermore, we could take issue with Pittock's assumption that glossaries are more likely to limit interpretation than dictionaries, by pointing to the many creative responses the glossary has engendered, and to the invaluable entry-point it offers into Burns' world. Moreover, we may observe that Pittock's claim rests on a myth of textual purity that locates Burns within an essentialist model of national identity. On the contrary, as we have seen, the juxtaposition of Scots and English in Burns' glossary is a crucial aspect of the poet's cultural and linguistic heterogeneity.

Burns' blend of languages reveals a fluid sense of selfhood that contrasts with the fixity of national identity. We can recognise this more clearly if we turn to his well-known declaration of his poetic vocation in his *Commonplace Book*:

> However I am pleased with the works of our Scotch Poets … I am hurt to see other places of Scotland, their towns, rivers, woods, haughs, &c. immortalised in such celebrated performances, whilst my dear country [is neglected] … we never had one Scotch Poet … to make the fertile banks of Irvine, the romantic woodlands and sequestered scenes on Aire, and the healthy, mountainous source, and winding sweep of Doon emulate Tay, Forth, Ettrick, Tweed, &c. this is a complaint I would gladly remedy.[59]

When we first inspect this passage, it might appear that Burns is announcing his ambition to be a national poet of Scotland. Indeed, Burns *does* claim the poet creates a sense of place by providing a means of imaginatively inhabiting the landscape. But his understanding of geographical identity is quite different to that inscribed within modern conceptions of nationhood. Firstly, he uses the noun 'country' to refer to a region, not a nation – even differentiating his own area to other parts of Scotland. Secondly, Burns builds his sense of the local scene by establishing its affinities with other places, pointing out how the Doon emulates the Tay and how local poets might imitate their regional counterparts. In contrast, national identities are forged in opposition to other communities. For instance, in her classic study *Britons*, Linda Colley claims that, in the eighteenth century, the British gained a sense that they were a single people due to their perception that they were 'different from their prime enemy, France'.[60] While the nation casts its members as subordinate parts of a bigger whole, Burns begins with the personal encounter with the local scene and builds upward. It is for this reason that his declaration of his ambition 'to sing his Country's service' (i) is more complex than it might appear. Far from being 'the archetypal national Bard'[61] – as Robert Crawford has it in his recent biography – Burns resists the exclusionism implicit in the idea of nation, proposing a model of identity that is fluid, composite and hybridic.

Importantly, in his earlier work *Devolving English Literature*, Crawford argues that, by mixing languages, Burns deliberately adopted a position of marginality, observing aptly: '[i]nsisting on the importance of his local vernacular, writing a deliberately impure language, deeply inscribing himself in a culture outside the prevailing metropolitan one, Burns marginalized himself'. For Crawford, Burns' cultural distinctiveness and diversity enabled him to embody a similar multicultural ideal at the heart of Britishness: 'it is because he is a Scottish writer that he exemplifies the development of a fully British literature'.[62] While Crawford's image of a multivalent British literature is inviting, we have seen that, in actual practice, Britishness was deployed to marginalise Scots aspects of Burns' work and the language and culture of the Lowlands.

Indeed, we might go further and recognise how Burns in fact contests the mono-lingualism that is central to modern conceptions of nationhood. Johann Gottfried Herder, the major theorist of Romantic nationalism, for instance asked: 'Has a nation anything more precious than the language of its fathers? In it dwell the entire world of tradition, history, religion, principle of existence, its whole heart and soul'.[63]

While Burns shares Herder's view of language as a repository of histories and values, he departs from his claim that this inheritance is the exclusive possession of a particular group. Instead Burns' creolisation of English and Scots resists the linguistic totalitarianism that is a key aspect of

both eighteenth-century attempts to enforce English as a universal tongue within Britain and the concept of nationhood itself.

Reading Burns' margins, therefore, shows us that his language constitutes what the theorist Édouard Glissant calls a 'méttisage': a site for writing in the interval between languages and cultures; and a means of uncovering the heterogeneous nature of geopolitical identities. Likewise, Burns' paratexts are profoundly dialogic documents: forged in collaboration, addressing the desires of influential patrons and specific audiences, and establishing connections across cultures. While Liam McIlvanney is right to draw attention to Burns' status as '[t]he radical bard of the democratic revolution', he is wrong to dismiss Edwin Muir's description of Burns as a [p]rotean figure'[64] as a 'trite proposition'.[65] Rather, what Don Paterson also refers to as Burns 'furious shapeshifting'[66] is a key component of the poet's complex geopolitical identity.

As such, Burns' glossary and notes draw our attention to the key role paratexts play in negotiating questions of cultural marginality. We might compare editors' use of Burns' with the 'paratextual domination'[67] Beth A. McCoy has observed the abolitionist editors William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Philiips exercise in their prefaces to the slave writer Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845).[68] Or we can perceive the affinities between Burns' glossary and the similar apparatus Aimé Césaire provides to translate the Martinican colloqualisms he combines with literary French in his anti-colonial poem *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* (1956). Identifying these connections breaks Burns out of the limitations of a Scottish or British literary canon. It also allows us to draw together the experiences of internal and external victims of European colonialism. As Césaire ruefully acknowledges, 'there is room for all at the rendezvous of conquest'.[69]

The reason why Burns is so important to this project is that his work embodies an inclusiveness that transgresses the limitations of nation. We have already seen how he refrains from placing himself in opposition to the English literary tradition and refashions it in his own image. Such open-handedness is also revealed in the performative nature of his poetry and its role in creating rituals that establish a sense of community. For instance, in his glossary for 'To a Haggis', McGinn underscores the participative nature of the poem by adding footnotes that give instructions on how to perform it during a Burns supper, telling us, for instance, at line fourteen to 'give the haggis a belt with the knife: a gentle stab or a backhanded blow – your choice!'.[70] Among other things, this ritual acts as an interactive glossary on 'To a Haggis', enabling diners to bring their own personalities and cultures to the poem and engage with it in any way they see fit. The glossary's potential for fostering transcultural dialogues is further developed in the version provided on the *Burns Country* Website, in which readers can click on Scots terms highlighted in violet and access translations in French, German and Spanish, as well as English. Such an

example demonstrates the potential hypertext offers for the creation of a new global culture of literary interaction and linguistic exchange.

Indeed, these efforts to break writing from Scotland out of the confines of a national tradition have also been taken up by some of the contemporary poets featured in Robert Crawford's recent anthology *New Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (2009). In 'Muckle Hippo', Alasdair Gray stages a hilarious confrontation between a bizarre Scots-language poem and a sanctimonious English-language gloss, which seeks to suppress the verse's scatology and cultural specificity. Moreover, in 'Ode tae a Hosefish', David Kinloch imagines the early-twentieth-century Italian poet Eugenio Montale being confronted by a Scots-speaking cuttlefish demanding an ode in Standard Habbie. The resulting poem is a conflux of different languages, mixing Heidegger and Houdini, Spanish cuisine and scientific terminology. Like Burns' collision of Scots and English, Kinloch's poem fuses disparate elements of different cultures to demonstrate the benefits of encounter and amalgamation. Crucially, many of these poets eschew a traditional Scottish literary identity. In 'English. A Scottish Essay', Douglas Dunn asks 'Who were these purer folk / Whose tongues absolved them from an "English" stain?'. For Dunn, Burns is the main symbol of Scottish literature's parochialism and hypocrisy. He scorns what he calls 'The Robert Burns syndrome – just write, like him, and you'll be true / To Scotland, when its good self returns'.

Drawing attention to Burns' cultural hybridity can act as a powerful panacea to such a syndrome. Above all it enables us to explode the nationalist myths that have confined both him and his antecendents. Doing so allows contemporary poets to escape the anxiety of Burns' influence and enables writing from Scotland to evade the shadow of English literature, locating it a transnational and translingual context quite different from a national tradition. As Dunn observes, 'we've got three sound tongues / In which to utter poetry'. Burns' work can contribute towards Dunn's attempts to 'to triplicate our nationality' by reclaiming English as '[a] site of rebel mimicry' and forging a polyglot tradition.[71]

The glossary is crucial to Burns' poetry because it highlights his role as a cultural mediator, fusing different traditions and subversively appropriating English in the way Dunn describes. Moreover, the generosity with which Burns engages with a range of cultures is an essential aspect of that same open-handedness that Emerson identified when he described Burns' poems as 'the property and the solace of all mankind'.[72] Such hospitality is also perhaps one of the many reasons why Burns has never found a comfortable home within the individualism and lyricism of English Romanticism – and also perhaps a reason why he does not need to do so. Instead, examining the glossary, and Burns' other paratexts, draws our attention to the fact that, far from being a fixed entity, his language is an 'echos-monde': a relation to everything else, not an essentialised whole. More generally, the complex, multi-faceted nature of Burns' paratexts

provides a compelling illustration of how the paratext's lack of fixed address enables writers to evade and challenge monolithic ideas of language, nation and poetic identity. The example of Burns therefore shows us how investigating the paratext can contribute towards the creation of a 'Poetics of relation': Glissant's label for a rejection of essentialised ideas of identity in favour of a pluralist and inclusive model in which 'each and every identity is extended through a relation with the Other'.[73] Crucially, Burns shows us how we can forge a form of identity that is alive to the particularity of our own cultural situation, while remaining aware of its contingency and hybridity, and reaching out to others. If we wish to liberate literature from the limitations of national traditions, and understand the dialogues it can create across cultures, the margins might be a good place to start. As Genette exclaims, '[a] threshold exists to be crossed'.[74]

NOTES

[1] Murray Pittock 'Burns, Smith, language and lice', 17 January 2009, *Robert Burns 1759 to 2009,* Centre for Robert Burns Studies, University of Glasgow.

[2] Henry Mackenzie, unsigned essay in *The Lounger*, 97 (9 December 1786) reprinted in Donald A. Low (ed.), *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974) [henceforth '*RBCH*'] pp. 67-71, p. 69.

[3] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 407-8.

[4] Susan Manning, 'Antiquarianism and the Scottish Science of Man' in Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorensen (eds), *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 57-76, p. 67.

[5] Kevin Halliwell, 'John Galt and the paratext: the discourse of authentication in North American emigration literature', *Star Project Website*, http://www.star.ac.uk/star-publications/e-texts.aspx, p. 4. See also Ian Duncan, 'Authenticity Effects: The Work of Fiction in Romantic Scotland', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 102, No. 1 (Winter 2003), pp. 93-116.

[6] Glyn White 'The critic in the text: footnotes and marginalia in the Epilogue to Alasdair Gray's *Lanark: A Life in Four Books*' in Joe Bray, Miriam Handley, and Anne C. Henry (eds), *Ma(r)king the Text: The presentation of meaning on the literary page* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 55-70, p. 55.

