

**WHO WROTE THE *SCOTS MUSICAL MUSEUM*?  
CHALLENGING EDITORIAL PRACTICE IN THE  
PRESENCE OF AUTHORIAL ABSENCE**

*Murray Pittock*

The *Scots Musical Museum* is arguably the underpinning canonical text of Scottish song, the place where the country's leading poet meets its great musical tradition in a "mouseion," a temple of the Muses, which is also a Museum, a collection of antiquarian fragments. This six volume collection of the songs of Scotland was produced by James Johnson and Robert Burns, with the help of Stephen Clarke and many others, in the years 1787-1803. Although it was apparently a collection which was to serve as a "museum" for Scottish song, it was in fact in many respects less Scottish and less antiquarian than it appeared. The *Museum* took advantage both of the extensive market in song across the British Isles in the eighteenth century, and also of the new market in pianofortes which was being opened up in Edinburgh and elsewhere in the 1780s by John Broadwood (1732-1812) and others: pianos began to appear in Edinburgh music shops only three years before the first volume of the *Museum* appeared. Collections were 'pianoized'. As David McGuinness points out, the bass line of Neil Gow's "Lament for James Moray of Abercairney" had turned from a lamenting drone to a piano accompaniment between the 1784 and 1801 editions. Many of the traditions of Scottish song that the *Museum* seemed to be preserving were themselves novelties: what had been "new" reels in Neil Stewart's 1761 *Collection* and its successor collections, were "old" less than a generation later. For example, *A Collection of Strathspey or old Highland Reels by Angus Cumming at Grantown in Strathspey* (Edinburgh, 1780) reproduced what had been Stewart's "newest" material as "old Highland reels", while Daniel Dow helped to introduce the concept of "Ancient Scots Music" a few years earlier.<sup>1</sup> In keeping with this context of

---

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to David McGuinness for this information, and for information over the piano trade and the rise of the bass stave, both generally and in work

branding recent compositions as examples of antique verity, the *Scots Musical Museum* was not a museum and was comprehensively “Scots” in point of neither tunes nor lyrics. This was, as we shall see, ironic, given that Scotland’s foremost poet appeared intent on using the *Museum* as the vehicle by which he might speak for a nation and preserve a tradition. Burns not infrequently comments on the national purity of a song or tune; at least as frequently, he ensures that songs or tunes which are neither national nor pure appear in the collection. Yet despite its (welcome) limitations as a reservoir of national purity, the *Museum* remains an indispensable collection of the canon of much of what remains the most popular in Scottish song.

The Catch Club to which the first edition of the *Museum* was dedicated had its origins with a group who met after the concerts held by the Edinburgh Musical Society in St Cecilia’s Hall. This Society, inaugurated in 1728 in St Mary’s Chapel in Niddry’s Wynd, was itself descended from the Weekly Club held at John Steill’s tavern, the Cross Keys in the 1690s, and perhaps partly from the 1695 St Cecilia’s concert at which Matthew McGibbon played, being given permission to open a music school in Edinburgh the following year. The Catch Club met after the concerts in St Cecilia’s Hall and performed “select pieces of vocal musick...intermingled with Scots songs, duets, catches, and glees.... the easy cheerfulness which reigned in this select society, rendered their meetings delightful.” The Catch Club then was an object of dedication which revealed both the traditional loyalties of the *Museum* to Scottish tradition, and its full engagement in the contemporary musical life of the Scottish Enlightenment’s fusion music tradition.<sup>2</sup>

In *A Dissertation on the Scottish Musick* (1779), William Tytler suggested that the modal and pentatonic quality of many Scots songs aligned with instruments such as the “shepherd’s pipe”, and had even gone so far down the route of autochthonous identity as to opine that “a Scots song can only be sung by a Scots voice.” Burns followed Tytler in a

---

carried out for his AHRC “Bass Culture in Scottish musical traditions” project (unpublished presentation of 19 March 2014: <http://bassculture.info>). See also Mary Anne Alburger, “The Fiddle”, in John Beech et al., eds., *Scottish Life and Society: Oral Literature and Performance Culture* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), 238-73 (254).

<sup>2</sup> Hugo Arnot, *The History of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: West Port Books, 1998 [1779]), 221, 222.

number of respects, not least his patriotic reading of the tradition, which had itself by this time become significantly altered. Ramsay's older argument for a national style which would with "*Correlli's* soft *Italian Song*,/*Mix Cowdon Knows...*" (a rather ironic example as it turns out, for "*Cowdenknowes*" first appears as an air in John Playford's 1651 *English Dancing Master*, while its earlier broadside origins are simply identifiable as "North Country") foreshadowed three generations of fusion music, which the new museologists of Scottish song were inclined to conceal. Following this lead, ornamentation had become quite common in Scottish song, and those who favoured unadorned simplicity were often commentators—such as Ritson—who were not primarily musicians.<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, the "bass line" approach recommended by Tytler and used by Johnson and Clarke dated back to Thomson's *Orpheus Caledonius*, and Thomson was a member of the Canongate Kilwinning Lodge No. 2 which was at the heart both of Scottish Freemasonry and the patronage of late eighteenth-century Edinburgh music. Both Stephen Clarke and Johnson notated the settings in figured bass and Burns seems to have been in agreement with them, though by the appearance of the last volume of the *Museum*, such an approach seemed to be too conservative. In 1790 for example, William Napier's *Scottish Songs* presented a more complex set of string parts, and "anything up to three string players could join in, the first instrument doubling the vocal line and the cello the bass, which was figured." However, it was Napier's settings which were themselves to be overtaken, as the 'cello came less and less to be used in this capacity.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> *Robert Burns's Common Place Book*, ed. Raymond Lamont Brown (Edinburgh: S.R. Publishers, 1969 [1872]), 48; James Beattie, *Essays on Poetry and Music*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh and London: Dilly and Creech, 1779 [1776]); Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music"* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 179-83. Urbani published his *Selection of Scots Songs Improved with Simple Adapted Graces* in 1792-94 (see also Burns to Cunningham, November 1793 (Letter 593A) and to Johnson, 29 June 1794). See also: Ruth Perry, "'The Finest Ballads': Women's Oral Tradition in Eighteenth-Century Scotland," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 32:1 (2008), 81-97 (83); Catarina Ericson-Roos, *The Songs of Robert Burns: A Study of the Unity of Poetry and Music* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsalensis/Almqvist & Wihzell, 1977), 26; Roger Fiske, *Scotland in Music: A European Enthusiasm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3; Alburger in Beech (2007), 253-54.

