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‘That Ill Opinion’：

Robert Burns and the British Romantic Tradition

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PhD in English Literature

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2021

Abstract

My thesis examines the influence of Robert Burns's poetry on the poetry of several major British Romantic poets, specifically William Wordsworth, John Keats, and Lord Byron. Burns's debut volume of poetry, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect,* published in 1786, became an immediate success in Scotland and England. My thesis offers the first sustained analysis of the self-conscious echoes of Burns by Wordsworth, Keats and Byron, where close readings of Burns's poems alongside their works unearth moments of allusion and intertextuality, as well as shared poetic techniques and aesthetic approaches.

My first chapter looks at Burns's influence on Wordsworth. Wordsworth was profoundly moved by Burns's sensitivity to nature and to his sincere attention to low and rustic subjects. Here, I examine Burns's influence on poems such as *Peter Bell*, *The Ruined Cottage*, and 'Michael', as well as some of Wordsworth's poems inspired by his 1803 tour of Scotland, which included visiting Burns's grave.

My second chapter begins by charting the complicated network of tributes paid to Thomas Chatterton and Robert Burns, where these seemingly disparate poets were often paired together by writers such as Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt, and John Keats. This chapter also focuses on Keats's poems and letters produced during his 1818 tour of Northern England and Scotland, where he, like Wordsworth, made a pilgrimage to Burns's grave, as well as to his birth-place cottage in Ayrshire.

My final chapter looks at the many shared qualities between the poetry of Burns and Byron. Both poets were adept at manipulating their perceived biographical personae within their poems and so this chapter looks at poems such as 'Tam O'Shanter' and Burns's verse epistles alongside some of Byron's major works, including *The Giaour*, *Don Juan,* and *The Vision of Judgment,* as well as Byron's shorter lyrics.

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Declaration

No material in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other University. The work is solely that of the author, Jake Phipps, under the supervision of Professor Fiona Robertson and Professor Mark Sandy.

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Finally, I wish to thank my parents, Ellen and David and my brother Josh for their love and support.

For James Aglio and Jacob Shoup

What is TITLE, what is TREASURE,
What is REPUTATION'S care?
If we lead a life of pleasure,
'Tis no matter HOW or Where.

— Burns

‘There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his toil.’

— Ecclesiastes 2:24

Introduction

> 'Tradition, generally speaking, is a sort of perverted alchemy which converts gold into led.'
> — Unsigned review of Burns by Walter Scott, 1809

Robert Burns's popularity as a poet has not diminished since his debut volume of poetry, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect,* was printed in 1786 in Kilmarnock.[1] However, scholarly criticism on Burns's place within the canon of great British poets remains relatively thin. Nigel Leask acknowledges this paradox in his chapter on Burns for the *Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature*:

> Ironically, though, while still enthusiastically celebrated in Scotland and globally at Burns Suppers on 25 January, Burns has been marginalised in English Departments across the world, as a result of a mistaken view that his writing is linguistically incomprehensible, and of interest to Scottish readers only.[2]

Fiona Stafford's chapter 'Burns and Romantic Writing' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns*, gives an important overview of key English Romantic writers' engagements with Burns; from similarities with Blake (as pertains to Milton's Satan, and democratic impulses) as well as other first-generation Romantic writers, such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Lamb, through to later, second generation Romantic poets Keats and Byron. Stafford also quotes from Jane Austen's unfinished novel *Sanditon* — important for its awareness of the complex issues surrounding Burns and biography — as well as Burns's transformative

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[1] Because all of Burns's subsequent (expanded) editions bear the same name, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, the 1786 edition is commonly referred to as 'The Kilmarnock edition' or 'the Kilmarnock Poems'.
[2] Nigel Leask, 'Robert Burns' in *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature*, ed. by Gerard Carruthers and Liam McIlvanney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 72-85 (p. 72).

influence on labouring-class poets of the late eighteenth, and nineteenth century such as Cumbrian poet Robert Anderson.[3]

Raymond Bentman and Murray Pittock have perhaps given the issue of Burns and Romanticism the most sustained attention. Bentman's 1972 article 'Robert Burns's Declining Fame' begins to detail Burns's critical neglect within Romanticism, and Pittock, who acknowledges and expands on Bentman's comments in his 2008 study *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, traces the critical history of Burns's treatment within Romanticism, expertly illustrating the decline of Burns in Romantic anthologies and journals after the Second World War.[4] However, Pittock's study, as well as other important, recent scholarship, has tended to focus discussions of Burns and Romanticism on the paradigm of Romanticism itself, where Anglo-centric, or even London-centric conceptions of British Romanticism are questioned, and an argument for 'four nations Romanticism' is put forward, as well as a more developed picture of Romanticism and the Celtic world. Pittock's work begins by asking 'what is Romanticism?' and seeks to reconfigure the foundations of the Romantic canon.[5]

Although these works provide the most sustained discussions of Burns and Romanticism, it is a question that has been noted by other critics, albeit often cursorily. Michael O'Neill has suggested 'there is a strong case for regarding his collection, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), as inaugurating Romantic poetry proper' and Jonathan Wordsworth, in the preface to his facsimile edition of the *Kilmarnock Edition* similarly claims: '*Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, published in July 1786 when Burns was twenty-seven, has an excellent claim to be the first work of English Romantic Literature',

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[3] Fiona Stafford, 'Robert Burns and Romantic Writing', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns*, ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 97-109.
[4] Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 144-47.
[5] See also: *English Romanticism and the Celtic World*, ed. by Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. by Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Dafydd Moore, 'Devolving Romanticism: Nation, Region, and the Case of Devon and Cornwall', *Literature Compass*, 5 (2008), pp. 949-63.

while Jerome McGann has called him 'the neglected master who all but invented Romanticism'.[6] Bentman concludes his 1964 essay 'The Poets and Critics on Robert Burns' by cataloguing the importance of Burns to the most important writers of the Romantic movement, remarking that they 'explicitly note poetic qualities that occur in Burns which are not common to British poetry before the nineteenth century and which are similar to qualities of their own poetry' before acknowledging that 'Burns's position in literary history must await that larger study. For the time, however, the comments of the Romantic poets and critics make the separation of Burns from British Romantic movement an unlikely hypothesis'. [7]

My thesis takes a different approach to Burns's relationship with English Romanticism than has been offered previously. I am less concerned with defining or redefining 'Romanticism', in terms of a cultural or aesthetic set of practices or conditions, and instead offer sustained close readings of Burns's poetry alongside a number of canonical English Romantic poets — specifically William Wordsworth, John Keats, and Lord Byron. My fine-grained approach to a reassessment of Burns and the accepted canonical poets of the Romantic period has two broad purposes. First, it provides a comprehensive analysis of the repeated and complicated debts Romantic writers owed to Burns, and the significant admiration they had for his poetry that permeated their own works in profound and surprising ways. Secondly, this approach lays bare the striking similarities between Burns's poetry and a Romantic movement so often celebrated for its originality.

As each of my chapters focuses on Burns's relationship to another poet, my introduction takes the opportunity to evaluate Burns alone. This includes a discussion of the

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[6] Michael O'Neill, *Romantic Poetry Handbook*, ed. by Michael O'Neill and Madeleine Callaghan (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), p. 137; Robert Burns, *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect 1786*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (Oxford: Spelsbury, 1991), p. 1; Jerome McGann, (quoted on jacket) in Jeffrey Skoblow, *Scots, Burns, Contradiction* (Newark, Del: University of Delaware Press, 2011).
[7] Raymond Bentman, 'The Romantic Poets and Critics on Robert Burns', *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 6 (1964), pp. 104-18 (p. 118).

critical work on Burns, beginning with his earliest reviewers and biographers as well as twentieth- and twenty-first century critics. Burns took exceptional care in curating his public image, and like all good poets, exhibited the same level of care with the language of his poems. I examine Burns's self-consciously defined persona, as well as his combination of Scots dialect and standard English, so that an impression of the poet encountered by later authors can be more clearly defined. While James Currie's highly influential (and grossly misleading) biography generated powerful and long-lasting myths about Burns, the poet's prefaces and poems were equally influential in defining the most sensational, supposed facts of a poor, Ayrshire ploughman. I do, however, briefly consider (later in this introduction) the little known Cumbrian-dialect poet, Robert Anderson, in a bid to emphasise Burns's immediate impact on the English poetic tradition, as well as to illustrate some of the complications that arise in a study that pairs one poet alongside another.

It is always difficult, if not impossible to talk of a poet's influence on later authors without acknowledging their own inheritances. This issue is acutely felt with respect to Burns and his Scottish predecessors, Alan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson. Burns encountered Scottish folklore and Scottish song from his earliest years, as Robert Crawford has shown.[8] And yet, Burns's reading and book learning were dominated by English poets and classical works for a long time before he encountered the poetry of his most important Scottish literary influence, Robert Fergusson. Burns's well-known and often quoted biographical letter to Dr. John Moore is as much an account of his life in reading as it is a narrative of his life's events. The letter proudly demonstrates his breadth of reading and acknowledges the most important works of the Western tradition, including: the Bible, Homer, Roman history, Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope.[9] All of these authors he encountered and imbibed as a teenager. Although

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[8] Robert Crawford, *The Bard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 20. Subsequent references to this work appear as '*The Bard'*.

[9] Robert Burns*, The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. by G. Ross Roy, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), I (1780-1789), pp. 133-46. Subsequent references to this work appear as 'Burns, *Letters*'.

Burns had read Ramsay at an early age he did not encounter Fergusson until he was twenty-three and rejoiced in this important discovery thus:

> Rhyme, except some religious pieces which are in print, I had given up; but meeting with Fergusson's SCOTCH POEMS, I strung anew my wildly-sounding, rustic lyre with emulating vigour.[10]

Burns's wide range of reading in English verse and sentimental novels, French — which he studied assiduously — and the Scots poetry of Ramsay, Fergusson, and William Hamilton of Gilbertfield, as well as others, helped develop Burns's protean language, which is the most visually and aurally striking element of his poetry.

Wordsworth and Byron are the preeminent figureheads of their respective generations of Romantic poets and it is important to recognise the legacy of Burns's poetry within their works. An analysis of Burns's influence on Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron is important not just because it illustrates their familiarity with or respect for Burns, but because his poetry spoke directly to the new creative energies of the Romantic movement. All poets are influenced by the writers who preceded them, but Burns's proximity in both time and place allows for a unique inheritance whereby each poet could reasonably imagine themselves to be partaking in the same poetic traditions of Burns as brother-poets. In this (very broad) sense, my thesis accepts Harold Bloom's belief in the power earlier poets can exert on later poets, though I am less interested in a Bloomian account of influence for those reasons noted by

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[10] Burns, Letters, I, p. 143. Two important essays discuss Fergusson's influence on Robert Burns. See: Robert Crawford, 'Robert Fergusson's Robert Burns' in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, ed. by Robert Crawford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 1-22; Rhona Brown, 'Alan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson, and Robert Burns', in *Burns and Other Poets*, ed. by David Sergeant and Fiona Stafford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) pp. 23-38. For a detailed exploration of Burns's uses, borrowings, and allusions to poets in the English tradition, such as Pope and Shakespeare, see: Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.43-82. Subsequent references to this work appear as 'Ricks, *Allusion*'.

Christopher Ricks, and agree that critics have both benefited and suffered from Bloom's work:[11]

> […] of Bloom's energies we are all both beneficiaries and victims. Beneficiaries, granted his passion, his learning, and his so giving salience to the impulse or spirit of allusion. Victims, because of his melodramatic sub-Freudian parricidal scenario, his sentimental discrediting of gratitude, and his explicit repudiation of all interest in allusion as a matter of the very words.[12]

These last two points, especially, have led me away from Bloom, where my thesis places great emphasis on notions of gratitude, friendship, and fellowship, and where my readings are arrived at through sustained attention to the borrowing of words, images, poetic forms, and thematic subjects.

Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron all had explicit connections to Scotland, either through pilgrimages to Burns's native Ayrshire, in the case of Wordsworth and Keats, or in Byron's attachment to his Scottish background on his mother's side. Although I do not wish to question or undermine the originality of the poets that followed Burns, I attempt to illustrate that many of the quintessentially Romantic traits, be these Wordsworth's colloquial diction or Byron's energetic verse and biographical manipulations, owe an outsized debt to the poems encountered in Burns's debut volume *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786) as well as in subsequent, enlarged editions and elsewhere, in poems such as 'Tam O'Shanter' and 'The Jolly Beggars'.

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[11] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).
[12] Ricks, *Allusion*, pp. 5-6.

Making it New: The Language and Persona of Burns

> 'I have some brief things to say about Scotch poetry as to the language which will best come in under Allan Ramsay. The language is no more *spoken* there than here. It is a sort of Rowleyism, composed of all the Scotch words they can collect — as Chatterton raked in glossaries, which has this advantage that passes for wit if you see the author meant to be witty, because you cannot tell whether he is or no, and allows him to introduce all the beastliest phrases and images in cant language, for which, if they had been in plain English or plain Scotch the book would have been deservedly thrown behind the fire.'
> — Robert Southey, letter to Grosvenor Charles Bedford, 6 April, 1805[13]

In choosing his title, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect,* Burns began his process of selective self-awareness, telling his audience that the poems of the volume will be primarily (or, perhaps, 'particularly') in the Scottish dialect. The title is backed up by claims he made in the Preface. The highly literary language of the Preface, as well as the table of contents and glossary deserve critical attention. One might expect in a volume of dialect poetry to see dialect in the titles of the poems. Instead, many of the poems are titled in standard English, with the exception of 'Deil' 'Auld' and 'Twa' and even these words are understood with ease (and can also be found in various northern English dialects).

Although early reviewers of Burns were interested in Burns's Preface, their interests lay primarily in their fascination with the idea of a peasant-poet; what Nigel Leask refers to as 'literary ignorance' as opposed to rigorous critical engagement:

> The claim here to be 'unacquainted' with the classical pastoral poets 'Theocrites and Virgil' underpins the ploughman persona of many of the poems that follow, especially the 'Epistle to Lapraik's' attack on those who 'think to climb Parnassus | by dint o' Greek!' This claim to

[13] *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. by Kenneth Curry, 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press), I, pp. 378-79. In *The Critical Heritage: Robert Burns*, ed. by Donald Low (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), pp.168-69.

> literary *ignorance* authenticates the poet's claim to natural genius and portrayal of the world of his 'rustic compeers' in 'his and their native language'.[14]

Because the early reviewers took the 'rustic bard' of Burns's Preface literally, they felt and fumbled their way through emotional discussions of Burns's success at vernacular, and relative failure at anything else. Francis Jeffrey's claims concerning Burns's use of Scots dialect and standard English are hyper-partisan, although he does acknowledge Burns had some skill in English, even if it is always inferior to the Scots:

> The last letter which we have quoted, proves, that before he had penned a single couplet, he could write in the dialect of England with far greater purity and propriety than nine-tenths of those who are called well educated in that country […] he took much greater pains with the beauty and purity of his expressions in Scotch than in English; and everyone who understands both, must admit, with infinitely better success.[15]

Jeffrey's remarks are similar to Henry Mackenzie's view on Burns's language as well as Walter Scott's, and these important and influential reviewers set the tone for how Burns's language was generally conceived of through to the Victorian period. Scott's review, published one month after Jeffrey's (and like Jeffrey's review, also unsigned), gives more credit to Burns's English poetry than Jeffrey, though he ultimately concludes that, compared with his Scottish, 'his expression [was] confined and embarrassed'.[16]

Modern critics have not always been more discerning. Thomas Crawford admits that much of Burns's best work is 'shot through with English', but quotes Scott's review as

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[14] *The Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns*, ed. by Nigel Leask, Murray Pittock, and Kirsteen McCue, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), I Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, And Miscellaneous Prose, Leask, (2014), p. 325. Subsequent references to this work appear as 'Burns, *Oxford Edition*'.
[15] Francis Jeffrey, unsigned review in the *Edinburgh Review,* January 1809. In, *Critical Heritage*, p. 187.
[16] Walter Scott, unsigned review in *Quarterly Review*, February 1809. In, *Critical Heritage,* p. 208.

having settled the matter. [17] John Speirs, who has written convincingly about the shared qualities between Burns and Byron, makes the confusing and unlikely claim that:

> His [Burns's] Scottish verse must first of all be isolated not only from his own English verse (which is so obviously bad that it may at once be dismissed as such) but from English Verse. It has no connections with English verse at any point […].[18]

Bentman and Carol McGuirk have offered more attentive and nuanced discussions of Burns's complex use of language as well as his literary inheritance. McGuirk's 1985 study, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era*, is a forceful defence of Burns's artistic and visionary qualities as a universal poet, not constrained by locality or dialect. Much of her introduction is devoted to correcting both early and modern critical assumptions about Burns. The following example (though I could have chosen many) reverses a number of prevalent (un)-critical attitudes:

> The assumption that Burns was incapable of understanding English, when added to the other assumption already discussed — that Burns was an oddly literal poet, deficient in imagination — probably accounts for the often condescending tone of Burns criticism. […] Burns's blending of English with Scots in his best vernacular poetry shows a sensitivity to the possibilities of both languages that is nothing short of masterful. Burns's diction, like his poetic world, 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. Burns uses all these elements to create in his best work an apparently seamless fabric of what are nonetheless totally disparate elements.[19]

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[17] Thomas Crawford, p. 194.
[18] John Speirs, *The Scots Literary Tradition*, 2nd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 117.
[19] Carol McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985), p. xxii.

McGuirk treats Burns not as a regional phenomenon but as a unique artist who skilfully employed the tools at his disposal; or as Pittock puts it, 'because Burns is a sophisticated writer, writing in Scots is always a poetic option for him, not an educational necessity'.[20]

One of the early assumptions about Burns's poetry, which still prevents a wide-spread acceptance of his poetry within the English tradition, is the belief that Burns belongs to an exclusively Scottish tradition. McGuirk, as well as Bentman, have discussed the importance the English literary tradition held for Burns, where Burns frequently praised the poets he quoted often and wished to emulate. Bentman, in 'Robert Burns's Declining Fame' responds to these assumptions in Burns's own words:

> Burns considered himself a part of a British tradition and showed little awareness that a purely Scottish tradition even existed. He did admire Ramsay and Fergusson and expressed a desire to 'kindle at their flame' (Preface to the Kilmarnock Edition). But he also referred to Goldsmith as his 'favorite poet' and to Cowper as 'the best Poet out of sight since Thomson' (I, 260). *The Task* was 'a glorious Poem' (II, 225). Thomson was the one poet whom he repeatedly mentioned and praised, starting with his list of favourite authors 'of the sentimental kind' […]. He named Pope as the paragon of 'satire's darts' […]. He quoted most frequently (after the Bible) Shakespeare, Thomson, Pope, Young, Milton, Addison, Blair, Gray, Shenstone, and Goldsmith, in that order. He apparently had an easy familiarity with a number of British poets of his own century, and looked to British poets for guidance.[21]

Burns loved English poetry and English novels. He also worked diligently at his French so that he could read other literatures. Burns's knowledge and appreciation of a wide range of

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[20] Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, p. 147.
[21] Raymond Bentman, 'Robert Burns's Declining Fame', *Studies in Romanticism*, 11 (1972), 207-24 (pp. 210-11).

literature has been well documented. A number of Bentman's criticisms of existing attitudes towards Burns's poetry (namely that he was not taken seriously as a poet) are thankfully no longer dominant. However, other issues remain, and my thesis confronts the lack of credit Burns continues to receive for his active role in shaping — if not initiating — British Romanticism.

Burns is not often included in discussions of evolving trends in English literary history even though the trend should be easily identified and understood, especially when we consider Burns's early success in England followed by the sensationalism of Currie's biography. Pittock highlights Burns's popularity with his English contemporaries and near contemporaries (had Burns not died at a relatively young age Burns and Wordsworth would have been exact contemporaries):

> Wordsworth, despite suppressing the extent of Burns's influence on him, as Kenneth Johnston has demonstrated, none the less ranked Burns with Dunbar and Buchanan as 'pre-eminent among Scottish writers', 'energetic solemn and sublime in sentiment'. For Keats he was the 'Great Shadow'; Byron used Burns's metre and was 'closer to Burns than he wished to admit'; for Clare, Burns was transparently a major model; Hazlitt thought that 'in vivid description of natural objects and of the natural feelings of the heart, he has left behind him no superior; Matthew Arnold put Burns on a level with Chaucer and above Shelley; Tennyson had 'as much veneration' for Burns 'as if I had been born a Scotchman'; Swinburne wishes he had 'more in me of Burns and less of Shelley, that I might write something that should do good and might endure' […][22]

The list goes on. Like Bentman who aligned Burns within a distinct tradition, Pittock shows how the trend was in fact recognized up until the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed,

[22] Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, p. 146.

Pittock illustrates that Burns's decline from the classroom and from critical editions and anthologies is relatively recent, in what he calls 'one of the most marked critical-canonical turns of the last sixty years':

> The erasure of Robert Burns from the literary history of the Romantic period has been one of the most marked critical-canonical turns of the last sixty years […] Earlier discussion of a Romantic movement within literary history saw Edward Dowden in 1897, P. Berger in 1914, Hugh Walker in 1925, Jacques Barzun in 1943, and even M.H. Abrams ten years later, accord Burns a shaping role, and/ or set him alongside one or other of the major English Romantics. When he was seen as a Romantic precursor, as by George Saintsbury and Jacques Cazamian, it was in company with Blake. Yet while Blake was adopted from pre-Romanticism firmly into Romanticism, a long and catastrophic critical decline awaited Burns. In the late 1930s, more articles were published on him than on Coleridge or Blake, and he was on par with Byron; by the 1960s, he had sunk to a quarter of Coleridge's total and half of Blake's, lying well adrift of the canon he had helped to define. While Burns could still justify a separate chapter in the 1957 *Penguin Guide to English Literature*, this situation had become unthinkable by the 1990s.[23]

Perhaps modern readers hesitate to make the effort with Burns's dialect. The dialect can be restricting but it is not insurmountable. Jeffrey Skoblow, discussing the paradox of Burns's world-wide fame and classroom neglect, acknowledges the problem of Burns's glossary, which sits at the back of Kilmarnock edition and was expanded in subsequent editions, curated by Burns himself. The initial glossary is comprised of roughly two-hundred fifty words, nearly a fifth of those words are specific to farming or kitchen life:

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[23] Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, p. 144.

> The most obvious problem, perhaps, is the business of glossary — Scots rendered marginal, a footnote, an appendix; one may come not to need the gloss largely, but there is no escaping it.[24]

While there are practical reasons for placing a glossary at the end of a work, there is no doubt that Burns's inclusion of one aided the coy posture he wished to present. The issue of Burns's dialect is intimately bound up with Burns's posturing. This was evidently the case in his earliest reviews, even while countless English readers flocked to his poetry that was published in London in 1787. Burns's exclusion from English Literature departments and classrooms may stem, in part, from his impulse for dramatic self-representation. However, Burns's glossary which includes remarks on some of the differences between English and Scots grammar illustrates both Burns's flexibility with both dialects while offering his readers important keys for approaching his poetry:

> 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.*[25]

[24] Jeffrey Skoblow, 'Resisting the Powers of Calculation: A Bard's Politics,' in *Critical Essays,* pp. 17-30, (p. 18).
[25] *Robert Burns: The Kilmarnock Edition: (Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect, 1786)*, ed. by Donald A. Low (London: Everyman's Library, 1985), p. 176. Subsequent references to this work appear as 'Burns, *Kilmarnock Poems*'.

Had Burns included this note at the beginning of the edition, some of the magic would have been lost. Burns's Preface, as well as his epigraph and title of the volume, present a different voice to the one helpfully explaining participles at the head of the glossary.

Another essay by Bentman focusing on Burns's language, 'Robert Burns's use of Scottish Diction' (1965), counters the widely held belief that Burns's language imitated a spoken language as opposed to a literary one: as Bentman quips '[…] the advocates of this belief seem to rely mostly on their feelings to establish linguistic details […]'.[26] Paying attention to grammar, syntax, diction, and prose comments made by Burns, Bentman comprehensively demonstrates the artifice of Burns's highly literary, highly constructed poetic language, speculating 'Why Burns referred to his "native language" when he meant a "sprinkling":

> […] it is an attempt, also in the epistles, to create an elaborate persona for the Kilmarnock volume, much as Housman did later in *A Shropshire Lad*; a cynical attempt to attract attention from the sentimental admirer of the heaven-taught ploughman; a self-delusion; too great a reliance on Ramsay's confused theories, which were in turn part of certain confusions in other British Augustan theories; or an ambiguity in terms, similar to the ambiguity which often causes a misreading of Wordsworth's theories of poetic diction.[27]

Bentman ties Burns's persona directly to his new poetic language. Burns, aware of the persona he was cultivating, knew that 'a sprinkling of Scotch in it, while it is but a sprinkling, gives it an air of rustic naïveté, which time will rather increase than diminish'.[28] The

[26] Raymond Bentman, 'Robert Burns's Use of Scottish Diction', in *Critical Essays on Robert Burns*, ed. by Carol McGuirk (New York: G.K Hall, 1998), pp. 79-94, (p. 80). Reprinted from, *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, ed. by Frederick W. Hills and Harold Bloom (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 239-58.
[27] Bentman, 'Scottish Diction' pp. 80-81.
[28] Bentman, 'Scottish Diction', p. 80.

appearance of ‘rustic naïveté’ was just one of the tools Burns used, and he was adept at balancing perceived biographical details against tightly crafted formal poetry. Burns’s poetry showed a constant awareness of two traditions without being derivative. His poems are too obviously Scotch to be part of the sentimental tradition he admired, while also using far more English than the poetry of Fergusson. This inventiveness from his own inheritances supports Bentman’s remark that ‘great poets use traditions; they are not enslaved by them’.[29] Bentman shows how Burns was happy to employ either Scots or English as poetic rule required, and after a comprehensive list of examples shows that: ‘One function of using both Scottish and English, then, is expediency; to facilitate rhyme and alliteration’.[30]

Burns’s decisions were often aesthetic and non-conforming. The spelling of words was not standardised, and, for words common to both Scots and English, Burns might choose to spell them differently depending on the occasion. Bentman’s attention to grammar reveals that phrases such as ‘Green Grow the Rashes’ and ‘Scots Wha Hae’ do not conform to the vernacular grammar. In the case of ‘Green Grow the Rashes’ ‘[it] is grammatical English but ungrammatical Scots’ and in ‘Scots Wha Hae’ ‘is fancy Scotch’. Spoken vernacular Scottish would be “scots at haes”’.[31] These observations reveal a level of attention not usually given to Burns’s language. Indeed, Bentman’s opening remarks about the differences, or lack of differences, between English and Scottish are worth quoting in full:

> Scottish and English are so closely related that they are little more than different dialects of the same language. It is often difficult to distinguish between them. But in Burns’s poetry the distinction between “Scottish” and “English” is inaccurate and misleading. Burns wrote some poems in pure English, most of them in neoclassic style, but he wrote no poems in pure

[29] Bentman, ‘Scottish Diction’, p. 81.
[30] Bentman, ‘Scottish Diction’, p. 82.
[31] Bentman, ‘Scottish Diction’, p. 79.

> vernacular Scottish. The “Scottish” poems are written in a literary language which was mostly, although not entirely English, in grammar and syntax, and, in varying proportions, both Scottish and English in vocabulary.[32]

Critics, like McGuirk and Bentman, have worked hard to show Burns as a unique artistic force who creatively expanded on the poetic traditions he inherited. Likewise, many other critics here quoted have discussed the elaborate and artfully constructed persona Burns adopted in his Kilmarnock volume Preface. Biographically, much of what Burns said was true enough, but he covered up the most important features of a poet: his familiarity with a tradition and his ability to create seriously. Part of the confusion and critical misrepresentation of Burns, then, comes from the poet’s own artifice.

Because of the early, literal readings of the Kilmarnock and Edinburgh editions, the idea that Burns was interested, or perhaps even capable of performing dramatic self-representation within his poetry, was generally absent from early reviews. Henry Mackenzie’s famous appellation of Burns as the ‘Heaven-taught ploughman’ says more about Mackenzie than it does about Burns.[33] Jeffrey and Scott, in taking Burns literally, used their erroneous conceptions of Burns’s biographical background to argue for his inability to write as well in English as he did in Scots. Both Jeffrey and Scott also give too much credence to the rumours of Burns’s alcoholism and dissipation made popular by Currie’s biography, where Jeffrey laments Burns’s frequent coarseness and lack of ‘chivalrous gallantry’.[34] Interestingly, of all the early reviewers and commentators, Wordsworth proves, as he so often proved with Burns, to be one of his most sensitive readers:

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[32] Bentman, ‘Scottish Diction’, p. 79.
[33] *Critical Heritage*, p. 70.
[34] *Critical Heritage*, p. 182

> Not less successfully does Burns avail himself of his own character and situation in society, to construct out of them a poetic self, — introduced as a dramatic personage — for the purpose of inspiriting his incidents, diversifying his pictures, recommending his opinions, and giving point to his sentiments.[35]

Wordsworth's remark on Burns's 'dramatic personage' anticipates the language of the twentieth-century critics and reads Burns as a creative force capable of dramatic self-representation. Wordsworth's *Letter to a friend of Robert Burns* (1816), reads Burns with greater sensitivity and seriousness than many of his contemporary reviewers and biographers, and will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on Wordsworth.

Burns's biographical manipulations have long been the subject of critical discussion. Perhaps the most insightful modern discussion came from New Zealand poet and critic James K. Baxter, in *The Fire and the Anvil*, a slim volume of three critical essays on modern poetry. His work is not solely confined to 'modern poetry' but rather is concerned with the difficulties of apprehending the qualities of a poem; how to distinguish between 'inflated trash' and when a poem is engaging in a more complex matrix of meaning, metaphor, and language.[36] Baxter's middle essay 'The Creative Mask' is concerned with, among other things, the significance of poetry and creative freedom. Burns provides Baxter with a useful example for his discussion, and like David Daiches before him, and like many other critics that were to follow, Baxter discusses the tensions and contradictions inherent in Burns's poetry and prefaces in terms of dramatic self-representation and deliberate guise:

[35] *William Wordsworth: The Major Works, Including The Prelude*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 671. Subsequent references to this work appear as 'Wordsworth, *Major Works'*.
[36] James K. Baxter, *The Fire and the Anvil: Notes on Modern Poetry* (Wellington: New Zealand University Press, 1960), p. 37.

> In attempting to assess the significance of a poem, one must realize that nearly all poetry is dramatic in character. The catharsis which a reader experiences could not occur if he felt the self that the poem expresses to be entirely actual; rather, the self is a projection of complex associations in the poet's mind, and the poem enables the reader to make the same projection. The *I* of a poem may not exist. Thus, if one regarded the work of Burns as a poetic *credo,* one would have to conclude that he was either insincere or schizophrenic. His quiet nature lyrics rub shoulders with bludgeoning satires; the piety of 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' with the iconoclastic wit of 'The Jolly Beggars'; romantic love poetry with brutal cynicism. But the problem arises from a false conception of the poet's role. If Burns had been permanently committed to any one attitude, he could not have attained the objectivity necessary to write at all.[37]

Baxter's point that the 'self is a projection of the complex associations in the poet's mind' is important. The poem is set between two sets of experiences: first, are the 'complex associations' which belong to the poet, out of which the poem emerges. It is also important to note that Baxter says the self that is represented is not '*entirely* actual', suggesting that dramatic projection is not wholly separate to the poet's character, but that the poem is driven primarily — though not solely — by artifice, not biography. The second experience belongs to the reader and their engagement with the poem at hand. In Baxter's formulation, either a successful poem, or a successful reading of the poem,'enables the reader to make the same projection', which might (and perhaps should) lead to the dissolution of the '*I'*. In the case of Burns, it was a failure of those who regarded his work 'as a poetic credo' that has contributed

[37] *The Fire and the Anvil*, pp. 48-49. Here I have quoted the same passage of Baxter quoted in the introduction to Thomas Crawford's influential study, *Burns: A study of the Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), p. xii. Crawford quotes Baxter in order to resist him, claiming that Burns did in fact exhibit 'insincerity and schizophrenia', and that as a highly inconsistent person his poems do not operate as a series of masks or poses around a more unified individual. Crawford acknowledges a 'qualified agreement' with some of Baxter's points, though he does not say which. However, Baxter's work does not suggest Burns was incapable of sincerely holding varying perspectives, but rather these various perspectives are imbued with more controlled artifice than mere agreement of temperament might permit.

to the many false conceptions surrounding both the poet and his poems. A given poetic persona as adopted by the poet need not be radically dissimilar to the actual character of the poet. Rather, the persona provides a platform for the poet to assume a voice that fits a purpose, no matter how temporary. In the same way that not all works of a poet are read under the same assumed voice, Burns's Preface assumes a different voice (and diction) to that of many of his poems. The above passage also acutely notes the danger in reading Burns's works as a coherent or unified voice. Indeed, we would not even have to read all of his works to 'conclude that he was either insincere or schizophrenic', since the Preface provides enough baldly contradictory or coy (playfully insincere) information to suggest otherwise.

Critics from Daiches, Bentman, and Thomas Crawford in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, to Leask, Pittock, Meiko O'Halloran, Skoblow, and McGuirk in more contemporary criticism, have examined Burns's sleight of hand, humour, and self-misrepresentations evident in the Preface, as well as the template it provided for Wordsworth's advertisement and Prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads*. Leask remarks that Burns's Preface was 'written in highly literary standard English, skilfully constructed the persona of the "Simple Bard, Unbroken by rules of Art", together with a partially submerged biographical narrative to match'.[38] O'Halloran calls attention to the tension between Burns's title page quotation and the Preface, noting 'Thus the many voices of Burns's begin to emerge before readers have even reached his poems'.[39] Thomas Crawford sees Burns as '[assuming] a deliberate disguise in order to storm his way into high society […]'[40] and Daiches, using similar imagery to Crawford and Baxter provides some context to Burns's persona:

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[38] Burns, O*xford Edition*, I, p. 71.
[39] Meiko O'Halloran, '"Simple Bards, unbroke by rules of Art": The Poetic Self-Fashioning of Burns and Hogg', in *Burns and Other Poets,* ed. by David Sergeant and Fiona Stafford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 143-55 (p. 148).
[40] Thomas Crawford, p. 198.

> If the Kilmarnock volume represented a deliberate public appearance, it was inevitable that he should dress for the part. The dress he chose was perhaps unfortunate, but it was understandable. A country poet whose audience had hitherto been restricted to friends and neighbours in his own corner of Scotland, a poet, moreover, with little of the formal education which he understood, from a study of Masson's reader and similar books, to be an orthodox prerequisite for a man of letters, had one obvious recourse: to fall back on that growing sentimentalism which, in one of its aspects, could be used to idealise the simple rustic. Burns knew all about that sentimentalism — Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* was his favourite novel from the first time he set eyes on it — and he deliberately took advantage of it in dressing himself to make his opening bow before the genteel world of the late-eighteenth century.[41]

Burns's Preface as well as the perceived naturalness of his language inspired the revised editions of Wordsworth and Coleridge's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, and the biographical alignment of poet and subject, as well as the energetic verse and satirical epistles that served as a model for Byron's best poetry.

Burns's Kilmarnock edition includes three paratextual components: the anonymous epigraph, the Preface, and the glossary. Unsurprisingly, the Preface has received more attention than either the epigraph or glossary, although there continues to be debate on whether Burns actually authored the epigraph himself.[42] Although plenty of attention has been paid to the sentiment expressed in the anonymously attributed lines on Burns's title page, to my knowledge, there has been little examination of the tension between its form and content:

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[41] David Daiches, *Robert Burns* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1952), pp. 108-09.
[42] Both Nigel Leask and Murray Pittock have attributed these lines to Burns: Burns, *Oxford Works,* I, p. 325, and Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism,* p. 148.

> THE Simple Bard, unbroke by rules of Art,
>
> He pours the wild effusions of the heart:
>
> And if inspir'd, 'tis Nature's pow'rs inspire;
>
> Her's all the melting thrill, and her's the kindling fire.[43]

The semantic notion expressed is that of a 'simple bard' who does not subscribe to an elevated artistic program (either through inability or choice, it isn't clear) and any skill or inspiration is deferred to nature's powers. But, if we take the suggestion that these lines were Burns's own composition, then we can see the greater significance that lends them. Greater, because it means the first lines of Burns's poetry that his audience encountered were written in neo-classical English couplets. These Heroic lines are not unbroken by rules of art, but conform, eloquently and expertly, to received conventions. The internal rhyme of 'Bard' with 'art', the similarity of both the vowels and semantic meaning of 'pours' with 'effusions', as well as the frequent punctuation, retard and restrain the flow of the lines, a further juxtaposition of 'unbroke' and 'wild effusions'. Finally, the repetition of 'her's' slows the flow of the fourth line. In these four lines, we can see the persona of the 'simple rustic' promoting the elevated bard. However, upon closer scrutiny, we can see how strongly the use of poetic artifice or 'rules of art' resist the unnamed Bard's proclamations. Burns refers to himself in the Preface as an 'obscure, nameless Bard', appearing just a few pages after the frontispiece. The 'nameless Bard', leaves an anonymous epigraph meant to simultaneously affirm and deny his own elaborately crafted debut bow, thus pleasing and perplexing his initial, eager, audience.