[7] The glossaries I have consulted are as follows: Robert Burns, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1787); Robert Burns, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (London and Edinburgh: Adam Neill and Co. for T. Cadell jun. and W. Davies and W. Creech, 1800); Robert Burns, *The Works of Robert Burns*, James Currie (ed.) (London and Edinburgh: T. Cadell and W. Screech, 1802); Robert Burns, *The Works of Robert Burns*, ed. The Ettrick

Shepherd and William Motherwell (Glasgow: Archibald Fullarton and Co., 1835); Robert Burns, *The Work of Robert Burns, with notes and illustrations* (Glasgow and Edinburgh: Blackie and Son, 1861); John Cuthbertson, *Complete Glossary to the Poetry and Prose of Robert Burns, with upwards of three thousand illustrations from English authors* (London: Alexander Gardner, 1886); Robert Burns, *The Life and Works of Robert Burns*, ed. Robert Chambers, revised by William Wallace (Edinburgh and London: W & R Chambers, 1896); Robert Burns, *The Poetry of Robert Burns*, William Ernest Henley and Thomas F. Henderson (eds) (Edinburgh: T.C. and E. C. Jack, 1896); Robert Burns, *A Choice of Burns' Poems and Songs*, ed. Sydney Goodsir Smith (London: Faber and Faber, 1966); Robert Burns, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns: Volume Three*, James Kinsley (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Robert Burns, *The Canongate Burns*, Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg (eds) (Edinburgh: Canongate 2001). Robert Burns, 'Address to a Haggis', *Robert Burns Country: The Official Robert Burns Website*, http://www.robertburns.org/works/147.shtml; Clark McGinn, *The Ultimate Guide to Being Scottish* (Edinburgh: Luath Press 2008).

[8] Cuthbertson, *Complete Glossary*, p. 28; Burns, *The Life and Works*, Chambers and Wallace (eds) p. 27; Burns, *The Poetry*, Henley and Henderson (eds) p. 238; Burns, *A Choice of Burns' Poems and Songs*, ed. Sydney Goodsir Smith p. 110. *Robert Burns Country*, http://www.robertburns.org/works/glossary/135.html.

[9] Robert Burns, 'Address to a Haggis', *Robert Burns Country*.

[10] Robert Burns, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Edinburgh: W. Creech, 1787) p. 363. Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text. Line numbers are provided for verse, page numbers for prose.

[11] Cuthbertson, *Complete Glossary*, p. vi.

[12] Clark McGinn Interview, 27 February 2009.

[13] Burns, *Poems*, Kinsley (ed.) vol. I, p. viii.

[14] Burns, *Poems*, Kinsley (ed.) vol. III, p. 1222.

[15] *Canongate Burns*, p. 214.

[16] Ibid., p. xciv.

[17] Ibid., both p. lxxxviii.

[18] See Gerard Carruthers, 'The Canongate Burns: Misreading Burns and the Periodical Press of the 1790s', *Review of Scottish Culture* 18 (2006), pp. 41-50,

[19] *Canongate Burns*, p. xcv and p. xcviv.

[20] See Robert Crawford, 'Bard of Friendly Fire', *London Review of Books*, 25 July 2002, pp. 16-8, p. 17.

[21] Robert Burns, *The Works of Robert Burns*, The Ettrick Shepherd and William Motherwell (eds) (Glasgow: Archibald Fullarton and Co., 1835), both p. 2.

[22] Ibid., p. 51 He quotes extracts of praise for the poet made by prominent English critics,

printing, for instance, William Hazlitt's effusive description of Burns' 1786 poem Halloween as 'striking […] picturesque […] humorous […] masterly […] remarkable'. Ibid., p. 99.

[23] Ibid., p. 62.

[24] Ibid., p. 30.

[25] Ibid., pp. 36 and 35.

[26] Burns, *Burns*, Currie (ed.) vol. III p. 406.

[27] Ibid., vol. I, p. 2.

[28] Ibid., p. viii.

[29] Ibid., p. 10.

[30] Ibid., p. 25.

[31] Ibid., p. 31.

[32] The National Burns Collection of Scotland lists an astonishing eighty-six different versions published between 1800 and 1874 (see http://www.scotlandsculture.org/nbc/index.cfm). And this figure does not count the many additional editions that focused exclusively on Burns' prose or his poetry (see, for instance: Robert Burns, *Poetical works of Robert Burns: as collected and published by Dr. Currie* (London: Jones and Co., 1825); Robert Burns, *Prose works of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers, 1839)). In comparison, the Hogg and Motherwell was reissued by the Glasgow publisher Archibald Fullerton eight times between 1834 and 1853, the Chambers was reprinted twice in 1851-2 and 1856-7, then revised by William Wallace and reissued in 1896; and the Henley and Henderson was printed in 1896 and 1901, before being reissued in 1927.

[33] Cuthbertson, *Complete Glossary*, p. v.

[34] James Currie, 'Criticism on the Writings of Burns', *The Works of Robert Burns, with an Account of his Life* (Liverpool, 1800) I, pp. 267-336, in Low (ed.), *RBCH*, p. 151.

[35] Henley and Henderson, pp. viii, ix.

[36] Chambers and Wallace, p. 28.

[37] *Canongate Burns*, p. 213.

[38] McGinn, p. 70.

[39] Robert Burns, *The Work of Robert Burns, with notes and illustrations* (Glasgow, Edinburgh and London: Blackie and Son, 1861) p.I.

[40] Hogg and Motherwell, p. 57.

[41] Ibid., pp. 115 and 109.

[42] Robert Crawford, *The Bard: Robert Burns, A Biography* (London: Princeton University Press, 2008) p. 3.

[43] Andrew Noble, 'Introduction' in *The Canongate Burns*, pp. ix-xcii, both p. lxxxviii.

[44] The paucity of typographical errors in the first edition suggests that he prepared each element of the edition carefully. In contrast, many copies of the second edition feature numerous

discrepancies. However, these are probably not the result of Burns' negligence, but the outcome of the printer William Smellie not printing enough copies initially and having to quickly reprint them, resetting all the type and most likely bypassing Burns. See James McKay, *Burns: A Biography of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1992) p. 288 and Crawford, *The Bard*, pp. 220-4.

[45] See MacKay, p. 298.

[46] MacKay, p. 25.

[47] See MacKay, p. 259.

[48] Burns, *Poems*, p. 358.

[49] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 9, 36.

[50] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Introduction: The Location of Culture' in *The Location of Culture* (London: New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 3.

[51] Murray Pittock, 'Robert Burns and British Poetry', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 121 (2003) pp. 191-222, p. 204.

[52] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Alastair Fowler (ed.) (University of California: Longman, 1998), Book Nine, lines 896 and 900, p. 521.

[53] Bloom defines 'daemonisation' as 'a movement towards a personalized Counter-Sublime, in reaction to the precursor's Sublime'. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Second Edn. (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 15.

[54]Unsigned review, *English Review* (February 1787), ix, pp. 89-93, reprinted in *RBCH*, pp. 76-7, fn p. 76-7.

[55] Ebeneezer Picken, *Poems and Epistles, mostly in the Scottish dialect* (Paisley: 1788) and Robert Crawford (ed.), *New Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (London: Polygon, 2009). See also David Crafurd, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect, on various subjects* (Edinburgh: 1788); Robert Gray, *Poems in the Scots and English dialect* (Glasgow: 1793); John Lauderdale, *A Collection of Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Edinburgh: 1796); David Morison, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Montrose: 1790); Andrew Shirrefs, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Edinburgh: 1790).

[56] For more details see Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, Second Edn. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 111-76.

[57] Charles A. Fergusson, 'Diglossia' in *Word* 15 (1959), pp. 325-340.

[58] Crawford distinguishes four kinds of language that Burns uses: 'English English'; 'Scots English'; a 'General Scots'; and his own 'regional dialect' of Ayrshire and the south-west. And McGuirk argues that 'Burns' diction…seems 'natural' but is designed and invented: a mixture of local dialect, archaic Middle Scots, dialect words of regions other than his own, sentimental idioms, and 'high' English rhetoric'. Thomas Crawford, *Burns: A Study of Poems and Songs*

(Edinburgh: Mercat Press 1978), p. vii-x; Carol McGuirk, *Burns and the Sentimental Era* (London: Tuckwell, 1997), p. xii.

[59] Robert Burns, *Robert Burns' Commonplace Book, 1783-1785*, J.C. Ewing and Davidson Cook (eds) (Glasgow: Gowans and Gray, 1938), pp. 1070-71.

[60] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 18.

[61] Crawford, *The Bard*, p. 3.

[62] Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, pp. 89, 109.

[63] J. G. Herder, *Sämliche Werke*, ed. B, Suphan, 33 vols. (Berlin, 1877-1913) vol. 17, p. 58, quoted and translated by Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (London: Viking, 1976), p. 165.

[64] Edwin Muir 'The Burns Myth' in *New Judgements: Robert Burns* (Glasgow: William Montgomerie, 1947), pp. 5-12, p. 6.

[65] Liam McIllvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (London: Tuckwell, 2002), pp. 4, 7.

[66] Robert Burns, *Robert Burns: Poems*, Don Paterson (ed.) (London: Faber, 2001), p. vii.

[67] Beth A. McCoy, 'Race and the Paratextual Condition', *PMLA*, January 2006, Vol. 1231, No. 1, pp. 156-169, p. 160.

[68] See Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, David W. Blight (ed.) (New York: Bedford, 1993).

[69] Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, trans. Mireille Rosello with Annie Pritchard (1956; Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 1995), p. 127.

[70] McGinn, p. 14.

[71] Douglas Dunn, 'English. A Scottish Essay', in Crawford (ed.), *New Poems*, lines 13-14, lines 38-9, lines 32-3, line 35, line 15.

[72] Ralph Waldo Emerson, extract from a speech given at a Centenary Burns dinner in Boston on January 25 1859, Low (ed.), *RBCH*, pp. 434-6, p. 436.

[73] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 11.

[74] Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 410.

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Negotiating Cultural Memory: James Currie's *Works of Robert Burns*

Leith Davis

In his 'Essay on Robert Burns,' the Victorian pundit Thomas Carlyle expressed his sense, in typically excessive style, of the difficulty involved in reaching an adequate assessment of his countryman in 1838, arguing that:

> till the companions of his pilgrimage, the Honorable Excise Commissioners, and the Gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt, and the Dumfries aristocracy, and all the Squires and Earls, equally with Ayr Writers, and the New and Old Light Clergy, whom he had to do with, shall have become invisible in the darkness of the Past, or visible only by light borrowed from *his* juxtaposition, it will be difficult to measure him by any true standard, or to estimate what he really was and did, in the eighteenth century, for his country and the world.[1]

For Carlyle, the business of estimating Burns cannot begin until all who knew the poet have passed away. Carlyle's articulation of the difference between the estimate of Burns that can be gleaned during the lifetime of the people who knew him and that which is arrived at after those people die finds an unlikely echo in the distinction that twentieth-century theorists, Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, identify between 'communicative memory' and 'cultural memory.' 'Communicative memory,' they suggest, is 'based exclusively on everyday [oral] communications' and is 'characterized by a high degree of non-specialization, reciprocity of roles, thematic instability, and disorganization.'[2] In contrast, 'cultural memory' is 'characterized by its distance from the everyday'; it is created when 'living communication crystalliz[es] in the forms of objectivized culture – whether in texts, images, rites, buildings, monuments, cities or even landscapes.'[3] In 'Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory,' Ann Rigney considers the difference between these two modes of memory in terms of mediation: 'communicative memory,' she observes, is oral, characterized by 'multiple narratives by

participants and eyewitnesses [which] circulate and compete with one another.'[4] 'Cultural memory,' on the other hand, refers to the time when all involved have passed away and 'a society has only relics and stories left as a reminder of past experience.'[5] This essay will draw on the theories of Assmann, Czaplicka and Rigney in order to provide a new perspective through which to understand the complex processes through which Robert Burns has been consumed at home and abroad over the last two and a half centuries. In the wake of the multitude of celebrations in honour of the 250th anniversary of Burns's birth, it is difficult to imagine a time when he wasn't such a global celebrity and to evaluate the circumstances that facilitated his rise to fame. An important starting point can be found in the complicated negotiations that ensued as 'communicative memory' of the poet became 'objectivized' into 'cultural memory' in the early years after his death.[6] In particular, as I shall suggest, James Currie's monumental *The Works of Robert Burns* effected a crucial transformation of Burns that prepared the way for his reception as an iconic figure of Scottish cultural memory.