<sup>4</sup> Ericson-Roos (1977), 13; Richard Hindle Fowler, *Robert Burns* (London: Routledge, 1988), 15-16; Gelbart (2007), 89, 90-91, 97-98; Nigel Leask, *Robert*

The apparent favouring of the “piano as the accompanying instrument” was not so much a “*lieder-type*” song culture being developed *avant la lettre*, as Janetta Gould argues, but more of a recognition of the role the domestic market was now playing in ensuring Scottish music’s future status. The “barbarous” music of Scotland was being eased gently into the discourses of intellectual cultural nationalism, softened of its politics through accompaniment on the new instrument of British bourgeois gentility. Sometimes this was strained beyond the point of credibility: the presence of airs from Purcell, Arne and some other English composers in the first volume of the *Museum* hardly fulfilled the case for the autochthonous voice—the judgement of the “Common People,” the “old words” of the national tunes—made in Burns’s preface to the second. Burns was in fact here as elsewhere pretending to be a conduit for the peasantry while all the while consciously pandering to the cultural nationalism of the middling sort in Scotland, whose “tradition” was already hybridized with English and Italian models, and who wanted—as Ramsay had realized sixty years earlier—neither “Smut” nor “Ribaldry,” though Burns was to satisfy those requiring these elsewhere. As Steve Sweeney-Turner notes, “the sweet simplicity” of “native melodies” sought by Johnson’s collection was in reality “presented for a specifically bourgeois audience trained in the notational and performance techniques of the Italian baroque style which had occupied such a high currency in Edinburgh.”<sup>5</sup>

---

*Burns and Pastoral* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75; John Aikin, *Essays on song-writing*, 3rd ed. (Dublin: Thomas Armitage, 1777), vi; see also Kirsteen McCue, ““An individual flowering on a common stem”: melody, performance, and national song,” in Philip Connell and Nigel Leask, eds., *Romanticism and Popular Culture in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 88-106 (98).

<sup>5</sup> Janetta Gould, *Burns Lieder: A Break with Tradition* (Glasgow: St Anne’s Music, n.d. [1995]), 2, 4, 5, 7. For *Museum’s* principles, see the frontispiece of the 1803 edition, as in Donald Low, ed., *The Scots Musical Museum*, 2 vols. (Aldershot: Scolar, 1991), 29; see also: Low (1991), 1, 23n.; Kirsteen McCue, “Une musique barbare,” unpublished paper, Robert Burns in European Culture conference, Charles University, Prague, 7 March 2009, and “Burns’s Songs and Poetic Craft,” in Gerard Carruthers, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 74-85 (79); Fiske, *Scotland in Music* (1983), 16, 55, 57, 218-19; C.M Jackson-Houlston, *Ballads, Songs and Snatches* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 17; Steve Sweeney-Turner, “The Political Parlour: Identity and Ideology in Scottish National Song,” in Harry White and

The textual editing of a collection like the *Scots Musical Museum* thus poses special challenges of unstable generic integrity and editorial intention in its musicology. This is truer still in the case of the text, which foregrounds all of the highly complex issues needed in the approach to editing traditional songs generally. Even without the special disingenuities of the *Museum*, the history, variety, locality and textual transmission of Scottish song suffers from being caught between two absolute claims, which are themselves—like so many disciplinary claims—historically contingent.

The first is the canonicity of the text. Even in the aftermath of the Greg-Bowers era, the power of the copytext remains considerable as a concept, however socially constructed we have theoretically acknowledged that text to be.<sup>6</sup> Much thinking in textual editing still relies on an inheritance of methodologies originally applied to sacred Scripture or the paradigmatic reconstruction of the most “correct” text through the Alexandrian analogical method, of which Greg is arguably a modern exemplar. We may have stopped privileging the ideal text of the editorial imagination, but we still decide that something—be it the manuscript, the first edition or the last, the author’s accidentals or the publisher’s, Gaskell or Greg—tells us the “truth” about the text. The ideal editorially constructed text is less common than it was as a matter of deliberate policy, but it is still often accidentally present by virtue of the fact that few authors before the modern era have left behind an intact and complete set of MSS. Even if the editor restores a reading on the basis of evidence, this is seldom comprehensive: the evidence that this reading was discarded passively or actively by the author before publication might be missing, but still relevant. MSS remain key to the editorial process, but editing still continues in their absence.<sup>7</sup> In James Kinsley’s 1968 Burns edition, the most complete up to the present time, this can be

---

Michael Murphy, eds., *Musical Constructions of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture 1800-1945* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 212-38 (220).

<sup>6</sup> See J. Stephen Murphy, “The Death of the Editor,” *Essays in Criticism*, 58:4 (2008): 289-310.

<sup>7</sup> For the theoretical debates alluded to, see D.C. Greetham, *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction* (New York and London: Garland, 1994 [1992]), 299, 333, 336, 337; Alison Lumsden, “Textual Messages: Scholarly Editions and their role in Literary Criticism,” *Studies in Scottish Literature* 39 (2013): 15-21 (17).

seen in the fact that Kinsley uses MSS he has never seen and which perhaps no longer exist to construct his texts.

I am not suggesting that the concept of base text or copy text is inappropriate, only that it involves sometimes unacknowledged inconsistency operating at the heart of apparently consistent method. Songs of course seldom have anything that can be characterized as a single source text at all, and thus a significant problem presents itself at once to any methodically minded textual editor. It was not a coincidence that Ernst Honigmann used Burns as an exemplar to criticize the Greg-Bowers model as long ago as 1964.<sup>8</sup>

This problem is—where it is acknowledged—addressed if not solved by the second absolute claim, that of romanticist ethnology. This position sees the multiplicity of song texts not as a textual problem, but as evidence of the indefinitely extensible plurality of variants deriving from orally transmitted authentic tradition. This position has simple and more sophisticated defenders. The latter, like the late David Buchan, while recognizing the force and influence of chapbook distribution and modern composition, see the core of Scottish tradition, with its “long-running interaction of high and folk literature” as oral, with “the place of the individual singer within the tradition” being “of the utmost importance.” Such a position, with its outlook “that literacy necessarily ‘erodes’ oral tradition,” echoes Vaughan Williams’s view that “every given tune has hundreds of origins”: text, music and performer are all individuated to a high degree. As Steve Roud points out, collectors tend to valorize the traditions they collect, overemphasize “the ‘illiteracy’ of the people from whom they collected” and postulate aesthetic superiority for “‘traditional’ as opposed to printed versions.” In support of the premises underpinning that valorization, various canonical figures are recruited as co-heirs of the tradition. Burns, Scott and Hogg are in this guise in their different ways portrayed as collecting from this “tradition” into a high culture. It is this elusive treasure-house of “oral tradition” which continues in the minds of its champions to contain the variants that can be captured from tradition bearers. The twentieth-century mission of song-collectors has thus been parallel to that of textual editors in one dimension, if orthogonal in another: to establish a different kind of perfect text, one composed of a