Burns restates the claim of the anonymous lines in his Preface, claiming that he is 'unacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing Poet by rule, he sings the

[43] Burns, *Oxford Works*, I, p. 71.

sentiments and manners, he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him, in his and their native language'.[44] As with the epigraph, the claim that he is unfamiliar with the 'necessary requisites for commencing Poet by rule', does not hold up. The first contradiction can be found in the preceding sentences:

> The following trifles are not the production of the Poet, who, with all the advantages of learned art and perhaps amid the elegancies and idlenesses of upper life, looks down for a rural theme, with an eye to Theocrites or Virgil. To the Author of this, these and other celebrated names their countrymen are, in their original language 'a fountain shut up', and 'a book sealed.'[45]

As Pittock, O'Halloran, and Leask have noted, Burns's mention of Theocrites and Virgil immediately undermines his claim of not having any 'learned art'. Similarly, his quoting of 'a fountain shut up and a book sealed' is taken from Song of Songs, the erotic and elliptical wisdom poetry of Solomon that Burns knew and loved.[46] Perhaps the quotation marks are a means of Burns gently prodding his readers to question him, but it is altogether more subtle than the explicit mention of classical writers. The fact that Burns could not read Greek or Latin is not a convincing demonstration of his claim of a lack of education or an inability to '[commence] Poet by rule', and indeed Leask's suggestion that Burns could not read Theocritus and Virgil in their original languages 'leaves open the possibility that he read them in translation'.[47] Burns repeats his unlearned rustic claim a third time, in his 'Epistle to J. L*****k, an old Scotch Bard':

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[44] Burns, *Oxford Works*, I, p. 72.
[45] Burns, *Oxford Works*, I, p. 72.
[46] Burns, *Oxford Works*, I, p. 325.
[47] Burns, *Oxford Works*, I, p. 325.

I am nae *Poet*, in a sense,

But just a *Rhymer* like by chance,

An' hae to Learning nae pretence,

Yet, what the matter?

Whene'er my Muse does on me glance,

I jingle at her.[48]

Although the language of this stanza might be categorised by what Thomas Crawford calls 'thinly veiled English', much of the poem is in heavy Scots vernacular.[49] In the Preface, Burns also refers to himself as 'a Rhymer from his earliest years', again showing his supposed distinction between 'rhymer' and 'poet', (although the title of his volume suggests he does in fact view himself as writing poems). As with the epigraph and Preface, Burns describes his relationship to his muse as a reactionary, energetic one opposed to a learned or practised art. Across the epigraph, Preface, and poems, we can see Burns making the same claim in three distinct voices, first in neo-classical couplets; in the Preface as a 'rustic Bard', but one who writes in literary English; and as a poet comfortable code switching between standard English and vernacular Scots. Each claim is undermined by the poet's artifice. In the case of the 'anonymous' lines the form resists the claim, in the preface Burns coyly uses *occupatio* to tell us about the things he has never heard of, and in his Epistle, he combines his skilful use of the Standard Habbie with acknowledgements of poets like Pope and Shenstone while rejecting any 'pretence' to 'learning'.

[48] *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. by James Kinsley, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), I, lines 49-54, p. 86. All Subsequent references to Burns's verse are taken from this edition and appear as 'Burns, *Poems and Songs*'.
[49] Thomas Crawford, p. 194.

Another way of apprehending Burns's deliberate posture in his debut volume is by reading it alongside his Preface for the 1787 Edinburgh edition. The second edition, under the same name (as all subsequent volumes were) was expanded from 240 pages to 408 pages, adding twelve poems and expanding the glossary.[50] The 1786 Preface which established the image of a regional, uneducated farmer who wrote to 'amuse himself with the little creations of his own fancy, amid the toil and fatigues of a laborious life' and who approached the idea of public authorship 'with fear and trembling', speaks with greater confidence, asserting both his powers as poet and claim to the title of Bard, addressing and dedicating the enlarged volume to his subscribers, the 'Noblemen and Gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt':

> MY LORDS, AND GENTLEMEN,
>
> A Scottish Bard, proud of the name, and whose highest ambition is to sing in his Country's service, where shall he so properly look for patronage as to the illustrious Names of his native Land; those who bear the honours and inherit the virtues of their Ancestors? — The Poetic Genius of my Country found me as the prophetic Elijah did Elisha — at the plough; and threw her inspiring mantle over me. She bade me sing the loves, the joys, the rural scenes and rural pleasures of my natal Soil, in my native tongue: I tuned my wild, artless notes, as she inspired. — She whispered me to come to this ancient metropolis of Caledonia, and lay my Songs under your honoured protection: I now obey her dictates.
>
> Though much indebted to your goodness, I do not approach you, my Lords and Gentlemen, in the usual stile of dedication, to thank you for past favours; that path is so hackneyed by prostituted Learning, that honest Rusticity is ashamed of it. — Nor do I present this Address with the venal soul of a servile Author, looking for a continuation of those favours: I was bred to the Plough and am independent. I come to claim the common Scottish

[50] Burns, *Oxford Works*, I, p. 74; Low, *Kilmarnock Poems*, p. 184 (appendix B).

name with you, my illustrious Countrymen; and to tell the world that I glory in the title. — I come to congratulate my Country, that the blood of her ancient heroes still runs uncontaminated; and that from your courage, knowledge, and public spirit, she may expect protection, wealth, and liberty. — In the last place, I come to proffer my warmest wishes to the Great Fountain of Honour, the Monarch of the Universe, for your welfare and happiness.

When you go forth to waken the Echoes, in the ancient and favourite amusement of your Forefathers, may Pleasure ever be of your party; and may Social-joy await your return! When harassed in courts or camps with the justlings of bad men and bad measures, may the honest consciousness of injured Worth attend your return to your native Seats; and may Domestic Happiness, with a smiling welcome, meet you at your gates! May Corruption shrink at your kindling indignant glance; and may tyranny in the Ruler and licentiousness in the People equally find you an inexorable foe!

I have the honour to be,

With the sincerest gratitude and highest respect,

MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,

Your most devoted humble servant,

ROBERT BURNS.[51]

What a difference a year makes. In the Kilmarnock Preface, the reference to Song of Songs was only alluded to. Here, Burns makes his invocation of Kings explicit and marries it with his work at the plough, giving the image of a humble ploughman supported by the weight of biblical history. In 1786, 'Poet' and farmer had been set in opposition, 'The following trifles are not the production of the Poet'. The Edinburgh address assumes the role of Bard awaiting the Muse's call to honour a nation, as opposed to one who simply wrote a few rhymes to

[51] Burns, *Oxford Works*, I, pp. 74-75. See pp. 326-27 for Leask's annotations of the Edinburgh Preface.

stave off boredom or the fatigues of manual labour. There is also an echo of Burns's praise of Fergusson, quoted above in his letter to Dr. John Moore, where: 'I tuned my wild, artless notes, as she inspired' echoes 'I strung anew my wildy-sounding, rustic lyre with emulating vigour'. Burns had initially claimed to be a regional voice with no real interest in publishing his trifles, and certainly never hoped to achieve the skill or fame of Ramsay and Fergusson. In addressing the Caledonian Hunt, as well as his wider audience, however, he speaks as a 'Scottish Bard, proud of the name'. Burns knew his audience, whom he depended on for financial stability and success. Referring to the Edinburgh Preface, Robert Folkenflik notes the 'neat trick' of asserting 'one's independence at the very moment of giving thanks for patronage'.[52] Essential similarities remain, of course, such as Burns's independence, or the view of his poems as 'artless', but the Edinburgh Preface reveals Burns's ability to calibrate his image to the needs of the moment. Having spent time in 1786 and 1787 in Edinburgh, where he kept company with influential literary figures such as Hugh Blair and Henry MacKenzie, as well meeting a teenage Walter Scott, the image of an untutored rustic needed to be adapted once the initial impression had been tempered by the society he kept.

Evaluating Burns's prefaces and paratextual materials, such as the glossary and epigraph, enable a clearer view of Burns's attention to his evolving status as a poet. Biographical manipulation coupled with an audience primed for native genius propelled Burns into celebrity.[53] Evaluating the differences between the two prefaces is not to suggest that one image is more accurate than the other, or that either image cultivated is entirely artificial. Instead, it strengthens the claim to view Burns as a poet meticulously and self-consciously developing a new poetry out of existing traditions. Burns's colloquial language is an obvious predecessor to Wordsworth, a subject that is explored in the following chapter.

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[52] Robert Folkenflik, 'Patronage and the Poet-Hero', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 48 (1985), 363-79 (p. 367).
[53] See: Nicholas Roe, 'Authenticating Robert Burns' in *Critical Essays on Robert Burns,* ed. by Carol McGuirk (New York: G.K. Hall, 1998), pp. 208-24.

Likewise, my chapter on Byron shows how Burns's 'complex associations' provided a model for Byron's own manipulations, as well the sensationalism of his public celebrity.

The Centrality of Burns and the Complexities of Influence: The Poetry of Robert Anderson

One aim of my thesis is to illustrate how Burns's originality as a poet — traversing dialects, modernising archaic poetic forms, crafting formal, rhymed structures into believable representations of colloquial speech — was woven into the fabric of three of the most important British poets of the early nineteenth century. As stated above, this thesis divides its chapters by focusing on Burns's influence alongside one other major Romantic poet. Although my chapter on Keats pays substantial attention to Thomas Chatterton's influence on Romantic myth and the consistency with which he was compared with Burns, my work is largely concerned with the lyric poetry of Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron. This approach allows for sustained readings that clearly define the unique inheritance each poet took from the work of Robert Burns and emphasises the singular importance one poet can have on another.

Such an approach makes for a potentially narrow view of literary history, eschewing broader narratives as well as marginal voices. Broader narratives that ask questions such as 'What is Romanticism?' are generally productive for stimulating debate over what authors should be included and on what grounds, as opposed to conclusively defining all the components of the genre. Although this thesis does not ask 'What is Romanticism?' it does make clear that many of the most salient features common to three important Romantic poets are partially achieved through repeated and explicit engagements with Burns's poetry.

Burns's success and celebrity meant that he was widely read throughout Britain, and he influenced a generation of working-class poets as well as more notable Romantics. Cumbrian poet, Robert Anderson, serves as an important reminder of Burns's early influence in England, as well as the changing conventions of poetry that Wordsworth and Coleridge codified into a movement with *Lyrical Ballads*. Robert Anderson was born in 1770, the same year as Wordsworth, in Carlisle. As Mike Huggins and Tim Burke have noted, the success of Burns's dialect poetry helped initiate a proliferation of dialect poetry in Scotland and England.[54] Burke has also noted in the case of Wordsworth that 'the differences between the two poets [Wordsworth and Anderson] are more striking than the comparisons'.[55] It is perhaps therefore more useful to think of Anderson as the Cumberland response to Burns rather than the labouring-class analogue to Wordsworth. Anderson, like Wordsworth, turned the popular Lucy Gray Ballad into verse.[56] Wordsworth's Lucy Gray poems did not appear until the second volume of the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, and Anderson's poem appears in *Poems on Various Subjects* published in 1798, although it was composed by Anderson in London in 1794.

Anderson's poem, 'Song. Lucy Gray Of Allendale' holds both interesting similarities as well as striking differences with the more familiar Wordsworth poems. 'Strange Fits of Passion I have Known' and 'She Dwelt Among th' Untrodden Ways' are tales mourning a deceased lover, as opposed to the young child that appears in Wordsworth's poem 'Lucy

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[54] Mike Huggins, 'Popular Culture and Sporting Life in the Rural Margins of Late Eighteenth-Century England: The World of Robert Anderson, "The Cumberland Bard"', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 45 (2012), 189-205, (p. 192); *Eighteenth-Century Labouring Class Poets: 1700-1800*, ed. by Tim Burke, 3 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), III 1780-1800, p. xvii.

[55] Burke, p. 305.

[56] Burke notes that Wordsworth and Anderson drew on 'a northern folk tale of doomed lovers' for their respective Lucy Gray ballads. However, Wordsworth claims familiarity with the story from 'a circumstance told me by my sister of a little girl who, not far from Halifax in Yorkshire, was bewildered in a snowstorm' (Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 693). While 'northern' can incorporate both Yorkshire and Carlisle, Russell Noyes has emphasised the importance of a number of Burns's poems to the Lucy Gray poems, specifically 'The Lass o' Ballochmyle'. See: Russell Noyes, 'Wordsworth and Burns', *PMLA*, 59 (1944), 813-32 (pp. 818-20).

Gray’. Anderson’s Lucy is the Lucy of ‘Strange Fits of Passion’ and ‘She Dwelt Among th’ Untrodden Ways’ and the poem also shares the haunting vagueness of Lucy’s death:

O have you seen the blushing rose,
   The blooming pink, or lily pale;
Fairer than any flow’r that blows
   Was Lucy Gray of Allendale

Pensive and sad by brae and burn,
   Where oft the nymph they us’d to hail,
The shepherds now are heard to mourn
   For Lucy Gray of Allendale.

With her to join the rural dance,
   Far have I stray’d o’er hill and vale;
Then pleas’d each rustic stole a glance
   At Lucy Gray of Allendale.

‘Twas underneath the hawthorn shade
   I told her first the tender tale;
But now low lays the lovely maid,
   Sweet Lucy Gray of Allendale.

Bleak blows the wind, keen beats the rain,
   Upon my cottage in the vale:
Long may I mourn a lonely swain,

For Lucy Gray of Allendale.[57]

Anderson's poem is composed of tetrameter quatrains as opposed to Wordsworth's traditional ballad meter, but the resemblances to Wordsworth's 'She Dwelt Among th' Untrodden Ways' are clear. 'Fairer than any flow'r that blows' echoes the second stanza of Wordsworth's poem:

A Violet by a mossy stone
   Half-hidden from the Eye!
-- Fair, as a star when only one
   Is shining in the sky!

Both poems share imagery, diction, and setting, as well as the implied musical component where each poem is also identified as a song.

The question of memory is also at play for both poets: In the case of Wordsworth, this is apparent in the third and fourth lines 'none to praise | and very few to love', the sixth line, 'half-hidden from the Eye!', and the final stanza:

She *lived* unknown, and few could know
   When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her Grave, and Oh!
   The difference to me.[58]

[57] Burke, pp. 318-19.
[58] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, lines 5-8 and 9-12, pp. 147-48.

In the case of Anderson's poem, however, Lucy's song is sung to be remembered, and the second stanza signals an awareness of shifting literary traditions:

> Pensive and sad by brae and burn
> Where oft the nymph they us'd to hail,
> The Shepherds now are heard to mourn
> For Lucy Gray of Allendale.

The movement from 'The nymph they used to hail' to the 'Shepherds now are heard to mourn' mirrors the change from classical, pastoral tradition to the bardic, or balladic tradition which is doubly emphasised by the poem's form.

It is also worth noting that Anderson's ballad is written entirely in standard English, in a volume which also features dialect verse, as in his epistle to Burns, written in the Standard Habbie stanza. Anderson, not unlike Burns, chose to fit the language to the occasion, although this gently contradicts the claim in his Preface to write in his 'native tongue'. Indeed, the decision to pose as an unlearned rustic, when he was well travelled, having lived in London (and later, in Belfast) and is well versed in both standard English and local dialect. Anderson's 1798 Preface echoes the 1786 Preface of Burns:

> At this enlightened period, when Britain can boast of a Cowper, a Roscoe, a Rogers, a Pindar, a Hayley, and a Mrs. Smith, whose works are in such high estimation, and known to every lover of poetry, it is with the greatest diffidences the author of the following trifles submits this volume to a numerous and respectable body of Subscribers […]. Prevented by his humble birth from enjoying the benefits of an education which enables mankind to pursue the flowery path of science, he owns with regret, that he can but peruse in his native tongue the sacred

> pages of the immortal few, whose works, like beacons, teach the modest Bard how to avoid the rocks of Criticism and is conscious how much he stands beneath the notice of the literary world […][59]

We can see similarities in the first instance, where Anderson refers to his poems as 'trifles', echoing Burns verbatim, and that he is writing in his 'native tongue' without the advantages of a proper education.

Although it is unclear when Wordsworth first became aware of Anderson's poetry, he was, along with Robert Southey, a subscriber to his *Poetical Works* in 1820.[60] Wordsworth's Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* and the subsequent prefaces remain amongst the most important poetic manifestos in the history of English poetry, yet the trends for a poetry of natural language and common subjects were being discussed in the borders of England and Scotland both before and alongside Wordsworth's manifesto. Anderson remains obscure partially because his poetry is not as good as Burns's or Wordsworth's. Anderson's Preface is interesting for its echoes of Burns (another volume of poetry is titled *Ballads in the Cumberland Dialect*) and for his proximity to Wordsworth in Cumbria at the turn of the century. Coupled with his Lucy Gray ballad, comparisons to Burns and Wordsworth are hard to resist. However, Anderson's Preface is derivative as opposed to Wordsworth's comprehensive originality. Although Anderson was only a minor player in the shifting trends at the end of the eighteenth century, he serves as an example of the complications involved in assessing the broader evolutions of literary history.

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[59] Burke, p. 307.
[60] Burke, p. 306.

Critical Directions and Overview

My brief discussion of Robert Anderson highlights an important legacy of Burns's influence on other poets: that what other poets found influential in Burns's poetry varied greatly. Anderson, like other labouring-class poets, was most inspired by Burns's successful dialect poetry as well as the profession of humble origins. Although Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron often quoted from or alluded to the same Burns poems, their engagements with his life and work are enhanced by their own poetic concerns.

Instead of offering a unified theory of influence, or a methodical account of Burns's influence on Romanticism, each chapter reads individual poems against each other, oftentimes revealing moments of intertextuality, echo, and allusion. Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron all discuss Burns at length in their letters and journals and mention him by name or through allusion in their poetry. Some of Burns's poems (as well as his Kilmarnock Preface) are read multiple times, such as 'Tam O'Shanter', 'The Vision', and 'Epistle to J. L*****k, an Old Scots Bard' as they were hugely influential poems for both Wordsworth and Byron, and their influence manifests differently for each poet. Indeed, the admiration and appeal of Burns affected Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron in distinct ways and so tracing the importance of Burns's influence within their poetry reveals each poet's unique engagement with Burns while also highlighting the extent of his legacy on a future generation of ground-breaking poets.

There are a number of authors and issues that my thesis does not address that might seem like notable omissions. I do not discuss Burns's song making and song collecting,

although I briefly touch on this matter at the end of my chapter on Byron. More emphasis to Burns and song making might have been given if this thesis had been structured differently, for example around forms of poetic genre. I also do not discuss the poetry of John Clare in this thesis for two reasons: firstly, I am more concerned here with Burns's importance as a poet who initiated many fundamental Romantic preoccupations and as a primary influence on the major Romantic poets. Secondly, Adam White's recent monograph *John Clare's Romanticism* provides a compelling and thoughtful account of Burns's relationship to Clare, and indeed to many major Romantic poets and so I do not wish to make a poor imitation of his argument.[61] Clare's poetry deserves to be taken seriously in discussions of Romantic canonicity, but as a poet still fighting for his place within the pantheon of accepted Romantic poets, a discussion of Burns's influence on Clare does not ask the same questions of literary history as a discussion of Burns alongside the preeminent figures of the period.

With a focus on Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron my study, inevitably, concentrates on the reception of Burns by male Romantic poets. It does so in the full knowledge that Charlotte Smith knew and admired the poetry of Burns.[62] Austen's unfinished novel, *Sanditon*, portrays a dialogue between Charlotte Heywood and Sir Edward, satirising moralistic attitudes held about Burns at the time, where Donald Low remarks 'Such poised mockery of an incoherent admirer of Burns underlines by contrast the clumsiness of more direct moralistic criticism of the poet'.[63] Charlotte's quip about her supposed inability to separate the poetry from the man, 'He felt & he wrote & and he forgot', serves not only as a brilliant and comic dismantling of the moralising attitudes on Burns by earlier reviewers, such as Francis Jeffrey, but might also be a maxim usefully applied to all writers.[64] But my aim in this thesis is not to illustrate how widely Burns was read by his contemporaries and

[61] Adam White, *John Clare's Romanticism* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[62] Charlottes Smith, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Judith Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2003), p.vii.
[63] *Critical Heritage*, p. 293.
[64] *Critical Heritage*, p. 295.

near-contemporaries such as Smith, Austen, or Cowper, or the poets that emerged at the turn of the century; Burns's early success has been well documented by Leask, Bentman, Pittock, McGuirk, and Robert Crawford. Instead, I argue through close textual analysis that three of the most important poets (Wordsworth, Byron, and Keats) of the Romantic tradition are indebted to the poetry of Burns, an indebtedness that manifests itself throughout their own works.

Burns's poetry, when discussed alongside other major Romantic writers by critics, tends to be discussed in isolation, meaning there is very little criticism that examines Burns alongside multiple Romantic authors, and almost no criticism that provides extensive readings of Burns's near-perpetual influence on poets such as Wordsworth, Keats and Byron. For this reason, each chapter begins with its own literature review, covering the critical material on Burns's relationship to that poet. I have attempted to refer only briefly to contemporary critics in this introduction so as to avoid repetition in later chapters.

Poets have a tendency to repeat themselves. Wordsworth's praise of Burns returns again and again to the same handful of poems; Byron's praise of Burns often reminds one of Byron's own subjective manoeuvres, and Keats, when reflecting on Burns often repeats phrases he used previously on Burns, or at least on the subject of fame, which from 1818 onwards was linked with his meditations on Burns. Because Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron return often to specific phrases, or to favoured poems (though they never feel repetitive), my chapters provide a detailed and extensive engagement, in an effort to trace how engagements with Burns initiated developments within their own poetry, often over a sustained period of time.

My first chapter "'Energetic Solemn and Sublime': Suffering and Friendship in the Poetry of Wordsworth and Burns", shows how Wordsworth's poems of human and animal suffering engage with the more sombre and 'solemn' elements of Burns's poetry, and reveals

Wordsworth to be uniquely sensitive to Burns's concern with suffering. The chapter reads *Peter Bell*, *The Ruined Cottage,* and 'Michael' alongside Burns's poems 'The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie', 'To A Mountain Daisy', and 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', among others. My chapter also discusses Wordsworth's Scottish Tour poems dedicated to Burns, and highlights how Wordsworth's proximity, both real and imagined, allowed him to productively meditate the possibilities of friendship with the poet whom he admired throughout his career.

I should also add a note about some of the poems that this chapter does not discuss. 'Resolution and Independence' with its explicit invocation of Burns is one of Wordsworth's most important engagements with Burns's life and poetry (particularly 'Man was Made to Mourn'). However, I discuss 'Resolution and Independence' in the following chapter on Keats. Wordsworth's poem couples his concerns of poetic fame with Burns and Thomas Chatterton, two poets that were of great importance to Keats, and thus require a focus on the symbolic relation of Burns and Chatterton to Wordsworth and Keats, as well as Coleridge and Shelley. This chapter also neglects one of Wordsworth's favoured Burns poems, 'Tam O'Shanter', which could be read alongside 'The Waggoner' (a connection McGuirk touches on).[65]

My next chapter "'Read me a Lesson, Muse, and Speak it Loud': Keats and Burns", begins with a discussion of the Romantic myths that tie Burns together with Thomas Chatterton. I begin by looking at a handful of Romantic elegies that pair Burns and Chatterton, including poems from Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Keats, while also looking at letters and lectures that helped to define the surprising comparisons of two very different poets. Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt were both interested in the early, tragic deaths of

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[65] McGuirk, *Reading Robert Burns: Texts, Contexts, Transformations* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), pp. 88-89.

Chatterton and Burns, although Hazlitt's criticism of the Chatterton's posthumous celebrity marks a departure in thought to many of his contemporaries.

I then analyse Keats's conflicted dialogue with Burns during his 1818 tour of Scotland. Keats's letters and poems from the tour chart his anxieties about poetic fame, where his pilgrimage to Burns country culminates in a number of important sonnets on Burns. Although Keats's explicit mentions of Burns are relatively few compared to Wordsworth and Byron, later sonnets on fame echo many of the concerns initiated during the 1818 tour, showing how, contrary to critical consensus, Keats's admiration for Burns survived beyond his experiences in Scotland.

My third and final chapter, "Antithetical Minds: Byron's Burns", explores three separate elements of Byron's transmission of Burns. First, I discuss the self-conscious biographical manipulations that Byron employed in his poetry, where the self represented in his poetry intentionally promotes complicated divisions between story and story-teller, and that this technique is derived, in part, from Byron's admiration for Burns, particularly his poem 'Tam O'Shanter'. This section takes seriously T.S. Eliot's 1937 essay on Byron, an essay that is often mentioned, though rarely discussed at length. I show that Eliot's brief mentions of Burns in his essay point to fundamental issues underpinning Byron's relationship to Burns as well as his relationship to his Scottish heritage.

The next section discusses the relationship of poetic form to satire in each poet's work, drawing on Byron's journals and letters that mention Burns, as well as explicit borrowings throughout *Don Juan*, to understand better the shared satiric impulse in their poetry that has been acknowledged but never fully explored. This section also reads Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* in conjunction with Burns's little-studied poem 'A Dream' while also focusing on Byron's criticism of Southey's poetic programme, and Byron's subsequent treatment of Southey in his poetry.

I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the shared quality of Burns's and Byron's shorter lyrics. This section begins with Burns's early poem 'Song Composed in August' and Byron's well known 'So, We'll go no More a Roving', before discussing 'Ae Fond Kiss', 'A Red Red Rose' , and Byron's 'When We Two Parted', where I look at the shared qualities of these lyrics such as: images, diction, and the emotional effects cultivated through these lyrics.

The poetry of Robert Burns inspired nearly everyone who read him. Writing about subjects such as mice and daisies with sincere sympathy struck a chord with the young Wordsworth, whose poetry responded to man's capacity to inflict suffering on nature with acute sensitivity and was often self-consciously bound up with his admiration for Burns. Keats's mortal fears fired his art, where Burns's tragic circumstances contrasted so painfully with his success and gave Keats the opportunity for a bold confrontation with his own poetic vision. Byron, who resembles Burns more closely than any other poet, wrote verse that struck its own 'emulating vigour', in hundreds of stanzas of *ottava rima*, though his originality can never be questioned. The self-conscious and seemingly authentic concerns of Burns's poetry, combined with the intellectual climate of the period made an unlikely artist into a national and international success. And while Burns is still sung and celebrated annually, my thesis both works backwards to, and radiates from, the beginnings of Burns's fame in an attempt to trace, carefully, his profound influence on three great English Romantic poets.

Chapter 1:

‘Energetic Solemn and Sublime’: Suffering and Friendship in the Poetry of Wordsworth and Burns

In this chapter, I examine a number of Wordsworth’s lyric poems that appear to manifest sentiments and subjects that Wordsworth himself located and celebrated in the poetry of Burns. I look closely at Wordsworth’s lyrics of human suffering and the influence of Burns’s poetry on these lyrics. Although Mary Jacobus does not discuss Burns in relation to *Peter Bell,* her reading of it provides useful analogues when considered alongside Burns’s poems on animal suffering, such as ‘The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie, The Author’s Only Pet Yowe, An Unco Mournfu’ Tale’ and its subsequent elegy as well as ‘To a Mountain Daisy’. The next section reads *The Ruined Cottage,* attentive to its multiple manuscript versions and the different effects Burns’s poetry offered the poem throughout its complicated textual development. This section also considers *The Ruined Cottage* alongside Burns’s ‘Epistle to J. L*****K, an Old Scots Bard’ and ‘Epistle to W. S*****M, Ochiltree, May 1785’, discussing the role of friendship, memory, and poetic inspiration. Central here is why, in a poem of such slow-motion despair, Wordsworth sought to call on Burns, and to invoke his lively epistle about the poetic ‘spark’. I then turn to a discussion of the poems inspired by Wordsworth’s 1803 tour of Scotland. Communal bonds and the importance of poetic inheritance and transmission remain important to the final section which reads ‘Michael’ alongside ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’.

Reading Burns alongside Wordsworth also enables a deeper reflection on what Wordsworth called 'energetic solemn and sublime in sentiment and profound in feeling' in Burns's poetry.[66] Burns is rarely considered solemn by critics, and his energetic verse is rightly celebrated for its wit, humour, cutting satire against religious traditions, sexual bravado, and political subversions. However, Burns was prone to depressive episodes, and was acutely aware of the imminent prospect of financial ruin. Much like Byron, Burns wrote himself, or a version of himself, into his poems, and the depressive farmer anxious about his poor health and financial prospects appears throughout *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* as much as his ready-witted persona that celebrates friendship, or his courtship of the poetic muse.

This chapter is concerned with Wordsworth's engagement with a different mode of Burns poem. These readings reveal Wordsworth to be a uniquely acute reader of Burns, which allows us to better understand Burns's concerns with human suffering and the human heart, while also showing how this element of Burns's poetry provided an emotional and aesthetic poetic engagement for Wordsworth's most profoundly affecting poems.

Russell Noyes's 1944 essay, 'Wordsworth and Burns', is the first piece of modern criticism to trace the influence of Burns's poetry on Wordsworth. Noyes identifies an impressive number of intertextual links, comparing several well-known lines and stanzas to corresponding Burns lyrics. 'Man was Made to Mourn' is compared with 'Lines in Early Spring,' 'Second Epistle to John Lapraik,' and 'Epistle to Davie' next to 'To My Sister'. Noyes also finds similarities in subject and tone between 'Tam O'Shanter' and 'The Waggoner'. Noyes wrote that 'Burns shared with Wordsworth at least in some degree a responsiveness to the power and mystery of the natural world'.[67] The essay is primarily

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[66] Extract from a letter of 27 February 1799 to Coleridge. In, *Critical Heritage*, p. 131.
[67] Noyes, 'Wordsworth and Burns', p. 815.

concerned with Wordsworth's poetic output of 1798-1805 as showing the most direct or explicit influence from his Scottish brother poet. Drawing on Noyes's essay, Bentman broadens the conversation by discussing Burns's relationship to Romanticism, and Romanticism's relationship to Burns in the series of essays discussed in the introduction ('The Romantic Poets and Critics on Robert Burns' (1964), 'Robert Burns's Use of Scottish Diction' (1965), and 'Robert Burns's Declining Fame' (1972)). Bentman's ground-breaking and indispensable pieces of criticism move beyond cataloguing intertextuality, and resist many of the myths and misconceptions surrounding Burns's poetry, while also calling attention to the ways in which nearly every important Romantic writer attended, or responded to Burns.[68] The first and third of these essays strike at the heart of the misguided critical assumptions that had kept (and to a degree still keep) Burns from being given his due as an important transitional poet in the history of British literature. In the third essay, Bentman argues that 'Burns figures in the major tradition of British poetry and is indeed significant in the transition from the style of poetry written in the early eighteenth century to the style of poetry written in the early nineteenth century'.[69] At times, Bentman's essays reach an energetic indignation worthy of Burns himself, as he illustrates, through the poet's own words, his indebtedness to the English tradition of Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Shenstone, Gray, and others, while also focusing on Burns's influence on Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Byron:

> Since Burns knew and admired the best eighteenth-century British poetry, and since his poetry was known and admired by the best nineteenth-century British poets, it seems to me that any notable similarities that Burns's poetry has with British poetry before and after him

[68] Bentman, 'The Romantic Poets and Critics on Robert Burns'; 'Robert Burns's Use of Scottish Diction'; 'Robert Burns's Declining Fame'.
[69] Bentman, 'Declining Fame', p. 207.

> would describe a trend. To deny that such similarities are a part of the development of British poetry is surely a distortion of historical method and forces the facts to fit the theory.[70]

Bentman's work on Burns, which acknowledges the important essay by Noyes, set the standard for any discussions of Burns and literary history, specifically Burns and Romanticism. Jonathan Wordsworth's facsimile edition of Burns's *Kilmarnock* poems contains an important preface which continues to track and explore Burns's connections to Wordsworth, and current critics such as Mary Jacobus, Stephen Gill, Nigel Leask, and Carol McGuirk have all produced outstanding critical material on Wordsworth's complicated indebtedness to Burns. It is fair to say that entrenched cultural views have prevented the overwhelming evidence supplied by critics of the last seventy-five years from being taken as fact. However, a critic's job is not to change public opinion, but rather to investigate, with honest precision, what has not yet been fully expressed or understood. McGuirk's recent monograph *Reading Robert Burns: Texts, Contexts, Transformations* includes a chapter on Wordsworth and Burns entitled '*If thou indeed derive thy light from heaven'* which offers an excellent series of close readings between a number of Wordsworth's and Burns's poems that previously have not been considered together, such as Burns's 'Tam Samson's Elegy' and Wordsworth's 'Simon Lee: The Old Huntsman'. I know of no other critic that engages so closely in such a sustained way with readings of Wordsworth and Burns. McGuirk perhaps places greater emphasis on Wordsworth's changeable opinions on Burns than I do in this chapter, and I find her coinage of the term 'Burnsworth' more confusing than helpful, however she remains one of the great modern critics on Burns's influence on English literature, particularly on Wordsworth.[71]

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[70] Bentman, 'Declining Fame', p. 212.
[71] McGuirk, *Reading Robert Burns*, pp. 75-108.

All of the critics mentioned above have cited moments of intertextuality between Wordsworth and Burns, thus establishing a healthy and convincing network of explicit borrowings by Wordsworth from Burns. This chapter continues to explore intertextual links, or previously unacknowledged allusions by Wordsworth to Burns while attempting to apprehend an understanding of the effect Burns had on Wordsworth, and the kind of poetry made possible by Wordsworth's uniquely acute and sensitive understanding of Burns.

Leask's 2010 monograph *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-century Scotland* concludes with a discussion of Wordsworth's response to James Currie's influential biography of Burns, and notes the effect Currie's biography had on the evolving prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads:*

> Daniel Sanjiv Roberts has shown that Wordsworth and Coleridge were reading Currie's edition of Burns in September 1800, the very month in which they were composing the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. […] Whereas the Advertisement to the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* declares the linguistic model for its poetic 'experiments' to be the 'language and conversation in the middle and lower classes of society', the 1800 Preface (composed *after* reading Currie's observations on the Scottish Peasantry') specifies 'low and rustic life' as the pastoral locus of 'the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation'.[72]

Although Leask's remarks on Burns and Wordsworth are relatively brief, he covers a lot of important ground, specifically on the complicated personal and political attacks between Wordsworth and Jeffrey, played out in various letters and reviews of the early nineteenth century.

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[72] Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 293. Subsequent references to this appear as 'Leask, *Burns and Pastoral*'.

Wordsworth has always been the most obvious starting point for comparisons between Robert Burns and English poetry. This is due in no small part to the monumental importance of *Lyrical Ballads* and the transformative theories established in its Preface and Advertisement. Wordsworth was perhaps the most discerning contemporary critic of Burns, and while his attempts to rescue Burns from the myths of Currie's biography were seen as a retaliation to Jeffrey's criticism of his own poetry, he nonetheless read Burns as a poet first, and treated the moral issues arising from biography as distinct from the poet's work, a belief made explicit in his 1816 *Letter to a friend of Burns*: 'Our business is with their books,—to understand and to enjoy them […] if their works be good, they contain within themselves all that is necessary to their being comprehended and relished'.[73]

Wordsworth's transmission of Burns is more obvious than Byron's or Keats's, perhaps in part owing to the comparative longevity of Wordsworth's career. Jacobus draws a number of important parallels as well as useful differences between Burns and Wordsworth, particularly in *Poems: Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* and *Lyrical Ballads,* in her well-known study *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798)*. Jacobus cites Burns as the most important influence on Wordsworth's lyric writing: 'What he provided was not so much specific source-material as an approach to poetry'.[74] The approach for Burns was a combination of dialect, or 'a man speaking to men' as well as rustic subjects; from elegising a sheep to mourning a daisy run down by the plough, although Jacobus shows how Wordsworth's poetry differs as he

[73] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 668; Stephen Gill's note to Wordsworth's *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns*, (p. 740) makes clear that personal animus is an unfair reduction of the passionate tone of Wordsworth's letter: 'Because of its attack on Francis Jeffrey the 'Letter' was taken by many to be merely a pretext for W to hit back at the influential critic who had savaged *The Excursion*, and 'The White Doe of Rylstone'. This judgement is unfair, however, for two reasons. W was genuinely concerned for the appreciation of a poet who had been important to him since his youth. He was also, and not improperly, concerned to lay down principles for the proper evaluation of a poet's work, in opposition especially to Jeffrey who had mounted his attack on 'the Lake School' in increasingly personal terms'.
[74] Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's "Lyrical Ballads" (1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 90.

> flaunts 'the language of conversation' more provocatively, and his extension of our sympathies is announced in a more doctrinaire way, but his aim is essentially the same – to create poetry that at once disarms and involves us in the simple feelings it depicts.[75]

Jacobus also hits at another shared element of Burns and Wordsworth, key to each of their respective programmes, that Burns's 'central value — humanity' becomes 'doctrinal' in Wordsworth, or what Jacobus elsewhere refers to as a poetry of the 'human heart'. *Tradition and Experiment* focuses on the development of Wordsworth's poetry as it relates to his poetic influences as well as his originality, primarily in the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798.