Robert Burns died on July 21, 1796 and was given a military funeral in his hometown of Dumfries five days later. The earliest account of Burns's life to appear after his death was the 'Obituary' published anonymously by George Thomson in the Edinburgh *Advertiser* for July 26. As well as eliciting the sympathy and the 'contributions' of 'the public' by suggesting that Burns's 'extraordinary endowments were accompanied with frailties which rendered them useless to himself and his family,' Thomson, who had never met Burns, took the first step toward turning face-to-face memories of Burns into cultural memories, calling for 'friends and acquaintances' 'to transmit such poems and letters as happen to be in their possession' to Alexander Cunningham or John Syme for use in 'a posthumous volume of the poetical remains of Robert Burns.'[7] The unfortunate emphasis on the poet's 'frailties' prompted such a flurry of debate that the poet's friend Maria Riddell felt obliged to step into the fray with a 'Character Sketch' published anonymously in the Dumfries *Journal*. In this work, Riddell fights the aspersions against Burns. Appealing to the aura of authenticity surrounding communicative memory, she suggests that 'the intimacy of my acquaintance [with Burns] for several years' past may 'perhaps justify my offering to the public a few of those ideas and observations I have had the opportunity of forming.'[8] At the same time as she attempts to depict for the general public her own personal memories of the poet, she also suggests the irredeemable loss that the translation of Burns from communicative into cultural memory actually involves. She suggests that Burns can never be fully appreciated by those who have not met him in person, indicating that the thing that really distinguished Burns was not his poetic work but his face-to-face conversation: 'Poetry was actually not his *forte*. If others have climbed more successfully the heights of Parnassus, none certainly ever out-shone Burns in the charms—the sorcery I would call it—of fascinating conversation.'[9] For Riddell, unlike Carlyle, a 'true estimate' of Burns can never be reached by those who have not heard him speak; cultural memory is a pale imitation of actual experience.

The next individual to attempt an assessment of Burns was Robert Heron in *A Memoir of the Life of the Late Robert Burns*, initially issued in two parts in the liberal *Monthly Magazine* then republished separately in 1797.[10] Riddell had made the fact that she was an acquaintance of Burns the key attribute of her 'Character Sketch,' but Heron, although he had visited Burns at Ellisland and in fact been lampooned by Burns for failing to deliver a letter to Thomas Blacklock,[11] conveys no personal knowledge of the poet in his account. He does include one gesture toward communicative memory as he describes his own memory of the popularity of Burns's first edition of the *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*: 'I was at that time resident in *Galloway*, contiguous to *Ayrshire*: and I can well remember, how even plough-boys and maid-servants would have gladly bestowed the wages they earned the most hardly . . . if they might but procure the works of BURNS.'[12] He continues to use the first-person perspective to convey the 'extraordinary' effect that Burns's work has on him as he stays up all night reading it. Heron also includes memory of a memory of Burns, as he quotes William Robertson's reminiscences of Burns: 'I remember, that the late DR. ROBERTSON once observed to me, that he had scarcely ever met with any man whose conversation discovered greater vigour and activity of mind than did that of BURNS' (25). For the most part, however, Heron eschews personal memories, basing his work rather upon what he calls 'the proper business of the biographer':

> TO TRACE THE GRADUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHARACTER AND TALENTS OF HIS HERO, WITH ALL THE CHANGES WHICH THESE UNDERGO FROM THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES, BETWEEN THE CRADLE AND THE GRAVE; AND AT THE SAME TIME, TO RECORD ALL THE EMINENT EFFECTS WHICH THE DISPLAY OF THAT CHARACTER, AND THE EXERCISE OF THOSE TALENTS, HAVE PRODUCED UPON NATURE AND HUMAN SOCIETY, IN THE SPHERE WITHIN WHICH THEY WERE EXHIBITED AND EMPLOYED. (2)

Heron's objective is to distill the life of the poet into an essence or 'critical principle' (2). The son of a weaver who was subsequently educated at the University of Edinburgh and spent his life battling drink and debt, Heron uses Burns as an example of what happens when a simple 'ploughman' is 'exalted into a man of letters' and 'seduced' into the dissolute 'habits of life' of the wealthy (33). In Heron's hands, Burns's life enters cultural memory as a morality tale about the consequences of overstepping class boundaries.

Heron's *Memoir* sowed the seeds for many tales of Burns's profligacy, although it was itself short-lived in the marketplace. By far the most influential postmortem textual packaging of Burns appeared four years after the poet's death with the first official biography and collected works of the poet: Dr. James Currie's *The Works of Robert Burns; with an Account of his Life and a Criticism on his Writings*, published in 1800 in Liverpool and London by Cadell and Davies.[13]

Currie's *Works* provided the raw materials concerning Burns – the poems, songs, letters – that were read and reproduced throughout the nineteenth century. He also wrote a narrative of the poet that became the prototype for all later biographical sketches. Where Heron had used Burns to suggest the negative effects of attempting to rise beyond class boundaries, Currie depicted Burns as a victim of his own heightened passions who despite the failings of his own life could serve nevertheless as a potent symbol of Scottish cultural memory at home and abroad.

Currie himself was a diasporic figure who maintained close links to Scotland, a factor that undoubtedly influenced his subsequent shaping of the memory of Robert Burns. Born in Dumfriesshire, in 1771 he began an apprenticeship in Virginia as a factor for William Cunninghame and Company, tobacco merchants from Glasgow. When the outbreak of the American troubles began, he found himself caught in an uncomfortable position as a citizen of Britain and an associate of the hated Scottish merchants. In March, 1775, he published a letter in Pinckney's *Virginia Gazette* defending the Scottish tobacco merchants in the American colonies. After a great deal of difficulty, he returned to Britain and enrolled in medical school at Edinburgh University. He was in London during the time of the Gordon Riots and wrote letters to the *Public Advertiser* (Tues, 15 August 1780 and Monday, 28 August 1780) advocating tolerance for all, but in particular for Scots who were being vilified by the enemies of Lord Bute. His plans to become a medical officer for a battalion in Jamaica failed, so he took up an appointment instead in Liverpool in 1780, where, as well as continuing his medical practice, he established a literary reputation for himself and worked for the cause of abolition alongside William Roscoe. He purchased an estate in his native Dumfries in 1792. It was on a visit back to the estate in 1792 that he briefly met with Robert Burns.[14]

When no one came forward to publish Burns's collected works after his death, Currie approached John Syme and Gilbert Burns, Robert's brother, volunteering to undertake the task. Currie raised subscriptions and made 'the necessary arrangements with the booksellers and printer' in addition to performing the editing of Burns's works. Currie appears to have been motivated partly by admiration for Burns's poetry and partly by humanitarian reasons, attentive to the fact that the proceeds of his volume would be used to 'raise [Burns's] Widow and children from penury' (1:1). As an ex-patriot Scot who had already written in the cause of his countrymen, he also demonstrated not a little concern for the negative manner in which Scotland was being represented after Burns's death; Scots were criticized for not providing adequately for the poet during his lifetime. In fact, Currie's letters indicate that his emphasis on Burns's faults is directly related to his concern for the public perception of Scotland. After receiving Burns's letters from John Syme he writes, 'To speak my mind to you freely, it appears to me that his misfortunes arose chiefly from his errors . . . his biographer must keep it in mind, to prevent him from running into those bitter invectives against Scotland, &c. which the extraordinary attractions and

melancholy fate of the poet naturally provoke. Six Liverpool poets have sung the requiem of our admired bard; and every one of them has indulged in the most pointed, and in some degree unjust, invectives against the country and the society in which he lived.'[15] For Currie, the unfolding of 'the errors and faults, as well as the excellences, of Burns's life and character' consisted of a balancing act of garnering sympathy for the poet and vindicating the Scottish reading public.

Currie attempts to include traces of the face-to-face Burns in his work. He even includes Burns's own perspective in writing the 'Life of Burns' as he incorporates some letters by the poet into the narrative. Apart from a brief sketch by Currie outlining the bare details of Burns's life and death, the first impression of Burns that the reader is given comes from Burns's autobiographical letter to John Moore. Currie suggests that the letter will convey an immediate sense of Burns and notes that the errors of composition in the letter, 'will be compensated by the opportunity of seeing our poet, as he gives the incidents of his life, unfold the peculiarities of his character with all the careless vigour and open sincerity of his mind' (1:34). 'The Life of Burns' also transcribes sections from the Commonplace book and the tours of the Borders and the Highlands, while Volume 2 of the *Works* presents the rest of Burns's letters.

In addition to featuring Burns's own words, the *Works* also includes accounts by those who knew Burns. Gilbert Burns's reminiscences appear directly after Burns's autobiographical letter as 'a commentary on the preceding sketch of our poet's life by himself' (1:78). An account by Mr. Murdoch, Burns's tutor, and letters sent to Currie by Dugald Stewart and James Adair are also included. The various narratives, indicates Currie, serve 'not merely to illustrate, but to authenticate each other' (1:96), and he notes that he has chosen to present them in their entirety so 'that the intelligent reader will be far more gratified by a sight of these original documents themselves' (1:96). Currie also features Maria Riddell's 'Character Sketch' and letters from the poet's brother in the Appendices to the *Works*. Such a scheme appears to attempt to approximate the 'multiple narratives by participants and eyewitnesses [which] circulate and compete with one another' that characterize communicative memory.

But instead of conveying a sense of the communicative memory of Burns, Currie's *Works* actually works to call into question the basis on which that communicative memory is established. Although he includes first-person accounts from Burns, Currie also suggests the gap between Burns's actual conversation and the words he wrote. In his Dedication, Currie notes that he 'had an opportunity of seeing and conversing with Burns' in the summer of 1792, adding: 'It has been my fortune to know some men of high reputation in literature, as well as in public life; but never to meet any one who, in the course of a single interview, communicated to me so strong an impression of the force and versatility of his talents' (1:v-vi). He reiterates Riddell's suggestion

regarding the excellence of Burns's conversation, noting that the poems 'afford but an inadequate proof of the powers of their unfortunate author' (1:vi). If the poems provide 'but an inadequate proof of the powers of their unfortunate author,' so, it would follow, do the letters. Rather than giving the reader some idea of the 'careless vigour and open sincerity of [Burns's] mind', the letters point to the inadequacy of print in capturing the 'impressions' of face-to-face communication, particularly when it comes to Burns.