---

<sup>8</sup> Greetham (1994), 2, 4-5, 338-39; Patrick Scott, “How Editorial Theories Have Changed,” *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 39 (2013): 3-14 (8). For a contemporary view on how digital editing has further altered the landscape, see Elena Pierazzo, *Digital Scholarly Editing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

fecundity of variation which in its turn demonstrated the creativity of the folk, particularly (as Buchan argued) of the north east of Scotland, “the richest regional tradition in Britain.”<sup>9</sup> The Greig-Duncan folksong collection came across material from that tradition which derived from Burns, though sometimes such material has been seen (such is the pressure of romanticist ethnology) as a distinct variant, without any supporting evidence save that of its variety. Even Burns’ greatest editor James Kinsley advanced (for example with reference to “There lived a carl in Kellyburnbraes,” K376) texts of a song that had been subsequently collected as being independent rather than more probably dependent variants.<sup>10</sup>

Just as much of the first absolute claim as to textual unity derives ultimately from Scriptural criticism and the sacred and exalted quality of the vernacular Bible in Protestant tradition, so the second derives from a Romantic concept of orality and the essential voice of the people preserved through their songs, a Herderian formulation though one foreshadowed by Vico’s idea of the purity of poetry among the common people, Percy’s constructed history of minstrelsy and the idea of Homer as a “man of the people.”<sup>11</sup> This was a case made most persuasively by Robert Wood, in his 1769 *Essay on the Original Genius of Homer*, and borrowed in cunning form by Macpherson, following the teaching he received at Aberdeen (he later donated volumes of Homer to the library in King’s College). Neither approach does justice to the idea of “a continuum of spoken and written culture” in song tradition.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Steve Roud, “Introduction,” in David Atkinson and Steve Roud, eds., *Street Ballads in Nineteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and North America* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014), 1-17 (5, 6, 10); David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 3-5; Buchan, *Scottish Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 11-12, 89; Julie Henigan, *Literature and Orality in Eighteenth-Century Irish Song* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 63. For Vaughan Williams’s view, see McCue (2009), 88.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Keith, *Burns and Folk-Song* (Aberdeen: D. Wyllie, 1922), 67; *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed James Kinsley, 3 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), III: 1404-5.

<sup>11</sup> Kirsti Simonsuuri, *Original Genius: Eighteenth-Century Notions of the Early Greek Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 95-96; see Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 [2008]) for Percy’s goals in this context.

<sup>12</sup> Paula McDowell, “‘The Art of Printing was Fatal’: Print Commerce and the Idea of Oral Tradition in Long Eighteenth-Century Ballad Discourse,” in Patricia

Johann Hamann introduced Herder to Macpherson's Ossian poetry and to the ballads of Percy's *Reliques of English Poetry* (1765), and thence Herder created the idea of the "group mind", operating through its language, "a dictionary of the soul" by which "a nationality is educated and formed." This language was the means by which nationality defined and defended itself: the voices of the people in their songs. As a consequence, Herder effectively invented the concept of *Volkslieder*, folksong, as it is now understood, in the 1770s, as Peter Burke pointed out more than thirty years ago. Yet despite the culturally constructed category of "folksong," the word and its associated references to an idealized essentialism are still common currency. Many of the contents of the *Museum* would be dubbed "folksong," but such a label is the very opposite of a definition, being instead an implicit or explicit idealization, a trope posing as a delineation, "a nineteenth-century neologism," as Robert Darnton describes "folklore." Arguably this is linked to the very premises of idealization on which Herder built his argument: the personal, autobiographical, cultural and national self depends on the mythology of origin inherent in autochthonous fantasies of the folkish. It may be no coincidence that this development can be traced to the politics of landscape in the Romantic era. Song and its variety may be one means of expressing the gap between "language and the existing" which constituted Lyotard's idea of the sublime (see Chapter 22 of *Waverley* for Scott's anticipation of this in practice), and the association of song with certain aboriginal and hidden values in rural culture served to make it a particularly suitable genre to appear in apparent definition of what was in fact constructively aspirational. Herderian variety carried with it the implication of an emerging phenomenon, more elusive than the canon, more powerful than the vatic voice of the Romantic poet: the voice of the national self in the national landscape. These ideas were popular in Prussia and other German states, and contributed in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* to the notion of the objectification of the subjective will, one of the means by which nationality eluded the mere formalism of civil

---

Fumerton, Anita Guerrini and Kris McAbee, eds., *Ballads and Broadides in Britain, 1500-1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 35-56 (38-39); Julie Henigan, *Literature and Orality in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 9.



society and acquired transcendent meaning within history. Folksong kept metaphysics warm.<sup>13</sup>

Scottish song fitted this outlook for a variety of reasons. First, there was the de Stael identification of the Romantic with the northern, so ably initiated by Macpherson. Secondly, there was the iconization of *les montagnards* of the Jacobite era as the metaphorical “mountaineers” of the Jacobin one (it is arguable that one of the earliest “Romantic” landscape backgrounds appears behind the 1716 portrait of the Jacobite patriot Earl Marischal, himself later the patron of Rousseau). Thirdly, there was the manner in which Burns—in Germany especially—simultaneously appeared as a unified voice of the folk tradition and a representative of contemporary radical progressiveness, while fourthly, the alleged primitive remoteness of Scotland fed the idea of its being home to traditions “essentially cut off from contact with the written word.”<sup>14</sup> In addition, Macpherson, Burns, Scott—and even, in her smaller way, Mrs Brown of Falkland—were powerful propagandists for the authenticity of a tradition into which they entered as in reality creative editors. It is interesting to note the diverse fate of each of them in the framing process of popular memory, with its addiction to the simple frames of Foucault’s *loi de rareté*: Macpherson a forger, Scott a knowing collector, Anna Brown an unknowing one and Burns—as recent editors such as Carol McGuirk are still at pains to argue—the *author* of the tradition he collected. It might be better to recognize that these authors were all engaged on similar projects, and this approach is increasingly finding favour. At the same time, Burns alone retains the almost magical reputation of being the most authentic voice of a tradition whose diversity

---

<sup>13</sup> Robert Reinhold Ergang, *Herder and the Foundations of German Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 59-60, 93; Captain Francis O’Neill, *Irish Minstrels and Musicians* (Cork and Dublin: Mercier Press, 1987 [1915]), 101; Gordon A. Craig, “Herder: The Legacy,” in Kurt Mueller-Volmer, ed., *Herder Today* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 17-30 (25); , Michael Morton, “Changing the Subject: Herder and the Reorientation of Philosophy,” in Mueller-Volmer (1990), 58-72 (172); and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, “Herder’s Concept of the Sublime,” in Mueller-Volmer (1990), 58-72 (172) 268-91. See Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978), 3 ff; Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1984), 24.