One of the most important effects influence can have upon another poet is originality. Despite the obvious comparisons between Wordsworth and Burns, it would be nearly impossible to mistake the poetry of one for the other. Many of Wordsworth's comments on Burns stress the 'humanity' of Burns's poetry, while acknowledging the poetic persona he adopted in order to give his lived experience a more deeply-felt realism:

> Neither the subjects of his poems, nor his manner of handling them, allow us long to forget their author. On the basis of his human character he has reared a poetic one, which with more or less distinctness presents itself to view in almost every part of his earlier, and in my estimation, most valuable verses. This poetic fabric, dug out of the quarry of genuine humanity, is airy and spiritual: —and though the materials, in some parts, are coarse, and the disposition is often fantastic and irregular, yet the whole is agreeable and strikingly attractive.[76]

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[75] Jacobus, p. 195.

[76] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 669. As this chapter examines various editions of *Peter Bell,* as well as poems not included in the *Major Works,* I refer to a number of different sources for Wordsworth's poems including the *Cornell Wordsworth* and *De Selincourt's Oxford edition.*

Wordsworth's descriptions of Burns are often surprising to modern critics. Burns is not usually considered 'airy and spiritual', and commentators are often surprised by Wordsworth's admiration for 'Tam O'Shanter':

> […] in Burns you have manners everywhere. Tam Shanter I do not deem a character, I question whether there is any individual in all Burns' writings except his own. But every where you have the presence of human life. The communications that proceed from Burns come to the mind with life and charm of recognitions. But Burns also is energetic solemn and sublime in sentiment, and profound in feeling. His 'Ode to Despondency' I can never read without the deepest agitation.[77]

These lines appeared in a 1799 letter to Coleridge, and as in his 'Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns', Wordsworth locates in Burns a depth of feeling, aligned more with Wordsworth's own poetic sentiments than with the often-playful digressions of Burns's masterly mock-epic. Indeed, 'energetic solemn and sublime in sentiment, and profound in feeling' sounds more like Wordsworth than it does Burns, yet Wordsworth, writing nearly twenty years later, still reads 'Tam O'Shanter' as a moral, if not didactic, poem: 'Though there was no moral purpose, there is a moral effect'.[78] Wordsworth's sensitivity to Burns's poetry that could cause both delight and deeper feeling can be traced in Wordsworth's poems that often treat the seemingly trivial with great sincerity, while retaining an element of playfulness.

[77] *Critical Heritage*, p. 131.
[78] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 670.

1.1‘Thou’s Met Me in an Evil Hour’: *Peter Bell*

‘I would not strike a flower | as many a man would strike his horse’ — Wordsworth, *The Prelude*[79]

Wordsworth’s admiration for ‘Tam O’Shanter’, a poem that combines the comic and moral, as well as the thematic resonances of a lesson learned through violence done against a horse, is hard to ignore in *Peter Bell*. Although this section does not read ‘Tam O’Shanter’ alongside *Peter Bell*, Wordsworth’s familiarity with and fondness for Burns’s poem recalls the poet’s attention to the ‘moral effect’, which is more forcefully expressed elsewhere in Burns’s poetry.

Peter Bell, as Jonathan Wordsworth has remarked, ‘has the rare distinction of being parodied, under its own name, two weeks before its first appearance in print in April 1819’.[80] John Hamilton Reynolds and Percy Bysshe Shelley both parodied Wordsworth’s poem (although Shelley’s *Peter Bell the Third* was not published until 1839). Reynolds’ and Shelley’s parodies of Wordsworth’s poem sometimes obscure the other curiosities of *Peter Bell’s* textual history. It was first composed in the spring of 1798 but did not appear until 1819, in revised form. In terms of composition, the poem belongs to the years of the *Lyrical Ballads,* given that the poem’s playful verse form, and indeed its subject, still feels like a

[79] Lines 1-2, p. 493 of *MS. Drafts and Fragments, 1798-1804*, in William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*: *Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (London: W.W. Norton, 1979). Subsequent references to *The Prelude* are from this edition.
[80] Jonathan Wordsworth, *Peter Bell* (Oxford: Woodstock, 1991).

product of that period. However, its later publication date, as well as the many, decades-long revisions Wordsworth undertook, lend it to comparisons with *The Prelude*. Jonathan Wordsworth, discussing the poem in relation to the 1799 *Prelude,* reads *Peter Bell* thus:

> Though perhaps not in the usual sense, *Peter Bell* is very much a Poem of the imagination, a poem of power and strangeness that concerns itself on different levels, and in different aspects, with mental processes.[81]

Wordsworth's 1819 preface to the poem, dedicated to Southey, deals with the issue of 'imagination' and its relation to the supernatural:

> The Poem of Peter Bell, as the Prologue will show, was composed under a belief that the Imagination not only does not require for its exercise the intervention of supernatural agency, but that, though such agency be excluded, the faculty may be called forth as imperiously, and for kindred results of pleasure, by incidents within the compass of poetic probability, in the humblest departments of daily life.[82]

'[T]he humblest departments of daily life' recalls the poem's origins of 1798, while responding to the supernatural poetry written by Coleridge of that time, particularly the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner.* As Jonathan Wordsworth has noted, the formal preface sits in contrast to the playful and curious Prologue of the poem, which begins with an act of self-conscious imaginative creation:

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[81] J. Wordsworth, *Peter Bell,* introduction (page unmarked).
[82] *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Ernest De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, 2nd edn, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), II: Poems Founded on the Affections; Poems on the Naming of Places; Poems of the Fancy; Poems of the Imagination, p. 331. Subsequent references to this addition appear as 'Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*'.

THERE'S something in a flying horse,

There's something in a huge balloon;

But through the clouds I'll never float

Until I have a little Boat,

Shaped like the crescent-moon.[83]

Wordsworth's speaker plays with this act of imagination by instantly propelling it forward:

And now I *have* a little Boat,

In shape a very crescent-moon:

Fast through the clouds my Boat can sail;

But if perchance your faith should fail,

Look up – and you shall see me soon![84] (6-10)

The Prologue carries on in this fashion, playfully gliding through classical constellations, representing itself line after line with a self-conscious and wry humour that becomes the posture of the poem's speaker with a slightly bewildered audience. It is not until the prologue's twenty-ninth stanza that we are made aware of the poem's subject, and the young characters gathered in audience:

These given, what more need I desire

To stir, to soothe, or elevate?

What nobler marvels than the mind

May in life's daily prospect find,

May find or there create?

[83] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works,* II, p. 231, lines 1-5.
[84] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works,* II, p. 332.

A potent wand doth Sorrow wield;
What spell so strong as guilty Fear!
Repentance is a tender Sprite;
If aught on earth have heavenly might;
'Tis lodged within her silent tear.

But grant my wishes, —let us now
Descend from this ethereal height;
Then take thy way, adventurous Skiff,
More daring far than Hippogriff,
And be thy own delight!

To the stone-table in my garden,
Loved haunt of many a summer hour,
The Squire is come: his daughter Bess
Beside him in the cool recess
Sits blooming like a flower.[85] (141-60)

The poem's speaker has moved from his playful-imaginative act and 'descended' into a more descriptive scene, while foregrounding the moral narrative of the poem. The Prologue belongs to a particular breed of Wordsworth's poems; of 'Simon Lee', 'The Idiot Boy', and 'Goody Blake'. But 'Part One' of *Peter Bell* still manages to begin *in medias res.* What is most striking about one revised version of this poem is the opening stanza of Part One, which explicitly echoes the famous boat-stealing scene of *The Prelude*:

[85] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works,* II, p. 337.

> ALL by the moonlight river-side
>
> Groaned the poor Beast—alas! In vain;
>
> The staff was raised to loftier height,
>
> And the blows fell with heavier weight
>
> As Peter struck—and struck again.[86] (191-95)

Compare alongside lines from the 1799 *Prelude*:

> They guided me: one evening led by them
>
> I went alone into a shepherd's boat,
>
> A skiff, that to a willow-tree was tied
>
> Within a rocky cove, its usual home.
>
> The moon was up, the lake was shining clear
>
> Among the hoary mountains; from the shore
>
> I pushed, and struck the oars, and struck again
>
> […]
>
> The bound of the horizon, a huge cliff,
>
> As if with voluntary power instinct,
>
> Upreared its head. I struck, and struck again.[87] (81-87, 108-10)

Wordsworth is deploying a number of intricate poetic manoeuvres in the above passage from *Peter Bell*: the Prologue has set us up with its playful discussion of a canoe (also referred to as a skiff) which semantically takes us far away from the solemn meditations of the *Prelude,* only to be re-inflected with the simultaneous emotional blows meted out on the poor donkey,

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[86] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works,* II, p. 339.
[87] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, pp. 3-4.

and a reference to a scene of Wordsworth's childhood, marked by guilt. The move is also playful, albeit insidiously so, as the poem's speaker forcefully announces the true weight of the tale that needs to be told — again punning on 'lofty height' and what kind of verse the poet is writing. The poem descends from the 'ethereal height' of the Prologue, down to the base treatment of a base animal. Anticipating the audience's (or critic's) resistance to the preceding lines, Wordsworth forces the reader to confront the powers of wilful imagination:

> 'Hold!' cried the Squire, 'against the rules
> Of common sense you're surely sinning;
> This leap is for us all too bold;
> Who Peter was, let that be told,
> And start from the beginning.'[88] (196-200)

The 'rules of common sense' is a knowing, and anticipatory comment on the strangeness of the poem being written. While initiating a mock-epic in *medias res* is certainly not against the rules, the subject matter might be, and the poem has been given a strange name, something Keats remarked on in a letter to Reynolds and, indeed, an acknowledgement by Wordsworth himself who uses 'what's in a name' as one of the poem's two epigraphs. But Wordsworth retains control of both his imagination, and his poetic capabilities. Indeed, part of the poem's conceit is not only to show how imagination can exist without supernatural intervention (this is inverted, as the comic-supernaturalism of the Prologue gives way to something far more powerful), but to show how low subjects, such as the ruffian Peter Bell and a ragged ass, can form the locus of one of a solemn poet's most moving poems.

[88] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, II, p. 339.

Two of Wordsworth's strongest contemporary influences, William Cowper and Robert Burns, both wrote faux-didactic comedies centring around a man's transformative journey on a horse. Both 'Tam O'Shanter' and *John Gilpin* depict drunken, or otherwise ridiculous men being driven at great speed by a horse, only for the poem to conclude on some half-serious piece of wisdom involving the protagonist's wife. Wordsworth owed much to each of these poets, and expressed his love of Burns's 'Tam O'Shanter' in particular. While Cowper and Burns no doubt provided formative inspiration for *Peter Bell,* Wordsworth's poem moves far beyond the playful verse of either. Both Peter Bell and Tam O'Shanter are regarded as men of morally suspect character: Tam is a drunk who cares little for his wife, first flirting with the tavern landlady 'The landlady and *Tam* grew gracious, | Wi' favours, secret, sweet, and precious', and later ogling the witches in the kirk. Likewise, Peter Bell is introduced to us as one

> Of all that lead a lawless life,
> Of all that love their lawless lives,
> In city or in village small,
> He was the wildest far of all; —
> He had a dozen wedded wives.[89] (276-80)

Peter is more of a ruffian than Tam, but they both undertake transformative moral or mock-moral journeys with a horse, or ass, and both poems make much of the physical pain dealt to either animal. Matthew Bevis has noted in his recent monograph *Wordsworth's Fun* the presence of Burns in *Peter Bell* and the shared subject matter of 'lasses and asses'.[90] Bevis's sustained reading of *Peter Bell* also draws on Wordsworth's sonnet occasioned both by the

[89] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, II, p. 341.
[90] Matthew Bevis, *Wordsworth's Fun* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), p. 104.

reviews of his poem and the ‘detractors’ who weren’t sufficiently roused by ‘Tam O’Shanter’.[91] When it comes to *Peter Bell* and Burns, Bevis is more interested in the playful, sexually sportive qualities in Burns’s poem ‘The Vision’, and rightly notes the lasting influence the poem had on Wordsworth.[92]

It makes sense for a discussion of ‘play’ in *Peter Bell* to turn to a poet Wordsworth long admired, and a poem famous for its playful energies. However, I am more interested in the sombre, solemn moments that connect Wordsworth and Burns. The most affecting and emotionally forceful relationship in *Peter Bell* is the relationship of the ass to its dead master. When Peter first encounters the ass, it is hanging its head mournfully over the river:

> There’s nothing to be seen but woods,
>
> And rocks that spread a hoary gleam,
>
> And this one Beast, that from the bed
>
> Of the green meadow hangs his head
>
> Over the silent stream.[93] (391-95)

Wordsworth imbues the ass with a sad stoicism before we know he is mourning his dead master. The ass is subjected to Peter’s violent cruelty, but remains unmoved:

> Then Peter gave a sudden jerk,
>
> A jerk that from a dungeon-floor
>
> Would have pulled up an iron ring;
>
> But still the heavy-headed Thing

[91] Bevis, p. 104.
[92] Bevis, p. 107.
[93] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, II, p. 346.

Stood just as he had stood before![94] (401-05)

Peter's violence against the ass, forceful enough to pull 'up an iron ring', is juxtaposed against the playful ballad-like rhythm of the stanza and by referring to the ass as a 'heavy-headed Thing' as opposed to a living creature. The tempo and rhythm of the poetry retain the narrative pace of a ballad, yet the scene fails to move forward, and Peter cannot force the ass to do what he wants it to do. In fact, Peter's increased violence has the opposite effect; as he again 'dealt a sturdy blow' (425) the ass 'staggered with a shock' (426) only to drop 'gently down upon his knees' (430).[95] The pain of the ass is deepened, not just by Peter's repeated cruelty by the riverside, which carries on for another fifty lines, but by the creature's response to Peter's cruelty:

'Twas but one mild, reproachful look,
A look more tender than severe;
And straight in sorrow, not in dread,
He turned the eye-ball in his head
Towards the smooth river deep and clear.[96] (436-40)

We learn that the ass is not immune to Peter's blows, but that the pain of his grief outweighs the physical torture meted out by Peter. The ass does not fear Peter, nor does it feel the pain Peter wants it to feel. Instead, the poor creature's only thought is on his master's drowned body. Wordsworth spends a great deal of time presenting this scene of cruelty and vexation, at just over one-hundred lines. For most of Part One of *Peter Bell,* we bear witness to Peter's cold heart enacting increasingly cruel violence on an innocent creature. Despite the

[94] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, II, p. 347.
[95] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, II, p. 349.
[96] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, II, p. 349.

playfulness of the rhyme, and in sharp contrast to the poem's Prologue, Wordsworth has deliberately and forcefully cultivated a scene of intense animal sympathy. The remainder of the narrative — though there is a great deal else going on — focuses on Peter's discovery of the body and the subsequent return to the home of the dead man, where he is led by the ass. Wordsworth's desire to focus on the grief of a low animal like an ass, and the relationship between work animal and its owner, share similarities with Burns's two poems on his pet ewe, 'Mailie'.

Burns's two poems occasioned by the imagined death of one of his farm animals, the sheep Mailie, are seriocomic poems similar to *Peter Bell.* Farmhand 'Hughhoc' stumbles across the sheep who has become entangled in a rope and lies in a ditch, dying. The formal, literary speech of Mailie, as well as the sentimental couplets and playful rhymes, prevent the poem from being taken too seriously. However, Mailie's dying words make serious requests:

> Tell him, if e'er again he keep
> As muckle gear as buy a *sheep,* *money*
> O, bid him never tye them mair,
> Wi' wicked strings o' hemp or hair!
> But ca' them out to park or hill,
> An' let them wander at their will:
> So, may his flock increase an' grow
> To *scores* o' lambs, and *packs* of woo![97] (17-24)

Burns's ewe imagines two competing problems for someone who viewed his farm animals as both 'instrumental and sentimental'.[98] Mailie's first thoughts to her '*Master* dear' are to

[97] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 32.
[98] Leask, *Burns and Pastoral,* p. 145.

juxtapose the financial cost of buying another sheep against the freedom an animal should be given, and the problems remained entwined as if to suggest '*if* you ever have the money to afford another sheep, don't tie it up with rope, as an animal should be free', but also, one assumes, because the rope may kill the animal, and cost the beloved master more financial trouble. If the sheep are free the flock will 'increase an' grow | To *scores* o' lambs, and *packs* of woo'!' which again marries the freedom and happiness of the animal as being bound up with its financial value in packs of wool. Robert Crawford notes the time of this poem's composition, when Burns's father's health was failing: 'it is fun, but underpinned at points by Burns's awareness of being close to a loved parent who was dying'.[99] Burns's sheep, like the ass of *Peter Bell,* cares deeply for the owner, although in this poem it is the animal facing death as opposed to the owner who has died. Mailie's speech, humorous though the situation may be, continues to make serious requests which underpin Burns's sensitivity to the situation, knowing that the death of a parent means someone must provide for those who are left:

> Tell him, he was a Master kin',
> An' ay was guid to me an' mine;
> An' now my *dying* charge I gie him,
> My helpless *lambs,* I trust them wi' him.
>
> O, bid him save their harmless lives,
> Frae dogs an' tods, an' butchers' knives![100] (25-30) *foxes*

[99] *The Bard.*
[100] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 33.

Despite the poem's depiction of a speaking animal, 'The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie' is not a supernatural poem. Nothing is revealed, there is no otherworldly intervention, simply an anthropomorphising of a farm pet. The poem still fits with the volume's rustic themes, where Burns might 'amuse himself with the little creations of his own fancy, amid the toil and fatigues of a labouring life […]'.[101] The following poem in the Kilmarnock volume is another poem on Mailie, though this elegy is from the poet's perspective:

> It's no the loss o' warl's gear,
> That could sae bitter draw the tear,
> Or make our *Bardie,* dowie, wear *Sad*
> The mourning weed:
> He's lost a friend and neebor dear,
> In *Mailie* dead.
>
> Thro' a' the town she trotted by him;
> A lang half-mile she could descry him;
> Wi' kindly bleat, when she did spy him,
> She ran wi' speed:
> A friend mair faithfu' ne'er came nigh him,
> Than *Mailie dead.*[102] (7-18)

The elegy is equal in tone and sentiment to the poem that came before, though it allows for Burns, as both farmer and poet, to say his words of mourning for a favoured pet. Despite the sentimentalism of the poems, Burns's attention to the subject reveals a caring sensitivity to animal suffering and to human-animal relationships. Burns is quick to point out that it is not

[101] Burns, *Oxford Works*, I, p. 72.
[102] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 35.

the loss of 'warl's gear' (worldly property) that makes him cry, but the fact that he has lost a friend he has known for many years. Recalling Mailie in her youth and how she used to 'trot' by his side recalls another poem in Burns's volume 'The Auld Farmer's New-Year-Morning Salutation To his Auld Mare Maggie, On Giving her the Accustomed Ripp of Corn to Handsel In The New Year', where, much as in 'Poor Mailie's Elegy', the pain of watching a pet grow old and infirm is recorded along with the shared sufferings of a farmer who works the land alongside his animals:

> Monie a sair daurk we twa hae wrought,
> An' wi' the weary warl' fought!
> An' monie an *anxious day,* I thought
> We wad be beat!
> Yet here to *crazy Age* we're brought,
> Wi' something yet.[103] (91-96)

While each of Burns's poems on sheep or horses taken individually are playful, 'fun' poems, they also suggest a pattern when considered together. Referring to these two poems, Jacobus writes that 'their humour coexists with tenderness' and their 'language is rough and unpolished, and seems to flow immediately from the heart'.[104] Part of this immediacy might come from the speed at which Burns composed many of his poems in his debut volume. 'The Death and Dying Words', according to Burns's brother Gilbert, was composed by Robert while he was behind his plough, and was very similar to the poem that appeared in print. Burns's imagination altered the events, however, as Gilbert recalls that upon finding the sheep tethered in the ditch, she was 'set to rights'.[105] Although the sheep did not die, when

[103] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 167.
[104] Jacobus, p. 195.
[105] *The Bard,* p. 135.

Burns used this incident as inspiration for a poem he imagined an outcome far darker than what he experienced. Crawford's pairing of this poem with Burns's family circumstances at the time continues to shed light on the motivating sentiments behind the poem:

> In the context of Burns's family around 1783 this ewe's speech takes the figure of a dying parent anxious about farm, future, and children. Presenting these elements as art makes them not just bearable but enjoyable.[106]

Wordsworth may not have known the particulars of Burns's family life, or the details surrounding the poem's composition, but situating Burns's seemingly playful poems on animal suffering alongside difficult biographical circumstances helps elucidate what Wordsworth refers to in 'Letter to A Friend of Robert Burns' as 'This poetic fabric, dug out of the quarry of genuine humanity, is airy and spiritual […]'.[107] Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) emphasises the humanity and feeling that can be cultivated from writing about rural life. Likewise, Wordsworth's preface to *Peter Bell* which announced a wish to write about the 'humblest departments of daily life' without the supernatural, suggested that the tale about to be described is within the 'compass of poetic probability', another way of saying that he wishes to show the imagination's ability to conceive and depict what is possible. The 'humblest departments of daily life' strongly echoes the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads:*

> The principal object […] in these Poems was to chuse incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of

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[106] *The Bard, p. 136.*
[107] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 669.

> language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way […][108]

Given that Wordsworth began composing *Peter Bell* in 1798, it should not come as a surprise that the Preface to *Lyrical Ballad*s (1800 and 1802) should so closely resemble the Preface to *Peter Bell*. It is a poem that certainly does present ordinary things — a ruffian traveller finding an ass by a river — in an unusual way — the ruffian beating, insulting and abusing an animal that eventually leads him to his own salvation.

Peter Bell shares Burns's ability to treat an imaginative yet poetically 'possible' scene with a balance of fun and deep feeling. Wordsworth's imagination was fired by a combination of events he read about in a newspaper and an encounter with a 'wild rover':

> Founded upon an anecdote, which I read in a newspaper, of an ass being found hanging his head over a canal in a wretched posture. Upon examination a dead body was found in the water and proved to be the body of its master. The countenance, gait, and figure of Peter, were taken from a wild rover with whom I walked from Builth, on the river Wye, downwards nearly as far as the town of Hay.[109]

Not unlike Burns, Wordsworth combined actual events with his own 'colouring of imagination' to create an effect that blends both nature and imagination. The kind of colouring performed by Burns and Wordsworth always maintains essential differences. Jacobus's noting of the 'doctrinaire' in Wordsworth as distinct from what is just 'humanity'

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[108] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 596-97.
[109] William Wordsworth, '*Peter Bell',* ed. John E. Jordan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 3. Hereafter referred to by the editor's name '*Jordan'* as I discuss multiple volumes of the Cornell Wordsworth throughout this chapter.

in Burns can be more fully developed in a consideration of *Peter Bell* alongside another of Burns's poems, admired by Wordsworth (and his sister Dorothy), 'To A Mountain Daisy, on Turning one down, with the Plough, in April 1786'.

For Jacobus, *Peter Bell* is Wordsworth's 'most doctrinaire celebration of the human heart', where Peter provides Wordsworth with a 'thesis about the redemptive effects of feeling'.[110] There are a number of passages in *Peter Bell* that echo other Wordsworth poems. Along with the lines quoted earlier that recall the *Prelude,* there are moments that echo 'Tintern Abbey':

> Though Nature could not touch his heart
>
> By lovely forms, and silent weather,
>
> And tender sounds, yet you might see
>
> At once that Peter Bell and she
>
> Had often been together[111] (286-90)

These lines offer a corrupted, unredeemed consideration of man and nature that is anathema to Wordsworth's own imaginative understanding in 'Tintern Abbey':

> and this prayer I make,
>
> Knowing that Nature never did betray
>
> The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
>
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead
>
> From joy to joy[112] (122-26)

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[110] Jacobus, p. 266.
[111] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, II, p. 342.
[112] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, pp. 134-35.

Wordsworth also emphasises Peter's corrupted, loveless relationship with nature in lines which recall 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'. Peter's heart is impenetrable and impervious to joys of nature, either simple or profound:

> In vain, through every changeful year,
> Did Nature lead him as before;
> A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more.[113] (246-50).

At times, *Peter Bell* suggests an earnest pastiche of Wordsworth's solemn poetry, as these lines recall the famous conclusion of his 'Ode':

> Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
> Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.[114] (203-06)

These lines are in sharp contrast to the language and tone of *Peter Bell*, yet each poem concludes with a similar exhortation to human sympathy for non-human agents, although we are moved by the tears of Peter Bell. Wordsworth's ability to be moved by a flower, or for Peter's eventual redemption to be brought about by a 'lowly' creature, recall Burns's poem 'To A Mountain Daisy'.

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[113] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, II, p. 341.
[114] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 302.

Although Burns was not nearly as uneducated as he often pretended to be, or, as he put it, 'unacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing Poet by rule', he was a poor farmer who spent a lot of his time performing difficult, exhausting labour behind a ploughshare. A great deal of Burns's poetry assumes the voice of a peasant-poet, a voice that Burns promoted, or at least did not discourage, from being perceived as autobiographical. Burns's pose gave his poetry an immediacy and authenticity that was enhanced further by his blending of Scots dialect with learned, literary English (three poems in *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* begin 'O Thou'). This immediacy meant that the moral or philosophical purposes that required a ruffian such as Peter Bell were not necessary for Burns's poetry, as the lessons learned from a violent engagement with nature were experienced by the same persona who wrote the poem. This effect was achieved often through the self-conscious use of personal pronouns:

> Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flow'r,
> Thou's met me in an evil hour;
> For I maun crush amang the stoure
>   Thy slender stem:
> To spare thee now is past my pow'r,
>   Thou bonie gem.[115] (1-6)

Burns juxtaposes the 'modest' flower against his own capacity for evil, as well as his inability to spare it from his cruel and sudden intervention. Despite Burns calling the daisy a 'bonie gem', the poem recognises that a mountain daisy is not one of the ornamental 'flaunting *flow'rs* our Gardens yield' thus depriving it of the safe shelter, and is instead hid

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[115] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 228.

'beneath the random bield' 'Unseen, alane' (alone). In Burns's poem, the daisy is the meanest flower, totally guileless and at the mercy of its surroundings. Burns anthropomorphises the daisy, cultivating an affected sense of pity for what must have been a fairly regular occurrence:

> Cauld blew the bitter-biting *North*
> Upon thy early, humble birth;
> Yet cheerfully thou glinted forth
> Amid the storm,
> Scarce rear'd above the *Parent-earth*
> Thy tender form.[116] (13-18)

Both Burns's speaker in 'To A Mountain Daisy' and 'Peter Bell*'* need to be reconciled to the natural world they inhabit and have sinned against. The fact that Peter's crimes are far greater than the crushing of a flower, which may simply be an occupational hazard, is beside the point for two poets who believed, as William Blake expressed, that 'everything that lives is holy'.[117] Peter's redemption comes with the acknowledgment of the suffering he has caused, first to one of his many wives, and at the end of Part III, when he arrives at the home of the drowned man. The 'doctrinaire' in Wordsworth involves the potential for Methodist

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[116] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 228. Wordsworth echoes these lines in his poem 'To the Daisy' which uses a similar rhyme scheme and truncated fourth and final line, though the stanza adds an additional line to the Standard Habbie:

> When, smitten by the morning ray,
> I see thee rise alert and gay
> Then, Chearful Flower! My spirits play
> With kindred motion:
> At dusk, I've seldom mark'd thee press,
> The ground, as if in thankfulness,
> Without some feeling, more or less,
> Of true devotion.

[117] William Blake, *Blake's Poetry and Designs: Illuminated Works, Other Writings, Criticism,* ed. by Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant, 2nd edn (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979; repr. 2008), p. 82.

conversion, which is literally doctrinal. It also involves an ending where Peter is explicitly, albeit playfully, redeemed:[118]

> And Peter Bell, who, till that night,
>
> Had been the wildest of his clan,
>
> Forsook his crimes, renounced his folly,
>
> And, after ten months' melancholy,
>
> Became a good and honest man.[119] (1131-35).

Peter's conversion from bad to good is explicit, though it is hard won. Peter is used as an example to teach a lesson: 'an ass has been maltreated and a family bereaved, all to save a single ruffian', whereas the lessons of Burns's poems are often directed back upon the self:[120]

> Such is the fate of simple Bard,
>
> On Life's rough ocean luckless starr'd!
>
> Unskilful he to note the card
>
> Of *prudent Lore*,
>
> Till billows rage, and gales blow hard,
>
> And whelm him o'er!
>
> Such fate to *suffering worth* is giv'n,
>
> Who long with wants and woes has striv'n,
>
> By human pride or cunning driv'n

[118] Bevis refers to these lines as being delivered with a 'deadpan polish' and compares it to the 'mock moral at the end of Tam O'Shanter', p. 110.
[119] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, II, p. 382.
[120] Jacobus, p. 266.

To Mis'ry's brink,

Till wrench'd of ev'ry stay but HEAV'N

He, ruin'd, sink!

Ev'n thou who mourn'st the *Daisy's* fate,

That fate is thine – no distant date;

Stern Ruin's *plough-share* drives, elate,

Full on thy bloom,

Till crush'd beneath the *furrow's* weight,

Shall be thy doom![121] (37-54)

The fate of the simple flower is also the fate of the simple Bard. Burns playfully yet sincerely admonishes against his own judgment, 'unskilful he to note the card | of prudent Lore', until it's too late. The metaphorical 'gales' that threaten to 'whelm him o'er' mirror the 'bitter-biting North' that would bend the daisy with the wind, though it shows more resolve as it 'chearfully […] glinted forth | Amid the storm'. Wordsworth needed Peter Bell to be redeemed for the harm he had done to nature, and to his fellow man. For Burns the lesson is more humbling; facing ruin or death at the hands of a plough was a metaphorical reality as much as it was a physical reality for the daisy, and while each of them will reach the same end, his initial 'evil' of crushing the flower leads to a simultaneous reflection of his own fragility, and the greater resolve of the lowly, common daisy. Burns reaches a similar conclusion in the companion poem 'To A Mouse', where again the ploughman has distressed nature, turning up a mouse's nest and threatening it with ruin. As in 'To A Mountain Daisy' the poem ends by reversing the fortunes of the ploughman with its unexpected and un-expecting victim:

[121] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 229.

Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' *me!*

The *present* only toucheth thee:

But Och! I *backward* cast my e'e,

On prospects drear!

An' *forward,* tho' I canna *see,*

I *guess* an' *fear!*[122] (43-48)

Burns's poems to the daisy and the mouse are autobiographical in that they are taken from everyday experiences common to his working life. They are meditations on his own mortality and livelihood as much as they are hymns to the 'humblest departments of daily life'. Wordsworth's appreciation of Burns's poems that celebrated 'lowly' subjects such as a daisy, a sheep, an old mare, or a mouse, provided a model from which Wordsworth's unique sensitivities would cultivate his own humanising tales. *Peter Bell,* like Burns's poetry, treated these subjects with humour, tenderness, and sympathy, while concerns of the human heart remained central to a reflection on man's sins against nature.

Wordsworth 1816 letter, 'To A Friend of Robert Burns', was written with the hope of being published and was offered as a corrective to the harmful, inaccurate narrative of Burns's life as recorded by James Currie in his much-read biography. Incensed by a false narrative that damaged Burns's reputation, Wordsworth recalls reading Currie's narrative with 'acute sorrow […]. If my pity for Burns was extreme, this pity did not preclude a strong indignation, of which he was not the object'.[123] Wordsworth's sorrow over the misrepresentation of Burns centres on the lack of decency afforded not just to the memory of Burns, but to those who survived him:

[122] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 128.
[123] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 664.

> The poet was laid where these injuries could not reach him; but he had a parent […] a brother like Gilbert Burns […] a widow estimable for her virtues and children, at that time infants, with the world before them, which they must face to obtain a maintenance; who remembered their father probably with the tenderest affection;— and whose opening minds, as their years advanced, would become conscious of so many reasons for admiring him.— Ill-fated child of nature, too frequently thine own enemy,— unhappy favourite of genius, too often misguided,— this is indeed to be "crushed beneath the furrow's weight!".[124]

It is moving that Wordsworth's defence of Burns is as concerned with the impact on the family that survived him, as much as it is with the poet's posthumous reputation. Wordsworth, who aligned Burns with the daisy 'crushed beneath the furrow's weight' makes an acknowledgement of Burns's unique position as 'a man of extraordinary genius; whose birth, education, and employments had placed and kept him in a situation far below that in which the writers and readers of expensive volumes are usually found'.[125] But it also makes true Burns's fears expressed in 'To A Mountain Daisy' and elsewhere that a life of hard labour would bring him to ruin. Wordsworth's sensitivity to Burns's loved ones had been coupled with his appreciation of Burns's daisy poem years earlier, in 1803, during his trip to Scotland. Two of these poems Wordsworth composed in the Standard Habbie stanza. The first of these, 'At the Grave of Burns, 1803, Seven Years after his Death' (which he worked on and did not publish until 1842), compares Burns to the flower of his own poem:[126]

> Fresh as the flower, whose modest worth

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[124] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 667.
[125] Wordsworth*, Major Works*, p. 667.
[126] For a discussion of the complicated composition and publishing history of the poems from this tour see Stephen Gill, 'Wordsworth and Burns' in *Burns and other Poets,* pp. 157-67.

He sang, his genius "glinted" forth,
Rose like a star that touching earth,
For so it seems,
Doth glorify its humble birth
With matchless beams.[127] (19-24)

Wordsworth unifies the humble, glorious beauty of both the daisy and Burns, and connects the celestial light of the heavens to the earth Burns worked and sang. Wordsworth's tour also inspired a poem addressed to the 'Sons of Burns'. It is important to see how Wordsworth's sensitivity to Burns's suffering could unify both the poet and his work as well as the wife and children left behind by his untimely death. The image of a widow with young children was important to Wordsworth and is central to the humanizing of Peter Bell's soul:

Beside the Woman Peter stands;
His heart is opening more and more;
A holy sense pervades his mind;
He feels what he for human-kind
Has never felt before.[128] (1051-55)

The newly widowed woman reveals to Peter that she has seven children who are now all 'fatherless'. Widowed wives and fatherless children were a powerful subject for Wordsworth's poetry of the human heart and key to *The Ruined Cottage,* a poem composed during the same years that *Peter Bell* was begun.

[127] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, III, p. 65.
[128] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, II, p. 380

Early drafts of *The Ruined Cottage* used lines from Burns's 'Epistle to J. L*****k, an Old Scotch Bard' for an epigraph, although Wordsworth adjusted the lines slightly. The next section of this chapter will explore the bonds of community, friendship, and the importance of shared or inherited memory in *The Ruined Cottage* and Burns's epistle, as well as 'Michael: A Pastoral Poem' and 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'.

1.2 'Heart with Heart and Mind with Mind': *The Ruined Cottage* and Burns's Verse Epistles

A 1798 manuscript of *The Ruined Cottage* (MS B) begins with an epigraph that misquotes Burns's 'Epistle to J. L*****K, An Old Scotch Bard':

> Give me a spark of nature's fire,
> Tis the best learning I desire.
> . . . . .
> My Muse though homely in attire
> May touch the heart.
>
> Burns.

One critic has suggested Wordsworth 'bungled' Burns's lines, but it is unlikely that he misquoted these lines by accident.[129] It is hard to understand why he would have left out the middle lines of a stanza form he was fond of and familiar with, and, according to Robert Crawford, Wordsworth had a habit of reciting Burns's second epistle to Lapraik ('To the Same') which appears directly after his first epistle in the Kilmarnock volume.[130]

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[129] Kurt Fosso, 'Community and Mourning in William Wordsworth's *The Ruined Cottage, 1797-1798', Studies in Philology,* 92 (1995), 329-45, (p. 339).
[130] *The Bard,* p. 189.

Wordsworth has changed a few of the words while also flattening out the dialect of the original:

> Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire,
>
> That's a' the learning I desire;
>
> Then tho' I drudge thro' dub an' mire
>
> At pleugh or cart,
>
> My Muse, tho' hamely in attire,
>
> May touch the heart. [131] (73-78)

Wordsworth changes the Scots 'ae' or 'one' to the indefinite article 'a' as well as 'That's a' (all) the learning' to 'Tis the best learning'. Each of these changes offers a broader, less specific rendering of Burns's lines, which also elides the stanza's middle, autobiographical lines. MS B of *The Ruined Cottage* gives the pedlar, who tells Margaret's tale, a more developed background as well as another explicit mention of Burns:

> His eye
>
> Flashing poetic fire, he would repeat
>
> The songs of Burns, and as we trudged along
>
> Together did we make the hollow grove
>
> Ring with our transports. Though he was untaught,
>
> In the dead lore of schools undisciplined,
>
> Why should he grieve? He was a chosen son[132] (70-76)

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[131] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 87. Burns's lines are themselves a reworking of both Pope and Sterne (*Poems and Songs*, vol 3, p. 1059). I discuss this stanza in more detail in the chapter on Byron.

[132] *William Wordsworth: The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar,* ed. by James Butler (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 46. Hereafter referred to as 'Butler'.