The accounts by people who knew Burns suggest similar limitations. While Gilbert's account dominates over fifteen pages of the narrative at one point, Currie also exercises his editorial authority over it, indicating that the excerpt is actually taken from a printed source. A footnote draws attention to the fact that the narrative is from a 'Letter from Gilbert Burns to Mrs. Dunlop' (1:60 fn.). Another footnote intrudes on the narration to point out the specific scene from *Titus Andronicus* to which Gilbert alludes. Currie adds his own opinion to that of 'all the best critics' that this 'silly play' is not Shakespeare's (1:63; fn). On one occasion, Currie does include perspectives that comment on each other and create a layered narrative of competing representations, noting for example that Gilbert Burns wished to have omitted the paragraph in Burns's letter to Murdoch where he describes his ancestors as 'renting lands of the noble Keiths of Marichal, and as having had the honour of sharing their fate' (1:80). Where Gilbert suggests that their father had in his possession a letter stating that he had 'no concern in the *late wicked rebellion*' (1:81), Currie also includes 'the information of one who knew William Burnes soon after he arrived in the county of Ayr' (1:81). But Currie himself rushes in to mediate the controversy, offering the suggestion that the rumour about Burns's father was a consequence of his having come as a stranger from the North and that Burns himself favoured the connection with Charles Edward Stuart because the heroic and unfortunate story of the House of Stuart appealed to his sensibilities. Absorbed within Currie's editorial apparatuses, the immediate memories of 'the companions of [Burns's] pilgrimage' as Carlyle termed them are converted into mediated 'relics and stories.' Currie's narrative thus embodies the process by which communicative memory becomes objectified into the printed medium of cultural memory.

At the same time as he contains communicative memory of Burns, Currie's own commentary on the poet in his 'Prefatory Remarks' and 'Life of Burns' stages Burns in cultural memory in a manner that proves remarkably durable for the rest of the nineteenth century. In Currie's narrative, Burns serves to embody a Scottish identity that is rapidly disappearing and to represent that identity to the rest of the English-speaking world. Currie notes that by the time he is compiling Burns's work, the poet's 'reputation has extended itself beyond the limits of [Scotland], and his poetry has been admired as the offspring of original genius, by persons of taste in every part of the sister islands' (1:1). For this reason, Currie suggests, he directs his 'Prefatory Remarks' not only to Scots but to readers beyond Scotland's border: 'It seems proper, therefore, to write the

memoirs of his life, not with the view of their being read by Scotchmen only, but also by natives of England, and of other countries where the English language is spoken or understood' (1:2). Accordingly, he begins his discussion of Burns with a description of the cultural milieu in which he flourished: the world of the Scottish peasantry. As his description unfolds, however, it becomes clear that this identity is already under threat, indeed has been so since well before Burns's time. Currie begins by praising the Scottish peasants for possessing a 'degree of intelligence not generally found among the same class of men in the other countries of Europe' (1:2). In particular, he notes, 'every one can read, and most persons are more or less skilled in writing and arithmetic' (1:3) due to the establishment of parish schools in the previous century. Currie also suggests that Scots are distinguished for their 'spirit of emigration and adventure' (1:6), and it is their education that has in fact contributed to this. The attainment of knowledge raises 'desires or ambitions' which are 'stimulated' by imagination, and 'distant and uncertain objects, giving freer scope to the operation of this faculty, often acquire, in the mind of the youthful adventurer, an attraction from their very distance and uncertainty' (1:6-7). Currie maintains that emigration from a poorer country to a more wealthy one by those who have been given a 'greater degree of instruction' is as certain as a natural law of physics – providing the 'barriers' that kept them separate are removed: 'emigration from the former to the latter will take place to a certain extent, by laws nearly as uniform as those by which heat diffuses itself among surrounding bodies, or water finds its level when left to its natural course' (1:7). It is this law which has been responsible for the diffusion of the Scots into England and abroad, as 'knowledge and poverty poured the adventurous natives of the north over the fertile plains of England, and more especially, over the colonies which she had settled in the east and in the west' (1:7). Currie's justification for his personal circumstances as a Scot residing in England is visible in his naturalized representation of emigration. Once more he addresses negative preconceptions of Scots in England, arguing that a 'richer country' is 'constantly invigorated by the accession of an informed and hardy race of men, educated in poverty, and prepared for hardship and danger, patient of labour, and prodigal of life' (1:7). Currie also suggests that the 'marriage-laws of Scotland' which legitimize children born out of wedlock once their parents do get married are partly responsible for producing 'that habit of emigration, and spirit of adventure, for which the people are so remarkable' (1:22). 'Irregular marriages' are often 'improvident' and the children consequently seek elsewhere for 'the comforts of life, and the gratification of ambition' (1:22). With this emphasis on explaining and justifying emigration, the narrative underlying the 'Prefatory Remarks' depicts a nation that is gradually diffusing throughout the globe. Currie suggests that Scottish dances and tunes have now 'penetrated into England' and will 'in another generation' be 'naturalized in every part of the island' (1:14). The Scottish people, he implies, are following a similar trajectory.

Currie's discourse about the Scottish peasantry also outlines the changes that are affecting those who choose to stay in their country. The Union, which has had the positive effect of making the

nation secure, is also effecting other changes: ‘property, as well as population, is accumulating rapidly on the Scottish soil, and the nation, enjoying a great part of the blessings of Englishmen . . . might be considered . . . to be as yet only in an early stage of their progress’ (1:24). While Scotland maintains several of its ‘own happy institutions,’ it is also becoming more like England: ‘Since the Union, the manners and language of the people of Scotland have no longer a standard among themselves, but are tried by the standard of the nation to which they are united—Though their habits are far from being flexible, yet it is evident that their manners and dialect are undergoing a rapid change’ (1:25). This change has trickled down even to the farmers ‘of the present day’ who ‘appear to have less of the peculiarities of their country in their speech, than the men of letters of the last generation’ (1:25). Burns, suggests Currie, is in fact less Scottish than his more illustrious predecessors: ‘Burns, who never left the island, nor penetrated farther into England than Carlisle on the one hand, or Newcastle on the other, had less of the Scottish dialect than Hume, who lived for many years in the best society of England and France; or perhaps than Robertson, who wrote the English language in a style of such purity’ (1:26).

In the midst of these representations of social changes, Burns’s poetry plays an important role. Currie devotes a lengthy section of his ‘Prefatory Remarks’ to describing the patriotic feeling of the Scottish people. A ‘partiality’ for their native country is ‘a very strong and general sentiment among the natives of Scotland’ (1:27). While ‘an attachment to the land of their birth’ is a common among all human societies, suggests Currie, it is strongest where ‘comforts, and even necessaries of life’ must be ‘purchased by patient toil’ (1:28) such as in Scotland. In such situations, people must ‘combine’ for defense as well as for ‘common wants,’ and the ‘social affections’ so developed ‘extend from the men with whom we live, to the soil on which we tread’ (1:28). Love for one’s country, then, develops as love for one’s fellows is ‘expanded by the powers of the imagination’ to ‘those inanimate parts of creation, which form the theatre on which we have first felt the alternations of joy and sorrow, and first tasted the sweets of sympathy and regard’ (1:28). This patriotic feeling is further developed in ‘free countries,’ where each individual is of consequence in his community, in small states where the independence of the nation is frequently threatened and in mountainous countries where ‘social affections’ are called forth and concentrated ‘amidst scenery that acts most powerfully on the sight, and makes a lasting impression on the memory’ and where ‘the tide of invasion’ by more powerful nations is often turned back (1:28). Another feature strengthening ‘the ties that attach men to the land of their birth’ is the existence of national songs, a feature that Currie associated with Scotland earlier in his narrative. In short, Scotland provides an example of a nation in which for all these reasons ‘ we so generally find a partial attachment to the land of their birth’ (1:31).

Burns, suggests Currie, like his fellow Scots, was ‘strongly tinctured’ with ‘a partiality for his native country, of which many proofs may be found in his writing’ (1:27). In fact, his patriotic feeling is

even more intense because of his education and his passionate nature: he ‘joined to the higher powers of the understanding the most ardent affections’ (1:31). Currie situates his image of Burns’s patriotism within a narrative of national dissolution. Because Scots are predisposed to emigrate, many leave their native lands for more profitable parts of the globe, while those who stay are also undergoing transformation as they adjust themselves to ‘the standard of the nation to which they are united’ (1:25). But Burns’s poetry serves to preserve what is left of Scottish culture, as Currie suggests that it, ‘displays, and as it were embalms, the peculiar manners of his country’; because of this quality, Burns’s poetry ‘may be considered as a monument, not to his own name only, but to the expiring genius of an ancient and once independent nation’ (1:31). In the midst of this ‘expiration,’ however, Burns’s poetry also becomes the object that can connect the nation’s constituent members. Currie had suggested that ‘love of country’ was a displacement of ‘the affections of the mind’ from fellow humans to the ‘inanimate parts of creation’ that constitute the land itself. Burns’s poetry becomes a displacement of that earlier displacement, as it is the poetry rather than the land which now serves as a representation of ‘the theatre on which we have first felt the alternations of joy and sorrow, and first tasted the sweets of sympathy and regard’ (1:28). Burns’s representation of ‘love of country’ becomes a means of connecting all those who share that love.

Appropriately, the Dedication of the *Works of Burns* itself performs the work of connecting two ex-Scots as Currie addresses Captain Graham Moore of the Royal Navy: ‘In a distant region of the world, whither the service of your country has carried you, you will, I know, receive with kindness this proof of my regard" (1:v). Graham Moore was the son of John Moore, a correspondent of Burns and the author of *Zeluco* and other works. Currie suggests that, ‘The works of Burns will be received favourably by one who stands in the foremost rank of this noble service and who deserves his station’ (1:ix). More importantly, however, he hopes that the poetry of ‘the Ayrshire ploughman’ can help remind Moore of his homeland: "These volumes may sometimes engage your attention, while the steady breezes of the tropics swell your sails, and in another quarter of the earth, charm you with the strains of nature, or awake in your memory the scenes of your early days" (1:v). Currie shifts from a focus on Burns to the way his poetry creates connections, concluding: ‘Suffer me to hope that they may sometimes recall to your mind the friend who addresses you, and who bids you—most affectionately—adieu!’ (1:x). In Currie’s *Works*, Burns is represented as preserving ‘the peculiar manners of his country,’ a Scotland lost in space through emigration and in time through cultural change, but he is also depicted as reuniting members of the Scottish community through memory. By representing the process whereby communicative memory of Burns solidifies into cultural memory and by depicting Burns as the ‘embalming’ receptacle and connective tissue of Scottishness, Currie’s *Works of Burns* made Burns not only a universal symbol of Scottish identity but also a metaphor for cultural memory itself.