<sup>14</sup> See Murray Pittock, “Introduction,” in Pittock, ed., *Robert Burns and Global Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2011), 13-25; Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 8.

is simultaneously celebrated: just as in nineteenth-century Germany, his is still the paradox of the canonical collector.<sup>15</sup>

When the diversity of Scottish song is the case under discussion, the need for textual fidelity is itself problematic. The nature of any performed song is found in variety, and variety is a product of orality, song as performance—ultimately the performance of nationality through the collective wisdom of its traditions—not song as canonical text. It is however increasingly clear that variations in textual ancestry are much more crucial than oral transmission: as Paula McDowell notes in the context of *Chevy Chase*, with its multiple oral, written and scribal variants, a new model is needed.<sup>16</sup> There is in this sense far less likely to be an absolute “author,” there are only editors, of whom Burns was one—and the crucial one—in the composition of the *Museum*. Previous editors of Burns have, by contrast, often been editing an author. This is why, despite the passing of more than two centuries, the scholarly editing of the *Museum* as a collection in its own right has not yet been attempted. From the beginning the songs which appear there have been seen in a binary fashion, with the question dividing the sheep from the goats being a simple one: “Did Burns write this?” By 1803, the few dozen Burns songs of the first edition had become 111 identified as having received the input of the master, while by the time J.W. Egerer’s bibliography was published half a century ago this had grown to well over 200, and Kinsley’s listing (including *Dubia*) stands at 235. This edition will propose that around 50 songs currently seen as Burns’s have little or no evidence connecting him to either their authorship or to significant textual intervention in them. On the other hand, some of the songs Kinsley tended to dismiss deserve at least a place as possibly edited by Burns.

Ascertaining the process of textual transmission of songs is a challenge to the idea of authorship, the idea of copy text and the pleasing illusions of orality alike; it has consequently been neglected. Yet it is increasingly understood that the vast body of text in circulation in the early modern period had a major effect on the songs that were sung and on those that were collected, and that this tended towards print-generated standardization with variants, not infinite diversity. In the nineteenth century, Robert Chambers put the annual circulation of chapbooks at 200,

---

<sup>15</sup> See Murray Pittock, “‘A Long Farewell to all My Greatness’: the history of the reputation of Robert Burns,” in Pittock, ed., *Robert Burns in Global Culture*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011), 25-46 (36); Burke (1978), 18, 74.

<sup>16</sup> McDowell (2010), 37; see also Fox (2000), 2-5.

000, while more recent research has secured figures of 70-90,000 items in one London location alone in the 1690s, and some 500,000 in the stock of Oudots at Troyes in 1722, while as early as 1664 the publisher Charles Tyus “had 90,000 octavo and quarto chapbooks.” The chapbook itself (8-24 pages “folded into a booklet”) is a nineteenth century term, but not a nineteenth-century invention. Its ancestors can be seen in the “lytle books” of the 1570s, as Margaret Spufford has pointed out. By the 1620s, these were in extensive circulation; by the 1650s, there were explicitly political small printed goods, by 1685 a chapman’s almanac, and by 1697 there were “over 2,500 pedlars” licensed to sell goods in England alone; sales of domestic items frequently accompanied chapbook sales, as chapbooks replaced broadsides or broadsheets (a broadside printed on both sides) in a number of areas as “more songs could be sold more cheaply” in the chapbook format. The pedlars and chapmen “became cultural intermediaries because they had a vital economic function,” which is why for example they leave at the end of market day in *Tam o’Shanter*, part of a beautiful conceit whereby the poem that follows records a traditional tale after the departure of all traditional tale tellers to their homes (leaving aside the smothered chapman silenced long ago on Tam’s pilgrimage into orality).<sup>17</sup> Robert Thomson claimed that over 80% of folk songs in the major collections derived from printed broadsides, and when one thinks of the vast number of broadsides and chapbooks which have not survived, this is a compelling figure, reinforced by the fact that the regions where folksong collectors worked were overlaid on chapman routes. It is also important to note that “chapmen and hawkers” were usually “non-performing” in contrast to “ballad-singers” distributing their broadsides: thus the major source of dissemination was not infrequently detached from any notion of performativity, even one

---

<sup>17</sup> William Harvey, *Scottish Chapbook Literature* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1903), 21, 24-25, 116, 117, 137; Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750-1850* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 55, 66, 77; Julie Crawford, “Oral Culture and Popular Print,” in Joad Raymond, ed., *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 114-29 (115); Margaret Spufford, *Figures in the Landscape* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 200, 201, 205, 206, 208, 209n; Fox (2000), 15; John Morris, “A Bothy Ballad & its Chapbook Source”, in Peter Isaac and Barry McKay, eds., *The Record of Print* (Winchester: St Paul’s Bibliographies; Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 1998), 85-102 (88, 101n); Atkinson and Roud (2014), xiii; Henigan (2012), 175. For the range of wares sold by pedlars, see also Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984).

dependent on the medium of print. Serious scholarship continues to bear out this strongly-evidenced challenge to Romanticist ethnology: Steve Roud's recent estimate is that "some 90 per cent of 'traditional' folk songs appeared on broadsides," and given the casualty rate among printed ephemera, this kind of figure calls into question the very idea of an oral tradition at all in the early modern Anglophone British Isles.<sup>18</sup>

The scale of printed matter in early modern circulation was first discussed in Tessa Watt's pioneering *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, and Adam Fox has recently begun to apply her findings in a Scottish context. Watt estimated up to 3-4 million printed items in circulation in Great Britain between 1560 and 1600, and Fox suggests up to 100 million ballads were printed in the 1640-90 period, with some 13,000 imprints estimated at Edinburgh between 1679 and 1749. Watt argues that as a consequence of the "advent of print," more songs were "divorced... from any localized or specialized social function", and certainly the wide range of distribution methods evident ("*Hawkers, Mercury-Women, Pedlers, Ballad-singers...Boat-men, and Mariners*" as Roger L'Estrange put it in 1663) suggests (together with vaguely geographical subject matter such as "The North Countrie") that this process was quite advanced by the reign of Charles II (1650/60-85). "Hawkers and ballad singers" who were "paper criers" bought ballads at 7shillings per quire, and indeed Fox suggests that the popularity of vernacular Scots in broadside ballads had "an important reciprocal relationship" with "the renaissance in the Scots vernacular," a development which gathered strength as the existence of a separate Scottish state began to come under sustained political pressure in the last years of the seventeenth century. By the early eighteenth century, the development of the (not altogether successful) Society of Paper Criers was indicative of the professionalization of this mass market, one also reinforced by the popularity of "Scotch" ballads and airs in London, often (though not always) with English authors.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Robert S. Thomson, "The Development of the Broadside Ballad Trade and its Influence on the Transmission of English Folk-Songs" (unpublished PhD, Cambridge, 1974); Atkinson and Roud (2014), 11; Henigan (2012), 173.

<sup>19</sup> Adam Fox, "The Emergence of the Scottish Broadside Ballad in the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* (2012), 169-94 (172, 173, 176, 179, 182, 188); Fox (2000), 15; Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Crawford (2011), 117-18 (quoting Watt, p.118); Alburger in Beech et al (2007), 249.