These lines echo Wordsworth's epigraph where 'flashing poetic fire' recalls 'a spark of nature's fire'. The image of the poet and wanderer who 'trudged' along with an 'untaught' pedlar also recalls the lines Wordsworth omits, where the ploughman poet claims 'tho I drudge thro dub and mire' his 'Muse […] May still touch the heart'. Stephen Gill notes that when Wordsworth returned to this 'unfinished poem a few years later', he 'developed the figure much more fully as Scottish'. [133] However, in MS B the pedlar figure was 'born of lowly race | On Cumbrian hills' (47-48).[134]

Wordsworth's epigraph provided a series of useful images and rustic poses that help flesh out the figure of the pedlar which recall Burns both explicitly, 'he would repeat the songs of Burns', as well as developing a rustic and untutored bard of 'dead lore of schools' that echoes the Preface of Burns's Kilmarnock poems:

> The following trifles are not the production of the Poet, who, with all the advantages of learned art, and perhaps amid the elegancies and idlenesses of upper life, looks down for a rural theme, with an eye to Theocrites or Virgil. To the Author of this, these and other celebrated names their countrymen are, in their original languages, 'A fountain shut up and a book sealed'.[135]

The figure of the Pedlar in MS B is both one who can remember and pass along Burns's songs, while also having numerous traits that resemble the Scottish poet himself.

Although *The Ruined Cottage* as it appears now is without both the epigraph to Burns or the lines that refer to the Pedlar singing songs of Burns, it is worth considering the possibilities Burns held for Wordsworth in *The Ruined Cottage* MS D. MS B's epigraph and

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[133] Gill, 'Wordsworth and Burns' p. 157.
[134] Butler, p. 44.
[135] Burns, *Oxford Works,* I, p. 72.

its resonance with the Pedlar's association with Burns productively qualify each-other's existence in the poem, but Wordsworth's decision to quote from Burns's epistle is an epigraph for the whole poem and Burns's presence can still be felt in later manuscript versions.

Wordsworth's decision to quote from such a fast-paced and swaggering Burns verse epistle feels at odds with the solemn and distressful tale of Margaret and her children. Burns's poem is a celebration of Scottish poetry and a wish for friendship, written as a response to hearing 'another Ayrshire poet', John Lapraik sing a heartfelt song at a farmhouse gathering on Shrove Tuesday in 1785.[136] Lapraik, who was nearly sixty, sang a song on married love 'entirely in decorous English'.[137] Burns's poem extends the hand of friendship to Lapraik, a fellow poet who shared an appreciation for 'Scots locutions' as well as the English verse of Pope, Steele, or Beattie. Burns praises Lapraik by pretending to confuse the older poet's poems for the verses of English poets. [138] Perhaps Wordsworth recognised something valuable in a poem where a young, robust poet who could reel off verses, seemingly at will, wished for kinship with an older poet who sang moving songs that could describe what 'gen'rous, manly bosoms feel' (20).[139] Social relationships or friendships are a central concern of *The Ruined Cottage,* and the bonds that serve to unite or fracture these relationships are symbolised potently in the Pedlar's tale.

Mark Sandy has observed the relationship between fragments and suffering, noting the importance of the 'useless fragment of a wooden bowl' next to the more complete, intricate and natural, spider's web:

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[136] *The Bard,* pp. 186-87.
[137] *The Bard,* p. 187.
[138] *The Bard,* p. 187.
[139] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 85.

> For Wordsworth, what is ruined articulates the deepest grief while frustrating the desire for consolation. Fragments paradoxically voice through their incomplete condition an unspoken 'tale of silent suffering'.[140]

The broken bowl symbolises the ruined state of the cottage and the dire circumstances of its former inhabitants, as well as, Sandy notes, recalling a passage from Ecclesiastes that is suggestive of a return to a 'natural and spiritual resting place' befitting of the poem's circular patterning.[141] The passage of the broken bowl that, for the Pedlar, 'moved my very heart' (92), follows directly from his description of the poets who mourned the dead:

> The Poets in their elegies and songs
> Lamenting the departed call the groves,
> They call upon the hills and streams to mourn,
> And senseless rocks, nor idly; for they speak
> In these their invocations with a voice
> Obedient to the strong creative power
> Of human passion.
> […]
> Beside yon spring I stood
> And eyed its waters till we seemed to feel
> One sadness, they and I. for them a bond
> Of brotherhood is broken[142] (73-79, 82-85)

[140] Mark Sandy, 'Wordsworth and the Circulation of Grief', *Essays in Criticism,* 62 (2012), 248-64 (p. 256).
[141] Sandy, p. 258
[142] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 33.

The poets sing and mourn the dead calling on the natural world through an obedience to 'human passion'. The Pedlar, despite his commitment to remembering human suffering, is not one of these poets, even though he acknowledges they 'feel one sadness'. Margaret's death appears to have fractured the poet's ability for 'human comfort' as 'a bond of brotherhood is broken'. 'Brotherhood' in *The Ruined Cottage* applies both to the poet's bond with each other, as well as the communal bonds they (as well as passers by) shared with Margaret, where:

> Many a passenger
> has blessed poor Margaret for her gentle looks
> when she upheld the cool refreshment drawn
> from that forsaken spring, and no one came
> but he was welcome, no one went away
> but that it seemed she loved him.[143] (98-103)

The bonds of brotherhood illustrated by Margaret's kindness, who also gave the old Pedlar 'a daughter's welcome', recall Burns's hoped-for brotherhood with Lapraik, and all 'whose hearts the *tide of kindness* warms':

> But ye whom social pleasure charms,
> Whose hearts the *tide of kindness* warms,
> Who hold your *being* on the terms,
> 'Each aid the others,'
> Come to my bowl, come to my arms,

[143] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 33.

> My friends, my brothers![144] (121-26)

Burns's call for brotherhood and friendship is as universal as the kindness Margaret shared with the 'passengers', where all who came were 'welcome' and 'loved'. But it is also as specific, local, and personal as the Pedlar's father-like relationship with Margaret, whose heart was moved to find the bowl broken and is now left to tell her tale of suffering and death.

Although *The Ruined Cottage* as it appears in modern editions does not include any specific references to 'Epistle to J. L*****K' it was, along with the rest of Burns's Kilmarnock volume, very much in Wordsworth's head during the years of the poem's composition. It is probable that Burns's wish for shared kindness that warms the heart resonated with Wordsworth, who was composing a tale of 'silent suffering' that depended on reciprocal acts of friendship where 'each aid the others'.[145] The only direct invocation of Burns that remains in published versions of *The Ruined Cottage* is Burns's 'Epistle to W. S*****n, Ochiltree, May 1785', a poem that directly follows Burns's two verse epistles to Lapraik in the Kilmarnock edition. Wordsworth alerts his readers to Burns with quotation marks for 'trotting brooks' during the Pedlar's tale, 'and now the "trotting brooks" and whispering trees | and now the music of my own sad steps' (295-96).[146] Christopher Ricks usefully distinguishes between allusion and plagiarism, where 'the alluder hopes that the reader will recognise something, the plagiarist that the reader will not'. [147] Wordsworth's use of quotation marks clearly indicates a wish for something to be recognised, serving as a coded reference to another poet who can enrich the scene of his own thinking through an

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[144] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 89.
[145] Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading: 1770-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 23-24. Wu gives the suggested reading dates as 1797-98. Wu also notes multiple reading dates for Burns as early as 1786 and again in 1787.
[146] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 38.
[147] Ricks, *Allusion*, p. 1.

allusion that is both subtle and obvious: Subtle, as it gives very little away, yet obvious in its desire to be recognised. Perhaps, like the Pedlar himself who can 'see around me here | things which you cannot see' the reader is prompted to search with a worthy as opposed to an 'unworthy eye' (511). Unsurprisingly, Wordsworth has altered Burns's lines again, substituting 'brooks' for 'burns':

> The *Muse,* nae *Poet* ever fand her,
> Till by himsel he learn'd to wander,
> Adown some trottin burn's meander,
> An' no think lang;
> O sweet, to stray an' pensive ponder
> A heart-felt sang![148] (85-90)

Despite the earlier passage where the Pedlar of *The Ruined Cottage* shares 'one sadness' with the poets, yet is not one of them, Wordsworth's allusion to Burns's epistle suggests otherwise, where, as a solitary wanderer who finds his muse among the 'burns' (a Scots word for streams), and mulls a 'heart-felt sang' is aligned with the Pedlar whose 'best companions' are 'winds', 'brooks' and 'whispering trees', as well as the 'music of his own sad steps'. Wordsworth's subtle allusion which aligns the Pedlar explicitly with a solitary poet seeking the muse among nature and his own pensive heart suggests a greater commitment to the bonds of poetic brotherhood. Both 'Epistle to J. L*****K' and 'To W. S*****N, Ochiltree' call to fellow poets and hope to inspire a greater community of poets.

Although the Pedlar is never referred to as a poet and holds himself separate from the poets and their songs and elegies, yet he is a teller of elegiac tales of 'silent suffering' (233)

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[148] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 95.

and refers to himself as 'an idle dreamer' (231), though his wandering journeys have taken him to 'a country far remote' (240). The Poet-traveller receiving the tale betrays the uncertainty that attends his encounter with the Pedlar who speaks in a 'solemn tone' yet 'there was in his face such easy chearfulness' (200-01) and whose retelling of Margaret's suffering carries an air of practised performance:[149]

> He had rehearsed
> Her homely tale with such familiar power,
> With such a[n active] countenance, an eye
> So busy, that the things of which he spake
> Seemed present […][150] (208-12)

Stories and tales, like manuscripts of poems or the circumstances of Margaret, are changed and altered as they are revisited. The unreliability of the Pedlar's memory suggests a greater commitment to the telling of a story or teaching of a lesson than a factual communication of events. As Sandy remarks of Wordsworth's pastoral elegies, including *The Ruined Cottage:* 'Wordsworth's pastoral elegies, in their efforts to recapture a specific time, place, and individual, are about the unreliability — not the recovery — of memory'.[151] The Pedlar's tale recaptures the suffering circumstances of Margaret as an individual just as the *The Ruined Cottage* recaptures the 'way-wandering' Pedlar, a character that the Poet-traveller re-encounters at the site of Margaret's cottage.

The relationship between the Poet-traveller and Pedlar is one of friendship that is developed and strengthened through the telling of Margaret's tale. Upon seeing the Pedlar by

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[149] These lines are reminiscent of the juxtaposition recalled by Hazlitt from Wordsworth's reading of *Peter Bell* in 1798, where he displayed a 'convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of his face'. Jacobus, p. 271.
[150] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 36.
[151] Sandy, p. 260.

the cottage, he is recognised from ‘two days before’ (40) when they had been ‘fellow travellers’ (41).[152]

> With instantaneous joy I recognized
> That pride of nature and of lowly life,
> The venerable Armytage, a friend
> As dear to me as is the setting sun.[153] (36-39)

In these lines, the Pedlar is recognised as both ‘a friend’ but also as a figural abstraction. Referring to the Pedlar as ‘that pride of nature and of lowly life’ is a way of capturing his status as one capable of authentic instruction. The abstractions given to the Pedlar in MS D are a concise sketch which, unlike MS B, make the claim of friendship early on. In MS B the Poet-traveller had seen the Pedlar ‘the day before’ (40) where his ‘eyes were turned | towards the setting sun’ (41-42).[154] And yet, the description in MS B aligns the Pedlar more closely with Burns and offers further echoes with Burns’s Kilmarnock Preface where the Pedlar’s knowledge of rustic men had shown him how:

> Their manners, their enjoyments and pursuits,
> Their passions and their feelings, chiefly those
> Essential and eternal in the heart,
> Which ‘mid the simpler forms of rural life
> Exist more simple in their elements
> And speak a plainer language.[155] (60-65)

[152] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 32.
[153] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 32.
[154] Butler, p. 44.
[155] Butler, p. 46.

These lines contain an echo of the passage quoted earlier in Burns who, 'amid the elegancies and idlenesses of upper life looks down for a rural theme' as well as his claim that his poetry 'sings the sentiments and manners, he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him, and in his and their native language'.[156]Although Burns's presence is more sparse in MS D, Wordsworth's strengthening of the claim of friendship between the traveller and the Pedlar allows for a greater emphasis on 'social pleasure'. Burns's poetry's most frequent and most celebrated elaboration of social pleasure is drinking, either in the convivial scenes of warmth in 'Tam O'Shanter', 'While we sit bousing at the nappy | Getting fou and unco happy' (5-6) or in 'The Jolly Beggars',

> SEE the smoking bowl before us,
> Mark our jovial, ragged ring!
> Round and round take up the Chorus,
> And in raptures let us sing[157] (250-54)

As well his verse epistle to Lapraik:

> The *four-gill chap,* we'se gar him clatter, *we'll make*
> An kirs'n him wi' reekin water; *christen*
> Syne we'll sit down an' tak our whitter
> To chear our heart;
> An' faith, we'se be *acquainted* better
> Before we part.[158] (109-15).

[156] Burns, *Major Works,* I, p. 72.
[157] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 207.
[158] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 88.

When Wordsworth quotes or borrows from Burns in *The Ruined Cottage,* he flattens out his Scots dialect. *The Ruined Cottage,* specifically the relationship of the Poet-traveller to the Pedlar, has repeated references to drinking, though, Wordsworth has again tempered the livelier impulses of Burns by converting wine into water. Upon first seeing the Pedlar the Poet-traveller is

> Glad to see his hat
> Bedewed with water-drops, as if the brim
> Had newly scooped a running stream.[159] (49-51)

The Pedlar then directs the traveller to the well where 'I slaked my thirst' (64). The Pedlar's bond with the Poets is kindled by the stream:

> Beside yon spring I stood,
> And eyed its waters till we seemed to feel
> One sadness, they and I.[160] (82-84)

In the second part of the poem, after conversing with the Pedlar and feeling a 'heartfelt chillness', the traveller 'went out into the open air and stood | to drink the comfort of the warmer sun'. Each of these instances are interactions directed by an attention to the social bonds that the solitary, way-wandering Pedlar or poet has with other poets. What Burns's verse epistles offered Wordsworth in *The Ruined Cottage* is a mode for exploring the dialectic of the solitary poet who must wander out in nature — alone — to court the muse,

[159] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 32.
[160] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 33.

yet still requires the bonds of social kinship to communicate and maintain what is won through an obedience 'to the strong creative power | Of human passion'. Burns's epistle to 'W. S*****N' refers to his addressee as 'my rhyme-composing' brither!' (97) as well as celebrating his poetic predecessors: Ramsay, Fergusson, and William Hamilton of Gilbertfield (Fergusson he elsewhere calls his 'elder brother in the muse') and takes heart from his native Ayrshire district having '*Bardies* o' her ain' (own). Although for Burns, the muse who allows him a place amongst a community of poets must be courted 'by himsel' (86).

In *The Ruined Cottage,* the Pedlar gives voice to Margaret's tale of silent suffering, where a community of broken brotherhood is partially restored in a ruined spot through the relationship secured between Poet-traveller and Pedlar; through the power of the Pedlar's story the Poet-traveller is able to think of Margaret as 'one | Whom I had known and loved' (207-08). The Poet-traveller first hails the Pedlar 'with thirsty heat oppressed' (48), and, as Jonathan Wordsworth notes, 'Poet and Pedlar enter separately, with their separate attitudes: at the end they go off together, their differences resolved through their shared response to the story that is told'.[161] Importantly, they go off to a 'rustic inn' (538), a site more appropriate to conviviality and drink of a different kind.

The tone of Burns's 'Epistle to J. L*****K' 'emphasises fun and friendship', where friendship and brotherhood become nearly synonymous. Burns was attracted to a poet like Lapraik not just because he shared poetic affinities: writing in a blend of Scots dialect as well as in standard 'decorous' English, Burns and Lapraik also both lived under financial strains and the very real threat of economic ruin. Following the 'Ayr Bank collapse, Lapraik had to sell his farm' and 'in 1785 financial troubles led to his imprisonment in Ayr for debt'.[162] The

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[161] J. Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity,* p. 151.
[162] *The Bard,* p. 189.

desires of Burns's epistle are strengthened through an understanding of shared circumstances. Wordsworth knew he lived a very different life to Burns, but saw those differences in temperament and circumstance as a cause for a stronger bond in his poem 'At the Grave of Burns, 1803, Seven Years After His Death'. The poem, which underwent multiple revisions and was not published until 1842 though it was begun in 1807, imagines the wholly possible scenario of a friendship with Burns:

> Alas! Where'er the current trends,
> Regret pursues and with it blends, —
> Huge Criffel's hoary top ascends
> By Skiddaw seen, —
> Neighbours we were, and loving friends,
> We might have been[163] (37-42)

Wordsworth could imagine such a friendship given both the temporal and geographic proximity they shared, and his yearning for a friendship with an older brother-poet delights in the same wished-for connections that Burns frequently expressed to his own neighbours. Wordsworth also freely admits his differences with Burns, though he sees it as no impediment to their friendship, instead showing how differences can forge a firmer bond:

> True friends though diversely inclined;
> But heart with heart and mind with mind,
> Where the main fibres are entwined,
> Through Nature's skill,
> May even by contraries be joined

[163] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, III, p. 66.

More closely still.[164] (43-48).

As the poem's title suggests, composition was inspired by a visit to the site of Burns's resting place. Burns's grave called Wordsworth to both mourn and pay tribute to the poet who had taught him 'How Verse may build a princely throne | On humble truth' (35-36). Wordsworth's imagined friendship with Burns feels more wistful than sorely disappointed, as making a trip to Burns's grave seven years after his death allows him to lament what could have been as opposed to what should have been.

Wordsworth's poem for Burns balances a sense of deep mourning and sadness against the unprofitability of such painful meditations:

Off weight – nor press on weight! – away
Dark thoughts! – they came, but not to
Stay;
With chastened feelings would I pay
The tribute due
To him, and aught that hides his clay
From mortal view.[165] (13-18)

The site of Burns's grave and thoughts of his decline pose the problem of paying a just tribute through mourning, grief, and memory, against the dangers of the 'weight' of 'dark thoughts'. Wordsworth's elegy for Burns concludes with a departure and a recognition of the limits of mourning that recall the ending of *The Ruined Cottage:*

[164] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, III, p. 66.
[165] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, III, p. 65.

Sighing I turned away; but ere

Night fell I heard, or seemed to hear,

Music that sorrow comes not near,

A ritual hymn,

Chanted in love that casts out fear

By Seraphim.[166] (79-84)

Wordsworth must turn away so as not to become overcome with grief, and displays the same wisdom of the Pedlar that juxtaposes holding 'vain dalliance with the misery | even of the dead' (223-24) against a knowledge that:

there is often found

In mournful thoughts, and always might be found,

A power to virtue friendly[167] (227-29)

Ultimately, the rest of the deceased, and 'uneasy thoughts' threaten to disturb such peace both for the living and the dead:

She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.

I well remember that those very plumes,

Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,

By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,

As once I passed did to my heart convey

So still an image of tranquillity,

So calm and still, and looked so beautiful

[166] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, III, p. 67.
[167] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 37.

> Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
>
> That what we feel of sorrow and despair
>
> From ruin and from change, and all the grief
>
> The passing shews of being leave behind,
>
> Appeared an idle dream that could not live
>
> Where meditation was. I turned away
>
> And walked along my road in happiness.[168] (512-25)

Although Burns's presence in MS D of *The Ruined Cottage* is only subtly hinted at, his verse epistle to poet-friends of his own community remain valuable to a reading of the Pedlar's relationship with the Poet-traveller. Burns's poems provided Wordsworth with a way of acknowledging both the solitary and communal impulses of the meditative poet, where what is recollected in tranquillity survives and depends on social communion. One of the lessons of Margaret's death was about the dangers of mourning, or of dwelling too long on 'uneasy thoughts', a lesson that was repeated in 1803 during Wordsworth's visit to Dumfries. Both the Pedlar and Wordsworth turn away, not because to remain is too painful, but because it threatens to destabilize an inner harmony, 'a ritual hymn | Chanted in love' or 'happiness' that is necessary for proper 'meditation' and the work of a poet.

The fragility of communal bonds and the emotional devastation that is risked when those bonds are broken is central to Wordsworth's poem, 'Michael'. The next section of this chapter will examine the importance this tragically pastoral poem places on the bonds of fatherhood alongside Burns's poem, 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', a poem conceived, in part, as an homage to Burns's father. Wordsworth's anxiety of a 'second self' applies equally to Michael's broken covenant with his son, as well as the role of future poets.

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[168] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 44.

1.3 The Strength of Love: 'Michael' and 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'

'The Cotter's Saturday Night' is one of Burns's most peculiar poems. The poem is not peculiar in and of itself as a pastoral piece, as it is fully in conversation with both the English and Scottish (and classical) traditions Burns admired. Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* and Gray's 'Elegy Written in A Country Churchyard', as well as Robert Fergusson's 'The Farmer's Ingle' all contribute images, scenes, and phrases, which Burns used or adopted for his 'Cotter' poem: however, it is a poem that stands out within the poet's *oeuvre*. It is his only poem in Spenserian stanzas and while there are autobiographical inflections, they are not posited as such (as they are in the epistles, or his addresses to a mouse and daisy, among others). Leask usefully cautions drawing too much on autobiography in reading 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', noting the important class differences of Burns's circumstances to the scenes described within the poem: 'For all the poverty and hardship that he'd suffered at Mount Oliphant and Lochlie, the domestic scene portrayed in 'The Cotter' is not Burns's own world'.[169] Leask also notes the immense influence of Burns's poem on nineteenth-century Scottish literature and the many imitations it inspired, although he concludes his section by turning to Wordsworth and his 'Cumberland pastorals', singling out 'Michael'. Leask's discussion of 'Michael' and 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', albeit brief, raises important issues that are useful for a longer discussion of the two poems:

[169] Leask, *Burns and Pastoral,* p. 219.

> […] 'Michael' (1800), one of a series of poems described by Wordsworth as 'Cumberland Pastorals', does engage directly with Burns's 'The Cotter' in its account of Michael's piety, thrift, and sobriety, and the 'hard' pastoral depiction of the Lakeland cottage economy.[170]

Leask further suggests, somewhat tentatively, that Luke's dissipation and 'forced emigration to the colonies' may echo Burns's planned emigration to Jamaica, as Currie's biography was 'fresh in his mind' while he was composing 'Michael'.[171] But it is Leask's final words on the matter that call for more exploration:

> […] Wordsworth praised the power of Burnsian pastoral in depicting 'not transitory manners reflecting the wearisome unintelligible obliquities of city-life, but manners connected with the permanent objects of nature and partaking of the simplicity of those objects. Such pictures most interest when the original must cease to exist'. […] what Wordsworth means — very much against the manifest drift of Burns's 'The Cotter' — is that the human 'permanence' represented by pastoral is *more* richly endowed with poetic affect when the original rural world which it portrays has ceased to exist. But maybe Wordsworth here puts his finger on the particular — and to modern critics often elusive — pathos of 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'.[172]

Here, Leask is quoting from the same Wordsworth letter written to Coleridge of 1799 that celebrates the 'energetic solemn and sublime in sentiment, and profound in feeling'.[173] Leask's suggestion acknowledges Wordsworth's uniquely sensitive reading of Burns, and the 'pathos' that does indeed tend to elude modern critics, not just of 'The Cotter' but of many of Burns's poems. Wordsworth's notion of certain manners or feelings gaining a more

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[170] Leask, *Burns and Pastoral,* p. 235.
[171] Leask, *Burns and Pastoral,* p. 235.
[172] Leask, *Burns and Pastoral,* pp. 235-36.
[173] *Critical Heritage,* p. 131.

interesting or permanent effect only upon 'ceasing to exist' helps us to understand part of what is at stake in a poem such as 'Michael', where a lost way of life, specifically a simple way of life, is described in the hopes that it may be restored and remembered, if only through poetry.

Wordsworth's 1801 letter to Thomas Poole concerning 'Michael: A Pastoral Poem' notes the following:

> I have attempted to give a picture of a man, of strong mind and lively sensibility, agitated by two of the most powerful affections of the human heart; the parental affection, and the love of property, *landed* property, including the feelings of inheritance, home, and personal and family independence.[174]

'Michael', Wordsworth wrote elsewhere, was a poem intended to show that 'men who do not wear fine cloaths can feel deeply'.[175] Parental affection, home, and personal and family independence are all concerns of Burns's pastoral poem 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. Although property or 'landed property' is not an explicit concern of Burns's poem, his title's awareness of landed property is implied by taking 'cotters' for his subject. A cotter is defined by the OED as:

> *Scottish*. A peasant who occupies a cot-house or a cottage belonging to a farm (sometimes with a plot of land attached), for which he has (or had) to give or provide labour on the farm, at a fixed rate, when required.[176]

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[174] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 701.
[175] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 700.
[176] OED, https://www-oed-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/view/Entry/42464?rskey=yQdFMD&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid

Like *Peter Bell* and *The Ruined Cottage,* 'Michael' is a tale concerned with the 'most powerful affections of the human heart', and, as I have argued throughout this chapter, Wordsworth's poems of the human heart that take low and rustic subjects from the 'most humble departments of daily life' have a close relationship with his appreciation for and understanding of Burns. The kind of influence that Burns exerts on Wordsworth's poetry of human suffering is not of genre or narrative frame although there are moments, particularly in 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' that appear to provide source material. Wordsworth's blank verse is more immediately influenced by Cowper's long poem *The Task* and (as was Burns's poem). Instead, what 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' offers 'Michael' is a portrayal of parental affection that is affecting on its own terms while also calling on the power of biblical epic to codify the importance of familial relationships as well as authenticating the poem's grander pretensions to poetic inheritance or, in Burns's case, a national literature.

'The Cotter's Saturday Night' is a richly allusive poem that self-consciously blends Burns's love of both the English and Scottish pastoral traditions. Written in Spenserian stanzas, the poem's epigraph is taken from Gray's 'Elegy written in A Country Churchyard', with a further echo of Gray, where the second stanza recalls the opening images of a 'plowman' who 'plods' home at the close of day.[177] Unlike Gray's elegy, however, the ploughman of Burns's poem is the subject and is followed into the domestic scene which was inspired by Robert Fergusson's poem 'The Farmer's Ingle', also written in Spenserian stanzas. Despite the autobiographical elements of 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', the poem is not given the first-person narration that we might expect. The scene is viewed instead by an intimate observer, who paints the scene as the events unfold. In keeping with pastoral tradition, 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' symbolically depicts a pastoral ideal. For Burns, this ideal is a currently-realised way of life that elevates the 'hardy sons of rustic toil' (174) who

[177] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, III, p. 1113.

represent more than ‘the short and simple annals of the poor’, becoming instead a ‘*virtuous populace’* who ‘may rise’ (179) and ‘stand a wall of fire, around their much-lov’d isle’ (180). Conversely ‘Michael’ looks back — as far back as Genesis and the Book of Daniel — to a way of life no longer extant, yet still capable of instructing or delighting ‘a few natural hearts’ (36).

Wordsworth’s claims for ‘Michael’ are similar to claims made by the Pedlar in *The Ruined Cottage* who tells ‘a homely tale’ (209) ‘by moving accidents uncharactered’ (232): the poet-narrator of ‘Michael’ tells a story ‘ungarnished with events’ (19) and a history ‘homely and rude’ (35). While the story is ‘ungarnished’, the biblical symbolism that gives the poem so much of its power helps to define Michael in semi-mythic terms:

> Upon the Forest-side in Grasmere Vale
> There dwelt a Shepherd, Michael was his name,
> An old man, stout of heart, and strong of limb.
> His bodily frame had been from youth to age
> Of an unusual strength: his mind was keen
> Intense and frugal, apt for all affairs,
> And in his Shepherd’s calling he was prompt
> And watchful more than ordinary men.
> Hence he had learned the meaning of all winds,
> Of blasts of every tone, and often-times
> When others heeded not, He heard the South
> Make subterraneous music, like the noise
> Of Bagpipers on distant Highland hills[178] (40-52)

[178] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 225.

Michael, who is old when the poem begins, is of 'unusual strength' and ability, more watchful than 'ordinary men' and to his ears, harsh winds are like music and a calling. Although 'Michael' is written in the language of 'ordinary men' Michael is not one of them, and an almost supernaturally-long life makes the scenes of parental affection all the more arresting. Michael, and the father of 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', are the central characters of their respective poems, as well as the characters that impart the religious wisdom or the virtues of hard work, fundamental to the upholding of tradition.

For Wordsworth, religious weight is married with physical industry in Michael's role as shepherd. In the Book of Daniel, Michael is a guardian of Israel and protector who defends against foreign lands. Michael's role as a protector or guardian of biblical proportions is further emphasised with his role as a shepherd and as one committed to the 'dumb animals'

> Whom he had saved,
> Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts,
> So grateful in themselves, the certainty
> Of honorable gains[179] (71-74)

Michael's role as protecting shepherd has obvious resonances with Christ, something we are called to think of throughout the poem, first early on when the narrator speaks of 'youthful Poets, who among these Hills, | Will be my second self when I am gone' (38-39), and when through Luke, 'the Old Man's heart seemed born again' (213). Wordsworth's blank verse also recalls books XI and XII of *Paradise Lost,* where the archangel Michael is tasked with commanding and escorting God's first children out of Eden. However, Wordsworth's pastoral inverts the virtues of Paradise, where to live and toil in their native hills near Green-

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[179] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 226.

Head Gill, in their secluded valley, is imagined as a refuge from the modernizing world. Luke, unlike Adam and Eve, only learns to sin once he has left his home and his father's care, where Isabel's warning about leaving appears to break the bonds of immortality: 'do not go away | For if thou leave thy Father he will die' (307-08). These lines suggest that Michael's survival depends on Luke's presence. For Wordsworth, Michael's commandment for Luke to leave inverts and reimagines the archangel Michael's task of telling Adam and Eve their fate:

I am come,
And send thee from the garden forth to till
The ground whence thou wast taken, fitter soil.[180]

Tilling and working the land through hard labour in Wordsworth's poem gives Michael's life meaning, and the threat that his son might not inherit that life of toil and hard work is a source of distress as it threatens to break traditions he inherited from his forebears. Michael, who 'toiled and toiled' while 'God blessed me in my work' (386), 'wished that thou should'st live the life they lived' (381). Similarly, Eve's lament upon overhearing her fate captures the sense of sadness and loss felt by Michael and Isabel at Luke's parting:

Must I thus leave thee Paradise? thus leave
Thee native soil, these happy walks and shades,
Fit haunt of gods? where I had hope to spend,
Quiet though sad, the respite of that day
That must be mortal to us both.[181] (Book XI, 269-73)

[180] Book XI, lines 260-62, in John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 280.
[181] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, p. 281.

Wordsworth's deployment of strong biblical and Miltonic resonances (we are also called to think of Abraham and Isaac, the most important father-son relationship of the Hebrew Bible) serve to enrich the wished-for effects described in his letter to Thomas Poole, but rather undermine the claim for a tale that is 'homely and rude'.[182]

'The Cotter's Saturday Night' likewise juxtaposes a sense of grandeur within a scene of domestic simplicity. This is partially achieved through Burns's use of Spenserian stanzas. While the stanza form is perfectly suitable for pastoral, the poem is an unusually sober depiction of a happy scene for Burns's poetry. Burns's father, William Burnes, had taken the religious education of his children seriously and the description of the father who would lead his family in prayer is inspired by Burns's childhood education:[183]

> The chearfu' Supper done, wi' serious face,
> They, round the ingle, form a circle wide;
> The Sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace,
> The big *ha'-Bible,* ance his *Father's* pride:
> His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
> His *lyart haffets* wearing thin and bare; *grey temples*
> Those strains that once did sweet ZION glide,
> He wales a portion with judicious care;
> '*And let us worship God!'* he says with solemn air.[184] (100-08)

[182] See Marjorie Levinson, 'Spiritual Economics: A reading of Wordsworth's "Michael"', *ELH*, 52 (1985), pp. 707-31. Levinson gives a sustained account of Abraham and Isaac's relevance to 'Michael', focusing on the importance of substitution in the biblical account as well as in Wordsworth's poem. However, her analysis which proposes to address the 'network of biblical allusion' in the poem says nothing of the angel Michael, either via Old Testament, New Testament, or Milton, nor is there any mention of the Gospel of Luke.
[183] The son Robert deliberately spelled his surnamed 'Burns' differently than his father 'Burnes'.
[184] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 149.

The sense of tradition is evoked through the bible which has been handed down from older generations ('ance his father's pride'), as well as through the familiarity of the ritual where all form a circle around the fire, suggesting it is a regular occurrence, as indeed it was for Burns. Unlike Wordsworth's patriarch, the father in Burns's poem with grey and thinning hair helps to maintain the scene's natural realism, much as the simple supper just finished does in the previous stanza:

But now the Supper crowns their simple board,
  The healsome *porritch,* chief of SCOTIA'S food:
The soupe their *only Hawkie* does afford, *cow*
  That 'yont the hallan snugly chows her cood:
The *Dame* brings forth*,* in complimental mood,
  To grace the lad, her weel-hain'd kebbuck, fell; *well-kept cheese*
And aft he's prest, and aft he ca's it guid;
  The frugal *Wifie,* garrulous, will tell,
How 'twas a townmond auld, sin' Lint was i' the bell.[185] (91-99)

The poem's most dialect-heavy stanza introduces Burns's nationalising programme for an idealised, rustic Scotland.[186] Porridge is ordained as the 'chief of Scotia's food' and the families' rustic *bonafides* are emphasised with having only one cow, as well as the thrift to make 'guid' cheese from it, and the generosity to share what little they have with the neighbouring lad. Burns's stanza takes the most simple, rustic elements of a cotter's life and imbues it with national importance, through a combination of rustic, antique language, and

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[185] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, pp. 148-49. There are further biographical references in this stanza as Burns's mother was, by her son's account, an expert cheese maker.
[186] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* III, p. 1112.

inflated terms for simple things. The supper 'crowns' the simple board, and the wife is a 'dame', though at the end of the stanza is referred to with the diminutive, colloquial, 'wifie'.

Wordsworth does not import such significance to his simple cottage dinner, yet the scene described in 'Michael' has strong echoes of the above Burns stanza:

> I may truly say,
> That they were as a proverb in the vale
> For endless industry. When day was gone,
> And from their occupations out of doors
> The Son and Father were come home, even then
> Their labour did not cease, unless when all
> Turned to their cleanly supper-board, and there
> Each with a mess of pottage and skimmed milk,
> Sate round their basket piled with oaten cakes,
> And their plain home-made cheese.[187] (95-104)

The language of 'Michael' is as plain and simple as the food described. The blank verse allows for a slow, gentle description of the scene filled with monosyllables and ordinary language. However, both poems mark the domestic scene as an important break from toil. This passage from 'Michael' represents the 'piety, thrift, and sobriety' that Leask reads as a direct engagement with Burns. However, the 'doctrinaire' Wordsworth uses the religious symbolism of the bible and of Milton to imbue his pastoral with the grandeur of epic, where a 'homely and rude' cottager experiences patrimonial loss and emotional hardship on a scale that far outstrips anything that is at stake in 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. Religion in 'The Cotter' is not symbolized through biblical allusion, as in 'Michael', but rather serves as the

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[187] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 227.

symbol itself, whereby the father's ritualised reading from scripture paints a portrait of piety and of sobriety. Burns can quickly move from Genesis through to Revelation in two Spenserian stanzas to give character to the father, whose livelihood may be uncertain and who may have a 'wayward' daughter (stanzas VII-X). However, none of this is brought to bear on the family. Instead, the scenes where the 'priest-like Father reads the sacred page' (118) or where he is described as 'The *Saint*, the *Father*, and the *Husband*' (137) paint the humble cottager's religion as more authentic and sincere than what is found in the upper classes, or in congregations:

> Compar'd with this, how poor Religion's pride,
>   In all the pomp of *method,* and of *art,*
> When men display to congregations wide,
>   Devotion's ev'ry grace, except the *heart!*
> The POWER, incens'd, the Pageant will desert,
>   The pompous strain, the sacredotal stole;
> But haply, in some *cottage* far apart,
>   May hear, well pleas'd, the language of the *soul;*
> And in His *Book of Life* the Inmates poor enroll.[188] (145-53)

The good religious life is won in the small, rural cottages. The humble life of the cotter is worth more than the pretensions and pageantry of the church (Burns's sometimes tempestuous relationship with his church community may inform these lines). The image of pious cotters who represent rustic pride and delight in the 'language of the soul' may also be another point of engagement for Wordsworth. Leask's reference to the '"hard" pastoral depiction of the Lakeland economy' is defined through the thrift of Michael's household, as

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[188] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 150.

well as their acknowledged standing within their community where 'they were as a proverb in the vale | For endless industry' (96-97). Like the fire which becomes the locus of religious virtue in 'The Cotter', where family and friends gather to sing, learn, and remember, the lamplight of 'Michael' gives the cottage both its name and its symbolic worth:

> The Light was famous in its neighbourhood,
> And was a public Symbol of the life,
> The thrifty Pair had lived.
> […]
> And from this constant light so regular
> And so far seen, the House itself by all
> Who dwelt within the limits of the vale,
> Both old and young, was named the Evening Star.[189] (137-39, 143-46)

Wordsworth must make explicitly symbolic what in Burns's poetry is taken as natural, authentic, and biographical. The light that emanates from and gives name to the cottage symbolises the 'industry' and thrift of the family within, while also serving as an indelible aspect of the cottage and a way of life that no longer exists. But Burns's poem still depicts rustic symbols for effect, just on a smaller scale. In the third stanza, Burns creates a scene filled with stock images of rustic affections:

> At length his lonely *Cot* appears in view,
>   Beneath the shelter of an aged tree;
> Th' expectant wee-things, toddlan, stacher thro'
>   To meet their *Dad,* wi' flichterin noise and glee.

[189] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 228.