Currie's representation proved remarkably popular. Chambers notes that, 'Four editions [of the *Works of Robert Burns*], of 2000 copies each, were disposed of in the first four years' (229). Cadell and Davies churned out eight regular editions between 1800 and 1820, including a vegisemo-quarto (24mo) edition in 1814.[16] The *Works of Robert Burns* was pirated numerous times beginning in the United States in 1801 and in Belfast in 1805; the first Canadian edition came out in Halifax in 1842.[17] When the British copyright ran out, publishers in Edinburgh, Glasgow London, Montrose and Durham rushed to provide more copies to the marketplace. Four other editions were produced in 1819 alone. Material from Currie's *Works of Robert Burns* was also reproduced in other collections of Burns. Cadell and Davies published the four volumes of Currie's edition in duodecimo with a fifth volume consisting of Cromek's *Reliques of Robert Burns* in 1814. Macredie, Skelly and Muckersy brought out *A New edition of the Life and Works of Robert Burns, as originally edited by James Currie* along with 'a Review of the Life of Burns and various Criticisms on his Character and Writings, by Alexander Peterkin' in 1815.[18] *Nineteen Views in North Britain, Illustrative of the Works of Robert Burns* (1805) included a 'Sketch of the Poet's Life' which was abridged from Currie's 'Life.'[19] Currie's *The Life of Robert Burns* was also published separately for fourteenpence in 1838 in William and Robert Chambers' *People's Edition* series; the editors note that Currie's account will help 'extend a sympathy for the wondrous and ill-requited poet to quarters where the circumstances of his life have as yet been comparatively little known . . . namely, among the lowly-born and obscurely-toiling.'[20]

Currie's 'Life of Burns' also became the standard which all subsequent biographers of Burns cited (either positively or negatively) and against which they measured their achievement. In his *Reliques of Robert Burns* (1808) Robert Hartley Cromek writes approvingly of Currie: 'Whatever unhappiness the Poet was in his life-time doomed to experience, few persons have been so fortunate in a biographer as Burns. A strong feeling of his excellencies, a perfect discrimination of his character, and a just allowance for his errors, are the distinguishing features in the work of Dr. Currie.'[21] Thomas Carlyle, although somewhat critical of Currie for not entering more strongly into the mindset of his subject, referred to Currie as the 'first and kindest of all our poet's biographers' whose fault was not 'want of love, but weakness of faith.'[22] William Wordsworth, on the other hand, excoriated Currie for 'revealing to the world the infirmities' of Burns.[23] In his *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* Wordsworth recalls, 'the acute sorrow with which, by my own fire-side, I first perused Dr. Currie's Narrative' (5). Wordsworth urged that any republication of Currie's *Works* include, if not the 'striking out' of 'such passages as the author, if he were now alive, would probably be happy to efface,' then at least the attachment of 'notes . . . to the most obnoxious' passages (3). Other commentators saw no problem with Currie's initial work. Writing in 1828, Lockhart feels obliged to note that the only reason he is attempting to write his own 'Life of Burns' is because, 'Dr. Currie's Memoir cannot be, with propriety, detached from the collection of the Poet's works which it was expressly designed to accompany.'[24] In his collection of Burns

edited with William Motherwell, James Hogg asserts: 'I wish no one had ever meddled with the Life of BURNS, save Dr. Currie and Mr. Lockhart,' and he suggests that 'the work of the latter . . . is rather a Supplement to the former than a Concise History of the Poet's Life from beginning to end.'[25] Consumed by readers, reprinted by publishers, and referred to by other biographers, Currie's perspective on Burns dominated representations of the poet in the early to mid years of the nineteenth century.

It also served as a direct and indirect source for another important but not so well documented phenomenon involved in the memorialization of Burns: speeches at Burns suppers. Donald Low suggests that the first Burns Clubs to be 'formally constituted were Greenock (1801), Paisley (1805), Kilmarnock (1808) and Dunfermline (1812).'[26] Celebrations of Burns at these venues initially started as gatherings of his friends. According to the 1881 *Bibliography of Robert Burns* published by James M'Kie, at the first meeting of the Alloway Burns Club in 1801, 'nearly one half of the company were personally known to BURNS, or had their names associated with some particulars of his history.'[27] Such gatherings took on a life of their own as social events including those who had no acquaintance with the poet except to be familiar with his poems and songs. Carol McGuirk suggests that these ritualistic suppers worked to sever Burns from the historical contexts in which he wrote and turning him into a 'pleasantly vague and idealized public icon.'[28] But they are also essential to consider seriously as they contributed to the received cultural memory of Burns. In particular, the suppers featured a genre of rhetorical effusion that made biography pre-eminent in commemorating the poet: the 'Immortal Memory' speech, which, as it developed, used poetry and songs to illustrate biographical details of his life. And as the Ur-text for biographies of Burns, Currie's work became an important source for such speeches.

There are numerous accounts of Burns suppers in the early nineteenth century. In the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* for 27 January 1816, for example, the writer outlines the celebration held at MacEwan's Tavern in Edinburgh, noting with approval that the, 'feelings of admiration universally entertained for the genius of Burns have at length been exhibited in the metropolis of the country which gave him birth in a manner somewhat worthy of that country and of himself.'[29] The toast to 'The Memory of Burns' on that occasion was given by Alexander Boswell, son of the famous biographer of Johnson. The most extensive collection of 'Immortal Memory' speeches is found in a book published for the centenary of the poet's birth, *The Chronicle of the Hundredth Birth Day of Robert Burns* (1859) by James Ballantine. Ballantine was an Edinburgh stained glass artist and writer who embarked on a 'labour of love'[30] of editing accounts from 832 Burns celebrations around the world: 676 from Scotland; 76 from England; 10 from Ireland; 48 from the Colonies; 61 from America; and 1 from Copenhagen. The speeches recounted in the Chronicle show their debt to Currie. Lord Neaves, in proposing a toast to 'The Biographers of Burns, and Mr. Robert Chambers' (who was present) at the Edinburgh Music Hall celebration, suggests that Currie was

‘the first great biographer of Burns,’ whose services were ‘nearly as valuable as they were meritorious and disinterested’ (10) and credits Currie with interpreting Burns for an audience outside Scotland. Other commentators draw from Currie’s ‘Life.’ Professor Craik, for example, delivering his oratory at the Music Hall in Belfast notes that, ‘Burns’ biographer, Dr. Currie, remarks of Burns, that, he rose by the strength of his talents, so he fell by the strength of his passions’ (497). The Honorable William Young at the North British and Highland Societies’ gathering in Halifax, Nova Scotia quotes a whole passage from Currie without attribution (518).

But as well as merely citing Currie, the speeches in Ballantine’s *Chronicle* suggest how powerful the structure of feeling that Currie set in motion had become by 1859, as it shows Burns iconized as a receptacle of Scottish cultural memory. At the Corn Exchange celebration, for example, The Lord Provost indicated that, ‘the source of the intense admiration cherished towards Burns by his countrymen is to be traced . . . to the vivid delineation given by him in his writings of our national character’ (20), echoing Currie’s contention that Burns’s poetry displays ‘the peculiar manners of his country.’ Similarly, at the dinner at the Guildhall Coffee-House in Cheapside, London, the Chairman, a Mr. Hannay, indicated that Burns ‘embodied in himself knowledge of the late times of Scotland with all the intellect that was necessary for the new period’ (428), while Mr. Gorrie at the Queen Street Hall in Edinburgh comes closer to Currie’s sense that the genius of the nation is ‘expiring,’ as he declares that Burns was ‘a type’ of Scottish nationality, ‘a nationality which even now grows dim in the hearts of the people’ (29).

The celebrations that the *Chronicle* records also recall Currie’s positioning of Burns as a symbol who unites Scots around the globe. The Lord Provost of Edinburgh asks rhetorically: ‘Who does not know some exile whose fond recollections of country and of home have been soothed and sustained by the songs of Burns, whose works find a place in the library of every Scotchman who leaves his native land?’ (21). Drawing on the new technology of the mid-nineteenth century for his analogy, George Hally, Chairman of the gathering at the Masonic Hall in Auchterarder, suggests that Burns’s poetry operates as a metaphorical cord across the Atlantic: ‘although the Atlantic telegraph cable lately laid by the energy, capital, and skill of two great nations, is now silent and dumb, there is a cable of poetry and song, laid nearly a hundred years ago by a simple ploughman, which neither the length, the depths, nor the storms of the Atlantic can ever sever, and through which this day the electric sparks flow, making hearts in America beat warmly and in unison with those in Scotland.’[31] Burns and his works are a conduit which articulate the connection between Scotland and its diaspora.

The *Chronicle* also reveals alterations in the way that Currie positioned Burns. For Currie, Burns’s poetry served to articulate the Scottish ‘love of country’ and to connect those who shared that love. In many speeches in the *Chronicle*, Burns’s poetry becomes not a reflection of Scottish

patriotism but in fact its source. Duncan M'Laren at the Corn Exchange suggests, for example that, 'The poetry of Burns has sunk into the character and hearts of the people of Scotland . . . They have, as it were, been woven into the thoughts and feelings of the people' (19). Lord Ardmillan similarly speculates on the 'influence of Burns's poetry upon the people of Scotland': 'it affects them in their homes, it affects them at their social meetings, it affects them in their public convocations,--it affects the heart and mind of Scotchmen not in Scotland only, but throughout the whole world' (12). Mr. A. Denniston, a writer who proposed a toast to 'The Scottish Peasantry' at Glasgow City Hall, remarks on the 'leading characteristics of our peasantry' and concludes, 'Nor is it the least remarkable feature in their character their high appreciation of the character and works of Robert Burns . . . as a poet of the people how deeply has our national mind been impressed with the poetry of Burns! To that feeling I do not hesitate to ascribe much of that lofty spirit of religion and patriotism for which our peasantry are so remarkable' (47). The same Gorrie who laments the 'dimness' of Scottish national feeling also intimates that it may become the only thing keeping Scottish 'nationality' alive: 'in another hundred years [national feeling] may be fed entirely by the songs of Burns' (29). Rather than connecting those who already feel a sense of Scottish patriotism, Burns's poetry impresses Scottish patriotism upon its readers.

Moreover, that poetry impresses others with its imprint. In the pages of the *Chronicle*, Burns emerges as the poet not only of Scottish nationality, but of nationality in general: 'he proclaimed in noble words a catholic patriotism, an intense love for his mother-land, which yet should be compatible with the recognition that men of other lands should also love them with a similar love' (28). Thus his reputation, notes Colonel Mellish at Glasgow City Hall, 'has come to embrace not only his countrymen but all who can admire genius and venerate lofty feelings in every country of the civilised globe' (41): 'Vast as is this assembly which I now address, it is but the representative of millions in the East and in the West, in the North and in the South, who are now found together in the expression of common feeling; and the pulse which now throbs so violently at the very name of Burns under this roof, is beating also at the same moment in the extremities of the earth, afar off in Australian and Transatlantic wilds' (41). By 1859, Burns has become a universal donor inspiring love for one's country.

Much had changed in the world between the initial publication of Currie's *Works of Robert Burns* and the first centenary celebrations – but much had stayed the same. A comparison between the positioning of Burns in Currie's *Works* and in Ballantine's *Chronicle* illustrates the ways in which, according to Ann Rigney, 'sites of [cultural] memory' are 'constantly being reinvested with new meaning': 'Whether they take the material form of actual places and objects, or the immaterial form of stories and pieces of music, "sites of memory" are defined by the fact that they elicit intense attention on the part of those doing the remembering and thereby become a self-perpetuating vortex of symbolic investment.'[32] Nevertheless, in considering the various ways in

which ‘symbolic investment’ accrues, it is important to consider the artifacts involved in the initial mapping of that cultural memory. James Currie’s *Works* has often been blamed for its negative impact on Burns’s reputation. But it also helped package Burns in such a way as to enable these later reinvestments of meaning. In a toast to ‘The Biographers of Burns, and Mr. Robert Chambers’ taken down by Ballantine from the Edinburgh Music Hall celebration, Lord Neaves noted, ‘It has been said that a hero is nothing without a poet to celebrate his achievements; and it may be added that a poet is not wholly himself without a biographer to commemorate his character and conduct’ (10). Currie’s *Works* facilitated a shift of Burns from communicative to cultural memory. In so doing, it ‘commemorated’ Burns’s ‘character and conduct’ in such a way as to make him a symbol of memory that could be resignified as necessary in subsequent chronological and geographical sites.