In the case of Robert Burns and the *Museum*, the claims of canonical textuality and traditional variety converge; the result is to an extent paradoxical or incoherent, according to taste. Whereas it is now often held that the best song collectors transmit rather than edit or rewrite their texts, Burns is held to have written songs he may have collected; to have collected songs he may have written, and to be indulged for his persistent editing of songs by the assumption that if he did rewrite them, his was the best version and the means of his “magic touch” justified all ends; in this we can perhaps see a faint echo of Child’s hierarchical and class-ridden division between “spontaneous” “true popular ballads” and the “humble” broadside and garland.<sup>20</sup> What in Hogg might be forgery, and in Scott butchery, is still too often in Burns genius. The aesthetic assumption involved in this is enormous, but it has remained largely unchallenged. One of the reasons it has been is the still lingering prejudice that regards Burns as the voice of the people, and in some sense entitled to speak for them, to act as the shop steward of Scottish song, articulating both its defensive nationality—of which he himself as “National Bard” is a synecdoche—and its broader grievance to the capitalist canon of high culture. This in itself is dependent on a set of ideological presumptions which Burns may have himself initiated. If his goal was to be both a named writer and “Scotland’s anonymous poet, speaking for her,” this was also the version of the poet assiduously promoted after his death. There are many problems with this view of Burns as the jolly ploughboy, close to the soil of a national tradition, and celebrated as its Antaeus. The historical Burns was, as a struggling tenant farmer and an exciseman, friend of gentry and schoolmasters, an impecunious and insecure but nonetheless undoubted member of the fringes of middle class Scotland (a term first used in the early 1740s, and quite established in Burns’ lifetime).<sup>21</sup> By comparison with Burns’ £50-£70 per annum from the excise, a contemporary southwestern Kirk of Scotland living such as the ministry of Kirkpatrick Fleming might in 1794 have a stipend of £60 and

---

<sup>20</sup> See David Atkinson, *The English Traditional Ballad: Theory, method and practice* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 235.

<sup>21</sup> For early use of the term “middle-class”, see P.J. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns 1700-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 138. In London in the middle of the eighteenth century, £50 a year qualified one for membership of this group: see Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter* (London: Athena Books, 2006), 85. Gatrell also (p. 100) points up the appeal of low ballads to a middle-class audience

some in-kind rewards, and that was a graduate's position. Jane Austen, thought of as from a completely different social class to Burns, was living on only £50 a year in the first decade of the nineteenth century, £2 13s 6d of which she was paying to hire a piano on which she could play his songs. The tradition Burns collected and voiced was itself the product of this group in society, a fact that many who see him as the autochthonous voice of tradition have been keen to deny. As David Johnson pointed out as long ago as the 1970s, "folk-fiddlers and bagpipers" frequently enjoyed a comfortable social background among the middling sort, while "music school pupils were taught folk-tunes as instrumental practice pieces." The material they worked on had often in some form or other (often not in musical notation, because of the technical barriers to reproducing it economically before the end of the eighteenth century) long been in print.<sup>22</sup>

The text of the edition is a facsimile of the first edition of the *Scots Musical Museum*: a documentary or cleartext edition: this is the best way to reflect its impact as a social text and to reproduce the text as Burns last saw it in his lifetime.<sup>23</sup> The 1803 edition of Volumes I-V (used, in its Stenhouse reprint, by Low) has hundreds of variants from those produced in Burns' lifetime, as well as missing the original dedications and frontispieces. There are also major textual and musical variants between the first editions of the *Museum* and the 1803 text: indeed, the large number of 1803 alterations in the bass line is particularly striking, some being no doubt a product of self-conscious sophistication, others mere tinkering. In 1803, Johnson is correcting errors, modernizing punctuation (the rise of the semi-colon can arguably be seen), and standardizing expression.

The editing of all the songs of the *Museum* together, irrespective of known authorship, is a major new departure, which recognizes that Burns was after all an *editor* far more than an *author*. Therefore the Hastie or other MS versions cannot be the right texts for a Burns editor: such a position not only undermines Johnson and Clarke, but also overlooks the

---

<sup>22</sup> David Johnson, *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 30, 99. For the stipend at Kirkpatrick Fleming, see R.D. Thornton, *James Currie: The Entire Stranger and Robert Burns* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), 8; for Jane Austen's income and piano, see David Nokes, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), 310

<sup>23</sup> See Pierazzo, (2015), 78.

fact that if Burns is *editing*, one MS text can hardly be *canonical* as it might be were he the sole begetter of these songs. The idea that there is an “ideal” or even reliable Burns text (beyond *SMM* itself) for a collection of song which Burns edited, not wrote—and that in collaboration—is untenable, and just as the edition will try to tease out which songs do, might do, probably don’t or don’t appear with any credibility in the Burns canon, so textually it will treat the appearance of the *Museum* itself as the fundamental grounds of its canonicity. It is a social text, not an author’s text.

Dr Vivien Williams from the project team looked in detail at the working archive of Kinsley’s papers in Nottingham University Library to seek to get a full sense of the approaches Kinsley used, as Dr Pauline Mackay’s work had already revealed that Kinsley’s MS collations were often inaccurate: so much so in some cases, that it must be presumed that Kinsley did not always see the MS he is collating and relied on earlier editors’ versions of it (the Alloway MS of K369/*SMM* 366 for example has 32 variants unrecorded by Kinsley, and it is not untypical). This is very much in keeping with the strong reliance Kinsley places in establishing his text on nineteenth-century editors’ own reports of MSS which they have seen which are no longer known; though in fairness, textual editing was not so well funded in the 1960s as it is today. In looking in detail at Kinsley’s papers, it seems that he transcribed Glenriddell, Hastie, Watson and the Alloway MSS directly (as well as other material, such as extensive auction material and Burns’ Highland Tour), but in other cases understandably relied on transcriptions from librarians or other third parties (which can often be surprisingly weak, as is evident for example in the transcript of the Pitsligo MSS in Aberdeen University Library). Kinsley also seems to have relied heavily on the 1896 Henley and Henderson edition, the notes from which are excellent. Kinsley’s own annotations on Hastie include reference to spelling variations between Hastie and Johnson.