> His wee-bit ingle, blinkan bonilie,
>
> His clean hearth-stane, his thrifty *Wifie's* smile,
>
> The *lisping infant,* prattling on his knee,
>
> Does a' his weary kiaugh and care beguile Carking Anxiety[190]
>
> And makes him quite forget his labor and his toil.[191] (19-27)

The expectant children who the father bounces on his knee, the smiling, 'thrifty wifie', as well the 'clean hearth-stane' and 'wee-bit ingle (small fire) all combine in a single image that would, in another diction, prove sentimental. Burns's scene is a composite of pastoral poetry, from Virgil's *Georgics* to Thomson's *The Seasons,* as well as the previously mentioned Gray's 'Elegy' and Fergusson's 'Ingle'.[192] In combining these images, Burns is capturing what Wordsworth had identified in his 1799 letter to Coleridge that celebrated manners that partook of the simplicity of natural objects, especially when those manners capture what had ceased to exist. Wordsworth's identification of Burns's technique is self-consciously employed in 'Michael', a poem that demands we remember what has been lost. For Wordsworth, those 'Whose memories will bear witness to my tale' and the 'youthful Poets' who 'will be my second self when I am gone' are tasked with remembering exactly the kinds of scenes described by Burns in 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. Similarly, the act of remembering is important to the scene in 'Michael' that attaches so much significance to the 'aged lamp' that had 'performed | Service beyond all others of its kind' (117-18). The poet-narrator tells us he lingers so 'minutely' on the Lamp 'for there are no few | Whose memories will bear witness to my tale' (135-36).[193] The poet-narrator's interjection, concerned with the memory and transmission of Michael's tale, relates both to his earlier remarks about

[190] Burns's Gloss.
[191] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 146.
[192] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, III p. 1114.
[193] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, pp. 227-28.

'youthful Poets' and a 'second self', as well — we are soon told — that the cottage is given its name of the 'Evening Star' by 'Both old and young' (146). This sense of intergenerational communal remembrance is likewise key to 'The Cotter' where the 'priest-like father' reads from his father's bible to the next generation and, when they sing, they sing together:

Then kneeling down to HEAVEN'S ETERNAL KING,
The *Saint,* the *Father,* and the *Husband* prays:
Hope 'springs exulting on triumphant wing,'[194]
That *thus* they all shall meet in future days:
There, ever bask in *uncreated rays,*
No more to sigh, or shed the bitter tear,
Together hymning their CREATOR'S praise
In *such society,* yet still more dear;
While circling Time moves round in an eternal sphere.[195] (136-44)

These lines depict the family at prayer in unison, where the Trinitarian figure of the father lifts them, through prayer, to heaven. The scene of prayer which transcends the humble cottage to an eternal realm is also captured literally and textually. The stanza acknowledges the hardships of life which may one day be escaped, 'no more to sigh or shed the bitter tear', yet the act of prayer that wishes for eternal rest and peace is made permanent through textual representation. Much like the earlier stanza filled with images of a happy family greeting a father home from work, Burns represents the events through images that mimic idealised actions, both homely and rude. As in the third stanza, Burns uses a gentle physicality to create an authentic scene. The father 'kneeling down' to prayer is a plain image made

[194] Burns acknowledges Pope's *Windsor Forest* next to his quotation.
[195] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 150.

powerful through its naturalness as well as affirming the pious rituals that the worthy cotters perform. Praying that the family might 'bask in *uncreated rays*' contrasts with the temporal suffering of 'bitter tears' before being enshrined, permanently, in time's 'eternal sphere'.

The image of celestial light in a scene concerned with the tensions of temporality and eternity, and of a shared remembrance of old and young, again recalls the community that named Michael's cottage the 'Evening Star'. It would be unhelpfully reductive to suggest that Wordsworth has this stanza in mind when naming the Evening Star, as it was an object familiar to Wordsworth's poetry ('Intimations Ode', among other places) and is one of the most commonly poeticised natural objects in literature. However, celestial light and the importance of poetic remembrance were crucial to Wordsworth's transmission of Burns and to the poetic vocation more broadly. McGuirk's recent work discusses the importance of celestial light in Wordsworth's admiration of Burns, focusing on the blank verse sonnet of Wordsworth that 'so well expressed for him his own poetic concerns that in 1845 he selected it to stand as the epigraph for his collected poems'.[196] Wordsworth's sonnet, which was 'written after 1813, published in 1827', reworks Burns's famous lines from 'The Vision', another of Burns's poems that Wordsworth praised throughout his career.[197] 'The Vision', where Burns's native muse, Coila (who is a sexualised composite of the Ayrshire landscape) affirms Burns's craft as a local bard, and has also successfully nurtured the poet's impulses to capture his native surroundings in verse:

> I saw thy pulse's maddening play,
> Wild-send thee Pleasure's devious way,
> Misled by Fancy's *meteor-ray,*
> By Passion driven;

[196] McGuirk, *Reading Robert* Burns, p. 77.
[197] McGuirk, *Reading Robert Burns,* p. 77.

But yet the *light* that led astray,

Was *light* from Heaven.[198] (235-40)

Burns's prurient muse plays with the distractions that both inspire and threaten the poet's aspirations, where nearly every impulse seems to mislead the poet, whether it be his impulses towards pleasure, fancy, or a purer (religious?) heavenly light. What Coila was able to teach Burns, though, was how to write poems like 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. The following stanza acknowledge the limits of Burns's art, though they really serve to mark out the differences that make his poetry unique:

I taught thy manners-painting strains,
The *loves,* the *ways* of simple swains,
Till now, o'er all my wide domains,
Thy fame extends;
And some, the pride of *Coila's* plains,
Become thy friends.

Thou canst not learn, nor I can show,
To paint with *Thomson's* landscape-glow;
Or wake the bosom-melting throe,
With *Shenstone's* art;
Or pour, with *Gray,* the moving flow
Warm on the heart.[199] (241-52)

[198] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 112.
[199] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 112.

Burns acknowledges his ability to depict 'the ways of simple swains' (which echoes Gray's 'Elegy' as it denies any pretensions to his eminence), or, more exactly, how to paint scenes of his native surroundings. 'Simple swains' recall Gray's 'hoary-headed swain' but also recalls the simple and humble scenes of 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. McGuirk notes Wordsworth's sonnet as a 'reply across the decades' to lines long-admired:

> If thou indeed derive thy light from Heaven,
> Then, to the measure of that heaven-born light,
> Shine, Poet! in thy place, and be content: -
> The stars pre-eminent in magnitude,
> And they that from the zenith dart their beams,
> (Visible though they be to half the earth,
> Though half a sphere be conscious of their brightness)
> Are yet of no diviner origin,
> No purer essence, than the one that burns,
> Like an untended watch-fire, on the ridge
> Of some dark mountain; or than those which seem
> Humbly to hang, like twinkling winter lamps,
> Among the branches of the leafless trees;
> All are the undying offspring of one Sire:
> Then, to the measure of the light vouchsafed,
> Shine, Poet! in thy place, and be content.[200]

Although Burns is not mentioned by name in the poem, the 'Poet' of Wordsworth's sixteen-line sonnet both captures and radiates light, which appears to shine like an 'untended watch-

[200] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, I, p. 1.

fire' or 'humbly to hang, like twinkling winter lamps'. Wordsworth's imagery ties his memory of a poet to the creative power, is simultaneously 'pre-eminent in magnitude' yet of 'no diviner origin' than the watch fire or humble lamp, and evokes the power of the lamp that 'performed service beyond all others of its kind' in 'Michael', where a simple rustic utensil comes to symbolise an entire way of life and is given the grandeur of an object as radiant, eternal, and heavenly as the Evening Star.

The poet-narrator's concerns in 'Michael' are concerns of poetic inheritance, wondering who will be there to relate the stories he is relating to us. The poet-narrator's attention to the importance of communal memory and the rustic 'thrifty' lives they attempt to remember draws from similar images and scenes that Burns likewise felt a call to authenticate and pay homage to in poems like 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. But the images of light also speak to Wordsworth's personal and very longstanding commitment to remembering (and reciting) Burns's poems. We should recall his elegy 'At the Grave of Burns' that again combines light, memory, mourning, and the powers of poetry:

> I mourned with thousands, but as one
> More deeply grieved, for He was gone
> Whose light I hailed when first it shone,
> And showed my youth
> How Verse may build a princely throne
> On humble truth.[201] (31-36)

Wordsworth was given a copy of the Kilmarnock *Poems* by his schoolmaster Thomas Bowman when he was seventeen, and it was important to the poet that he was such an early

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[201] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, III, p. 66.

admirer of Burns.[202] What Wordsworth's lines are suggesting is that he caught Burns's light at its brightest, giving him a clearer path to his own poetic voice. At times, Wordsworth must have felt like a 'second self' of Burns, tasked with capturing the feelings of humble men in a simple language. In 'Michael', Wordsworth sought — successfully — to depict the 'most powerful affections of the human heart; the parental affection and the love of property, *landed* property […]'. These affections are brought about by simple events that have profound consequences. Commenting on the political dimensions of Wordsworth's 'cottage poems', Leask notes that they 'perhaps owe more to the explicitly radical poetry of rural complaint'.[203] While 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' does not share the same explicitly political and economic concerns that bring about the sudden ruin in 'Michael', Burns's poem does display an acute awareness and tender engagement with the poverty described, where the 'only hawkie' (in Fergusson's pastoral there are multiple cows) emphasises the thin margins of their sustenance. 'Michael' takes greater pains to portray the tremendous fragility of self-sufficiency, where all it took for Michael's world to collapse, including everything that came before and the promise of what was to come after, were the 'distressful tidings' that the contract he had with his brother's son, who he was 'bound in surety', was called on. We are given the impression that this was never meant to happen as his nephew was

a man
Of an industrious life, and ample means,
But unforeseen misfortunes suddenly
Had pressed upon him, and old Michael now
Was summoned to discharge the forfeiture,
A grievous penalty […][204] (221-26)

[202] Bevis, *Wordsworth's Fun*, p. 158.
[203] Leask, *Burns and Pastoral*, p. 235.
[204] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 230.

Michael sends Luke away so that he might keep his property, thus allowing Luke to return and take his rightful inheritance. Michael gambles in sending Luke to the city in order to save his land and loses both. Luke's dissipation in the 'dissolute city' (453) that leads him first to 'ignominy and shame' (454), eventually causing him to flee to a 'hiding-place beyond the seas' (456), are anticipated by Michael in his final speech to Luke, where the covenant is made full in the knowledge that

> Whatever fate
> Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last,
> And bear thy memory with me to the grave.[205] (425-27)

Michael's anticipation of Luke's dissipation is made bearable through a covenant of unconditional love, where disappointment can wound but never destroy. Ultimately, neither Michael nor Luke are able to honour the covenant. But perhaps the unfinished sheep-fold is not a sign of an un-kept promise, but rather a site of sacred remembrance. To change the landscape where he and his son wept for love might threaten to disturb a treasured memory. After all, it is the memory of those that will be our second-selves that Michael bears to his grave. Although it is 'believed by all' that Michael would often go to the sheep-fold and 'never lift up a single stone' (473-74) and left the work unfinished (481), we know Michael did not die from heartbreak:

> There is a comfort in the strength of love;
> 'Twill make a thing endurable, which else

[205] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 235.

Would break the heart:— Old Michael found it so.[206] (457-59).

In 'Michael', Wordsworth offers a very different vision to 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. Wordsworth's poem shows how those in reduced circumstance might suffer and what they stand to lose when thrift doesn't pay out. Wordsworth shows the depth of feeling of rural characters, where a man of unusual age, strength, and emotional fortitude represents a way of life that is under threat, as well as the emotional toll of the changes wrought upon the landscape where all that is left is the unfinished sheep-fold and the Oak tree that 'grew beside their door' (489). Burns's poem likewise celebrates the poor, rustic cotters and, like Wordsworth, is intent on showing that those in plain clothes can feel deeply. For Burns, they feel more deeply, and are more virtuous than men of wealth and represent the best of 'Scotia':

From Scenes like these, old SCOTIA'S grandeur springs,
That makes her lov'd at home, rever'd abroad:
Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
'An honest man's the noble work of GOD:'
and *certes,* in fair Virtue's heavenly road,
The *Cottage* leaves the *Palace* far behind:
What is a lordling's pomp? a cumbrous load,
Disguising oft the *wretch* of human kind,
Studied in arts of Hell, in wickedness refin'd![207] (163-71)

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[206] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 236.
[207] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 151.

Burns's criticism of class is not about the precarious conditions of the rural poor but rather about how their humble circumstances give both their lives and their country richer meaning. Burns's democratic politics often place more value on an 'honest man' than could ever be determined by their class, such as the famous lines from 'A Man's A Man For A' That' which cry 'the rank is but the guinea's stamp, | The Man's the gowd for a' that'.[208]

The scenes that Burns created in 'The Cotter' provided material from which Wordsworth could build his own sympathies. Wordsworth's doctrinaire approach allowed him to take the affecting images in Burns's poem and place greater pressure on the threats a class of rural England were increasingly subjected to. Burns's 'Cot' first comes into view 'beneath the shelter of an aged tree' (20), and while 'shelter' has the potential to be a loaded term in a poem about a threadbare domestic experience, it really only adds to the homely simplicity of the family that dwells within, instead of serving as a more potent reminder of what nature might outlast, such as Wordsworth's Oak in 'Michael' or the Elms and spear grass in *The Ruined Cottage.* But through Wordsworth's reworking of Burns's imagery we are given greater insight into some of the unspoken concerns of 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' which remain present within the poem. Thrift and resourcefulness are virtues, but they are virtues of necessity and circumstance. Both poems, however, stress the importance of remembering and preserving a way of life that is valuable. It is valuable to preserve this way of life for its focus on love, hard work, thrift, and community. For Burns, it could enrich his native soil and become the foundation for a nation's history and future.[209] For Wordsworth, memory served the poets who had the courage to peer into the past where 'natural objects' reveal human suffering, and the hearts of 'fonder feeling' 'who will be my second self when I am gone'.

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[208] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, III, p. 762.
[209] See Kinsley's notes on the concluding lines of 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' which echoes *The Aeneid*. Burns, *Poems and Songs*, III, p. 1118.

Burns's poetry legitimised low and rustic characters, flowers, and animals as serious subjects for Wordsworth's revolutionary poetic programme. Burns could draw social sympathy from a field mouse and link his own fate to a rodent or a common daisy. And while Burns's poems on these subjects tend to disarm their more serious concerns of poverty and destruction ('Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim'rous *beastie*'), Wordsworth was acutely attuned to the unique power that these subjects afforded for a poetry of human suffering (in both 'To a Mouse' and *Peter Bell* animal suffering emphasises the fragility of a man's heart through cruelty against nature, intended or otherwise). What I hope this chapter has demonstrated is that Burns was an ever-present resource in Wordsworth's poetic imagination, from *The Ruined Cottage* to sonnets of the 1820s, and to the finally published elegies on Burns in the 1840s. And yet, Wordsworth's constant and consistent incorporation of Burns never subsumes Wordsworth's poetic voice. Wordsworth's poetry on human suffering and the human heart is unique and of course has more influences beyond Burns. Yet Burns meant something to Wordsworth that the long-deceased poets of his own country could not represent. Burns's life was both a tragedy and an example to Wordsworth. McGuirk has discussed the vacillations in Wordsworth's attitude towards Burns, where he can decry Currie's false and damaging account of the poet, yet also write an elegy for Burns's, addressed to the late poet's children, that captures both 'fraternal feelings' as well as using the site of their father's resting place as an admonishment.[210] Whatever Wordsworth's feeling were about Burns, he maintained a life-long love of his verse. In his 1816 *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns,* Wordsworth is characteristically effusive when he writes:

[210] McGuirk, *Reading Robert Burns,* p. 96.

> Why, sir, do I write to you at this length, when all that I had to express in direct answer to the request, which occasioned this letter, lay in such narrow compass?— Because having entered upon the subject, I am unable to quit it![211]

In a letter where Wordsworth simply offers some advice to Gilbert Burns, he rushes to the defence of the late poet, making sure not to miss the opportunity to convey to one of Burns's closest relatives — in both senses of the word — the depth of his admiration and knowledge of a poet he was habitually unable to stop thinking about.

Despite the inaccuracies and deficiencies of Currie's biography, Burns's early death, as well as his poverty and depressive tendencies (as expressed in such forceful terms for Wordsworth in 'Despondency. An Ode') served as a stark warning over the possible fate of a poet. The next chapter examines the fears of 'despondency and madness' in 'Resolution and Independence', where the double-meditation on Thomas Chatterton and Burns explores the greater symbolic effect each poet had not only for Wordsworth, but also Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. Keats was an early admirer of Chatterton, and in his 1818 tour of Scotland wrote a number of poems on Burns that engage with the tragedy of his life, the importance of his poetry, and – like Wordsworth – lament being so close in time and place to Burns, while he yet remained out of reach.

[211] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 667.

Chapter 2:

'Read Me a Lesson Muse and Speak it Loud': Keats and Burns
Or:
Romantic Meditations on Chatterton and Burns

'*When every childish fashion*
Has vanish'd from my rhyme,
Will I, grey-gone in a passion,
Leave to an after-time,
Hymning and harmony
Of thee, and of thy works, and of thy life;
But vain is now the burning and the strife,
Pangs are in vain, until I grow high-rife
With old Philosophy,
And mad with glimpses of futurity!'
— *'Lines on seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair'*[212]

This chapter focuses on John Keats's engagements with the poetry of Thomas Chatterton and Robert Burns. Both Chatterton and Burns came to symbolise the dangers of fame, the genius of seemingly uneducated, brilliant poetry, and an early death viewed as a tragic product of their singular genius and flawed personalities. Although this chapter is primarily concerned with Keats's relationship to Chatterton and Burns, it is necessary to chart the network of writers that paired Chatterton with Burns as early as 1796. I begin by looking at first-generation Romantic writers: Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Charles Lamb, who wrote poems and letters that mention by name or allude to Chatterton or Burns, where the poems often

[212] 'Lines on seeing a lock of Milton's Hair', lines 22-31, p. 107, in *John Keats: 21st Century Authors*, ed. by John Barnard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). All subsequent quotations of Keats's verse are taken from this edition unless otherwise stated. Future references appear as 'Keats, *Oxford Authors*'.

resist traditional elegiac modes. This section also considers the impact of the important early biographies of Burns by Robert Heron and James Currie, and the role they played in promoting biographical myths about Burns.

The next section discusses Keats's and William Hazlitt's responses to Chatterton and Burns. Hazlitt's 1818 lecture on Chatterton marks a unique departure from the celebration of Chatterton's genius to a more critical examination of why a figure such as Chatterton served as such a powerful model for other poets. This section then turns to Keats's 1818 tour of Northern England, Ireland and Scotland, where his letters and poems of the tour form the poet's most sustained and creative responses to Burns. The letters and poems at times affirm and augment each other, while at other points display opinions and attitudes that change depending on his mood or audience.

Although Keats did not mention Burns by name in any significant way after his tour, I argue that Burns — as well as some of his earlier meditations on Chatterton — remains important to a number of poems written in 1819. This section of the chapter reads Keats's sonnets on fame, as well as his earlier sonnet 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' in relation to the anxieties and uncertainties expressed in the poems written in Burns country. The chapter concludes with a brief reading of Percy Bysshe Shelley's elegy for Keats, 'Adonais', a poem important for its own myth-making out of Keats's death, as well as its attention to Keats's concern with poetic fame, something that is acknowledged through Shelley's invocation of Chatterton.

In 1797, Robert Heron published the first biography of Burns which, as Donald Low has noted, 'contained undocumented but plausible suggestions of his dissipation in later years in Dumfries'.[213] Heron's biography is one of the first examples of what would become customary in early Burns reception: false biographical assumptions more concerned with

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[213] *Critical Heritage*, p. 1.

myth making than with critical attention to the poet's work. In poetry, Burns's death became symbolic, and in an age where the cult of the genius was celebrated, and the emphasis on the self's inner subjectivities reacted against enlightenment rationalism, the idea of Burns as the 'Heaven-taught ploughman' resonated with conceptions of natural genius. In death, Burns's legacy served as a warning over the dangers of fame.

Burns was not the only poet to be either celebrated or mythologised for his early death and to gain cult status for seeming to possess poetic gifts beyond his learning. Thomas Chatterton, who took his own life in 1770, at the age of seventeen, came to share many of the qualities belatedly celebrated in Burns. With the notable exception of William Hazlitt, Romantic considerations of Chatterton always place him as a companion figure to Burns, which allowed poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats to construct a larger narrative out of their own ambitions instead of viewing Burns or Chatterton in isolation.

Studies pairing Keats and Chatterton have a long history which Beth Lau has carefully illustrated, beginning with early critics such as E.H.W Meyerstein, Robert Gittings, and Linda Kelley, through to more recent critics including Nicholas Roe, Jeffery Cox, Beth Lau, and Andrew Bennett.[214] Likewise, there is a long tradition of studying Burns's influence on Keats (particularly the 1818 tour) including work by John Barnard, Fiona Stafford, Fiona Robertson, Michael O'Neill, John Glendening, Nicholas Roe, Andrew Bennet, and Morris Dickstein, to name but a few.[215] Despite the critical interest in Keats's relationship to these two poets, as far as I know, little attention has been paid to considering Chatterton, Burns,

[214] Beth Lau, 'Protest, "Nativism", and Impersonation in the Works of Chatterton and Keats', *Studies in Romanticism,* 42 (2003), pp. 519-39.
[215] Fiona Stafford, *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Fiona Robertson, 'Keats's New World': An Emigrant Poetry' in *Keats Bicentenary Readings*, ed. by Michael O'Neill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 27-47; Michael O'Neill, 'Keats's Poetry: "The Reading of an Ever-Changing Tale"', in *Keats Bicentenary*, pp. 102-28; John Glendening, 'Keats's Tour of Scotland: Burns and the Anxiety of Hero Worship', *Keats-Shelley Journal,* 41, (1992), pp. 76-99; Nicholas Roe, 'Authenticating Robert Burns' in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, pp. 159-79; Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Morris Dickstein, *Keats and His Poetry: A Study in Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

and Keats together. The biographical and critical treatment of Burns is bound up with his reception in poetry, and the poetry can therefore be better understood in relation to the biographies being studied by the prominent group of Romantic poets. Early biographers Robert Heron and, more influentially, James Currie, cemented Burns's posthumous reputation as an inspired genius who fell into dissipation and alcoholism. Low, in the introduction to the *Critical Heritage* volume on Burns, provides a succinct summary of the first fifty years of Burns's reception:

> Much of the early criticism of Burns was compounded of praise for his genius, sympathy with his lot, disapproval of the man on moral, social, religious or political grounds, and failure to examine the art of individual poems and songs.[216]

In 1800 James Currie published his *Works of Robert Burns; with an Account of his Life, and a Criticism of his Writings, to which is Prefixed, Some Observations on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry,* a biography that remained the most important early biographical and critical work on the poet. Leask returns to Currie as Burns's most widely read biographer, and subsequently as the author responsible, in part, for much of the mythology that has unjustly followed Burns ever since. Leask argues that Currie's biography of Burns has received unfair critical treatment in Romantic studies, and it is important to understand the immense impact the book made, partly due to the important Romantic writers who read Currie's *Works of Robert Burns.* Leask has noted such illustrious readers of Currie as 'Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Scott, Hogg, Moore, Jane Austen, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Hazlitt'.[217] Although Wordsworth strongly disagreed with Currie's depiction of Burns as a once great poet whose genius had been destroyed by his own hand, it is nonetheless an

[216] *Critical Heritage*, p. 1.
[217] Leask, *Burns and Pastoral,* pp. 276-77.

image evident in Wordsworth's poetry, as well as poems, letters, and comments by Coleridge, Byron, Keats, and Hazlitt.[218] Although Robert Heron gave an erroneous account of Burns's life, Currie's biography had a far greater impact. Indeed, it was the success of Currie's book that made him the most important propagator of the myth that assumed the status of biographical fact. Among English Romantic literary circles, especially in the wake of Currie's biography, an unexpected pairing of Burns with Chatterton arose. Although Chatterton had died over twenty-five years before Burns, Chatterton exists as a ghostly presence attached to the homages to Burns.

For the ambitious writers who had read Currie, an important poetic influence had tragically passed away, and moved by Currie's harmful narrative, Burns's death could take on a complicated significance. To the newly sprung Romantic tradition emerging in England, Burns presented a poetry that celebrated the natural world, introspective reflections transmitted through nature, and unconventional poetic modes that broke free of Augustan satire, heroic couplets, or classical imitations. Instead, Burns was writing in new, energetic verse forms that, with its blend of Scottish dialect, standard English, and Burns's own coinages, appeared to approximate the natural speech of the poet. Burns also inspired a generation of 'peasant-poets' or labouring class poets on either side of the Border.[219] Many of the poems, particularly the ones written by the English Romantics, are either celebrations of Burns's poetic talents, or homages to the inspiration he provided them, as opposed to formal elegies.

The tragic, untimely death of a poet often serves as the occasion for elegies, and in this regard, the lack of formal elegies written on Burns at first appears unusual. However, the poems on Burns lack one important characteristic of more conventional elegies: *Lycidas,*

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[218] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* pp. 663-66.
[219] Burke's index to *Eighteenth-Century Labouring-Class Poets,* (III), lists five poems on or in memory of Burns, and much of the preface discusses the importance of Burns to labouring-class poetry.

'Adonais', *In Memoriam,* Thomas Hardy's poems of 1912-13, all mourn personal loss. Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge, and Hazlitt never knew or corresponded with Burns. Although Wordsworth could imagine climbing Skiddaw and seeing Burns, nothing of the sort ever happened. Indeed, Wordsworth and Keats are left imagining encounters with Burns at sites of mourning in place of any experienced encounter. Wordsworth's poem 'At the Grave of Burns', as well as Keats's sonnets, resist traditional modes of mourning, and instead are concerned, in the case of Wordsworth, with asserting his claim to Burns's influence, announcing 'Whose light I hailed when first it shone'. In the case of Keats, the poems are a mixture of praise for Burns, 'pledging his honour' or complicated meditations on his own poetic ambitions. Strangely, the more elegiac poems on Burns have a tendency to pair him with Chatterton and this unlikely matching with Chatterton deserves more critical attention than it has previously been given. An evaluation of the poems written on Burns, Chatterton, or both, will enable a better understanding of how writers such as Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge, and Hazlitt elegised or paid homage to Burns as one of their defining creative influences.

2.1 First-Generation Romantic Responses to Chatterton and Burns

Due to the immense celebrity experienced by Robert Burns in his lifetime, the impact of his life and work following his death was both immediate and diverse. Coleridge's poem 'To A Friend Who Declared His Intention of Writing No More Poetry' was composed the year Burns died, and was addressed to Charles Lamb who had considered Burns 'The God of my

Idolatry'.[220] Lamb had told Coleridge in a letter 'at length I have done with verse making' citing a lack of ideas and ability.[221] Coleridge's poem for Lamb was published in a 'Bristol Newspaper in aid of a subscription for the family of Robert Burns'.[222] The letters between Lamb and Coleridge came at a particularly fraught time for Lamb, whose sister Mary had killed their mother in September of that year. Charles Lamb, in his letter to Coleridge detailing the matricide asked his friend to '[…] mention nothing of poetry. I have destroyed every vestige of past vanities of that kind. Do as you please, but if you publish, publish mine (I give free leave) without name or initial, and never send me a book […]'.[223]Although Lamb continued to write poetry in the months after his mother's death, Coleridge's poem may have Lamb's earlier disavowal in mind. 'To a Friend' then, is an elegy on Burns, on Lamb's decision to quit poetry, and perhaps, motivated in part by the shocking death of Lamb's mother. This tangled set of circumstances surrounding Coleridge's poem on Burns is oddly indicative of the kinds of poems written by Romantic poets on Burns. Poems written by Wordsworth and Keats on the death of Burns often employ elegiac imagery and tropes, yet these poems are not traditional poems of mourning or loss and are as concerned with the authoring poet's own poetic posterity as they are with Burns's death. Romantic meditations on Burns tended to be more interested in the life of Burns than they are in Burns's life. Burns's continued success as a poet, which was coupled with myths surrounding his life and early death, became fundamental to Romantic engagements with his work.

In 1796, the first iteration of Coleridge's poem 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton' appeared in his debut volume of poems.[224] It was a poem Coleridge developed and edited for

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[220] Charles Lamb, *The Letters of Charles Lamb: To which are added those of his sister Mary Lamb*, ed. by E.V. Lucas, 3 vols (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1935), I, p. 73. Subsequent references to this work appear as 'Lamb, *Letters'*.
[221] Lamb, *Letters,* I, p. 66.
[222] *Critical Heritage*, p. 108.
[223] Lamb, *Letters,* I, p. 40.
[224] Linda Kelly, *The Marvellous Boy: The Life and Myth of Thomas Chatterton* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 86.

forty years.[225] Coleridge's poem is the earliest by a major Romantic author to elegize or commemorate Chatterton as a symbol of poetic ambition and despair. In 1802, William Wordsworth published 'Resolution and Independence', a poem concerned with the uncertainty that accompanies poetic ambition and that uses Chatterton and Burns as examples of the successes and pitfalls that await great poets. Keats dedicated his first major work, *Endymion,* 'Inscribed to the Memory of Thomas Chatterton', and mentions Chatterton with Burns in his playful poem 'To George Felton Matthew'.[226] Between 1815 and 1818 Keats wrote sonnets on Chatterton and on Burns, as well as meditative pieces that, while not explicit invocations of Chatterton or Burns, share thematic and imagistic similarities that are important to the Romantic discussion of Chatterton and Burns. In 1818, Hazlitt lectured on Chatterton and Burns, although he was far more critical of Chatterton than were most of his contemporaries. And in 1821, Shelley wrote his elegy 'Adonais' for Keats, which invokes Chatterton while comparing him to Keats. The relationship of the Romantics to Chatterton and Burns is a complicated network of poems, allusions, and symbolic reflections. Keats echoes Wordsworth's thoughts on Chatterton, and Shelley echoes Keats. The fact that nearly all of the major Romantic poets chose to associate Chatterton with Burns can be understood, in part, by the biographical legacies of each poet.

Chatterton and Burns could be viewed as similar examples of the mixed fortunes of poetic talent: everlasting fame and the destructive powers of melancholy and success. This symbolic relationship between the two poets proved powerful for the later Romantic poets, and it will be important to examine their treatment of the earlier poets as there are perhaps far more differences than similarities between Chatterton and Burns. Although both poets died young, it is worth remembering that Burns, who died when he was thirty-seven, was more

[225] For a detailed summary of this poem's complicated textual history see *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose,* ed. by, Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, Raimonda Modiano (London: W.W. Norton, 2004), pp. 5-6.
[226] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, p. 149.

than twice the age of Chatterton. There are also major regional, linguistic, and poetic differences between the poets: Chatterton lived and wrote in the city culture of Bristol, in the southwest of England, while Burns's poetry was forged in rural, southwest Scotland. Chatterton's affected Middle-English, claiming to be the work of the fifteenth-century monk, Thomas Rowley, radically differs from the mixture of regional Scots dialect and standard English of Burns's poems. Burns was also writing more than fifteen years after Chatterton's death in 1770. Burns was far more similar to the poets who commemorated him and associated him with Chatterton, than he was to Chatterton himself. These differences would not have been entirely unknown to Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Keats, and in highlighting them, it is important to investigate why, given the marked differences between Burns and Chatterton, they were repeatedly grouped together.

What Chatterton and Burns represented to the Romantics was possibility. Chatterton was celebrated for youthful poetic talents, and Burns was famously lauded, in the words of Henry Mackenzie, as the 'Heaven-taught ploughman', the peasant poet whose genius was all the more impressive for being uneducated.[227] Coleridge's schoolboy poem 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton' (written the year Burns died) praises his early influence, and laments his suicide. In the sixteenth line Coleridge refers to Chatterton as 'that heaven-born genius'.[228] Like Chatterton, Burns was often referred to as a 'genius', which was an attempt to explain his poetic skill in the face of a perceived lack of education. Coleridge's moniker echoes Mackenzie's famous appellation of Burns as the 'Heaven-taught ploughman'.[229] Coleridge had read Burns, and it is possible that he was familiar with the *Lounger* review containing Mackenzie's remark. Although Burns is otherwise left out of the 'Monody', it is part of a

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[227] *Critical Heritage,* p. 16.
[228] Coleridge, *Poetry and Prose,* pp. 5-10.
[229] Robert Crawford has discussed the importance of the phrase 'heaven-taught': 'If the *OED* can be trusted, MacKenzie is the first person in English to use the striking compound adjective 'Heaven-taught', but his discussion of natural literary genius is of a piece with the view of genius put forward by Blair and other eighteenth-century teachers […]'. Crawford 'Robert Fergusson's Robert Burns', p. 2.

larger trend that the two poets are considered alongside each other, and Coleridge's brief acknowledgement is the earliest example of this. Coleridge's poem 'To a friend who declared his intention of writing no more poetry' (published in 1796), in addition to responding to Lamb's circumstances described above, was also occasioned upon hearing news of Burns's recent death. In a revealing moment, we can see how Coleridge's use of 'henbane' and night-shade' allows the poem to attach Chatterton's ghostly presence to Burns:

> Pick stinking hensbane, and the dusky flowers
>
> Of night-shade, or its red and tempting fruit,
>
> These with stopp'd nostril and glove-guarded hand
>
> Knit in nice intertexture, so to twine,
>
> The illustrious Brow of SCOTCH NOBILITY.[230]

Henbane and night-shade are both poisonous plants, thus making a poisoned garland for the Scottish gentry that had refused Burns patronage. The dangerous plants may also have an echo with the self-poisoning of Chatterton. Coleridge has combined traditional and non-traditional elegiac images. Traditional in the 'plucking' of the 'darkest bough' as well as knitting or twining of flowers for a garland. However, the garland is not fitted for a poet but to those who denied Burns, and the imagery becomes bitter and ironic. Similarly, line nineteen, 'Without the meed of one melodious tear' quotes from Milton's great elegy, *Lycidas*. However, the use of poisonous flowers that must be 'glove-guarded' contrasts the

[230] Coleridge, *Poetry and Prose,* pp. 134-36, lines 33-37. These lines also recall Keats's 'Ode on Melancholy' in the opening lines:
No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
    Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine:
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kissed
    By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
    Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
Your mournful Psyche[…] (1-7).

more traditional, floral burials given to the dead.[231] Coleridge's poems to Chatterton and Burns contain familiar elegiac tropes, however 'Monody' echoes Burns, and 'To a friend' echoes Chatterton and also praises Burns as 'Nature's own beloved bard'.[232]

Although Byron pays only brief attention to Chatterton, he was a fond admirer of Burns's poetry, and reacting to the poetry of the day groups Chatterton, Burns, and Wordsworth together as poets who are 'never vulgar' (although he declares that Burns is 'coarse').[233] As in Coleridge's poem, the joining together of Burns and Chatterton is brief, but it is still useful. Perhaps Byron's comment that Burns and Chatterton are never vulgar points to their purity and youth. Byron's distinction between 'coarse' and 'vulgar' is also interesting. By suggesting that Burns and Chatterton are not vulgar, he praises them, along with Wordsworth, for eschewing over-elaborate forms of poetry, yet in calling Burns 'coarse' refers not just to the bawdy, or obscene moments in his poetry, but also suggests a roughness fitting with Burns's image as a ploughman peasant poet. Byron refers to Burns's coarseness a second time, in a journal entry, 13 December 1813. Reading 'unpublished letters' Byron is overcome by the contradictions he finds in Burns:

> What an antithetical mind!—tenderness, roughness—delicacy, coarseness—sentiment, sensuality—soaring and grovelling, dirt and deity—all mixed up in that one compound of inspired clay![234]

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[231] Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 95-97.
[232] For comprehensive annotations on 'To a Friend' see Coleridge, *Poetry and Prose*, pp. 134-36.
[233] *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals*, ed. by Roland E. Prothero, 6 vols (London: John Murray, 1922), V, p. 591. Although Leslie Marchand's edition of Byron's letters and journals is preferred, there are several instances where I was only able to track down certain quotes via Prothero. I have designated future references to his edition by his name.
[23] *Byron's Letters and Journal*, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols (London: John Murray, 1975), III, p. 239.

Byron's exasperation at Burns's 'antithetical mind', much like what Keats calls a 'dead weight' during his 1818 tour, captures the difficulty Romantic writers felt in attempting to describe Burns.[235] Perhaps Coleridge's poems that simultaneously knit a wreath of poisoned flowers and list Burns as 'nobility' recall similar tensions to the 'dirt and deity' described by Byron.[236]Although Byron's comments on Chatterton and Burns are brief, Burns's influence on Byron is significant and will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter.

To the Romantics, Chatterton and Burns served both as an inspiration and warning. Both Wordsworth and Keats were attracted to the fame and poetic capability of the earlier poets, while also viewing their early deaths as a price, or perhaps a condition of their fame. These fears are the subject of Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence'. Linda Kelly, Geoffrey Hartman, and Stephen Gill have each noted Chatterton's 'An Excelente Balade of Charitie' as the metrical basis for Wordsworth's poem, and Kelly points out the 'kindred theme: in both [poems] a man is rescued from dejection or despair by the providential appearance of another'.[237] Chatterton's poem, however, is not the only text Wordsworth had in mind. Burns was an equally powerful influence for the fears expressed by Wordsworth, as well as some of the poem's imagery. The most famous lines of 'Resolution and Independence' are in the seventh stanza, where Chatterton is hailed as 'the marvellous boy':

> I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous Boy,
>
> The sleepless Soul that perished in its pride;
>
> Of Him who walked in glory and in joy
>
> Behind his plough, upon the mountain-side:

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[235] Keats, *Oxford Authors,* p. 275.