NOTES

[1] Thomas Carlyle, *Burns* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1954), 3. Carlyle’s ‘Essay on Burns,’ a review of John Lockhart’s *The Life of Robert Burns*, was first printed in the *Edinburgh Review* of December, 1828 and republished numerous times afterward.

[2] Jan Assman and John Czaplicka, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,’ *New German Critique*, 65 (1995) 125-133; 126.

[3] Ibid, 128-29. Assman and Czaplicka suggest that one characteristic of ‘collective memory’ is its ‘limited temporal horizon’ of eighty to one hundred years which ‘shifts in direct relation to the passing of time’ and which ‘offers no fixed point which would bind it to the ever expanding past’ (127). Cultural memory, however, has a ‘fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time’: ‘These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation’ (129).

[4] Ann Rigney, ‘Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory,’ *Journal of European Studies*, 35:1 (2005), 11-28; 14.

[5] Ibid. Whereas Carlyle longed for the objectivity that he believed could only be achieved through processes involved in what Assmann and Czaplicka refer to as ‘cultural memory,’ Assman and Czaplicka themselves intimate that ‘communicative memory’ is more authentic in conveying the essence of the memory. Rigney examines the myth of what she calls plenitude and loss involved in this model. In response, she points out that communicative memory also involves a selection process.

[6] During his lifetime, Burns was well aware of the power of cultural memory in Scotland and used it to his advantage in works such as ‘The Vision’ and ‘Robert Bruce’s March to Bannockburn.’ But he also skillfully resisted being reduced to merely a channel for Scottish

cultural memory.

[7] Quoted in *Life and Works of Robert Burns*, ed. Robert Chambers (NY: Harper Brothers, 1854), p. 210 fn.

[8] Donald Low, *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1995), 102.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Low suggests that Heron's *Memoir* was important because it was 'the first book-length biography' of Burns (*Robert Burns*, 22).

[11] T. F. Henderson, 'Heron, Robert (1764–1807)', rev. H. C. G. Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13090, accessed 25 May 2009].

[12] Robert Heron, *A Memoir of the Life of the Late Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: T. Brown, 1797), 17. Subsequent quotations are to this edition.

[13] James Currie, *The Works of Robert Burns; with an Account of his Life and a Criticism on his Writings* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1800). Subsequent references are to this edition. Volume 1 included *The life of Robert Burns; with a criticism on his writings. To which are prefixed, some observations on the Scottish peasantry*; Volume 2 covered *General correspondence; including pieces of miscellaneous poetry*; Volume 3 consisted of *Poems, formerly published, with some additions. To which is added, a history of these poems by Gilbert Burns*; while Volume 4 concentrated on *Correspondence with Mr. George Thomson including poetry, hitherto unpublished or uncollected*.

[14]For more details on Currie's life, see Leith Davis, "James Currie," *Dictionary of Literary Biography* Vol. 142: *Eighteenth-Century British Literary Biographers*, 61-68.

[15] Quoted in Chambers, *Life and Works*, 225.

[16]The eighth edition was actually produced by Cadell and Davies with additional information from Gilbert Burns, but this was not successful and did not go to a second printing.

[17] See *The Works of Robert Burns* (Philadelphia: Printed by Budd and Bartram, for Thomas Dobson,1801); *The Works of Robert Burns* (Belfast: Abcher and Ward, and D. Simms, 1805); and *The Complete Works of Robert Burns, with an Account of his Life, and a Criticism of his Writings* (Halifax: William Milner, 1842).

[18] *A New edition of the Life and Works of Robert Burns, as originally edited by James Currie* (Edinburgh: Macredie, Skelly and Muckersy, 1815).

[19] James Storer and John Grieg, *Nineteen Views in North Britain, Illustrative of the Works of Robert Burns* (London: Vernor and Hood, 1805).

[20] James Currie, *The Life of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: William and Robert Chambers, 1838), ii.

[21] R. H. Cromek, *Reliques of Robert Burns* (London: Cadell and Davies,1817), iii.

[22] Carlyle, *Burns*, 4.

[23] William Wordsworth, *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees,

Orme and Brown, 1816). 8. Subsequent references are to this edition.

[24] J.G. Lockhart, *The Life of Burns*, ed. William Scott Douglass (London: George Bell and Sons, 1882), xv. In his sketch of Burns for *Lives of the Scottish Poets*, David Irving noted that 'The character of Burns has been drawn with sufficient accuracy by Dr Currie; from whom I shall borrow what appears most material' (*Lives of the Scottish Poets*, 2 vols. [Edinburgh: Alexander Lawrie and Company, 1804], 2:482).

[25] Quoted in Low, *Robert Burns*, 419. See James Hogg and William Motherwell, *The Works of Robert Burns* (Glasgow: Archibald Fullerton, 1836).

[26] Low, *Robert Burns*, xv.

[27]*The Bibliography of Robert Burns with Biographical and Bibliographical Notes, and Sketches of Burns Clubs, Monuments and Statues* (Kilmarnock: James M'Kie, 1881), 310.

[28] Carol McGuirk, 'Introduction: Burns Country—Critics and Cultists' in *Critical Essays on Robert Burns* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1998), 1-12; 2.

[29] See Donald Low, *Robert Burns*, 274.

[30] James Ballantine, ed., *The Chronicle of the Hundredth Birth Day of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh and London: A. Fullarton, 1859), vi. Subsequent references are to this edition.

[31] Ibid, 170.

[32] Rigney, 'Plenitude,' 18.

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Two Talks on Burns

Jeffrey Skoblow

I. Burns, Whitman, and the Nation of Song

'that man to man the world o'er / Shall brithers be for a' that'

The main claim I wish to make here is that Burns' great musical project – the gathering and writing of songs, most of them published anonymously in the multi-volume collections edited by Johnson and Thomson, *The Scots Musical Museum* and *A Select Collection of Original Scotish Airs*, others published anonymously, posthumously and more privately, as in the case of the *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* – (that all this) is also in fact a political project, involving the definition or redefinition of a 'Nation' as: a group of people who sing (or who are capable of singing) the same songs. These two points or projects – saving Scotland's national song heritage, and opening up or blasting away at the very idea of nationhood, as it would seem, in the face and name of a more universal brotherhood – would appear to be in contradiction: one an essentially nationalist endeavour, the other aimed at the negation of all that – and one (Song) generally a matter of merriment and conviviality, while the other (Nationhood) is a matter, generally, of assertion and division, of anxiety and often of violence. But the confusion – the apparent contradiction – is perhaps only a function of our having been schooled so effectively in the assumptions of Nation as a matter of political borders and governmental (generally bureaucratic) structures; the Nation-State model of the past several centuries. For Burns, though, perhaps this model does not prevail. For Burns, perhaps, there is no contradiction between Scotland and the World. (Or for that matter between himself and Scotland.)

A song sung together is in fact one type of representative government, or self-government, a way of delineating modes of social organisation, involving collaborations, dominations and subordinations of all kinds. So the notion of a Nation of Song is in the end perhaps not as

paradoxical as it may seem. What is important is to understand precisely how the conceptual framework of Song re-shapes our conception of Nation – how the whole question of Nation, nationhood, nationality, or national identity, is radically re-defined when we consider it to be something constituted by Singing.

One of the key issues involved here of course is the distinction or distinctions between oral / aural experience, on the one hand, and the experience of print media on the other. These distinctions have been much rehearsed and contested at least since Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (1982) if not since Plato, and Derrida even appears to have demonstrated that the distinction doesn't exist at all, or at least that the claims made on its behalf are quite generally, in the vast majority of instances, altogether without true basis – a fetish of the 'always already lost origin'. Fair enough. In any event, I don't mean here to suggest the primacy or purity of orality, only to recognise a degree of difference. The distinction between oral and print transmission is palpable, and by understanding it we illuminate something at the centre of Burns' work, and at the centre of the idea of Nation as well.

Orality / Aurality – or what we might call Performativity (though editors, not to mention Microsoft Word, have asked me to change this word because they don't find it in their dictionaries) – is distinguished from print in a number of crucial ways. Tolerance for variation is certainly one of the attributes of Performative utterance, relative to print, as evinced by this very example – the word 'performativity' itself. On the other hand, the performative mode – devised as a kind of continuous present – is not nearly as well designed as print media are for argument by means of multiple examples or by reference to the works of others: Song, or voice, or the Performative works by a more immediate process, and seeks its approvals by other means. Song is an appeal not to support (by rational and persuasive means) so much as to surrender, to identification, to opening up and taking in – quite the model for 'the Nation'! Instead of sovereignty, borders and the ability to defend them, surrender! Opening up and Taking in I mean both literally and metaphorically, both taking a song into your lungs, your mouth, making its breath your own, while appealing to ears to take it in as well, and beyond that, with reference to our consciousness – maybe even more to the point our unconsciousness – opening up and taking in instead of marking limits and exclusions.

Now these matters are complicated, and I don't mean to handle them lightly. Even Nazis have their songs, and singing them marks a powerful bond, involving a surrender, too, to some conception of 'the People' – part imaginary construction, part intense yearning. Sometimes the Opening up and the Taking in serve nothing so much as the marking of limits and exclusions, and I don't mean to be naïve, Song can be as deadly as any ten-point plan. (Indeed Hitler's own work flourished in the oral mode, appealing not to rational support as to surrender, identification, willing

submission: such deep passivities and subjections can feed deep aggressions. But the ‘Nation’ in that case was not singing, itself, but [so to speak] being Sung to.)

I do mean to say that Song embodies certain principles of human interaction – and cultural transmission – which are not as readily managed in print. Collaboration is one of them – singing together is the natural state of singing, you might say, or at least music-making together a kind of default mode for music-making, whereas writing, even, generally, in collaboration, involves more intensive and extensive periods of individual work. The collaboration of Song is collaboration in-the-moment (rather than the temporal and spatial distances between production and reception of printed language). A related principle (and again, these are not principles agreed upon but observations of standard practice) is the principle of emotional presence (rather than executive distance): a piece of writing can be emotionally absent, and still highly effective, even praiseworthy, but no song could ever be. You could even say, perhaps, that Song is, structurally, a kind of anti-masculinist activity: emotional rather than rational, with its emotional valence set at cooperation rather than threat or defense – but this may not be the best way to pursue the issue, since conceptions of ‘masculinist’ and ‘feminist’, like conceptions of ‘Nation’, have been narrowed for us perhaps over-zealously.

Distinctions between Song and Text in comparison are fairly straightforward sensory affairs. Is Scotland a nation or not a nation? The question is debatable in 1604, 1708, or today, as is the question of what ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ might mean. But the difference between singing and reading (or writing) is not to be reasoned away, however large the degree of overlap in import and function of both activities. The British archaeologist Stephen Mithen, in his fascinating and highly entertaining book *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body*, talks about music-making as a kind of foundational, fundamental experience of 'shared emotional state' in the evolution of our genus (note: our genus, deeper even than species-being – talk about always already lost origins!).[1] 'Trust in one’s fellow music-makers,' Mithen claims, is the key to this shared condition – again, a kind of early political arrangement. Music develops as an organ for group adhesion and cohesion. Song in particular, as a combination of music’s emotional modalities and the force of language (more rational, though not entirely rational), which equally powerfully underlies our experience of social relations and identification – Song would seem to be a powerful vessel and indeed engine of group recognition.