The *Museum*’s cultural politics reinforced its allegiance to the pastoral, and Scottish identification and self-identification as rural, plain and simple, rather than sophisticated, urban, imperial and rich: Caledonia as the *Gemeinschaft* of Great Britain. The frontispiece image of the shepherd and shepherdess which graced the first appearance of the *Museum* bore that stylized quality of classical pastoral (though with tell-tale Gothic ruins hinting at the repression of its political significance rather than its restoration, as in *The Gentle Shepherd*) which claimed a status for Scottish pastoral on a level with Vergil or rather Theocritus:

great but unconstrained by register, natural and to that extent only primitive. The relationship with Theocritus (possibly court poet of the Ptolemies) also aligned Scottish song with the Scottish origin myth (which held Egypt as the origin of the Scots through Scota, daughter of Pharaoh) and with the defensive orientalism which both it and Ireland shared in their self-definition against England in the eighteenth century: “the oriental vein of poetry” identified in Blair’s *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian*. Burns himself identified strongly with Theocritus, as his Preface to the Kilmarnock edition bore witness.<sup>24</sup>

In this context, the realization of the vernacular and apparently authentic served up in *SMM* was itself framed by the collectors’ paradigmatic cabinet of curiosities, enshrined in the term “Museum.” This representation escaped the pressure of its own paradoxicality through the relieving inheritance of a vernacular poetry which could aspire to gentility of register and genre while nonetheless remaining politically unthreatening in its “Museum,” whether temple of the Muses or lumber room of history. Sets adapted to voice, harp and pianoforte had been advertised in *SMM* from the first volume onwards. Only in Scotland could the inheritors of the Enlightenment have their vernacular Herderian cake and eat it with artsong confections. The artificiality of some of these confections was also plain, as the “National Airs” and “native melodies” promised by the collection were more than somewhat compromised by the fact that many of the airs were not native at all. The *Scots Musical Museum* is a monument to the musical and generic fusion culture of eighteenth-century Scotland, but it is a distinctly native hybridity, and thus remains, behind that paradox, autochthonous.

These are the key theoretical premises underpinning the edition of the *Scots Musical Museum*, which will be Volumes II and III of the *Collected Works of Robert Burns* from Oxford University Press. I will end this essay by giving three examples of songs which in their different ways exemplify the challenges and paradoxes of the *Scots Musical Museum* as we have received it.

The first is “The Birks of Aberfeldy,” first published in Volume 2 of the *Museum* as song 113, and numbered by Kinsley as 170: it was first attributed to Burns in the 1803 *Collected Edition*. Kinsley’s text derives from the Alloway MS collated with *SMM*, where “the chorus introduces

---

<sup>24</sup> Pittock (2011 (2008)); Gelbart (2007), 63-64, 129; Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).



115 He who presum'd to guide the Sun.  
Tune, The Maids complaint

112 He who presum'd to guide the sun, Was crown'd with bad suc-  
cess; Tho' for his rash attempt undone, He'd glory'd ne'er the less.

Him you resemble, and aspire To lead our brightest fair; Like  
him too, tho' consum'd by fire, You boast because you dare:

---

The Birks of Aberfeldy.  
Tune, Birks of Abergeldie.

113 Bonny ladsie, will ye go, will ye go, will ye go,  
Lively

bonny ladsie, will ye go to the Birks of Aber-fel-dy? Now

The image shows a page from the Scots Musical Museum, vol. 2, featuring two musical pieces. The first piece, numbered 115, is titled 'He who presum'd to guide the Sun' with the tune 'The Maids complaint'. It consists of two systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The second system is numbered 112. The lyrics are: 'He who presum'd to guide the sun, Was crown'd with bad success; Tho' for his rash attempt undone, He'd glory'd ne'er the less. Him you resemble, and aspire To lead our brightest fair; Like him too, tho' consum'd by fire, You boast because you dare:'. The tempo is marked 'Slow'. The second piece, numbered 113, is titled 'The Birks of Aberfeldy' with the tune 'Birks of Abergeldie'. It also consists of two systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'Bonny ladsie, will ye go, will ye go, will ye go, Lively bonny ladsie, will ye go to the Birks of Aber-fel-dy? Now'. The tempo is marked 'Lively'. There is a decorative horizontal line with a star pattern between the two pieces.

No. 113: "The Birks of Aberfeldy," in *Scots Musical Museum*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: James Johnson, 1788) (continued overleaf)

Continued. 116

Summer blinks on flowery braes, And o'er the chryf-tal stream lets  
play; Come let us spend the lightsome days In the birks of A. ber-  
fel-dy, Bonny lasie, will ye go, will ye go, will ye go,  
Bonny lasie, will ye go to the Birks of Aberfeldy?  
The little birdies blythely sing,      The hoary cliffs are crown'd w<sup>th</sup> flow-  
While o'er their heads the hazels hing;      White o'er the linn's the burnie pours,  
Or lightly flit on wanton wing      And rising weets w<sup>th</sup> misty flowers  
In the birks of Aberfeldy.      The birks of Aberfeldy.  
Bonny lasie, &c.      Bonny lasie, &c.

The braes ascend like lofty wa's,      Let Fortune's gifts at random flue,  
The foamy stream deep-roaring fa's.      They ne'er shall draw a wish frae me.  
O'er-hung w<sup>th</sup> fragrant-spreading shaws,      Supremely blest w<sup>th</sup> love and thee  
The birks of Aberfeldy.      In the birks of Aberfeldy.      B  
Bonny lasie, &c.      Bonny lasie, &c.

Birks of Abergeldie.

**B**ONNY lasie, will ye go,      Na, kind Sir, I dare nae gang,  
Will ye go, will ye go,      I dare nae gang, I dare nae gang.  
Bonny lasie, will ye go      Na, kind Sir, I dare nae gang,  
To the birks o' Abergeldie?      My minnie she'll be angry:  
Ye shall get a gown of filk,      Sair, fair wad she flyte,  
A gown of filk, a gown of filk,      Wad she flyte, wad she flyte,  
Ye shall get a gown of filk,      Sair, fair wad she flyte,  
And coat of calimancoe.      And fair wad she ban me.

No. 113: "The Birks of Aberfeldy," in *Scots Musical Museum*, vol. 2  
(Edinburgh: James Johnson, 1788)

and follows the first stanza". The *Interleaved Notes* state that "I composed these stanzas standing under the falls of Aberfeldy, at, or near, Moness."<sup>25</sup> The Falls of Moness are two kilometres along the birks walk and form a natural endpoint to it (there is now a bridge there), but the statue of Burns which has been erected in the Birks is much closer to the beginning of the route, and right at the end of the falls. Burns could have been here, or at a vantage point higher up the glen, looking down on the birks from where the Moness Burn tumbles over rocks.

The chorus is traditionally taken from the old lovers' dialogue, *Birks of Abergeldie* (Abergeldie is by Ballater in Aberdeenshire) in Herd's MS. This tune is found to a different set of words in *The Charmer*, (Edinburgh, 1752), 57, and subsequent collections. A song with the title "Birks of Abergeldie," beginning "Bonnie lassie, will ye go," is in Herd.<sup>26</sup> However, as "Aberfeldy," the song dates back to the late seventeenth century and was originally accompanied by a reel, or country-dance for three couples.