[236] Perhaps Byron's 'Inspired clay' comment recalls Canto II Stanza 212 of Don Juan 'just | To hint that flesh is form'd of fiery dust'. *Lord Byron: The Major Works: Including Don Juan and Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, ed. by Jerome McGann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 486. Subsequent references to this edition appear as 'Byron, *Major Works'*.

[237] Kelly, *Marvellous Boy*, p. 82.

By our own spirits are we deified;

We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;

But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness.[238] (43-49)

These lines are an homage to both Chatterton and Burns and a continued meditation on Wordsworth's own poetic fate. Curiously, Wordsworth mentions Chatterton by name, yet only alludes to Burns, signalling him by his plough. Wordsworth's decision to refer to Burns simply as 'Him' suggests the high regard he holds for Burns, and, in simply nodding to Burns betrays his familiarity with the poet, as well as an expected familiarity that his readers might share. Indeed, the stanza's third line 'Of Him who walked in glory and in joy' suggests a Christ-like image, which is then immediately scaled down with the plough, while also firmly designating the reference as Burns.[239] The possessives 'our' and 'we', along with the active voice, allow Wordsworth to place himself alongside Chatterton and Burns as great poets whose spirits descended into 'despondency and madness'.[240] Although the above stanza is the only explicit mention of Chatterton and Burns, Wordsworth uses the ending couplets, particularly the alexandrine, in the previous stanzas to invoke symbolic sentiments associated with Chatterton and Burns:

[…]

And fears, and fancies, thick upon me came;

Dim sadness, and blind thoughts I knew not nor could name.

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[238] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 705.

[239] Nicholas Roe has likewise suggested the Christ-like image present in these lines in his essay 'Authenticating Robert Burns', p. 220.

[240] 'despondency' recalls Burns's Ode that Wordsworth was familiar with, as well as the earlier line 'And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy' (21), compare with Burns's:

Or haply, to his ev'ning thought,
By unfrequented stream
The *ways of men* are distant brought,
A faint-collected dream (34-37. Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 233). Burns's italics.

[…]

But there may come another day to me,

Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty.

[…]

But how can He expect that others should

Build for him, sow for him, and at his call

Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all?[241] (27-28, 34-35, 40-42)

Hartman refers to these concluding lines as 'that last, draggle-tailed alexandrine' and the uncertainty it brings.[242] The uncertainty pertains to both the reader and the poet, something Hartman affirms in his claim that 'We feel the poet's distraught perplexity, as if this could not be, or could not last'.[243] Wordsworth's poem struggles to achieve either resolution or independence in these stanzas, as his 'blind thoughts' move towards naming Chatterton and Burns. Indeed, Wordsworth appears unable to move towards any form of resolution in the poem until the seventh stanza where his troubled and troubling influences are named. The following stanza introduces the leech gatherer, and the beginning of Wordsworth's move towards independence. McGuirk illustrates how Wordsworth's poem treats Chatterton and Burns not just as poetically symbolic equals with each other, but also with Wordsworth, 'They are treated as full peers in sensibility and suffering, Chatterton and Burns, long dead […] becomes ghostly witnesses as Wordsworth's speaker runs headlong from "blind thoughts" of unspecified future anguish'.[244] The opening seven stanzas therefore become a

[241] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 261.
[242] Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 268.
[243] Hartman, p. 268.
[244] McGuirk, *Reading Robert Burns*, p. 85.

sustained engagement with both the poetry as well as the perceived biographical events of two celebrated poets, whereby Chatterton and Burns can provide Wordsworth with a range of examples; from poetic form and theme, to the extremes of fame and ill-fortune.

While Kelly's comment on the shared content of Chatterton's ballad with Wordsworth's poem is accurate, Burns's poem 'Man was Made to Mourn' as well as imagery from 'The Vision' are present in 'Resolution and Independence'. Burns's description of a hare moving through the snow in the opening stanza of 'The Vision' may well be in Wordsworth's mind in the second stanza of 'Resolution and Independence'. Although Burns's poem takes place in winter, Wordsworth introduces the natural setting of the poem in the warm sun after a storm:

> There was a roaring in the wind all night;
>
> The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
>
> But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
>
> The birds are singing in the distant woods[245] (1-4)

By setting the poem in spring, Wordsworth is making a departure from both Burns and Chatterton, and the suggestions of renewal and growth offer a symbolic move from the stunted lives of the earlier poets. Both 'Man was Made to Mourn' and 'The Vision' take place in winter, and in 'The Vision', the opening stanza gives a beautiful description of a hare's prints in the snow:

> The sun had clos'd the *winter day*,
>
> The Curlers quat their roaring play,
>
> And hunger'd Maukin taen her way   the hare

[245] Wordsworth, *Major Works,* p. 261.

To kail-yards green,

While faithless snaws ilk step betray

Where she has been.[246] (1-6)

Wordsworth's description of a hare raising mist, betraying its own motions across the wet moors recalls Burns's hare whose paw prints are left in the snow:

The Hare is running races in her mirth;

And with her feet she from the plashy earth

Raises a mist; which, glittering in the sun,

Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.[247] (11-14)

There is a further intertextual link between Wordsworth's and Burns's hare, which can also be linked to Chatterton. Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes*, with its archaic language, reminiscent of Chatterton's Rowley poems, takes up a similar image of Burns's hare in winter:

The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;

The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,

And silent was the flock in woolly fold[248] (2-4)

As with 'The Vision' and 'Resolution and Independence,' these lines occur in the beginning of Keats's poem, but return to the wintery scenes of Burns's 'kail-yards green', perhaps marking a return in contrast to the departure suggested in Wordsworth's springtime setting. While there is also an echo of Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' with the quiet setting and cold

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[246] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 103. Burns uses a similar image of a hair moving unevenly in the opening stanza of 'The Holy Fair'.
[247] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 261.
[248] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, p. 461.

owl, the comparison is fleeting and only imagistic. Morris Dickstein has brilliantly traced the role of winter and cycles of renewal in Keats's poetry and their relationship to Keats's fears of mortality and poetic achievement.[249] Picking up on Dickstein's work in *Keats and his Poetry*, we can examine the startling relevance of 'The Vision' to concerns that are found repeatedly throughout the poems and letters of Keats. Although Burns can contemplate his role as poet with more light-heartedness and play than Keats, we can see how they were both burdened with the self-consciousness attached to fame, and necessarily anxious about the poets that came before, and succeeded. That *The Eve of St. Agnes* (as well as *The Eve of St. Mark*) owes part of its inspiration to the language of Chatterton has long been suggested and discussed by critics. And in these incipient lines we can trace both Keats's homage and influence to Burns, as well as a more complicated engagement with Wordsworth's treatment of a Burnsian image in a poem intimately concerned with both Chatterton and Burns, and the anxieties of poetic fame.

Jonathan Wordsworth has noted echoes between 'Lines written in Early Spring' and 'Man was Made to Mourn'.[250] Wordsworth's familiarity with Burns's poem extends its influence into the encounter of the solitary wanderer with the leech gatherer. His description of the leech gatherer as 'The oldest Man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs' recalls the opening stanza from Burns:

> I spy'd a man, whose aged step
> Seem'd weary, worn with care;
> His face was furrow'd o'er with years,
> And hoary was his hair.[251] (5-8)

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[249] Dickstein, pp. 131-36.
[250] Robert Burns, *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect (1786)*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (Woodstock: Oxford, 1991), Introduction.
[251] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 116.

Like Chatterton and Wordsworth, Burns's dirge achieves a form of resolution handed down from the encountered figure, although the conclusion of Burns's poem achieves this resolution through an acknowledgment of death's equalising powers. Michael O'Neill's discussion of 'Man was Made to Mourn' usefully draws out the differences in Burns's poem with that of Wordsworthian encounter:

> Unlike Wordsworth's poems of encounter, this meeting between narrator and 'rev'rnd Sage' begins with questions from the person encountered, whose speech is less one of counsel than of saddened awareness that 'Man was made to mourn', words whose calculated ambiguity concludes stanzas three to six.[252]

'Resolution and Independence' has a number of poetic predecessors, Chatterton's 'Balade of Excelente Charitie' as already noted, as well as Spenser's *Prothalamion,* as suggested by Hartman.[253] The case for including 'Man Was Made to Mourn' amongst these is not to suggest that Wordsworth's poem owes more significance to any one source, but rather to illustrate that part of what makes Wordsworth such an enduring poet is his ability to adapt multiple influences while retaining his unmistakable originality, as well as to show the constant familiarity with Burns apparent in so many of Wordsworth's poems of the period 1798-1805. Because Burns is the only other poet invoked in 'Resolution and Independence' and because the poem also shares thematic similarities with 'Man was made to Mourn' as well as the imagistic similarities of 'The Vision', we can see how Burns's influence on Wordsworth's lyric permeates at least as deeply as Chatterton and indeed back to Spenser.

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[252] O'Neill, *The Romantic Poetry Handbook*, p. 137.
[253] Hartman, p. 272.

The major problem of 'Resolution and Independence' is proposed in the title. Wordsworth wonders if a tragic and untimely death, or 'despondency and madness' are a condition or product of Chatterton's and Burns's success. Ultimately, Wordsworth has to find a different way, or 'resolve to become independent'. While conceiving of Wordsworth's title as the argument of the poem may over simplify, it is still a useful suggestion in reading the ending of the poem. The Leech Gatherer ultimately stands as a symbol of physical and imaginative fortitude, although Wordsworth's '[f]ormer thoughts' are recalled one final time before he can fully separate himself from the path of Chatterton and Burns:

> My Former thoughts returned: the fear that kills;
> The hope that is unwilling to be fed;
> Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;
> And mighty Poets in their misery dead.[254] (120-23)

'Labour' reaches back to the seventh stanza, where we recall Wordsworth's description of Burns 'walking in' 'glory' and 'joy' at his plough. Wordsworth ultimately resolves to persevere and the leech gatherer becomes his new symbol for poetic fortitude, replacing the despairing images of Chatterton and Burns.

'Resolution and Independence' is less of an homage to two of his poetic influences, as it is a crisis in faith in his chosen ambition. Gill's note on the reference to Chatterton's name refers to him as a 'symbol of the poet whose creative gifts are at once a blessing and a destructive power'.[255] The same might be said of Burns. Although the poetry of Burns and Chatterton differ greatly from each other, they offer a mutual symbolism, and in being able to link the poets together, the biographical myths that surrounded each poet in death are

[254] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 264.
[255] Wordsworth, *Major Works*, p. 705.

reinforced, thus allowing the coming generation of Romantic writers something to aspire to, and beware of.

2.2 Hazlitt and Keats respond to Chatterton and Burns

> 'We read fine— things but never feel them to thee full until we have gone the same steps as the Author.'
> — Keats, letter to Reynolds Sunday, May 3rd, 1818[256]

Wordsworth and Coleridge were not alone in their conflicted praise of Chatterton and Burns, nor were they alone in choosing to fuse them together in their praise. As William Hazlitt's *Lectures on the English Poets* were delivered to rapt audiences in 1818, Chatterton and Burns were again paired together. Hazlitt concludes his lecture 'On Swift, Young, Gray, Collins, &c.' with withering and tasteless remarks on the supposed genius of Chatterton, and having quoted from the 'marvellous boy' stanza of 'Resolution and Independence', continues:

> I am loth to put asunder whom so great an authority has joined together; but I cannot find in Chatterton's work anything so extraordinary as the age at which they were written. They have a facility, vigour, and a knowledge, which were prodigious in a boy of sixteen, but which would not have been so in a man of twenty. He did not shew extraordinary powers of genius, but extraordinary precocity. Nor do I believe he would have written better, had he lived. He knew this himself or he would have lived. Great geniuses, like great kings, have too much to think of to kill themselves; for their mind to them also 'a kingdom is'.[257]

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[256] Keats, Oxford Authors, p. 255.
[257] *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. by Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), II The Round Table: Lectures on English Poets, p. 278.

Hazlitt's disgust is not meant as an attack on Chatterton's poetry, but rather as an attack on the critics who held up and celebrated Chatterton's genius against reasonable proportions, and so Hazlitt begins his subsequent lecture 'On Burns, and the Old English Ballads' with an apology — of sorts — for his barbed conclusion in the previous lecture:

> I am sorry that what I said in the conclusion of the last Lecture respecting Chatterton, should have given dissatisfaction to some persons, with whom I would willingly agree on all such matters.[258] What I meant was less to call in question Chatterton's genius, than to object to the common mode of estimating its magnitude by its prematureness. […] Had Chatterton really done more, we should have thought less of him, for our attention would then have been fixed on the excellence of the works themselves, instead of the singularity of the circumstances in which they were produced.[259]

Hazlitt's tactful recovery of his previous lecture, telling his audience 'what I really meant by all that' still captures his initial remarks; that Chatterton was celebrated not for his poetry, but for the tragically young age at which he died. That Chatterton should serve as an interlude to Burns shows how deep Romantic preoccupations of pairing these two tragic figures went. However, unlike Wordsworth and Coleridge, Hazlitt does not find in Burns's circumstances the same symbolic, cautionary tale. Instead, Hazlitt points to an important difference in the legacies of the two poets. While Chatterton and Burns both died young (perhaps, relatively young in Burns's case), Hazlitt's objection to 'the common mode of estimating its [genius] magnitude by its prematureness' points up an important difference in how each poet's legacy was received. Chatterton's poetry held the promise of greatness, but part of his genius was

[258] It has been suggested that the 'person' here referred to is John Keats. Hazlitt, II, p. 385.
[259] Hazlitt, II, p. 278.

producing his poetry at such an early age. Burns's poetry was already considered great and had even been compared to Shakespeare by Mackenzie and Scott. Social class was for Burns what youth was for Chatterton. Hazlitt knew that Burns was a better poet than Chatterton, and in reading Burns finds vigour and manliness as opposed to the fragile youthfulness of Chatterton:

> He had a strong mind, and a strong body, the fellow to it. He had a real heart of flesh and blood beating in his bosom – you can almost hear it throb. Some said, that if you had shaken hands with him, his hand would have burnt yours […] for the artificial flowers of poetry, he plucked the mountain-daisy under his feet; and a field mouse, hurrying from its mined dwelling, could inspire him with the sentiments of terror and pity. He held the plough or the pen with the same firm, manly grasp […].[260]

Hazlitt's description and praise of Burns sits in striking contrast to his remarks on Chatterton. Similarly, Hazlitt treats Burns's poetry far more seriously than he does Chatterton's and goes so far as to quote 'Tam O'Shanter' in its entirety. Although Hazlitt does not explicitly reject pairing these two poets together, his *Lectures* are a departure from the poems of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Keats.

Robert Gittings, in an early essay on Keats and Chatterton, calls attention to Keats's dismay at Hazlitt's remarks on Chatterton and also notes, quoting from Dorothy Hewlett, that the Chatterton lines subsequently quoted by Hazlitt were 'so much a favourite of Keats'.[261] Gittings's essay traces Chatterton's influence on Keats, looking at intertextuality as well as Keats's longstanding admiration for the poet. The burden of posterity weighs heavily on most

[260] Hazlitt, II, p. 282.
[261] Robert Gittings, 'Keats and Chatterton', *Keats-Shelley Journal, 4* (1955), pp. 47-54, p. 49.

poets. To be remembered, or to be remembered as a great poet, is the question John Keats frequently fretted about in his poems and letters as Barnard has noted:

> Keats, the one great English Romantic poet whose prime concern was Art and Beauty, believed that true poetry was written for posterity, that the 'realms of gold' created by Homer, Spenser, or Shakespeare existed beyond the accidents of history.[262]

As with Byron, the similarities that Keats shared with Burns are partially made up of biographical coincidence, as well as poetic influence. The criticism Keats suffered as part of 'The Cockney School of Poetry' for his low language, and where he was deemed a 'lower-class pretender to culture, and as a levelling, if not seditious, threat to the established order', shares similarities with the kind of critiques about language and class status that Burns received, both coming from the established Edinburgh literati in the *Quarterly Review*, and *Blackwood's Magazine*.[263] Keats and Burns also suffered in the immediate wakes of their deaths by strange and untrue critical assumptions which came from friends and allies. Shelley prefaced his elegy for Keats, 'Adonais', with remarks suggesting that the negative reviews killed Keats:

> The savage criticism on his Endymion, which appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, produced the most violent effect on his susceptible mind; the agitation thus originated ended in the rupture of a blood-vessel in the lungs; a rapid consumption ensued, and the succeeding acknowledgements from more candid critics, of the true greatness of his powers, were ineffectual to heal the wound thus wantonly inflicted.[264]

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[262] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, p. xxxvii.
[263] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, p. xxix.
[264] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (London: W.W. Norton, 1977; repr. 2003), p. 410.

Like James Currie, who had hoped to secure sympathy and perhaps some financial relief for Burns's widowed wife and fatherless children, Shelley's remarks — ostensibly to offer a corrective critical opinion — promote a narrative, biographical myth. Keats, of course, was not killed by negative reviews, but by Tuberculosis.

In John Gibson Lockhart's famous *Blackwood* review of 1818, he criticises Keats for being one of many poor imitators of a certain kind of lowly poetry in the aftermath of Burns's success. Nicholas Roe has illustrated the similar problems of cultural authenticity and posthumous transmission shared by Burns and Keats:

> […] Lockhart diagnosed the 'cockney' idiom of Keats's poetry as the symptom of a diseased imagination, a literary pathology which gave some credibility to the claims made by Shelley, Byron and others that Keats's consumption (a congenital susceptibility) had been brought on by hostile reviews. In a similar manner Burns's 'weakness' was perceived by some readers as intrinsic to both his literary genius and his early death on 21 July 1796. Thomas Duncan, for example, writing on 10 October 1796, aligned the 'indelicacy of our poet's humour' with his 'frequently faulty' versification and the 'radical misfortune' of his dialect.[265]

Roe goes on to quote similar sentiments expressed by Burns's first biographer, Heron, as well as Robert Louis Stephenson's quip, 'He died of being Robert Burns'.[266] Keats and Burns were both made to suffer for the ways in which they lived and spoke, and even in how they supposedly died. Keats had read Currie's biography of Burns and the popular narrative along with fatigue and other circumstances may have contributed to the 'strange mood' in which

[265] Roe, 'Authenticating Robert Burns', p. 209.
[266] Roe, 'Authenticating Burns', p. 209.

his first sonnet on Burns was written and sent in a letter to his brother Tom on the first of July 1818 from Dumfries:[267]

> The Town, the churchyard, & the setting sun,
> The Clouds, the trees, the rounded hills all seem
> Though beautiful, Cold—Strange—as in a dream,
> I dreamed long ago, now new begun
> The Shortlived, paly summer is but won
> From winters ague, for one hours gleam;
> Through sapphire warm, their stars do never beam,
> All is cold Beauty; pain is never done
> For who has mind to relish Minos-wise,
> The real of Beauty, free from that dead hue
> Fickly imagination & Sick pride
> Cast wan upon it! Burns! With honor due
> I have oft honoured thee, Great shadow; hide
> Thy face, I sin against thy native skies.[268]

The opening three and half lines read like a journal entry and are quite similar to what he includes in his letter:

[267] Richard Cronin has suggested that George Keats's illness, along with Tom's departure to America, took a psychological and emotional toll on Keats. Not knowing how long one brother might live, and if he might not see another again could have added to the gloomy disappointments experienced at Burns's burial place. (Lecture given at Keats Conference, Hampstead, London, May 2018).

[268] Although my quotations of Keats are taken from John Barnard's edition, previously cited (p. 263-64), it is worth noting the complicated textual history of this poem, particularly line seven where some editions use *though* instead of *through* and line eleven where some editions have *Sickly* instead of *Fickly*. Other textual complications of this poem have been helpfully untangled by J.C. Maxwell in his essay 'Keats's Sonnet on the Tomb of Burns' *Keats-Shelley Journal* 4 (1955), pp. 77-80.

> This Sonnet I have written in a strange mood, half asleep. I know not how it is, the Clouds, the sky, the Houses, all seem anti Grecian & anti Charlemagnish—I will endeavour to get rid of my prejudices & tell you fairly about the Scotch.[269]

'The' is repeated six times in the opening two lines, and the diction is simple, almost flat. However, by the end of the third line Keats has embarked on a temporally complicated set of seasonal images which operate as an emotional barometer and is perhaps the kind of rapid movement that Fiona Stafford refers to as Keats's 'painful oscillations of aspiration and despair':[270]

> Though beautiful, Cold—Strange—as in a dream,
> I dreamed long ago, now new begun
> The Shortlived, paly summer is but won
> From winters ague, for one hours gleam;
> Through sapphire warm, their stars do never beam,
> All is cold Beauty; pain is never done

'[As] in a dream' rhymes with the mood in which the sonnet was composed 'half asleep', though the strangeness is attributed to a dream from 'long ago'. Keats's letter also tells us his sonnet was written in the evening, and so the setting sun, the cold, and sleep are appropriate to the threshold of early dusk. Stafford's 'painful oscillations' are found where a 'long ago' dream is 'now new begun' and 'the shortlived summer' takes over from 'winters ague' but only 'for one hours gleam'. Nothing is settled, and by the eighth line the poem has done little

[269] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, p. 264.
[270] Stafford, *Local Attachments,* p. 227.

more than move from 'beautiful, cold' to 'cold Beauty'. The beginning of the sestet has remained obscure to critics.[271] Barnard's gloss of lines eight to twelve are as follows:

> Lines 8-12 should probably be regarded as meaning 'Pain is never done for him who has a mind to relish the full reality of beauty, and to discount (as can Minos, the judge of the dead in the underworld) the pallor which the deceiving imagination and human arrogance 'cast upon it!'[272]

But Barnard also concedes that 'the punctuation and meaning of the poem are uncertain' and this uncertainty can be felt in the tentative suggestion about how lines '8-12 should *probably* be regarded'. In O'Neill's essay 'Keats's Poetry: "The Reading of an Ever-Changing Tale"', Barnard's gloss is fleshed out, and drives closer to the heart of why Burns, and visiting Burns's tomb, was able to cause such deep poetic anxiety for Keats:

> [Barnard's gloss] is helpful, but it is worth adding that the passage has a tangled intensity illustrative of troubled feelings. In the same breath, the lines raise up and deplore. They set the Minos-like intuition of 'The real of beauty' above the hues cast by 'Sickly imagination' and 'sick pride', yet they associate such an intuition with endless 'pain' and a judge from Hades' […][273]

[271] John Glendening refers to the three poems of Keats's tour that are concerned with Burns as an 'unintended trilogy'. Along with Glendening, Stuart Sperry and Morris Dickstein refer to these poems as either the 'climax' or 'central' moment of Keats's summer tour. All three critics give incisive and largely persuasive readings, particularly of the two sonnets, yet all three grapple with the inescapable difficulty and obscurity of Keats's Burns sonnets, a difficulty which is still reflected in current criticism. Glendening 'Keats's Tour of Scotland'; Stuart M Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 132-54; Dickstein, *Keats and his poetry*.
[272] *John Keats: The Complete Poems,* ed. by John Barnard (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 626.
[273] O'Neill, 'An Ever-Changing Tale', p. 106.

'Tangled intensity' that 'raise up and deplore' is perhaps another way of describing 'painful oscillations'. O'Neill and Stafford are both able to locate a tension that Keats plays out for us in a few condensed lines. O'Neill also draws on these line's allusion to Hamlet's 'to be or not to be' speech — lines that Keats invokes often in sonnets about poetic posterity — and that 'pain is not without its positive side'.[274] The question of pain is perhaps another of the sonnet's ambiguities. In the eighth line 'pain is never done', where 'done' can be glossed as either 'pain is never finished,' ('endless pain') or 'pain is never administered'.

Nearly two weeks later, Keats had made it to Burns's cottage, where, still in a strange mood, he attempted another 'flat sonnet'. Three sustained discussions of Keats's Burns poems, by John Glendening, Morris Dickstein, and Stuart Sperry, as well as a briefer account by Stafford, read 'This Mortal Body of A Thousand Days' as ultimately unsatisfactory. Sperry calls the Sonnets on Burns an 'unsuccessful attempt to celebrate the genius of the older poet' and Glendening reads the sonnet as 'bear[ing] witness to a growing commitment to the painful northern world of alienation and acceptance'. [275]As the above critics have all shown, Keats's tour poems can be usefully qualified by the letters they either appeared in, or, as in the case of 'This Mortal Body' the letters that discuss the occasion of the poem itself. The letters both contextualise and illuminate Keats's moods, thoughts, reactions, and conflicted frustrations that produced these poems that are as important as they are difficult. Reading Keats's tour letters, we can see a pattern emerge in which optimism for a journey of experience designed to enrich poetic imagination is continually let down by what Sperry helpfully refers to as 'the persistent intrusiveness of inappropriate details, the tenuousness and instability of the marvellous, and the sense of paradox and irony that too often

[274] O'Neill, 'An Ever-Changing Tale', p. 106.
[275] Sperry, *Keats the Poet*, p. 138.; Glendening, 'Keats's Tour of Scotland', p. 94.

resulted'.[276] Keats began his tour hoping that it could serve as the catalyst for the life he wanted to live, writing to Benjamin Robert Haydon:

> I propose within a Month to put my Knapsack at my back and make a pedestrian tour through the North of England, and part of Scotland—to make a sort of Prologue to the Life I intend to pursue—that is to write, to study and to see all Europe at the lowest expence. I will clamber through the Clouds and exist.[277]

Keats's 'Prologue' would turn out to be a series of disappointments which culminated in an early return to Hampstead due to poor health. The first disappointment came in his visit to Ambleside and then Wordsworth's nearby home, Rydal Mount. Having enquired after Wordsworth to a waiter in Ambleside, Keats writes to his brother Tom:

> I enquired of the waiter for Wordsworth—he said he knew him, and that he had been here a few days ago, canvassing for the Lowthers. What think you of that—Wordsworth versus Brougham!! Sad—sad—sad—and yet the family has been his friend always.[278]

And when Keats and Brown arrived at Rydal, Wordsworth was not home. Curiously, Keats's encounter at Rydal Mount is left relatively bare. In his letter to Tom (which includes the above excerpts) he writes 'I cannot make my journal as distinct & actual as I could wish, from having been engaged in writing to George'.[279] and in his letter to George and Georgiana marking the same days, the only substantive addition to the Rydal Mount passage noting

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[276] Sperry, *Keats the Poet*, p. 138.
[277] *The Letters of John Keats,* ed. by Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 1958), I, p. 264. All subsequent quotations from Keats's letters are from Rollins' edition and are referred to as 'Keats, *Letters*'.
[278] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 299.
[279] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 305.

Wordsworth's absence is 'I was much disappointed'.[280] In his letter to Fanny Keats he skips over the account altogether. It is hard to gauge Keats's level of disappointment at this episode, although what is clear is that the experience ran contrary to the expectation; a trajectory that would follow him into Scotland.

Keats's oscillations continued as he travelled through Burns country. His letters treat the Scots with a mixture of abuse and praise and when he considers the fate of Burns, he abuses the 'Kirkmen' and tries to rescue Burns by making him a 'southern':

> These Kirkmen have done Scotland Harm—they have banished puns and laughing and kissing […]. I shall make a full stop at kissing for after that there should be a better parent-thesis: and go on to remind you of the fate of Burns. Poor unfortunate fellow—his disposition was southern—how sad it is when a luxurious imagination is obliged in self defence to deaden its delicacy in vulgarity, and riot in things attainable that it may not have leisure to go mad after things which are not.[281]

For Keats, Burns represents the robust, sensuous life rejected by 'Kirkmen', as well as an imagination stifled — stifled from delicacy into vulgarity, and away from an inclination towards the unattainable towards the attainable. Keats's suggestion that these dispositions of Burns make him Southern is worth pausing over. Byron was able to align himself with Burns by taking pride in his Scottish heritage and viewing himself as a kind of successor to Burns. Keats's claim, I would suggest, is attempting a similar kind of move. The letters continue to reject Burns's countrymen, especially the 'mahogany faced old Jackass', encountered at Burns's cottage who drank with Burns, and by making Burns 'southern' Keats, who makes comparisons of the Scottish landscape to Devon, brings one of his poetic heroes closer to

[280] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 302.
[281] Keats, *Letters*, I, pp. 319-20.

himself in an act of poetic kinship. Keats's letter to Reynolds, dated July 11th and the 13th, is worth quoting at length as it is perhaps his longest sustained tirade against the conditions that stifled Burns, as well as his own poetic imagination:

> We went to Kirk allow'y 'A Prophet is no Prophet in his own Country'—we went to the Cottage and took some Whiskey—I wrote a sonnet for the mere sake of writing some lines under the roof—they are so bad I cannot transcribe them—The Man at the Cottage was a great Bore with his Anecdotes—I hate the Rascal […] –he is a mahogany faced old Jackass who knew Burns—He ought to be kicked for having spoken to him. He calls himself a 'curious old Bitch'—but he is a flat old Dog […]—O the flummery of a birth place! Cant! Cant! Cant! […] the flat dog made me write a flat sonnet—my dear Reynolds—I cannot write about scenery and visitings—Fancy is indeed less than a present palpable reality, but it is greater than remembrance […]. One song of Burns's is of more worth to you than all I could think for a whole year in his native country—His Misery is a dead weight upon the nimbleness of one's quill—I tried to forget it—to drink Toddy without any Care—to write a merry Sonnet—it wont do—he talked with Bitches—he drank with Blackguards, he was miserable—We can see horribly clear in the works of such a man his whole life, as if we were God's spies. […][282]

Keats's quotation from the Gospels aligns with his claim that Burns was a southern. It also matches with Keats's own poetic identity. That Burns was better understood or better appreciated in England is an unusual remark, and should probably be read as Keats making a claim that he himself understood Burns better than those who had done a miserable job in erecting a tomb for him, or than those who knew and drank with him, or those who forced him into vulgarity. There is a second disappointment in Keats's visit to Burns's cottage,

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[282] Keats, *Letters*, I, pp. 324-25.

where the ‘flummery of a birthplace! Can’t! Can’t! Can’t!’ recalls his earlier failed visit to Ambleside and Rydal, where, upon finding out about Wordsworth’s campaigning, he laments it as ‘sad—sad—sad’. Keats blames the ‘flat dog’ as the cause for his ‘flat sonnet,’ but it is difficult to think of many Keats sonnets that would be considered ‘merry’. However, Keats’s arrival at the cottage, at least as penned to Reynolds, shows a marked difference to his approach to Ayrshire, where from the disappointment of Burns’s tomb, Keats’s hopes were revived:

> […] One of the pleasantest means of annulling self is approaching such a shrine as the Cottage of Burns—we need not think of his misery—that is all gone—bad luck to it—I shall look upon it hereafter with unmixed pleasure as I do upon my Stratford on Avon day with Bailey—I shall fill this sheet for you in the Bardies Country.[283]

and two days later, July 13th:

> We were talking on different and indifferent things, when on a sudden we turned a corner upon the immediate County of Air—the Sight was as rich as possible—I had no Conception that the native place of Burns was so beautiful—the idea I had was more desolate, his rigs of Barley seemed always to me but a few strips of Green on a cold hill—O Prejudice! It was rich as Devon.[284]

Keats continues in this vein, marvelling at the local sites that populated Burns’s poems such as the ‘Brig that Tam O’Shanter coss’ed’, and is overcome by a thrilled excitement that comes with touching the hallowed ground of one of his heroes.[285] Keats’s excitement,

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[283] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 322.
[284] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 323.
[285] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 323.

however, soon turned to disappointment. Although Keats's letter to Reynolds is the most severe indictment of his experience, the tone of his letter to Tom on the same subject is less vitriolic, though it expresses similar sentiments:

> Then we proceeded to the Cottage he was born in—there was a board to that effect by the door Side—it had the same effect as the same sort of memorial at Stratford on Avon—We drank some Toddy to Burns's Memory with an old Man who knew Burns—damn him—and damn his Anecdotes […]. There was something good in his description of Burns's melancholy the last time he saw him. I was determined to write a sonnet in the Cottage—I did—but it is so bad I cannot venture it here […].[286]

Tom was sick and perhaps Keats did not wish to trouble his brother with an ill-tempered letter. Keats did not want his brother to be 'vexed or bothered at any thing' and so perhaps the difference in letters attests to Keats as shrewd judge of audience, but it is curious on the back of his letter to Reynolds to hear any kind words about the man he considered a 'mahogony faced old jackass'.[287] What is common to both letters, however, is Keats's disappointment at the sonnet he produced in the cottage. Keats destroyed the sonnet, though not before Brown copied it down.

> This mortal body of a thousand days
> Now fills, O Burns, a space in thine own room,
> Where thou didst dream alone on budded bays,
> Happy and thoughtless of thy day of doom!
> My pulse is warm with thine old Barley-bree,
> My head is light with pledging a great soul,

[286] Keats, *Letters*, I, pp. 331-32.
[287] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 333.

My eyes are wandering, and I cannot see,
Fancy is dead and drunken at its goal;
Yet I can stamp my foot upon thy floor,
Yet can I ope thy window-sash to find
The meadow thou has tramped o'er and o'er,—
Yet can I think of thee till thought is blind,—
Yet can I gulp a bumper to thy name,—
O smile among the shades, for this is fame![288]

Keats, having had a drink of whisky, writes his second Burns sonnet, also produced in a strange mood. If the earlier sonnet's line about Minos has confused and intrigued critics, the opening line of 'This Mortal Body of a Thousand Days' is no less obscure, in part because out of the three Burns country poems Keats wrote, it has been given the least attention. Critics have at times taken Keats's letters surrounding the poem at face value. Glendenning says of the sonnet that Keats 'Finds himself cut off from Burns's life and unable to respond appropriately to his cottage'. Stafford reads the poem as an example of Keats's failed poetic experiment with imagination and landscape, writing 'At once, Keats's belief in the need to experience reality collapsed and the desire to have his imagination surpassed seemed ludicrously misplaced', and Sperry, who does not quote from the sonnet, notes 'Yet on Keats's arrival at the cottage any capability for such creation disappeared amid a sense of distraction and unhappiness too overwhelming to be resolved'.[289] All of these remarks depend on reading comments in Keats's letters about the poem and Burns, onto the poem itself, and on the fact that Keats was too embarrassed by the sonnet to transcribe it. However, depending too strongly on either approach — let alone both — is a risky move. Poets are

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[288] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, p. 274.
[289] Glendening, 'Keats's Scotland Tour', p. 93.; Stafford, *Local Attachments,* p. 250.; Sperry, *Keats the Poet,* p. 145.

sometimes excellent readers of their own works, but we too often mistake a poet's emotional biases for privileged knowledge. Likewise, with the letters: they are performative pieces of writing in their own right, and as we have seen, Keats does not own one true response to a situation; responses are conditioned by his intended recipient. Even if the sentiment remains largely the same, the poem itself is capable of existing in proximity to those sentiments and may vary when considered in a new creative act. Glendening thought that Keats's poem 'suggests the poet was a poor drinker'.[290] I am not so sure. As far as I know, all the critical responses to the sonnet's sestet remain largely negative, by which I mean the lines are taken as a continued disappointment of the octave. However, I suggest that the sonnet turns from gloom to defiant celebration. The octave opens with Keats's awareness of his own physicality in a place once occupied by one of his poetic heroes. The first line is difficult to gloss. In literal terms, 'a thousand days' is two years and nine months, which might rhyme with writing in the house where Burns spent his earliest years, but why should Keats adopt Burns's infant posture?[291] Or, perhaps we can read the line as intentionally indeterminate. 'A thousand days' *sounds* like a long time, but it isn't really. Of course, on a metrical level, the line carries a fine cadence, typical of the openings of his sonnets. Andrew Bennett, in his study *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* resists Gittings' claim that the opening line is purely rhetorical, and remarks:

> 'This Mortal Body', with the absent, mortal but immortalised body of Burns, the poem allows for an identification of the living poet with the immortal one, an identification most clearly articulated in the ambiguous deixis of the final line —'for this is fame!'— which leaves open the question of whether *this* is fame for Burns or for Keats (or both).[292]

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[290] Glendening, 'Keats's Scotland Tour', p. 94.
[291] Perhaps excuses can be made. Keats *had* been drinking, and while the lines scans well (much like 'When I have fears that I may cease to be'), it may not carry the semantic value usually desired by both poets and critics.
[292] Bennett, *Culture of Posterity*, p. 155.

While I read the last line as Keats's emboldened assertion of Burns's immortal fame, reading the line ambiguously is useful, and points to the larger tensions within Keats's Burns sonnet. Indeed, when it comes to addressing Keats's destruction of the sonnet, Bennett remarks 'the poem on Burns's fame is both destroyed and recorded as having been destroyed'.[293]

Keats tells us that his 'pulse is warm with barley-bree' and that his 'head is light with pledging a great soul'. Is Keats lightheaded from the drink, or from the thrill of sitting where Burns might have sat, writing lines where Burns might have written? Lines seven and eight are the most negative of the whole sonnet 'my eyes are wandering and I cannot see, / Fancy is dead and drunken at its goal' but they allow the poem to descend at the crucial moment before the turn and give the beginning of the sestet greater emphasis:

> Yet I can stamp my foot upon thy floor,
>
> Yet can I ope thy window-sash to find
>
> The meadow thou has tramped o'er and o'er,—
>
> Yet can I think of thee till thought is blind,—
>
> Yet can I gulp a bumper to thy name,—
>
> O smile among the shades, for this is fame!