Merely considering these elementary principles of collaboration and emotional presence, along with a third signature, so to speak, of Song culture – anonymity (most of Burns’ songs were unaccredited, just as the provenance of many of the songs he gathered from other sources is traditionally ‘anonymous’) – we can see already how a concept of Nation conceived in such terms would be … unrecognisable. A kind of Utopian nation, is maybe the best way to think of it –

expressed not in the content of the songs (some of which, for instance from *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, can be quite brutal, not exactly dreams of perfection), but expressed, rather, in the very form of Song, as I have been trying to sketch it.

Walt Whitman, a more programmatic type of personality, addresses these matters perhaps more directly, although even Whitman, here, is less than explicit. Whitman recognises in Burns what we recognise in both Walt and Rabbie: deep commitment to a radical democracy, and strong identification with Song as a medium. These commitments and identifications are linked in Whitman's work – 'Song of Myself' is itself, among other things, a great manifesto of radical democracy – and in his essay 'Robert Burns as Poet and Person' (collected among other places in the volume *Democratic Vistas*) we can see him reflecting on this same linkage in his Scottish brother. First of all, it is 'among singers' that Whitman considers Burns.[2] (In his account of the means by which 'we know [Burns],' text per se is hardly a factor; instead, it is by means of 'recorded utterances, … diligence of collections, personal songs, letters, [and] anecdotes.' Only almost as an afterthought, and vaguely, does he refer to 'the lines mainly by his own hand' – that is, Burns' hand, or Burns as poet rather than singer.)[3] And if, for Whitman as for the tradition at large, 'song' is often a word meaning 'verse' generally, and the distinctions between the terms are differences of degree more than of kind, nevertheless, it does seem for Whitman (and to me) that the category of Song emphasises something latent in print poetry, but not always, shall we say, active. Burns is identified with that dimension of 'poesy' which print is not central to, and to which, indeed, print is not always friendly.

The songster Burns is also, for Whitman, a deeply political figure, although again, since we are talking about a radically democratic politics, the political figure to be cut here may not be the one we ordinarily recognise as such. He is not, so to speak, a public political figure but a private one, if such a thing is even possible – a kind of oxymoron under the sign, again, of Utopia. Burns is not, that is, a leader or a hero – or perhaps this is the wrong way to put it, better to say: he *is* a leader and a hero only to the extent that he is, in Whitman's words, 'an average sample', the 'essential type of so many thousands': he stands out, in other words, by disappearing. 'Without the race of which he is a distinct specimen, (and perhaps his poems),' Whitman adds, 'America and her powerful democracy could not exist today' (1882 when Whitman first published the piece), and: 'He was essentially a republican – would have been at home in the western United States, and probably become eminent there'.[4] (Something you could say about Sarah Palin or George Bush, of course, too, though in a very different sense.) Burns provides the 'full and true portrait' that Whitman says 'is always what is wanted; veracity at every hazard'.[5] (Indeed a kind of anti-Bush. I ask you to forgive the reference to my own national example, which indeed has been an egregious one; but you will all I expect be able to supply your own examples of less than

always veracious figures from your own political cultures.) ‘Veracity’ too, perhaps, is a salient value of Song: easier to fake it in print than in full throat.

Burns does his work, in Whitman’s words, ‘through the years and under the circumstances of the British politics of that time’,[6] and although of course much has changed in the interval, it would seem to be the argument of Poets and Singers generally that certain elements of politics – that is, of human social power arrangements – remain quite constant. ‘Nation’ (like tribe or kingdom) is one of our paradigms of the constant: an arrangement between those governed and their governors. The Nation of Song, however, proposes not so much an arrangement but a form of membership in a body, all of whose parts are in communication with all. This is the idea of Nation transformed.

Whitman imagines such a nation in ‘I Hear America Singing’ (first published in 1860 under the heading of ‘Chants Democratic’). He hears ‘the varied carols’ ‘of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong’, as for instance ‘the carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam’, or ‘the boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deck-hand singing on the steamboat deck’, ‘the wood-cutter’s song, the ploughboy’s on his way in the morning’, or ‘the delicious singing of the mother, … or of the girl sewing or washing’.[7] Although in each case here we can imagine the person literally singing as they work, Whitman makes it possible to imagine Singing in a figurative sense too: the work itself conceived as a kind of Song that he ‘hears’, a metaphor for natural expression, for self-creation, and harmonious action. ‘Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else’, Whitman says, ‘Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs’, but this vision of isolate individuals seemingly defined by their tasks is also a vision of the Nation singing – ‘America singing’ – a vision of the union of peoples.[8] The union is figured in the song.

It is interesting to note that in his revisions of the order and contents of his *Leaves of Grass* over the years, Whitman moved this poem from ‘Chants Democratic’ to the ‘Inscriptions’ section of the work, as if acknowledging the distance of this print reflection from the live performance it makes record of.[9] The Nation is a song, and the song remains ineffable, not to be fixed in its truest form by mere print – by ink and paper. Another of the ‘Inscriptions’ addresses these same subjects in particularly pithy form: ‘Still though the one I sing, / (One, yet of contradictions made,) I dedicate to Nationality, / I leave in him revolt, (O latent right of insurrection! O quenchless, indispensable fire!)’[10] The Nation here is composed of sung selves, and as such, of contradictions; and it is subject to its own subjects, vulnerable to being decomposed, as it were, by the ones who make it up. Before it was an ‘Inscription’ this poem was the introduction to a series of ‘Songs of Insurrection’.[11]

This endlessly de- and re-composed Nation of Song for Whitman is called America, but America is a plastic entity that essentially means 'the people' of a universal brotherhood – at least in potential, if the songs are widely enough shared. (In this context, 'Auld Lang Syne' may be Burns' most revolutionary song.) Song is the voice of this 'nation', for Whitman, in part because Song embodies a kind of resistance to being fixed in its form and future, and Burns is one of the nation's chief prophets, because he plants himself, textually speaking, firmly in that mode, that is, in the anonymity and collectivity of Song. Burns you could say walks a kind of borderline between the textual and the oral; he is not Mrs Hogg complaining (famously) to Walter Scott that in collecting and printing her songs he'd ruined them forever, but he doesn't fully give himself over to print, either. He stands out, again, by disappearing into the collective anonymous, making a claim of the broadest possible identification.

The nation of song Burns imagines is imagined at a moment of cultural crisis, when definitions of 'the collective' are precisely what is at stake: a type of phoenix-nation, rising from the museum of one people to assume a broader conception of itself, indeed an endless one. This nation – this union or universal brotherhood – is at once a dream and a tangible fact. In the world it is a dream. In Song, for Burns (as for Whitman), it is fact.

II. A --- by any other name: Burns and BAUDY!

This talk grows out of a moment, when I first saw the conference invitation with its list of 'suggested topics' for papers and sessions, and at the bottom, as I remember it, one of the items was 'Burns and Pornography,' and I thought: 'well, that's not the right word for what Burns does'. So what *is* it that Burns does, with regard to what might be categorised as 'pornography'? And what might 'it' better or more appropriately be called? Or, another way to say the same thing, maybe: my title is 'A --- by any other name: Burns and BAUDY!' and my main subject here is what that 'blank' might stand for or mean. The 'blank' figures prominently in Burns' own work, and of course in eighteenth-century convention widely observed, when objectionable or otherwise over-charged words must be at once used and suppressed. 'L–d,' for instance, as in Burns' 'Epitaph for J. H. Writer in Ayr,' 'Here lies a Scots mile of a chiel, / If he's in heaven, L–d, fill him weel!,' where 'Lord' reads 'L dash d', blanking out the 'o r'.[12] Or 'G–' in 'The Holy Fair' ('Should *Hornie*, as in ancient days, / 'Mang sons o' G– present him'), where words like 'd-mn-t--n' have all their vowels replaced by dashes, too, and where various preachers' names are blanked out as well (by rows of asterisks rather than 'blank' dashes).[13] Kilmarnock appears here, too, as 'K*******ck'.[14] And other names, like 'Aiken' in 'The Cotter's Saturday Night,' appearing as 'A****,' or all the recipients of the verse epistles, among many other examples, are scattered throughout his work,

blanked out in this fashion, whether the names are public or private in context.[15] But the 'blank' figures still more extensively and centrally in the bawdy songs, like those collected in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, where we see it – that is, the 'blank' – spreading to virtually every part of speech, from the proper nouns already mentioned to common nouns (and I do mean common nouns) with a varied range of reference, to verbs (like 'f---g' and 'f---rted' – fucking and farted – not to mention 'r---ger' for 'roger', as when 'Latona's son' goes 'To r---ger Madame Thetis' in 'Ode to Spring'), and even to the adjectival: I'm thinking of 'd---n'd,' and also of 'Wry-c---d is she' (Wry-cunted) in 'O Saw Ye My Maggie?'[16]

Perhaps the best place to start is with Burns' own framing of the other key term in the title of my talk, that is, 'BAUDY!' Here is his characterisation of the matter from his well-known letter to Robert Maxwell, in the revolutionary year of 1789:

> Shall I write to you on Politics, or Religion, two master-subjects for your Sayers of nothing?... –I might write you on farming, on building, on marketing, on planning, &c., but my poor distracted mind is so torn, so jaded, so racked & bedevil'd with the task of the superlatively Damn'd – MAKING ONE GUINEA DO THE BUSINESS OF THREE – that I detest, abhor and swoon at the very word, Business, though no less than four letters of my very short Sirname are in it. –
>
> Well, to make the matter short, I shall betake myself to a subject ever fertile of themes, a Subject, the turtle-feast of the Sons of Satan, and the delicious, secret Sugar-plumb of the Babes of Grace; a Subject sparkling with all the jewels that Wit can find in the mines of Genius, and pregnant with all the stores of Learning, from Moses & Confucius to Franklin & Priestly – in short, may it please Your Lordship, I intend to write BAUDY![17]

That last bit bears repeating: BAUDY is 'a subject ever fertile of themes, the turtle-feast of the Sons of Satan, and the delicious, secret Sugar-plumb of the Babes of Grace; a Subject sparkling with all the jewels that Wit can find in the mines of Genius, and pregnant with all the stores of Learning, from Moses & Confucius to Franklin & Priestly'. Even accounting for Burns' tongue being firmly at least halfway in cheek here, if this is Pornography, then Pornography is something like an area of Classical Studies or Philosophy, or a branch, perhaps, of Theology, uniting both sinners and holy folks, Sons of Satan and Babes of Grace, in one grand simultaneously dirty and purifying embrace. A Subject that is markedly *not* religion, politics, or business. A kind of 'blank' called BAUDY!

Burns writes this word in his letter to Maxwell all in caps with an exclamation point, spelling it B-A-U, as elsewhere (though sometimes 'b-a-w'). In a letter to Robert Cleghorn in 1793 – an even

scarier revolutionary year – he spells it thus too, B-A-U, but also writes it with its vowels blanked out, as in 'B–dy-song' and 'B–dy' (which really reinforces the sense of Bawdy as a synonym for Body. And in fact, most of the words blanked out in *The Merry Muses* are words for body parts, far outnumbering all proper nouns and verbs put together). The exclamation and the upper-case letters stress the corporeality of the term, as do the blanks – as if it were a word for something not quite fully conceivable in *language* – not located in a purely linguistic or semantic context, but in the *body*, a representation of something that cannot be represented, at least not without losing all the force and spirit and sensual engagement that makes it what it is: the body, I mean, and why we cherish it (when we don't despise it). The closest we get to the unrepresented thing itself, that phantom presence.