The tune is found in Playford's *Dancing Master* (1690) and *Collection of Original Scotch-Tunes* (1700), and it also appears in the 1701 broadside *Sweet is the Lass that Loves Me* (NLS Rosebery III.a.10).<sup>27</sup> Hecht points out that "I will kiss your wife, carl" (Hecht LXVIII) and "Some say the deel's dead" (Hecht LXXXIX) are set to the same air. A version of the air is in Oswald. The *Scottish Fiddle Music Index* has extensive records of the tune under both titles.<sup>28</sup> There is thus a good deal of evidence suggesting that both the "Abergeldie" and "Aberfeldy" versions predate Burns. Moreover, there is a significant musical change between the 1790 and the 1803 printings, which means that the song as we know it has not historically been performed as it first appeared in the *Museum* in Burns's lifetime. The 1803 edition (the basis for so many reprintings and performances) has its second Ds as sharps in bars 4, 9 and 13 of the bass line, and an F in place of a D in bar 6 of the

---

<sup>25</sup> Low (1991), Appendix 26.

<sup>26</sup> David Herd, *Ancient and Modern Scots Songs, Heroic Ballads &c.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Glasgow: Robert Anderson, 1869 [1776]), II: 221-22. A copy of this edition in its 1776 printing was in Riddell's library.

<sup>27</sup> NLS Rosebery III.a.10.

<sup>28</sup> James Oswald, *The Caledonian Pocket Companion*. 12 vols, (London, 1743-48, 1759), VIII:16; Charles Gore with Morag Elder and Lynn Morrison, *The Scottish Fiddle Music Index* (Musselburgh: Amasing Publishing, 1994), 8-9.

melody line. This is a significant change: as David McGuiness commented in August 2014:

I'll settle for delighting that the crass-sounding D sharps in the bassline for *The Birks of Aberfeldy* aren't in the original version. I won't be playing those again then.<sup>29</sup>

There is much more to say about “*The Birks of Aberfeldy*,” but the two key elements here are that Burns’ role was editorial as well as authorial, and that we have not been playing the tune as it was initially conceived and printed in the (now rare) first edition.

“*McPherson’s Farewell*” was first printed as no. 114 in the second volume of the *Museum*, and ascribed to Burns in the 1803 collected edition. It is at Kinsley 196. In his letter to Thomson of 19 October 1794, Burns claims this song as his own, “excepting the chorus & one stanza.” He uses the tune, identified as “*McPherson’s Farewel*,” as a tune for the *Commonplace Book* text of “*The Wintry West*” (“*Winter, a dirge*”), possibly written in April 1784. The MS of this song is at BL MS Egerton 1656 f. 26. Kinsley in his notes states that the “definitive version” is in Herd I: 99-100, and contrasts the “emphatic and defiant first part of the tune” with the “brisker, distinctively reel-like” chorus.

*The Last Words of James Mackpherson Murderer* is—as is well known—a broadside which can be found in the National Library of Scotland Rosebery Collection,<sup>30</sup> and which may have appeared in some form as early as 1701, the year after its subject’s execution at Banff, and not at Inverness, as Riddell’s MS note suggests. It is a “last words” ballad of what was to become a fairly conventional type, also containing themes (such as the centrality of betrayal to Macpherson’s fate) typical of the celebration of social bandits and banditry more generally. The betrayal of Macpherson by “Peter Brown” often survives in the oral reception of the original ballad, which itself was “almost certainly” the work of John Reid, junior, who kept a printing house in Libberton’s Wynd from 1699 to 1719 and a second laigh shop in Mary King’s Close for some of that time. Reid’s version was *Macpherson’s Farewell*, but the song appears to have been known as a “rant” before Burns’ time. Burns adapted Reid’s last four lines:

Than wontonly and rantingly  
I am resolv’d to die  
And with undaunted courage I

---

<sup>29</sup> <http://bassculture.info/?p=303>

<sup>30</sup> NLS Ry. III.a.10 (29).

117. M<sup>c</sup> Pherson's Farewell.

114 \* Farewell, ye dungeons dark and strong, The wretch's destin-

Slowly

- iel. M<sup>c</sup> Pherson's time will not be long, On yonder gallows-tree.

Chorus

Sae rantingly, sae wantonly, Sae daunting-ly gae'd he. He

play'd a spring, and danc'd it round, Be- low the gallows-trees.

The image shows a musical score for a song. It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The first system is labeled '117. M. Pherson's Farewell.' and '114 \*'. The lyrics are 'Farewell, ye dungeons dark and strong, The wretch's destin-'. The second system continues the lyrics: '- iel. M. Pherson's time will not be long, On yonder gallows-tree.' The third system is labeled 'Chorus' and has the lyrics 'Sae rantingly, sae wantonly, Sae daunting-ly gae'd he. He'. The fourth system has the lyrics 'play'd a spring, and danc'd it round, Be- low the gallows-trees.' The tempo marking 'Slowly' is placed below the first system.

O what is death but parting breath?	I've liv'd a life of sturt and strife;
On many a bloody plain	I die by treacherie:
I've dar'd his face, and in this place	It burns my heart I must depart
I scorn him yet again!	And not avenged be.
Sae rantingly, &c.	Sae rantingly, &c.

Untie these bands from off my hands,	Now farewell, light, thou sunshine bright
And bring to me my sword;	And all beneath the sky!
And there's no a man in all Scotland,	May coward shame disdain his name,
But I'll brave him at a word.	The wretch that dares not die!
Sae rantingly, &c.	Sae rantingly, &c.

Z

No. 114: "M<sup>c</sup>Pherson's Farewell," in *Scots Musical Museum*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: James Johnson, 1788)

Shall mount the fatal tree.

“McPhersons Last Farewell” appears in John Niven’s songbook (dated 11 July 1761) at Aberdeen University Library MS 2232, where it is no. 137 on p35, and in David Herd’s 1776 collection. The broadside *McPherson’s Rant* is reprinted in Maidment’s *Scottish Songs and Ballads* (1859), 29. The song as printed here is attributed to Burns in *SMM*. The tune is “Macpherson’s Farewell” in Oswald, but appears as “Lament” or “Rant” elsewhere.<sup>31</sup>

The air to which Burns sets this song is found in Margaret Sinkler’s MS of 1710 and in Oswald and McGibbon.<sup>32</sup> NLS MS 3296 (“McFarsence’s Testament”) is effectively the same tune. Riddell notes that “Gow, with his wonted impudence, has published a variation of this fine tune as his own composition, which he calls *The Princess Augusta*”. Cromeck removed the phrase “with his wonted impudence.”<sup>33</sup>

The execution of Macpherson in 1700 appears to have become an event of cultural significance. In Torry in Aberdeen, rhymes continued to be recited on the event until the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> The reiver Macpherson became a social bandit figure, seen as the defender of his community against aristocratic double-dealing and oppression in an era when famine had displaced large numbers of Scots. As a half-gipsy by background, the leader of “the Egyptian band” was also a representative of the patriotic, old Scotland, for the Scottish nation was held in its foundation myth to descend from Egypt, via Scota, the daughter of Pharaoh. Hence gipsies could be identified with the original and thus patriotic Scots in an era of perceived decay and decline. The betrayal of Macpherson “by a woman’s treacherous hand” was an established social bandit trope, as the true heroic bandit can only be overcome by underhand means such as treason. The breaking of the fiddle, found neither in Reid nor Burns, but widely transmitted in other versions from at least 1710, indicated an isomorphic relationship between the betrayed bandit and the betrayed nation, voiced through its songs. Two versions of this kind were “recorded by Peter Buchan, and

---

<sup>31</sup> For examples, see *Scottish Fiddle Music Index*, 76.