Glendening reads 'yet' as Keats's awareness of his own mortality, 'Keats it still alive, but only for a while "yet"', and takes the last lines of the poem as 'wry humour'. Reading the concluding lines ironically is perhaps the only way to make sense of a negative reading of the sonnet, but I would like to offer a different reading. 'Yet' should be taken as 'and yet' or 'despite all of this' he can still stamp his foot down (much like the Scottish dancing he had

[293] Bennett, p. 155.

admired earlier in his tour), yet can he look out into the fields Burns walked, and raise his glass. The 'yet' also distinguishes between his emotional or visual uncertainties 'I cannot see' and a firm, tactile grounding in the physical act of stamping his foot. We should remember, too, that a 'bumper' is for toasting, suggesting a measure of happiness. The concluding couplet rises to a crescendo pressed on by the momentum of the preceding lines' anaphora, and despite the misfortune of Burns's life, despite Keats's own disappointments of his tour, and indeed in the cottage, he has made it to a site of deep emotional importance. Fame is not won in life's miserable circumstances, but in what remains after the fact. After all, what could be a better sign of poetic fame than another poet making a pilgrimage to a poet's birthplace? Wandering sight and wandering thought, first in line seven, and then line twelve, are clouded, though it is not clear why, or from what. The ending lines of the sonnet might also be read as a response to the earlier poem at Burns's tomb, which concludes:

> […] Burns! With honor due
> I have oft honoured thee. Great shadow; hide
> Thy face, I sin against thy native skies.

At Burns's burial place, Keats's imagery is tangled, and the use of honour/honoured is repetitive. Similarly, the great shadow, either the monument itself, or Burns's memory, causes Keats to hide his face, and apologise for a poem he views as a 'sin'. However, the cottage sonnet ends with a raised glass and a smile, where 'shades' calls us to remember the earlier 'shadow' and the exclamation point strikes a more confident and bold tone to the embarrassed disappointment two weeks prior.

Although only three of Keats's tour poems explicitly invoke Burns, two other poems 'Ah! Ken Ye What I Met the Day' and his sonnet 'Written Upon the Top of Ben Nevis', draw on images from his poems in 'Burns country', or rhyme with the images of earlier Burns

poems, while ‘Meg Merriless’ is a pastiche which humorously imitates the language and rhythms of Burns. Read together, these six poems form a loose narrative journey of fractured sight, tangled sensory responses to a new and sometimes strange geography, and a striving for assurance forged from a complicated array of personal trauma and disappointed expectations. ‘Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to Burns’s Country’ more commonly known by its first line, ‘There is a joy in footing slow across a silent plain’ and his remarkable sonnet ‘Written Upon the Top of Ben Nevis’ (also known by its first line ‘Read Me a Lesson Muse, and Speak it Loud’), are an interesting addendum to the places of pilgrimage that were so unsatisfactory to Keats. Although these poems do not mention Burns by name (other than in the title), they offer the distance necessary for Keats to be able to sit more comfortably with his tensions and fraught contradictions. ‘There is a Joy in Footing Slow’ is in conversation with the sonnet destroyed at Burns’s cottage and attempts to re-tread some of the same emotions of the earlier sonnet by using words or phrases familiar to ‘This Mortal Body of A Thousand Days’. The poem is written in fourteen syllable couplets, and lines nine through twelve echo images and ideas expressed in his birthplace sonnet:

> When weary feet forget themselves upon a pleasant turf,
>
> Upon hot sand, or flinty road, or Sea shore iron scurf,
>
> Toward the Castle or the Cot where long ago was born
>
> One who was great through mortal days and died of fame unshorn.[294] (9-12)

The cot and ‘mortal days’ are a clear return to the tangled thoughts expressed in Keats’s sonnet, as are the ‘weary steps,’ again seeking to ‘forget’ themselves in a new locale in hopes of overcoming the previous week’s disappointments. But poetry is an act of remembering,

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[294] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, p. 279.

and having written a sonnet, destroyed the sonnet, and then written multiple letters telling of the poem's destruction, the experience that motivated the poet to write was still fresh. The 'pleasant turf' recalls 'the meadow thou has trampèd o'er and o'er' especially in the context of memory and forgetting. Keats appears to set a distance between this poem, written in the Highlands, by suggesting that Burns was 'long ago born'. Time may be relative, of course, but the earlier sonnets, situated at important locations of literary pilgrimage grasp for an immediacy and urgency not looked for in the slow, drawn out lines, written far away from Burns's meadows, bridges, or hillsides: 'Light heather-bells may tremble, then, but they are far away' (13) acknowledges this distance. Lines thirteen through twenty-seven slip into a conditional, subjunctive mood before returning to the pain encountered in Ayrshire:

> He might make tremble many a Man whose Spirit had gone forth
> To find a Bard's low Cradle place about the silent North.
> Scanty the hour and few the steps beyond the Bourn of Care,
> Beyond the sweet and bitter world – beyond it unaware;
> Scanty the hour and few the steps because a longer stay
> Would bar return and make a Man forget his mortal way.[295] (27-32)

This is a poem of retreating and retracing steps. The same impulses that allow for Bennett to remark on the tension in Keats's decision to both destroy his sonnet and record its destruction are still at play in 'There is a Joy'. The poem's long lines with slow iambic feet mimic the poet's own move into silence and towards nothingness. But it is not just the pain of Keats's recent trip to Burns's tomb and birth cottage, but a more intense personal pain concerned with the fear of losing his brothers, either to illness or foreign lands:

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[295] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, p. 279

> O horrible! to lose the sight of well remember'd face,
>
> Of Brother's eyes, of Sister's Brow, constant to every place;
>
> Filling the Air as on we move, with Portraiture intense,
>
> More warm than those heroic tints that fill a Painter's sense[296] (33-36)

These lines, like so many of the lines in his Burns poems, are about sight and sensation. Inward sight restored by intense concentration on the pain that causes outward blindness. When considered alongside the other poems concerned with Burns during the 1818 tour, 'There is a Joy' reads as both reaching back to his earlier sonnets at Burns's tomb and cottage, as well as his failed experience at Ambleside and Rydal, while also anticipating the sonnet written on top of Ben Nevis, 'Read me a Lesson, Muse, and Speak it Loud'. 'There is a Joy in Footing Slow' concludes thus:

> One hour, half ideot he stands by mossy waterfall,
>
> But in the very next he reads his Soul's memorial:
>
> He reads it on the Mountain's height where chance he may sit down
>
> Upon rough marble diadem, that Hill's eternal crown.
>
> Yet be the Anchor e'er so fast, room is there for a prayer.
>
> That Man may never loose his Mind <on> Mountains bleak and bare;
>
> That he may stray league after League some great Birthplace to find,
>
> And keep his vision clear from speck, his inward sight unblind.[297] (41-48)

Line forty-one recalls Keats's visit to Ambleside, where he describes the waterfall in wondrous detail:

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[296] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, p. 279

[297] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, p. 280.

> […] the waterfall itself, which I came suddenly upon, gave me a pleasant twinge […] we afterwards moved away a space, and saw nearly the whole more wild, streaming silverly through the trees. What astonishes me more than any thing is the tone, the coloring, the slate, the stone, the moss, the rock-weed; or, if I may so say, the intellect, the countenance of such places. The space, the magnitude of mountains and waterfalls are well imagined before one sees them; but this countenance or intellectual tone must surpass every imagination and defy any remembrance.[298]

Keats's letter to Tom is filled with beautiful, florid descriptions of his journey through Ambleside and later into Burns country. After describing the waterfalls, he tells his brother, by way of disagreement with Hazlitt, that 'I never forgot my stature so completely — I live in the eye; and my imagination surpassed, is at rest'.[299] And so when composing his poem in the Highlands several weeks later, this moment in Ambleside, coupled with reflections on his brothers, and anticipating his struggles with mental sight still to come, is blended with his experience at Burns's tomb ('reads his soul's memorial,') and culminates with his experience at Burns's cottage, 'That he may stray league after League some great Birthplace to find'. While the references to Burns and Wordsworth are clear, there is a further ambiguity with 'Birthplace'. This is the trip that would teach Keats how to write poetry, and how to become a poet, and so he again appears to be blending Burns country with a kind of birth-place for his poetic soul, where born again, his 'inward sight' will be 'unblind'. 'There is a Joy' still suffers from 'painful oscillations' and 'tangled intensities' and it is not until what I believe to be his final Burns poem, 'Read me a Lesson Muse, and Speak it Loud' that any sense of resolution is achieved:

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[298] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 301.
[299] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 301.

Read me a Lesson muse, and speak it loud
Upon the top of Nevis blind in Mist!
I look into the chasms and a Shroud
Vaporous doth hide them; just so much I wist
Mankind do know of Hell. I look o'erhead,
And there is sullen Mist; even so much
Mankind can tell of Heaven: Mist is spread
Before the Earth beneath me – even such
Even so vague is Man's sight of himself.
Here are the craggy Stones beneath my feet;
Thus much I know, that, a poor witless elf,
I tread on them; that all my eye doth meet
Is mist and Crag, not only on this height,
But in the World of thought and mental might—[300]

For the first time, Keats is able to embrace fully what he cannot see. Physical realities are clearly mapped onto mental struggles, something Keats can see from his clouded vantage on Ben Nevis. What is lost in sight, Keats can make up for in the physical certainty of his tread. With feet firmly on the ground, he is able to accept that his mind's eye, his poetic being, will have to make concessions on his expectations in order to 'clamber through the clouds and exist'. Perhaps this sonnet is more settled as it is most removed from the sites of literary pilgrimage, and in a place where Keats can comfortably sit and contemplate all of his disappointments.

[300] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, pp. 281-82.

Summiting Ben Nevis only to find the view obscured by mist provides a symbolically neat alignment with Keats's Northern trip as a whole. Continually making pilgrimages and trips — often by foot — to destinations that ultimately led to an anti-climax, either in Wordsworth's or Burns's homes, are mirrored by the misfortune of climbing Ben Nevis — the highest peak in the Nation — yet not being able to see what he came for. And yet, unlike Keats's angry reactions to finding Wordsworth out campaigning for the Tories '[Sad – Sad – Sad]', or the man at Burns's cottage ('Cant! Cant! Cant!'), Keats's sonnet at Ben Nevis takes the disappointment in stride, accepting the physical and metaphysical limitations placed upon him by circumstance. Simon Bainbridge, in his recent study, *Mountaineering and British Romanticism: The Literary Cultures of Climbing, 1770-1836*, contends that Keats's sonnet written on Ben Nevis accords with his developing poetic conceptions which sits between '*Negative Capability'* and the 'egotistical sublime', to which he gives the term 'negative sublime'. Bainbridge rightly notes the differences between Keats's letter to his brother Tom, and the limits of vision described in the sonnet. Most importantly, perhaps, Bainbridge sees the link between Keats's obsession over poetic achievement and its incompatibility with the reality of human experience:

> As a statement of not knowing, Keats's sonnet echoes his conception of '*Negative Capability*', which he famously defined in December 1817 as 'when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'. In his sonnet, Keats presents an enforced example of such a state, in which any sense of visual clarity is denied by the atmospheric conditions. While Keats's letter voices some frustration at the loss of the summit view, his sonnet is more reconciled to the lack of certainty imposed upon him. According to Keats, the 'quality' of '*Negative capability*' 'went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously'. On the

> summit of Ben Nevis, Keats realized that becoming a 'man of Achievement' was more about understanding the human condition than climbing Great Britain's highest mountain.[301]

This reconciliation on the top of Ben Nevis had been expressed, albeit less confidently and less explicitly, in the turn of his sonnet in Burns's cottage where 'And yet' takes a hard look at the immediate disappointments, placing them in the greater context of the experience of the journey, as well as Burns's own achievements.

Keats's ability to compose such a reflective and accepting sonnet in the midst of what must have been grave disappointment affirms Keats's developing acceptance of his previous disappointments as expressed in 'There is a Joy in Footing Slow Across a Silent Plain'. Reaching the mountain's summit, and doing so with the expectation of sublime views, only to find himself shrouded in mist, was only a momentary setback, and a creatively productive one at that. Keats was able to take wisdom from experience and became increasingly less likely to dwell on what the tour was not. He had, after all, still made visits to homes of two poetic heroes, written a sonnet under the roof of Burns's cottage, and climbed the highest mountain in Britain. The failures and disappointments contained in those experiences were of less significance than the acceptance of his own limitations, and the creative power in acknowledging such a fact.

2.3 Keats's Meditations on Poetic Posterity: Chatterton and Burns

Keats was not to know he would die young, but the remarkable speed at which he produced brilliant poetry suggested the pressure he felt to immortalise himself in verse, and his

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[301] Simon Bainbridge, *Mountaineering and British Romanticism: The Literary Cultures of Climbing, 1770-1836* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 122-23.

appreciation of both Chatterton and Burns only enhanced his awareness of what could await.[302] Three years before his tour, and what became the most productive years of his career, Keats had composed a sonnet and verse epistle about Chatterton. Although the poem 'To George Felton Matthew' is the only mention of Burns and Chatterton together, and is more of an acknowledgement of Keats's enjoyment of their poetry (along with that of Milton and Shakespeare), his two sonnets on the respective poets strike similar tones, and suggest Keats held them in similar regard. That Keats chose the sonnet form for each homage is also intriguing. The first sonnet to Chatterton 'Oh Chatterton! How Very Sad thy fate!' laments his early death, calling into question Keats's own mortality. Keats's language is reminiscent of Wordsworth's great elegy 'A Slumber did my Spirit Seal' with his use of phrases such as 'human fears', as well as 'rolling spheres'. Imagery from this sonnet also presages 'When I have fears that I may cease to be'.[303] Keats's meditations on the poet's struggle for immortality are intensified in his reflections on Burns and Chatterton.

Although Chatterton and Burns stand as companion figures, Keats's sonnet to Burns, 'This Mortal Body of a Thousand Days' praises Burns the poet much more than his homage to Chatterton praises the poetry of Chatterton. Despite Keats's admiration for Chatterton, the 'Oh Chatterton!' sonnet's treatment of the young poet is exactly the kind of engagement Hazlitt scorned in his lecture, as the poem pays far more attention to Chatterton's life than it does his works as a poet, unlike his later sonnets to Burns. In the eyes of Wordsworth and Keats, Chatterton is mourned for what he could have been, whereas Burns was mourned for what he was. Burns's career was short. Ten years after his debut volume was published in Kilmarnock he was dead. However, Burns experienced success, celebrity, and fame in his lifetime. Keats's sonnet for Chatterton affirms Hazlitt's sentiment, as he laments 'How soon

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[302] John Barnard's introduction to his recent 21st-century Oxford Author's helpfully illustrates important bursts of productivity in Keats's career, as well as some of the motivating forces behind these periods. John Barnard, *21st-Century Oxford Authors: John Keats*, ed. by John Barnard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[303] Keats, *Complete Poems,* p. 40.

the film of death obscur'd that Eye', or later referring to him as a 'half-blown flower'. The overriding tone of the sonnet is of pity. Conversely, 'This Mortal Body of a Thousand Days' begins with a meditation on Keats's own mortal fears. Sitting in Burns's cottage, Keats is overwhelmed by Burns's celebrity and greatness, his 'head is light with pledging a great soul' and the poem carries a maudlin excitement in writing poetry where Burns might have written. Keats's sonnet also pledges to do something his homage to Chatterton would not do: he seeks to imitate Burns. 'Yet can I gulp a bumper to thy name,– | O Smile among the shades, for this is fame!' Despite the rumours of Burns's alcoholism, Keats can comfortably drink to his memory. Keats mourns Chatterton, and even mourns his own mortality, but he celebrates Burns. Symbolically, the connections were hard to resist, but when it came to honouring Chatterton and Burns in verse, Keats illuminated the differences between the two poets.

In Stuart Curran's discussion of the Romantic sonnet, he tells us 'No English Romantic spent more time writing about writing than Keats. The sonnets on *King Lear*, on Homer, on Robert Burns realise an intensity of presence and response, — even an anxiety — as Keats contemplates what at once excites, troubles, and mocks him'.[304] The problems of mortality and fame reflected in his sonnets for Chatterton and Burns are the problems Keats seeks to annihilate in his sonnet 'When I have fears that I may cease to be'. There is an echo in the last line 'Till Love and Fame to Nothingness do sink.' with the concluding line of 'This Mortal Body', 'O smile among the shades for this is fame!'. In the case of the Burns sonnet, fame is being honoured by future poets. Keats, in writing his homage to Burns has validated Burns's own lasting fame, but a meditation on whether he can achieve the fame of Burns or Chatterton forces him away from his own ambitions. The obsession with youth, fame, and beauty are all at stake for Keats in this sonnet. His fears are compounded, disrupted, and eventually annihilated. The fears meditated on in this sonnet are very similar to

[304] Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 52.

Wordsworth's concerns in 'Resolution and Independence'. Indeed, 'the fear that kills | The hope that is unwilling to be fed' (120-21) plagues Keats whose logic is confused and threatened by thoughts of his mortality. Again, these fears also motivated Wordsworth's concerns as he was haunted by Chatterton and Burns, or 'mighty poets in their misery dead' (123).

The conditional logic in the octave of 'When I have fears' is disrupted by the abstract physical concerns of the sestet. The opening eight lines are clearly ordered and the fears which condition the thoughts of mortality are easily traced. Beginning the *volta* with the conjunction 'And' the order of the octave is strained by the new, abstracted fears of love. 'And' is a lateral and complicated move. Part of the confusion that arises in this sonnet is where, exactly, do we locate the turn? Keats has Shakespeare's sonnets in mind, particularly sonnet sixty-four. Keats explicitly echoes Shakespeare's sixty-fourth sonnet beginning 'When I have seen by Time's fell hand defac'd', which deals with similar questions of time and posterity, as well as the construction 'When I have', which recurs three times in sonnet sixty-four.[305] Despite the Shakespearean rhyme scheme of the sonnet the poem is not grouped by three quatrains and a couplet, but as fourteen lines grouped together. Although the visual representation of the sonnet is not unusual, it does, in part, motivate the confusion of poem's turn: We might expect it in the ninth line, 'And when I feel' (a further delay of our expectations) but rhythmically and sonically we expect the resolution in the concluding couplet. The introduction of a paratactic structure disrupts and undermines the order of the preceding lines and ultimately moves the poem towards annihilation. Further complications arise with Keats's fear that he will lose out on 'unreflecting love' forcing him into a moment of crisis that cannot be resolved. 'Unreflecting' suggests a consuming, or absorbing of his

[305] William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets*, ed. by G. Blackmore Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 62-64.; See also, Stephen Regan's discussion of Shakespeare's influence on Keats's sonnet, as well as his deft, compelling reading of the sonnet as a whole in, *The Sonnet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 115-16.

love, which is rejected for isolation and nothingness. The concluding two and a half lines of the sonnet represent the poem's second turn, wherein the logic of the octave is thrown into crisis with the sestet, and resolved unhappily in the ending couplet. Keats achieves the effect of nothingness by disrupting his argument and negating the original conditional 'if' 'then' problem that we expect to be resolved. Keats cannot offer a solution to his fears of dying before he writes everything he wants to write, or facing up to the physical consequences of mortality, or the problem of romantic love, and so even the thought of losing out on all forces him to 'stand alone and think' until 'Love and Fame to nothingness do sink'. In a superb display of negative capability, or — existing in contraries — thinking both causes and negates annihilation. Part of the problem in Keats's troubled meditation is the problem of lasting fame. The Romantics' recurring concern with immortalising the self through poetry (though they were not alone in this) is one of the problems throughout 'Resolution and Independence'. Keats immortalises Chatterton and Burns through his dedicatory sonnets, and his sonnet written at Burns's cottage echoes the fears of the poem he had written six months earlier. The anxiety of 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' is partially motivated by Keats's concern that he cannot immortalise himself through his verse. However, Keats is unable to do for himself what he can do for his poetic influences. Chatterton and Burns are successful examples of lasting poetic fame, although part of their lasting poetic recognition is derived from poems like 'Resolution and Independence' and 'When I have fears' that both consciously and subconsciously contribute to their respective myths.

In April 1819, nearly a year after the aborted 1818 tour, Keats penned two sonnets on fame. Both sonnets offer an almost playful reconfiguration of the artist's tortured relationship to fame. The first sonnet 'Fame, Like a Wayward Girl, Will still Be Coy' proposes a more disaffected courtship of the muse and leaves us with the warning:

Ye love-sick Bards, repay her scorn for scorn,
   Ye Artists lovelorn, madmen that ye are!
Make your best bow to her and bid adieu,
Then, if she likes it, she will follow you.[306] (11-14)

These lines appear to suggest a more comfortable, less fraught contemplation of posterity than either 'When I have fears' or the sonnets written from Burns country. But Keats does not appear to have left all of his fears behind in Scotland. His second sonnet, accompanied by a well-known proverb curiously inverted, echoes refrains written both at Burns's cottage, and later in the Highlands:

"You cannot eat your cake and have it too"- Proverb

How fever'd is the Man who cannot look
   Upon his mortal days with temperate blood,
Who vexes all the leaves of his life's book,
   And robs his fair name of its maidenhood;
It is as if the Rose should pluck herself,
   Or the ripe Plum finger its misty bloom,
As if a Naiad, like a meddling elf,
   Should darken her pure grot with muddy gloom;
But the Rose leaves herself upon the Briar,
   For winds to kiss and grateful Bees to feed,
And the ripe Plum still bears its dim attire,
   The undisturbed Lake has crystal space;

[306] Keats, *Oxford Authors,* p. 356.

> Why then should Man teasing the world for grace,
>
> Spoil his salvation for a fierce miscreed?[307]

The first sonnet is a warning against chasing too hard after fame, as it is more likely to come unsought for. The second sonnet likewise suggests a rebuke to those who cannot patiently wait for creativity or recognition to take root independent of the creator. What is striking about this sonnet, and what causes us to return to the poems of 1818 is the 'mortal days' mentioned in the sonnet's second line. 'Mortal days' immediately reminds us of both 'This Mortal Body of a Thousand Days' and 'There is a Joy in Footing Slow'. 'This Mortal Body' is as concerned with fame and posterity as anything else Keats wrote, and the return of the phrase suggests that the tangled complexities of that sonnet, and of that tour, were still on Keats's mind when he wrote these two poems. But these poems are of a different breed to his earlier meditations on fame, and perhaps resonate more with the tone of his lines on Ben Nevis. Keats seems to have kept the lesson learned from the peaceful distance found on the top of Ben Nevis.

Now time, as well as geographical space, have further moderated the artist's relationship to fame and posterity. Was Keats fevered while writing his sonnet in Burns's cottage? He certainly seemed incapable of writing his poems with 'temperate blood'. The first realisation of the sonnet comes in the fifth and sixth lines: 'It is as if the rose should pluck herself | Or the ripe plum finger its misty bloom'. However, the 'meddling elf' of line seven offers a brief resistance (and perhaps an echo of the 'poor, witless elf' of 'Read Me a Lesson'), and the poem has only solved half of its problem. The sestet suggests not only that fame can't be worried into being, but that it requires external nourishments such as 'winds to kiss and grateful bees to feed'. Similarly, 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' the

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[307] Keats, *Oxford Authors,* p. 356.

imagery of ripeness, either of grain or fruit, is employed, representing the tensions of mortal anxieties and the patience required to transcend them. Keats ends his second sonnet to fame on a more fiery or resolute note than his first sonnet. The first, playing out its metaphor of courtship playfully suggests that fame, like a girl, may follow if moved by your overtures. In the second sonnet, salvation is at stake. Not only should the artist not try to worry his work into being, doing so risks robbing 'his fair name of its maidenhood' and all for a false creed. In this respect, the sonnet's logic is circular. A calm head is needed to produce the work with the best chance of succeeding, (although that should not be its primary concern), and even if the poetry is successful, you may not live to enjoy the fruits of your labours. The sonnet's strongest advice comes in its opening line, and is also expressed in the inverted proverb inserted as its epigraph. 'You cannot eat your cake and have it too,' a fitting and clever opening to a poem that cautions the artist about wanting fame, finding fame, and experiencing fame. You cannot have it all. 'Fame,' however, is not mentioned once in the sonnet, unlike the first sonnet where it is the first word.

'Mortal days' is not the only link between Keats's second sonnet to fame and 'This Mortal Body'. Much like 'There is a Joy', echoes from the discarded poem find their way into new material. Fame, or the processes by which fame is won, is a primary concern for Keats's cottage sonnet. 'Temperate blood' recalls Keats's 'warm pulse' and the poem's frenzied ending, where the later sonnet sits at a calmer remove and can coolly discuss fame without the anxiety of Burns's birthplace or tomb and all the distractions held there.[308]

Glendening has noted that after the 1818 tour, Keats didn't mention Burns again, and certainly not in any substantial way.[309] And while a concordance of Keats's works substantiates the claim, it doesn't tell the whole story. Glendening's comment is meant to

[308] Poetic fame and mortality, as well as 'temperate blood' are all mentioned in 'Lines on Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair': 'Yet, at the moment, temperate was my blood. | I thought I had beheld it from the flood' (41-41), Keats, '*Oxford Authors*', p. 107.
[309] Glendening, 'Keats's Scotland Tour' p. 97.

illustrate the limited effect or influence Burns held for Keats, but risks obscuring the issue. While Keats did not meditate on Burns in the same way after 1818, he only lived three more years, and may well have died before his pen had gleaned his teeming brain. Glendening's remark also ignores other possible connections to Burns in his poetry, such as the above sonnets on fame. While I do not wish to suggest that 'How Fever'd is the man who cannot look' is a 'Burns poem' in the way of his 1818 poems, we can see that Keats's own crisis of poetic development is bound up with the language and experience of his 1818 tour, specifically of his sometimes painful, sometimes celebratory engagements with Burns's grave and birthplace.

Perhaps Jacobus's claims that Burns provided Wordsworth with an 'approach to poetry' might also apply to Keats, though the influence is not nearly as comprehensive for Keats as it was Wordsworth. However, he is nonetheless the model of a poet who struggled and succeeded, who found fame and recognition and yet died in miserable circumstances. In Burns, Keats recognised a poet who was maligned for his language, denigrated for his class, died young though not obscure, and wrote outside the traditions that marked him out as other. When it came to the anxieties of fame and death, Burns was as important for Keats as Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton. But the proximity of Burns's life to Keats's own allows for greater reflection and consideration of what success meant for the living.

The sonnets on fame could only be written with the wisdom that came from the failed experiences of the northern tour. The hopes of the Scottish tour were expressed in deeply self-conscious poems, a tour he believed would be an important and necessary step in his poetic development, where he would 'clambour through the clouds and exist'. Indeed, it is Keats's self-consciousness that we watch evolve throughout these poems. Dickstein, in his preface to *Keats and his Poetry* proposes to treat the poems, letters, and biographical events

of 1818 as ‘scattered parts of a single puzzle, fragments of a larger poem’.[310] Dickstein’s study ‘attempts to explore Keats’s own mode of subjective reflection’, as it evolved throughout his poetic career.[311] Here, ‘subjective reflection’ is largely concerned with self-consciousness, and self-consciousness as a central concern of Romantic poetry. The poems I have been discussing, beginning (chronologically) with ‘When I have fears that I may cease to be’ through the tour poems, and concluding with the two sonnets on fame, are all highly self-conscious poems, and a large part of that self-consciousness is derived from each poem being, to varying degrees, concerned with the act of poetic creation or poetic achievement. Poetic achievement or ‘achieved greatness’ weighed heavily on Keats, and the urgency and frequency which these concerns are taken up in Keats’s poetry is both remarkable and unique. Although the motivations for the poems on Burns were occasioned by the various disappointments of circumstance, they are in keeping with Keats’s habit of writing poems on or about his influences. As Dickstein has illustrated, one of the binding images or tropes of Keats’s poems (usually sonnets) to his poetic heroes is that of winter, and cycles of renewal: ‘These months are full of appeals to the great poets, to Milton and Shakespeare in January, Spenser in February, and now Homer […]’ and while a discussion of Burns in these terms is not comprehensively undertaken, it is alluded to with an apposite quotation from the sonnet at Burns’s tomb. [312] Without repeating Dickstein’s argument, I wish to return to his work and emphasise the relationship of Burns in Keats’s mind, to Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton, as well as other brushes with greatness, such as Keats’s reading of Chapman’s Homer, and seeing the Elgin Marbles. As already noted, Keats compares Burns’s cottage to Shakespeare’s home, and the language not just of winter, but of shadow and shade in his sonnet at Burns’s tomb, recall lines from his sonnet ‘On Seeing the Elgin Marbles’:

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[310] Dickstein, p. xv.
[311] Dickstein, p. xii.
[312] Dickstein, p. 134

> Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
> Bring round the heart an undescribable feud;
> So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
> That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
> Wasting of old time—with a billowy main—
> A sun—a shadow of a magnitude.[313] (9-14)

'[A] shadow of a magnitude' reminds us of the 'great shadow' in Dumfries, and more tellingly, the overriding concerns of the Elgin Marbles sonnet are well matched to the fears of 1818:

> My Spirit is too weak—Mortality
>   Weighs heavily upon me like unwilling sleep,
> And each imagined pinnacle and steep
>   Of godlike hardship, tells me I must die
> Like a sick Eagle looking at the sky.
>   Yet 'tis a strange luxury to weep
>   That I have not the cloudy winds to keep,
> Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.[314] (1-8)

It is not just the fears of mortality, and the weakness of spirit that can only be revived by a bumper of whisky, an imitation of Burns, that speak to this earlier sonnet, but also the tangles and oscillations noted by Stafford and O'Neill, and the deadening of the senses, chiefly of sight. The 'undescribable feud' of the heart is symptomatic of that familiar Keatsian tension,

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[313] Keats, *Oxford Authors,* p. 13.
[314] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, p. 13.

and it should not surprise us that certain anxieties attached to viewing classical artefacts are at play while attempting to respond to the grandeur of Burns country, and Burns's tomb. What I am suggesting with this brief comparison, is that when attending to sites of greatness, or paying homage to celebrated influences, we can see repetitions of mortal anxieties, which tend to manifest themselves in similar ways: with a loss of sight, or generally conflicted and tangled engagements.

In May 1818, roughly two months before beginning his tour, Keats penned a sonnet 'To Homer'. The sonnet takes up concerns already familiar to Keats. Dickstein discusses the wintery imagery of this sonnet in relation to his other poems to poets such as Milton and Spenser, saying of the poem 'The sonnet to Homer is explicitly about poetic creation [...]'.[315] Dickstein's close attention to this series of Keats's poems is elegantly and persuasively argued, but I would add one layer to the discussion. Issues of sight and the blurring of physical and mental vision can be found in nearly every poem of this period concerned with poetic creation, and so Homer, the blind Bard, is the perfect poet for Keats to pay homage to two months before he began his tour:

Standing aloof in giant ignorance,
   Of thee I hear and of the Cyclades
As one who sits ashore and longs perchance
   To visit dolphin-coral in deep seas,
So wast thou blind;—but then the veil was rent,
   For Jove uncurtain'd Heaven to let thee live,
And Neptune made for thee a spumy tent,
   And Pan made sing for thee his forest-hive;

[315] Dickstein, p. 133.

> Aye on the shores of darkness there is light,
>
> And precipices show untrodden green,
>
> There is a budding morrow in midnight,
>
> There is a triple sight in blindness keen;
>
> Such seeing hast thou, as it once befel
>
> To Dian, Queen of Earth, and Heaven, and Hell.[316]

Homer's physical blindness is transcended through the 'veil' 'rent' by Jove, and Keats, speaking for himself as much as Homer, suggests that 'There is a triple sight in blindness keen'. Keats's unabashed obsession over poetic achievement suggests here that possessing an awareness of the self's blindness might lead to a 'triple sight' or a rending of the veil. Dark shores, untrodden precipices, and blindness would all be put to the test over the next few months, and despite the disappointments and failures of the tour, Keats's poetry and letters written before his trip display extraordinary prescience. Around the same time as the Homer sonnet, Keats wrote in a letter to Reynolds 'We read fine things but never feel them to the full until we have gone the same steps as the Author'.[317]

The effect Burns had on Keats in 1818 is evident. However, there is almost no attention given to the larger influence of Burns on Keats's poetry. Burns's poem 'The Vision' (already echoed in *The Eve of St. Agnes*) provides an opportunity to see how Burns was similarly concerned with issues of fame and poetic achievement, and the mortal anxieties that attend such fears. Although Dickstein does not undertake any close readings of Burns, he does acknowledge the role he plays as a Romantic poet as well as a subject for Keats, Wordsworth, and others: 'The place of Burns in the Romantic pantheon is an important one, as a poet, surely, but also as a saint and martyr to the cause of poetry'.[318] Although Burns can

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[316] Keats, *Oxford Authors*, p. 147.
[317] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 279.
[318] Dickstein, p. 170

contemplate his role as poet with more light-heartedness and play than Keats, we see how they were both burdened with the self-consciousness attached to fame, and necessarily anxious about the poets that came before and succeeded. Burns begins his poem in a setting similar to 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' with a weary farmer returning to his cottage for some quiet relief after the arduous toils of the day. No sooner has Burns's speaker found repose by the fireplace than fears about his poetic abilities intrude upon his restless mind:

> All in this mottie, misty clime,
> I backward mus'd on wasted time,
> How I had spent my *youthfu' prime,*
> An' done nae-thing,
> But stringing blethers up in rhyme
> For fools to sing. (19-24)

Burns follows on with what might have been had he chosen a more financially viable vocation, and concludes with an oath swearing off the writing of poetry before the providential appearance of the local muse 'Coila' appears:

> I started, mutt'ring blockhead! Coof!
> And heav'd on high my wauket loof,
> To swear by a' yon starry roof,
> Or some rash aith,
> That I, henceforth, would be *rhyme-proof*
> Till my last breath—
>
> When click! The *string* the *snick* did draw;
> And jee! The door gaed to the wa';

And by my ingle-lowe I saw,

Now bleezan bright,

A tight, outlandish *Hizzie,* braw,

Come full in sight.[319] (31-42)

These lines are tinged with the playful humour familiar in much of Burns's poetry, where the farmer-come-poet must self-consciously invoke his own limited capabilities before feigning deference to the greater powers of his poetic Muse. Coila is little more than a personified composite of the natural world Burns knew and loved, but is imbued with an authenticating Scottish authority that can legitimate Burns's verse. Although the conceit of 'The Vision' already vindicates and validates Burns's decision to write poetry, the poem enters into its pre-ordained dialogue with a Scottish muse as a way of articulating the abilities required for poetic fame. Burns's feminising and sexualising of his muse reminds us of Keats's first sonnet to fame where he does essentially the same thing. Burns's muse seems to come from his hybrid-blend of classical and folkloric traditions, which again adds to its authority:

Down flow'd her robe, a *tartan* sheen,

Till half a leg was scrimply seen;

And such a *leg!* My bonnie JEAN

Could only peer it;

Sae straught, sae taper, tight and clean,

Nane else came near it.[320] (61-66)

[319] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, pp. 103-04.
[320] Burns, *Poems and songs*, I, pp. 104-05.

Burns earlier refers to Coila as a '*Hizzie'* (as well as 'sister') which can mean anything from a 'silly girl' to a 'whore' but is in either case sexually charged. We can compare these lines with Keats's sonnets on fame where fame is considered as 'a wayward girl' (1), a Gipsey (5), a 'jilt' (7), and 'sister-in-law to jealous Potiphar' (10). Or in the second sonnet on fame which indulges in the masturbatory imagery of the rose that 'should pluck herself' or 'the ripe plumb fingering its misty bloom'.

Keats's poems do not express the same level of confidence or assuredness as Burns's poetry does when it comes to fame. Indeed, part of what makes Keats's poetry on fame or poetic ambition so consuming is the anxiety that attends each poem. However, Keats does engage his playful side in his first fame sonnet 'Fame, like a wayward girl'. While stylistic and temperamental differences separate the poetry of Burns and Keats, they are unified by a shared belief that fame can transcend the more tangible successes of mortal life, and a striving after poetic fame 'is not simply a vanity'. Dickstein discusses the importance of these two sonnets, and his reading of these poems can helpfully contribute to a discussion of these concerns alongside Burns's poetry. Thinking of the second sonnet, Dickstein writes:

> He writes a poem not about servitude to fame but about the mind itself. The desire for fame, he realizes, is not simply a vanity (as he had treated it, with fine wit, in the first sonnet) ; this wish for secular 'grace' through art arises from the passionate human desire for permanence, the inability of the mind to reconcile itself to mortality[…] this time nature is not as in 'drear-nighted December,' full of the same terrors that afflict man, but marked by sensuous reciprocity[…] It is, moreover, sensuous enjoyment of a peculiarly feminine kind, set off against the masculine activity of the too self-conscious mind.[321]

[321] Dickstein, p. 17.