So BAUDY is perhaps best thought of less as a form of representation (maybe that's another meaning of the 'blanks') and more as an engagement to perform, its effects aimed not at constructing an image but at inviting an action – that is, Singing, and specifically Singing the Body, filling in the blanks with our own voices. And this is itself, perhaps, part of the political philosophy of BAUDY-Song, part of the lore and learning that BAUDY is said to be pregnant with.

BAUDY in other words is a branch of Song, for Burns, and perhaps in a certain sense the most eminent or purest branch, the place where Song most directly and completely makes its claim on the Body that sustains it, singing. Almost anything you could say about Song in general would apply to Baudy-Song as well. But not everything you can say about Baudy-Song would you say about Song generally.

There's another dimension of the 'blank' that is BAUDY, and that is that it pertains to a broader set of Burn's concerns with questions of Scottish identity and the Scottish nation, indeed concerns not only of Burns but of Scottish literature generally, such as the question of what to call things, or the constructedness of all answers to such questions, which is to say the politically and culturally charged nature of all such questions and all possible answers – as to What to Call Things. Scotland in a particular way is a kind of blank, that is, a type of the unwritten writ large; W. N. Herbert's work, for one example on the contemporary scene, explores this dimension of Scottish cultural consciousness, worrying and savoring that porous border, as in his poem 'The Laurelude', but this is a central concern of MacDiarmid's, too – writing the unwritten Scotland – and of Burns' as well, not to mention John Barbour's in the fourteenth century. (When Edwin Muir calls Scotland a 'Nothing' with 'a blank, an Edinburgh, in the middle of it', he is making a different kind of argument, positing an obstacle where I am arguing an opportunity.)[18] The way we frame these matters now, we would call this a matter of postcolonial identity narrative: the Scottish self and society has been unwritten, that is, folded into the British (with the problematic way the British has of morphing into the English) which at the same time provokes a kind of assertion of the

Scottish – as in the work of Allan Ramsay, say, or in Burns' own song-gathering. The blanking-out of Scottishness (used and suppressed at once) in this context becomes a kind of insight, pointing to the hidden identity of *all* nations, selves, societies, the constructedness of them all, the non-inevitability of them all. The blank – like postcolonial identity – is a great de-stabiliser, a kind of great leveler. Like Baudy is.

This is all admittedly a long way to go from '---' (blank), or from arse, cunt, cock and ballocks – but this is part of Burns' great genius, that sense he has and imparts of the elemental and transient mundane (of abiding truths for good or ill), which is also a kind of philosophical reflection on the standing and nature of mankind, and on the nations of mankind. Not so far from Moses and Confucius after all, even if he works in quite a different key. The fundamental functions of the body – the 'things' that are specifically left out of ordinary 'polite' discourse, and normally left to the specialists (the doctors and the pornographers) – are central to Burns' overall subject. These fundamental functions, like the body parts involved in some of them, speak to our being in the grip of forces beyond us – and yet forces that define us, too, if not exclusively at least centrally. This is a kind of politics in itself, perhaps a kind of cosmic politics, the heel under which we are all ground. That it can feel good sometimes, and even be a source of joy (and even a kind of spiritual ecstasy) and humour, is only a kind of bonus, a great unexpected gift of nature; that nobody can escape – can escape shit (another word blanked out in *The Merry Muses*), or the deep shaking of sexual impulse, can escape the flesh, or death in the end – this is the important part.

The politics of Baudy situates itself underneath all other politics: Scots and English, in fact everyone on earth, all share *these* lords and devils. In this way, at least, Baudy is a deeply subversive mode of literary action, even if in other ways it is quite utterly conventional and in some ways not subversive at all but right at the heart of patriarchal power-politics: a very voice of oppression. As leveler, Baudy blanks out distinctions: a man's a man for a' that.

I don't mean to suggest here that when Burns writes songs with Baudy gaps and dashes in them he means to say that sex is a metaphor for Scotland – or vice versa – in its indeterminability, in its openness as a sign and its power as a suppressed truth to overturn all conventional orders. (Microsoft Word tells me that 'indeterminability' is not a word, but I will leave it for that very reason. You can say things that you're not allowed to write.) And I don't mean to say that Burns writes BAUDY! *as* a postcolonial (or colonial) subject looking to define his postcolonial identity – although he *is* a postcolonial (or colonial) subject writing BAUDY. I do mean that when Burns addresses questions of Scottish national identity, and when Burns writes BAUDY, in either case he has in mind a species of Otherness, something at once unspoken and irrefutable, something that will not be refused regardless of the constraints upon it, and that he approaches both

subjects – Scotland, and the Body – as performance projects, not to be described or defined so much as embodied, given voice to: blanks to be filled in with our own breaths.

Pornography would seem to be a representation of sexuality and sexual fantasy based on the endless availability of one gender, and the endless capacity of the other – or as in the case of same-sex pornography, the endless availability and capacity of the Other and others generally. Acknowledging that the majority of such representations speak to men, for men (even though women may be and generally are involved), whichever gender or sexual being is displaying its availability and capacity is debased, perhaps, more by virtue of this display, than by the mere fact of sexual body parts (or the words for these body parts) having been shown: more dehumanised not by virtue of being sexual, or even being nothing *but* sexual, but by virtue of being rendered nothing but a capacity and an availability: a kind of slave.

BAUDY on the other hand presents its sexual subjects as partaking of a more varied condition. Enslaved in a sense, not to their sexual others but to sex itself: in the grip of our flesh. And in a way reduced to this 'status' or condition. But that's not quite the right way to put it. Some of the songs, like 'Act Sederunt of the Session,' are about the legal restrictions on sexual expression more than about sex itself, or like 'When Princes and Prelates' are about politics and economic injustice, with sex (specifically, 'mowing') as one of the argument's key elements – not any particular couple's sexual encounter but the widespread fact of sexual activity among human beings: hardly the pornographic perspective.[19] ('When Princes and Prelates' is where 'Poor bodies hae naething but mowe,' and where 'Br–nsw–ck,' 'Fr–nce,' 'Pr–ss–a,' and 'Emp–r–r' would appear to be obscenities.)[20] 'While Prose-Work and Rhymes' (to the tune of 'The Campbells Are Coming') is reflective along these lines as well; it includes the line 'No treason is in a good --- ' (where the dash means 'mow'), itself, again, a kind of nascent sociopolitical compact.[21] 'Ode to Spring' – where Latona's son rogers Madame Thetis – is a classical romp, a naughty pastiche of classical highmindedness, and in the end just another case of the old gods and their randy ways, more Ovid than Henry Miller. Even among the songs that deal more directly with sexual encounters between mortal (and one could say eternally contemporary) individuals presented in some degree of graphic detail, the range is wider than the term 'pornographic' suggests. Some songs, like 'The Patriarch' and 'Duncan Gray', are about the endless capacity of one and the endless *un*availability of the other;[22] Duncan Gray and 'our Meg' pursue each other with equal persistence to the tune of cosmic laughter – 'Ha, ha, ha, the girdin' o't' is the refrain – until in the end Duncan himself 'wearies o' the girdin' o't,' a kind of sin in porno.[23] Quite a few songs fit into this mismatch-of-energies category, including 'Nine Inch Will Please a Lady', which you could also call a bit of domestic sex education (this is the 'evidently old' song to the effect that size indeed matters, but that spirit and technique matter more: closer to tender than to salacious).[24] 'O Saw Ye My Maggie' is a tender tune as well, a powerful love song (it helps to hear Ewan

MacColl sing it), which speaks directly to the power of a beloved body, and happens to use forbidden words.[25] Finally there's 'The Trogger' which may be, among other things, about getting a case of the crabs or pubic lice from a roadside sex encounter – hardly, again, the porno perspective. But even if the song's conclusion, 'I've clawed a sairy c–t sinsyne, / O the deevil tak sic troggin!' refers to a case of compulsive masturbation instead (as indeed it sounds in MacColl's rendition), we're talking (or singing) not endless consummation here but bitter loss, or at least rueful recognition of our incapacities, needs and frustrations – which is not where porn lives, either.[26]

Perhaps it *would* be better to call them Body Songs (to which category we could admit other songs, about fingers or lips or eyes) – or maybe, simply, Baudy is best understood as the Body in its condition or categorisation as forbidden in word or deed. That this forbidden body is of an elemental nature, nowhere else addressed (except by specialists, doctors or pornographers), makes the loss a great one, and makes Baudy's reclamation of the body a powerful one, however unsavoury we may find it.

Scotland, for Burns, is a kind of forbidden body too – this is in part what his massive Song project is aimed at bearing forth, not to mention *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. (The body is always his most trusted touchstone, and the poor body's oppression his steadiest complaint.) If Scottish identity is at once proscribed and inescapable, and a matter of endless construction and reconstruction, then Baudy must be at least one of its Muses.

In the end for Burns 'the smuttiest sang that e'er was sung / [the] Sang o' Sangs is a' that,' – that's King Solomon's Sang o' Sangs – so who's to say: one body's trash is another body's Bible.[27] This is from 'The Bonniest Lass', more a sermon on hypocrisy in high places than a raunch-fest, and without even a single word blanked out: the crime of this song would seem to be merely imagining 'Your patriarchs in days o' yore' as sexual beings of sometimes questionable morals, and making direct though veiled reference 'to what we shall not name' – the female sexual organ. At the other end of the spectrum there's 'Eppie McNab', an old song collected by Burns, where 'Thy breeks they were hol'd, and thy [blank] hung out, / And thy [blank] play'd ay did dod, did dod' – and not much else goes on.[28] But from one end to the other, Baudy for Burns gives voice to central preoccupations with the body, in both its subjection and its resistance: a political matter, ultimately, that undercuts the authority of all parliaments, courts, and churches.

NOTES

[1] Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 208.

[2] Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas and Other Papers* (London: Walter Scott, 1888), p. 113.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 114.

[6] Ibid., p. 120.

[7] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Sculley Bradley and Harold Blodgett (New York: Norton & Company, 1973), p. 12.

[8] Ibid., p. 13.

[9] Ibid., p. 12.

[10] Ibid., p. 13.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Robert Burns, *Poems and Songs*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 354.

[13] Ibid., p. 106.

[14] Ibid., p. 105.

[15] Ibid., p. 116.

[16] Robert Burns, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, ed. James Barke & Sydney Goodsir Smith (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), pp. 90, 72, 62, 64.

[17] Robert Burns, *The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. J. DeLancey Ferguson, 2nd ed. G. Ross Roy, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931, 1985), I: 462.

[18] Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1936), 12.

[19] *Merry Muses*, pp. 54-57.

[20] Ibid., p. 56.

[21] Ibid. p. 58.

[22] Ibid., pp. 89-91, 128-130.

[23] Ibid., pp. 128-129.

[24] Ibid., pp. 60-1.

[25] Ibid., pp. 64-6.

[26] Ibid., p. 101.

[27] Ibid., p. 93.

[28] Ibid., p. 127.