<sup>32</sup> *Caledonian Pocket Companion*, VII:14, and William McGibbon, *A Collection of Scots Tunes* (Edinburgh: Bremner, 1768 [1742]), 92.

<sup>33</sup> Low (1991), Appendix 63; R.H. Cromeck, *Reliques of Robert Burns*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Cadell and Davies, 1817), 236.

<sup>34</sup> I am grateful to Scott Styles, Senior Lecturer in Law at the University of Aberdeen, for this information.

transmitted to William Motherwell;” many years later Hamish Henderson took down versions which stressed the breaking of the fiddle from Jamie McBeath and Davie Stewart.<sup>35</sup> There is a parallel Irish traditional song, where John Macpherson, “a leading man at hurlings” (so another strong national character, fond of the national sport) is “carried to the gallows” playing “a fine tune of his own composing on the bagpipe, which retains the name of MacPherson’s tune to this day,” a story told in the ubiquitous 1740s publication, *A history of the most notorious Irish tories, highwaymen, and rapparees*, known for short as *Irish Rogues*.<sup>36</sup>

The Irish Macpherson is a gentlemanly robber, a “*tóraithe*” figure displaced into banditry by the victory of William of Orange and the penal laws, a model that fits well enough with its Scottish equivalent, where the stanza in the variant that begins “If thee, *O Scotland*, I forget” is a variant of a Jacobite version of the 137<sup>th</sup> psalm.

“Macpherson’s Rant,” with its symbolism of the fiddle broken at the foot of the gallows, is the ancestor of other references to the damaged nation such as the fiddle broken on Culloden by William Farquharson or the broken harp of Thomas Moore’s “Minstrel Boy,” where the dying boy who possesses the last “faithful harp” which can express the praise of the Irish nation “tore its chords asunder” rather than let it fall into the hands of the stranger.<sup>37</sup> Thus “McPherson’s Farewell,” edited by Burns rather than authored, is actually not the central, but a divergent set of the song. The version most popular in performance today is not Burns’s, nor is it descended from his song, which omits the two key *topoi* of the betrayal of the social bandit and the symbolic breaking of the instrument.

The final song examined in this essay is “The winter it is past,” first published as the final number (200) of the second volume of the *Museum*, and listed by Kinsley as no. 218. Kinsley’s text is *SMM* collated with Cromek (*Reliques*, 466) for the first eight lines. There is no reason for recording Cromek’s variants in an edition of the 1788 *SMM* text. There is, however, a manuscript in the Newberry Library, Chicago, in Case 7A.4.2,

---

<sup>35</sup> John Morris, “Scottish Ballads and Chapbooks”, in Peter Isaac, Peter and Barry McKay, eds., *Images & Texts: Their Production and Distribution in the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, (Winchester: St Paul’s Bibliographies/Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 1997), 89-112 (97, 104-05).

<sup>36</sup> J. Cosgrave, *A genuine history of the lives and actions of the most notorious Irish highwaymen, tories and rapparees* (Dublin: printed by C.W., 1747).

<sup>37</sup> Murray Pittcock (ed.), *James Hogg: The Jacobite Relics of Scotland, First Series* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 159.

The Winter it is Past. 208

200 \* The winter it is past, and the sum-mer's come at

Very Slow

last, And the small birds sing on ev'ry tree; The

hearts of these are glad, but mine is very sad, For my

Lover has part-ed from me.

The rose upon the brier, by the waters running clear,  
 May have charms for the linnet or the bee;  
 Their little loves are blest and their little hearts at rest,  
 But my Lover is parted from me.

My love is like sun, in the firmament does run,  
 For ever constant and true;  
 But his is like the moon that wanders up and down,  
 And every month it is new.

All you that are in love and cannot it remove,  
 I pity the pains you endure:  
 For experience makes me know that your hearts are full of woe,  
 A woe that no mortal can cure.

END OF VOLUME SECOND.

No. 200: "The Winter it is Past," in  
*Scots Musical Museum*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: James Johnson, 1788)



which is a fair copy of ll. 1-8, beginning “The winter, it is past & the simmer comes at last.” The 1803 Collected *SMM* has some small variations from the 1788 text, with “the sun” for “sun” in line 9 and “Forever is” for “For ever” in line 10. There is a low G for the second low A in bar 7 of the bass line.

The song was adapted from a variety of sources, including *The Lovesick Maid* published in 1765 and a source in Herd’s MSS. It is not attributed to Burns in *SMM*. Another broadside, *The Lamenting Maid*, has a second stanza very close to Burns’s first and is possibly a Jacobite broadside. Even closer is *The Irish Lovers*, which begins “Now the winter is past,/And the summer comes at last,/And the birds sing on every tree,/The hearts of those are glad,/Whilst I am very sad,/Since my true love is absent from me,” which became transmuted into “The Curragh of Kildare.” The seventh stanza of this broadside, which begins “My love is like the sun,” is very close indeed to Burns’s third stanza. Hecht (CIV) also notes a version in *The London Rake’s Garland* (1765). Burns alters the Hecht text slightly and the rest substantially. The music is from Oswald X: 9. There is no compelling remaining reason to suppose this song to be by, rather than edited—and possibly quite lightly edited—by Burns. Kinsley’s attribution of the song as canonical exceeds the evidence and brings us back to where I began: the nature of the Burns canon and the confusion between editing and authorship.

The *Scots Musical Museum* is a challenging and tricky collection to edit. Despite its canonical status, the fact that it has never benefited from a scholarly edition tells its own story of the confusion referred to above. But its complexity is rewarding, for not only does the *Museum* raise questions which challenge the whole notion of what constitutes authorial canonicity; it also informs debates throughout the whole of textual editing, whether or not all readers agree that a documentary edition is the right answer to the question of what constitutes a social text.<sup>38</sup>

*University of Glasgow*

---

<sup>38</sup> It should not be forgotten, however, that the *Museum* has also always been a text to enjoy in performance, so here are links to some recordings by a variety of singers of (in order) “The winter it is past,” “Macpherson’s Rant,” and the project website, which has many songs for free download:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltHpu4M\\_pAY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltHpu4M_pAY)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F\\_x8XwcOPV4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_x8XwcOPV4)

<http://burnsc21.glasgow.ac.uk/song-and-music/>