We have seen the tension of permanence against mortality in 'The Vision' where the poem begins with the lament on wasted time, and we have seen Keats and Burns employ sexually charged images. Similarly, Coila is not unlike the 'wayward girl' who must initiate contact with the poet and will appear on her own terms. What Burns and Keats share in these poems is a meditation on permanence and beauty that is both playful and fraught. Beauty, especially feminine beauty, is fleeting and impermanent yet is attached to the lasting power of poetic achievement. For Burns, this is played out as a dialogue with the self whereby he resolves to undertake the mantle of 'rustic bard,' a mantle which marks Burns out as a different kind of poet to his influences, and designates him as a poet of place:

> 'Then never murmur nor repine;
> 'strive in thy *humble sphere* to shine;
> 'And trust me, not *Potosi's mine,*
> 'Nor *kings regard,*
> 'Can give a bliss o'ermatching thine,
> 'A *rustic Bard.*[322] (259-64)

In an earlier stanza Coila tells Burns's speaker that she cannot teach him how to be Thomson, Shenstone, or Gray, and that he can be a poet not of the 'unrivall'd rose' but of the 'lowly Daisy'. This is no insult, however, as he can proudly assume the 'rustic bard' title he had set out for himself in his prefatory material. Ultimately, Keats seems to take home a similar lesson. Whether lasting achievement is bestowed, learned, earned, or taught, is ultimately beyond the reach of the poet, and chasing after it will do no good.

Keats's meditations mature through time. Early poems such as 'On Seeing the Elgin Marbles' or his poems to Milton and Homer have no satisfactory answer to his concerns. The

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[322] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 113.

poems of 1818, beginning with ‘When I have fears’, through to his sonnet written at Burns’s cottage, fight a losing battle with what is elsewhere described as ‘The feel of not to feel it’. But Keats’s self-consciousness finds greater clarity first on top of Ben Nevis, when calling out to the muse, he accepts:

> […] That all my eye doth meet
> Is mist and crag—not only on this height,
> But in the world of thought and mental might.

These lines display a unification of the mental and physical. Keats was aware of the mist of thought before he set out on his tour, but the hopes he had set out for himself where he could properly begin his career as a poet met their disappointments on a physical and visceral level. Months later, Keats composed his sonnets ‘On Fame’ where he is able to take the lessons learned on his tour and distil them into a more easeful dialectic.

In his sonnet at Burns’s cottage, Keats makes the curious claim ‘Burns! With honour due | I have oft honoured thee’. Curious, because there are very few intertextual links between Keats and Burns, and many of his explicit or sustained mentions of Burns occur very shortly after this sonnet was written. What I hope my chapter illustrates is that Burns was on Keats’s mind both before and after his 1818 tour, and perhaps poems such as ‘The Vision’ had long sat in Keats’s mind. What I have also hoped to show is that Keats’s treatment of Burns shares many similarities to his treatment of other poetic influences such as Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton. To concentrate on the importance of the tour to Keats’s poetic development would be a poor imitation of the brilliant work done by critics such as Barnard, Stafford, and Dickstein. But I would like to offer a departure from their inspiring work with regards to the larger questions of Burns and Romanticism.

Final Reflections: Shelley on Keats, Burns, and Chatterton

That Keats died young is part of the cruel irony attached to the three major poets of the second generation of Romantic poetry. 'Adonais', Shelley's elegy for Keats, lists a procession of other poets who, like Keats, were 'The inheritors of unfulfilled renown'. Chatterton is the first name called forth: 'Chatterton Rose pale, his solemn agony had not | Yet faded from him'.[323] Shelley puns throughout this stanza on the word 'rose' as he simultaneously calls forth great poets who died young while burying them in floral imagery. Shelley's invocation of Chatterton transcends the symbolism he was typically associated with in Romanticism and becomes a more personal association with his friend Keats. The fifty-fifth and final stanza of 'Adonais' equates Keats to a star 'The soul of Adonais, like a star, | Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are'. Similarly, Keats placed Chatterton 'among the stars | Of highest heaven', and perhaps sees Chatterton again in his later sonnet as he 'behold[s] upon the night's starr'd face | Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance'. 'Adonais' not only uses similar imagery to Keats's sonnet for Chatterton but draws on imagery from 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' in an attempt validate Keats's poetic ambitions in much the same way that Keats sought to validate the poetry of Chatterton and Burns. Shelley echoes the self-annihilation reached for in Keats's sonnet:

> The breath whose might I have invok'd in song
>
> Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven
>
> Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
>
> Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
>
> The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven!

[323] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works,* ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 'Adonais', lines 399-401, p. 543.

I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;

Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,

The soul of Adonais, like a star,

Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are. (487-96)[324]

Shelley positions himself 'far from the shore' somewhere between earth and heaven. The shore and star both echo Keats's poetry, but more importantly recover for Keats what he was forced to reject in his own meditations. Shelley is able to do for Keats what Keats did for Chatterton and Burns but could not do for himself, and through Shelley's poem, as well as through the tragic events of Keats's own early death, becomes another 'inheritor of unfulfilled renown'.

[324] Shelley, *Major Works*, p. 545.

Chapter 3:

Antithetical Minds: Burns and Byron

> 'Burns, in depth of poetical feeling, in strong shrewd sense to balance and regulate this, in the *tact* to make his poetry tell by connecting it with the stream of public thought and the sentiment of the age, in *commanded* wildness of fancy and profligacy or recklessness as to moral and *occasionally* as to religious matters, was much more like Lord Byron than any other person to whom Lord B. says he had been compared.' — Scott, Undated MS note[325]

This chapter navigates several different, yet related, aspects of Burns's and Byron's poetry that have not yet been subjected to critical scrutiny. In the first two sections, I look at how both poets play with their own public personae within their poetry that creates tensions between the role of story-teller and story, crucial to the reader's interaction with the poem. This section takes T.S. Eliot's 1937 essay as its point of departure for this discussion of the role of story-teller and story in Byron and Burns, while also examining the rest of Eliot's illuminating essay as an important and serious piece of criticism that explores areas of both poets that deserve more attention than previously received. Eliot's wide-ranging essay

[325] Prothero, II, p. 376.

provokes many interesting considerations on digression and the uses of biographical material for Byron's narrative purposes, including Eliot's treatment of Byron as a Scottish writer. In the third section, I look at how the satires of Byron, and verse epistles and satires of Burns share similarities that have previously been ignored. Additionally, this section also reads Burns's poem 'A Dream' alongside Byron's *The Vision of Judgment*, as two satires against King George III that share a similar satiric approach.

A constant throughout these sections is an evaluation of verse form. John Speirs has commented on the 'madcap rhyming', among other things, that provides the foundation for my investigation into the similarities between these two poets.[326] Burns's use of the Standard Habbie, has not, as far as I know, been considered alongside Byron's *ottava rima,* where Byron's satire is usually considered to derive most of its influence from the Augustan satires and mock-heroics of Alexander Pope, as well as from his various Italian influences. While we should not ignore Pope's influence on Byron (or on Burns), it will be worth looking at each poet's use and mastery of an existing, but previously limited stanza, and how these verse forms facilitated an energetic and seemingly casual language designed in part to conceal its own formal and technical achievements. I conclude by looking at a number of Byron's shorter lyrics alongside several of Burns's poems and examine how, in the absence of intertextuality, influence might still be detected. Burns was a hugely significant poet for Byron, and while much of Byron's poetry does not invoke Burns, or share much in common with Burns's work, much of it does. Despite wildly different social circumstances, Burns and Byron resemble each other more closely than perhaps any other Romantic poets, and it is those moments in which this statement feels most true that I am interested in unearthing.

It has long been acknowledged that Burns and Byron can and should be studied alongside each other. Speirs was perhaps the first modern critic to place the two poets in

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[326] Speirs, *The Scots Literary Tradition*, p. 24.

dialogue in *The Scots Literary Tradition* (1962), a critical dialogue continued in another essay more generally concerned with the scholarly neglect of Burns in the tradition of English poetry by Bentman, who called Burns 'one of the most important satirists between Pope and Byron', and most recently in a 2011 special issue of *The Byron Journal* dedicated to the topic of Burns and Byron and a 2012 essay by Brean Hammond.[327] Burns and Byron have been noted as sharing an energetic and colloquial style and for writing satires of a similar disposition. Low's introduction to his edition of the Kilmarnock *Poems* comments that:

> Of the major English poets of the next century, only Byron would develop an intimate colloquial style to compare with that of Burns the natural communicator […]. Just as Byron was to attain his full poetic identity only with the discovery of *ottava rima,* so Burns — from early in his career — felt especially at home with the […] 'Standart Habby'.[328]

However, there is still no comprehensive account of the complicated debts, both acknowledged and implied, that Byron's poetry owes to Burns. In what follows I examine several areas of Burns and Byron that have not yet received serious critical attention.

The 2011 spring edition of *The Byron Journal* was dedicated to the theme of Burns and Byron, with five essays specially commissioned, featuring prominent Burns scholars such as Murray Pittock, Nigel Leask, and Pauline Mackay (amongst others). The subject of Byron and Scotland has taken up a similar recent focus, where Pittock has discussed the Scottish networks of Byron, and even tentatively suggests considering Byron as a Scottish writer.[329] Michael O'Neill, in a recent publication with Madeleine Callaghan, *The Romantic*

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[327] Bentman, 'Declining Fame', p. 208; Brean Hammond, '"The Ethical Turn" In Literary Criticism: Burns and Byron', in *Burns and Other Poets* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 168-81.
[328] Burns, *The Kilmarnock Poems*, pp. xxiv-xxv.
[329] Murray Pittock, 'Byron's Networks and Scottish Romanticism', *The Byron Journal* June 37.1 (2009), pp. 5-14.

Poetry Handbook, comments in his discussion of 'Tam O'Shanter' that some of the 'image's poignancy derives from its proto-Byronic refusal to be either wholly serious or merely playful'.[330] Drummond Bone's essay in the 2011 spring issue of the *Byron Journal* gives an extensive, and highly illuminating selection of close readings centred on the theme of 'nostalgia' in Burns and Byron.[331] Hammond has gone so far as to suggest that 'there are some grounds for saying that Byron Hero-worshipped Burns[…]'.[332] Although recent criticism has expanded the discussion considerably, a comparison of both poets comes as early as Speirs's 1962 preface to *The Scots Literary Tradition,* where his remarks are worth quoting from generously:

> If Burns had a successor, it was the Byron of *Beppo, A Vision of Judgment,* and *Don Juan*. The circumstances and social worlds of the two men could not have been more different […] and yet there are essential resemblances between the verse of *Don Juan* and Burns's Kilmarnock poems. Both poets have more in common with each other than either has with Pope and the Augustan line. A recklessness, a defiance, a gaiety, a kicking over the traces, a devil-may-care spirit, an indecorousness is common to both; Byron had not only English respectability to break away from but also, like Burns, a Scottish Calvinism. The air of gay improvisation of the verse of *Don Juan*, as if talking at ease among friends in a convivial hour over a bottle, apparently slapdash verse (really extraordinarily skilled), the madcap rhyming recall Burns'[s] comic and satiric verse. Both poets have an independent spirit […] a contempt for forms and conventions and class distinctions. Both find a solid basis of value in the idea of a common humanity; the satiric spirit in both is tempered by a warm-hearted geniality and generosity; both assert that what matters is a man's intrinsic worth.[333]

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[330] Michael O'Neill and Madeleine Callaghan, *The Romantic Poetry Handbook*, p. 139.
[331] Drummond Bone, 'Nostalgia in Byron and Burns', *The Byron Journal* 39.2 (2011), pp. 97-105.
[332] Hammond, p. 170.
[333] Speirs, pp. 23-24.

These energetic remarks are striking and the comparison moves swiftly across a number of important and insightful associations between the two poets. Speirs' apprehension of the similarly expressive energy in Burns and Byron, the conversational tones and forms that mask their formal complexities, and the tender independence of each poet is acutely identified, and these suggestions would have been well-served by textual comparisons.

Criticism on Burns and Byron — though steadily increasing — is by and large confined to essays on a specific theme (as with Leask and Bone) or passing comments in the case of Speirs and O'Neill. Indeed, Byron's own mentions of Burns or his poems are often brief. A handful of diary entries and letters, two mentions in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, and several mentions (either by name or reference) in *Don Juan*, as well as *The Bride of Abydos,* which takes lines from Burns's 'Ae Fond Kiss' as its epigraph. Discussions on Byron's relationship to Burns are often coupled with Byron's nostalgic and often affected identifications with his own Scottish background. While Byron's mentions of Scotland should not be taken as a dialogue with Burns, they do help to contextualise Byron's own conceptions of the poetic tradition he views himself as participating in. By identifying the stylistic, thematic, and formal similarities between Byron and Burns, we can better understand the importance of Burns's greater impact on the Romantic tradition and achieve a more accurate impression of his lasting influence on a preeminent Romantic figure.

When considering Burns's poetry alongside the more established canonical figures of Romanticism, critics have often grouped his debut volume *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* into either the shadowy genre of the pre-Romantic, as purely Scottish, or simply do not mention him at all. However, many critics in recent years have suggested (usually in brief asides) Burns might be placed more firmly within the accepted canon of major Romantic poets of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, and Shelley. Part of the difficulty in assessing Burns's influence across the major poets of the period lies in the varied

manifestations of his influence. What Wordsworth appreciated and adapted from Burns in *Lyrical Ballads* or *Peter Bell*, as well as later poems paying direct homage to Burns, is different to the fears and appreciations meditated upon in Keats's sonnets composed during his Northern tour in 1818. What Coleridge hailed as a young schoolboy obsessed with Thomas Chatterton and other tragic poetic figures looks very different to the 'antithetical mind' that Byron wrestled with in his journal. Although, with the exception of Blake, every major Romantic poet commented on Burns, they all read him differently, and thus his influence reads differently across their works.

Burns's influence on Byron is interesting in part because the influence seems to extend beyond textual comparisons or literary influence. As Speirs's comments suggest, there was a similar cult of personality shared by the two poets, and both poets were highly aware of the public personae they cultivated in part through circumstance and in part through their poetry. Both Burns and Byron experienced intense public celebrity. Indeed, the dramatic events of their respective personal lives have played a major role in how they were remembered and received, for better or for worse. Jerome J. McGann's introduction to Byron's *Major Works* tells us 'Byron writes himself into all his poetry, of course, but the self thus represented is always viewed in a detailed context of impinging social and historical relations'. Later in the introduction, McGann notes that 'this Romantic emphasis on the personality of the poet was to become one of the hallmarks of all Byron's own poetry'.[334] The same might be said of Burns, at least in regard to the first half of his poetic career. Like Burns, Byron did not set out to make a career in poetry, yet unexpected overnight success, in both cases, thrust them each into their respective social celebrity circles which would have profound impacts on their works and legacies. Bentman has summarised the events of

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[334] Byron, *Major Works*, p. xvii.

Burns's early career, and how the unexpected success of his first volume changed its course and shaped his literary and personal life:

> Burns made the decision to publish his poems partly for financial reasons. He planned to emigrate to Jamaica, seeing that change as the only way to break away from the poverty of Scottish village life. He hoped that the royalties would pay for his passage. In addition, he had fathered a child by Betty Paton, and he wanted to leave her provided for. The book, however, turned out to be far more successful than he had expected, and the planned emigration never took place.[335]

Although the circumstances that led to Byron's success were vastly different, it was perhaps equally unexpected. Byron had already published his volume *Fugitive Pieces* in 1806 as well as; *Poems on Various occasions* (1807), *Hours of Idleness* (1807), *Poems original and translated* (1808) and his scathing, if somewhat underdeveloped, critique, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809).[336] However, it was not until 1812 with the publication of the first cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* that 'Byron woke up to find himself world-famous'.[337]

Burns and Byron shared a reputation as men of passion and excess. Their amorous affairs were cause for gossip and opprobrium. As Speirs notes, they shared a 'contempt for forms and conventions and class distinctions' although their contempt came from opposite ends of the class system. The reputation of both poets was mediated and elevated through their works. In the case of Burns, a combination of an affected persona of a peasant-genius along with circumstance and prevailing attitudes allowed for his image as the 'Heaven-taught ploughman' to dominate popular culture, despite its obvious inaccuracies. Indeed, the peasant-poet image of Burns was developed almost exclusively through perceived

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[335] Raymond Bentman, *Robert Burns* (Boston: Twayne, 1987), p. 21.
[336] Byron, *Major Works*, p. xiii.
[337] Byron, *Major Works*, p. xiv.

biographical details of his poetry (albeit coyly and purposely cultivated by Burns). Likewise, Byron's aristocratic and youthful Harold: 'The Childe, Byron's surrogate, is, like his creator Byron, not merely culturally and socially disaffected, he is *young*, *privileged*, and also disaffected', thus the poetic characters, or characteristics of their poems became synonymous with each poet's living, breathing, self.[338]

3.1 Eliot's Byron and Byron's Burns

T.S. Eliot's 1937 essay on Byron has yet to receive the degree of attention it deserves. Philip W. Martin suggests that Eliot's 'harsh but penetrating' insights may be one reason for its relative neglect.[339] Alice Levine's 1978 essay, 'T.S. Eliot and Byron', gives a persuasive and highly illuminating account of subconscious parallels in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *The Waste Land*, arguing 'Byron and Eliot invite comparison, offering resemblances that are all the more striking amidst the obvious surface differences'.[340] Although Levine's essay does comment on the various contradictions of Eliot's essay on Byron, her primary objective is 'to deepen our awareness about the relationship between the nineteenth- and twentieth-century sensibilities as represented by Byron and Eliot'.[341] While Eliot's essay is not obscure to Byronists, it does not seem to be taken seriously as a piece of scholarly criticism. This section of the chapter reads Eliot's essay as an important contribution to Byron criticism and takes his brief yet revealing mentions of Burns as a point of departure for a discussion of the Byronic hero, and the role Burns may have played in its formation. And, in giving sustained attention to Eliot's essay on Byron, we can see much of what Eliot identifies in Byron is acutely applicable to Burns. Towards the beginning of his essay Eliot states that he wishes to

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338 Byron, *Major Works*, p. xvii.
339 Philip W. Martin, *Byron: A Poet before his Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 173.
340 Alice Levine, 'T.S. Eliot and Byron', *English Literary History,* 45 (1978), 522-41 (p. 523).
341 Levine, p. 524

treat Byron as a Scottish poet, though he distinguishes this from a 'Scots' poet as Byron 'wrote in English'.[342] In claiming his treatment of Byron as a Scottish writer as an original avenue for discussion, Eliot appears to forget that Byron, or at least the narrator of *Don Juan,* had already done so with the declaration in the tenth Canto: 'But I am half a Scot by birth, and bred | A whole one, and my heart flies to my head'.[343] The question of Byron's Scottishness has since been taken up with great enthusiasm in the last twenty years, and in turn so has the question of Byron's relationship to Burns. [344]

Although Eliot often treats Byron harshly, going so far to call him at the end of his essay both a 'vulgar patrician' and a 'dignified toss-pot', he also heaps praise upon the poet, especially for *The Giaour* and *Don Juan*. In these poems, Eliot recognises Byron's art for story-telling:

> As a *tale-teller* we must rate Byron very highly indeed: I can think of none other than Chaucer who has a greater readability, with the exception of Coleridge whom Byron abused and from whom Byron learned a great deal. […] What makes the tales interesting is first a torrential fluency of verse and a skill in varying it from time to time to avoid monotony; and second a genius for divagation. Digression, indeed, is one of the valuable arts of the story-teller. The effect of Byron's digressions is to keep us interested in the story-teller himself, and through this interest to interest us more in the story.[345]

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[342] T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, ed. by Ronald Schuchard et al, 8 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017) V *Tradition and Orthodoxy 1934*-1939, p. 431.
[343] This is a claim Eliot made in a letter to his editor, Bonamy Dobrée 'I propose to treat Byron as a Scotch rather than an English poet. This point of view, even if wrong, is, I think, a new one' (Eliot, p. 443); *Don Juan*, Canto X, lines 135-36, in Byron, *Major Works*, p. 703.
[344] A number of articles have explored Byron's Scottishness and his relationship to Scotland. In particular: Hermione de Almeida, 'Introduction: Byron's Scots and Byron's Scotland' *Studies in Romanticism,* Vol 47.1 (2008); *English Romanticism and the Celtic World*; *The Byron Journal,* 39.2 (December 2011).
[345] Eliot, 'Byron', p. 433.

Eliot's praise is fully justified. Both *The Giaour* and *Don Juan* delight in digression from the main narrative as a means to build suspense when the threads of the tale are picked up again. All these features: digression, a self-conscious mask, a fluency of verse apply to Burns's poem, 'Tam O'Shanter: A Tale'. Burns's poem was a favourite of Byron, who quoted from it on several occasions, and even referred to it as one of his '*opus magnum'* poems, alongside 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'.[346]

Much as Byron does in *Don Juan,* Burns displays throughout 'Tam O'Shanter' a self-conscious inability to control either the act of narration or the mock-heroic Tam, despite the narrator setting out with the purpose of telling a story, allegedly with a moral. However, within the first twenty lines, Burns's narrator has already digressed into anecdotes of Tam's previous drunken transgressions. While this develops the character of Tam, the digression both 'keeps us interested in the story-teller himself' and interests us 'more in the story'. The tensions between these interests are maintained through a careful choosing of nouns and pronouns: Burns as narrator using 'we', 'us', and 'our', maintains the artifice of a tale-teller delivering his story, and not as an actor within the story. However, switching from the plural to the singular 'me' places Burns in a new role; one where he forcefully distracts attention from those events he unfolds himself for the reader:

> Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,
>
> To think how mony counsels sweet,
>
> How mony lengthen'd sage advices
>
> The husband frae the wife despises!
>
> But to our tale […][347] (33-37)

[346] Prothero, V, p. 560.
[347] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, II, p. 558.

The switch in pronouns, coupled with an interjection addressing the reader 'ah, gentle dames!' further emphasises the deliberate complication of story and story-teller. Burns's narrator does not speak in the first-person singular again for over a hundred lines. Returning to the tale is successful for just over twenty lines, when another digression is introduced. This digression is notable not just for its thematic distance from the story, but also for the shift in language:

> But pleasures are like poppies spread,
> You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
> Or like the snow falls in the river,
> A moment white—then melts forever;
> Or like the borealis race,
> That flit ere you can point their place;
> Or like the rainbow's lovely form
> Evanishing amid the storm.[348] (59-66)

These lines are written in neo-classical English, as opposed to the vernacular language that precedes and follows it. Indeed, the vernacular is used to discuss Tam and his adventure, but in this digression the elevated language distinguishes it from the narrative thrust of the poem, instead offering up a playful self-conscious indulgence in language. The poem is jolted back into action, as the narrator seems to chide himself, or perhaps the reader:

> Nae man can tether time or tide;

[348] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* II, p. 559.

The hour approaches *Tam* maun ride[349] (67-68)

These lines are jarring for several reasons: first, we are made aware of the immediate switch in register with the vernacular 'Nae' as opposed to the standard English 'No', and the italicising of Tam's name increases the urgency that he 'maun' (must) ride. Is this urgency due to the foul weather and darkness of night, or is this an imperative – on the part of Burns – for the poem to fulfil its own demands?

We can see a similar act of digressive self-consciousness in Byron's poetry. The digressions of *Don Juan* are usually either autobiographical asides, on the part of the narrator, or musings on the act of writing his cantos. Early on in the second canto, Byron refuses to allow himself to 'dwell' on the dress and accoutrement of the people of Cadiz, 'that would very near absorb | A canto'. But Byron playfully gives into the demands of his muse:

(And so, my sober Muse – come, let's be steady –

Chaste Muse! – well, if you must, you must) – the veil
    Thrown back a moment with the glancing hand,
While the o'erpowering eye, that turns you pale,
    Flashes into the heart: – All sunny land
Of love! when I forget you, may I fail
    To— say my prayers – but never was there plann'd
A dress through which the eyes give such a volley,
Excepting the Venetian Fazzioli.

[349] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* II, p. 559.

But to our tale:[350]

Byron's self-conscious reintroduction into the narrative suggests both an awareness of Burns's lines, as well as a borrowing of technique. The effects located by Eliot in Byron are true in Burns, and perhaps this is no coincidence: Byron's admiration for 'Tam O'Shanter' was long-standing and well-documented. Whether the re-entry into the narrative with 'But to our tale' should be classed as 'intertextual' are perhaps a lesser concern, as the effects of digression and story-telling are of greater importance; the fact that he knew and loved Burns's poem makes the suggestion of influence more likely. Byron's fondness for 'Tam O'Shanter' can be traced in a letter to Annabella Milbanke, where he quotes from the poem, although not entirely accurately: 'Or like the snowflake on the river | A moment shine—then melts forever'.[351] That Byron gets the quotation slightly wrong ironically shows a greater familiarity with the poet. That is to say, if Byron is quoting Burns from memory, and dropping lines into a letter, it is indicative of a greater admiration, or at least time spent with Burns's poetry. Indeed, the lines chosen from 'Tam O'Shanter' provide images and ideas present in Byron's own work. It is remarkable how well the following lines of Burns pair with a scene from Byron's *The Giaour:*

> As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,
>
> The minutes wing'd their way wi' pleasure:

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[350] *Don Juan*, Canto II, lines 48-57, in Byron, *Major Works*, p. 435. Byron uses a similar self-conscious digressive construction in *Beppo*:
But to my tale of Laura,– for I find
Digression is a sin, that by degrees
Becomes exceeding tedious to my mind,
And, therefore, may the reader too displease –
The gentle reader, who may wax unkind,
And caring little for the author's ease,
Insist on knowing what he means, a hard
And hapless situation for a bard. (393-400, p. 328).

[351] *Byron's Letters and Journals*, IV, p. 56.

Kings may be blest, but *Tam* was glorious,

O'er a' the ills o' life victorious!

But pleasures are like poppies spread,

You seize the flower, its bloom is shed:

Or like the snow falls in the river,

A moment white—then melts forever;

Or like the borealis race,

That flit ere you can point their place;

Or like the rainbow's lovely form

Evanishing amid the storm. (55-66).

Compare with this passage from *The Giaour*:

As rising on its purple wing

The insect-queen of eastern spring,

O'er emerald meadows of Kashmeer,

Invites the young pursuer near,

And leads him on from flower to flower,

A weary chase and wasted hour,

Then leaves him, as it soars on high

With panting heart and tearful eye:

So Beauty lures the full-grown child

With hue as bright, and wing as wild;

A chase of idle hopes and fears,

Begun in folly, closed in tears.

[…]

The lovely toy so fiercely sought

Has lost its charm by being caught,

For every touch that wooed its stay

Has brush'd the brightest hues away

Till charm, and hue, and beauty gone,

'Tis left to fly or fall alone.[352] (387-99 and 404-09)

Images echo across each passage, and, as with Burns, Byron moves in and out of the poem's narrative with ease. Byron uses the more delicate butterfly, instead of the hurried, almost Marvellian bee of Burns's lines. Similarly, both passages ascribe the natural (honey, or a meadow) as 'treasure' or 'emeralds', as well as kings and a queen, enriching the landscape with the artifice of poetic self-awareness. Both Tam, and the 'young pursuer' are lost in the act of pursuit, and Byron's 'wasted hour' is perhaps something to be celebrated, at least more than the 'ills' of winning. Indeed, 'woe' of Tam's wife Kate is his ultimate destination, and the reader is spared that eventuality. Both passages use epic simile to give variation and colour to the elusive experience of pleasure, or beauty. In both poems, 'the lovely toy so fiercely sought | Has lost its charm by being caught'. Both poets attempt to describe the impossibility of apprehending pleasure, and instead insist that the chase — not the kill — is where the experience is most profound.[353] The poems also share metrical similarities with their tetrameter couplets, a meter well-suited to the galloping paces of flight on horseback:

[352] Byron, *Major Works,* pp. 217-18. This passage can also be read alongside a letter by Burns, dated October 1786, that appeared in Currie's biography: 'When all my school-fellows and youthful compeers, (those misguided few excepted who join, to use a Gentoo phrase, the *hallachores* of the human race,) were striking off with eager hope and earnest intent on some one or other of the many paths of busy life, I was "standing idle in the market-place", or only left the chace of the butterfly from flower to flower, to hunt fancy from whim to whim'. In Burns, *Letters*, I, pp. 53-54.

[353] See Nigel Leask's essay ' "To Canter with the Sagitarre": Burns, Byron and the Equestrian sublime', where Leask concentrates on 'Tam O'Shanter' and *Mazeppa*, highlighting that 'the abiding image of both poems is not so much the hard-won wisdom of riderly experience as the *frisson* of the 'wild ride' itself.' In *The Byron Journal,* 39.2 (2011) 117-33 (p. 131).

> Who thundering comes on blackest steed?
>
> With slacken'd bit and hoof of speed,
>
> Beneath the clattering iron's sound
>
> The cavern'd echoes wake around
>
> In lash for lash, and bound for bound[354] (180-84)

These lines introduce the titular character, which Eliot teasingly notes 'is enough to tell us, that the Giaour is an interesting person, because he is Lord Byron himself, perhaps'.[355] In 'Tam O'Shanter' the tone is different, but the effects produced by the meter are the same:

> Weel mounted on his gray mare, *Meg,*
>
> A better never lifted leg,
>
> *Tam* skelpit on thro' dub and mire,
>
> Despising wind, and rain, and fire[356] (79-82)

Both 'Tam O'Shanter' and *The Giaour* share another similarity in the legacies left by their heroic, or mock-heroic characters. Fiona Stafford has remarked that the character of Tam perhaps resembles the character of Burns, who in his capacity as an excise officer (as well as his supposed affinity for drinking) is easy to picture as the drunken horseman of his own tale.[357] O'Neill comments in his discussion of 'Tam O'Shanter' that some of the 'image's poignancy derives from its proto-Byronic refusal to be either wholly serious or merely playful'.[358] McGann has noted with *The Giaour* 'part of the sensationalism of the poem

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[354] Byron, *Major Works*, p. 212.
[355] Eliot, 'Byron', p. 434.
[356] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, II, p. 559.
[357] Stafford, *Local Attachments*, p. 221.
[358] O'Neill, *Romantic Poetry Handbook*, p. 139.

rested on the belief, which Byron did not discourage, that the narrative was based on events in which Byron himself took part'.[359]

After a discussion of *The Giaour* in his essay Eliot turns to *Don Juan* which takes up most of his attention. Quoting from one of *Don Juan's* earliest English scenes, where footpads attempt to hold-up Juan's carriage, Eliot senses something 'rather suggestive of Burns'.[360] While Eliot only mentions Burns twice, and while he does not name 'Tam O'Shanter' as the poem he has in mind, I suggest two passages as possible candidates for Eliot's remarks:

> He from the world had cut off a great man,
> Who in his time had made heroic bustle.
> Who in a row like Tom could lead the van,
> Booze in the ken, or at the spellken hustle?
> Who queer a flat? Who (spite of Bow-street's ban)
> On the high toby-spice so flash the muzzle?
> Who on a lark, with black-eyed Sal (his blowing)
> So prime, so swell, so nutty, and so knowing?[361] (Canto XI, 145-52).

Eliot clearly associates the words 'ken' and 'spellken' with Burns's language, as well, I would add, the use of 'Booze' as a verb, and — perhaps more tenuously — recognises something in the names Tom and Tam. The opening lines of 'Tam O'Shanter' set a scene that Tom might well fit in to:

> When chapman billies leave the street,

[359] Byron, *Major Works*, p. 1035.
[360] Eliot, 'Byron', p. 441.
[361] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 725.

And drouthy neebors, neebors meet,

As market-days are wearing late,

An' folk begin to tak the gate;

While we sit bousing at the nappy,

And getting fou and unco happy[362] (1-6).

Or a few lines later, though less semantically appropriate, there is a shared sonic quality, where the repetition and assonance become increasingly chaotic:

O *Tam*! hadst thou but been sae wise,

As ta'en thy ain wife *Kate's* advice!

She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,

A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;

That frae November till October,

Ae market-day thou was nae sober[363] (17-22)

Eliot is right to detect traces of Burns, but the stanza has a broader influence. Byron attaches a note to this stanza, tracing it to a song 'which was very popular, at least in my early days'. Here the first stanza of the recollected song is as follows:

On the high toby-spice flash the muzzle,

In spite of each gallows old scout;

If you at the spellken can't hustle,

You'll be hobbled in making a Clout.[364]

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[362] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, II, p. 557.
[363] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, II, p. 558.
[364] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 1060.

Spellken is a portmanteau of 'spell', which is a 'playhouse or theatre' and 'ken' 'a house where thieves, beggars, or disreputable characters meet or lodge. Frequently with qualifying words, as bousing-ken, dancing-ken […]'.[365] I do not wish to claim that Byron necessarily had Burns in mind when writing this stanza, but Eliot's association of Byron with Burns helps to illuminate greater affinities between the two poets, an association made more explicit when considered alongside Byron's profound admiration for poems such as 'Tam O'Shanter'.

The digressive moments of 'Tam O'Shanter' discussed above are also relevant to moments in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Burns's affected tension between the author and the speaker of the poem is a technique used by Byron in the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Byron's fourth canto begins with an open letter to his friend John Hobhouse, which, being published with the poem serves as a preface as much as it does an epistle. Byron who appeared to enjoy resisting the comparisons between his Byronic creation, Harold, and himself, claims a greater distance for the conclusion of his poem:

> With regard to the conduct of the last canto, there will be found less of the pilgrim than in any of the preceding, and that little slightly, if at all, separated from the author speaking in his own person. The fact is, that I had become weary of drawing a line which everyone seemed determined not to perceive […]. It was in vain that I asserted, and imagined, that I had drawn a distinction between the author and the pilgrim; and the very anxiety to preserve this difference, and disappointment at finding it unavailing, so far crushed my efforts in the composition, that I determined to abandon it altogether—and have done so.[366]

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[365] Oxford English Dictionary. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/186240?redirectedFrom=Spellken#eid

[366] Byron, *Major Works*, p. 146.

It is not just that Burns and Byron have a shared affinity for what Eliot calls divagation, or digression, or a desire to play with their own self-conscious creations, but rather that they both engage these aspects of their poetry with a sense of joy, bordering on the sardonic. Burns did not share Byron's explicit self-obsession, a trait that McGann has noted for being fundamental to certain Romantic conceptions.[367] And although Burns's celebrity manifested itself differently, it still provided Byron with the most likely and most compelling model to draw from. Burns was a marginalised figure; marginalised by the Edinburgh literati, fetishized during his life, and negatively mythologized in death. Byron found celebrity, but adoration quickly turned to scorn, from his own class, and more immediately, from his wife. Byron does not, in fact, successfully abandon Harold, although he does neglect him to a serious degree. Indeed, he does not always seem to have control of himself or of Harold, in the twenty-fifth stanza: 'My Soul wanders; I demand it back'.[368] It is a startling demand to make and can be read ambiguously. Has Harold, like Tam, become difficult to control due to the narrative forces of the poem, or has the failure (if failure it is) to draw a distinction between himself and his creation urged a new demand, to reclaim his identity back from his public?

Eliot's essay is intensely concerned with Byron's biographical manipulations and not always sympathetic to the manipulating impulse. The next section of this chapter discusses the 'Scottish antecedence' that Eliot places so much emphasis on, as well as the attendant biographical moves in both Burns's and Byron's verse.

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[367] 'Self-obsession' is Eliot's term, though McGann, in his introduction to the *Major Works*, tells us '[…] the Romantic emphasis on the personality of the poet was to become one of the hallmarks of all of Byron's own poetry'. Byron, *Major Works*, p. xvii.
[368] Byron, *Major Works*, p. 155.

3.2 'Scottish Antecedence' and Eliot's 'Damned Creature'

Before Eliot begins his critique of Byron's verse, he comments on 'a very important part of the Byronic make-up' which he traces to his 'Scottish antecedence' (his mother) as 'providing the material':

> That is his peculiar diabolism, his delight in posing as a damned creature – and in providing evidence for his damnation in a rather horrifying way. […] it could come only from the religious background of a people steeped in Calvinistic theology.[369]

Here 'posing as a damned creature' is the key phrase. Much is made in Eliot's brief essay of Byron creating and exploiting a role or persona for poetic effect, or to advance his own celebrity. Reading Byron as an actor of his own (often contradictory) creations who then self-consciously wrote his role under the mask of autobiography is a conceit that also applies to Burns. The qualities Byron most appreciated in Burns were qualities that can be located in certain conceptions of the Byronic Hero. Byron had read James Currie's highly influential biography of Burns, something he acknowledges in the third canto of *Don Juan* 'Like Burns (whom Doctor Currie well describes)'.[370]And, in reading Currie's book, which made famous the image of a poet destroyed by despondency and madness, falling into dissipation, born out of self-inflicted vice, Byron was aware of the most sensational elements of Burns's life. An often-quoted journal entry from Byron, dated 13 December 1813, is perhaps Byron's most famous remarks on Burns:

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[369] Eliot, 'Byron', p. 431.
[370] Byron, *Major Works*, p. 514.

> Allen…has lent me a quantity of Burns's unpublished and never-to-be published Letters. They are full of oaths and obscene songs. What an antithetical mind!—tenderness, roughness—delicacy, coarseness—sentiment, sensuality—soaring and grovelling, dirt and deity—all mixed up in that one compound of inspired clay![371]

The frequent dashes give the passage a tortured breathlessness, while the oppositions are delivered with a cool control. Sensing a mind at odds with itself, Byron pairs five opposite or seemingly contrary sets of emotions or characteristics, and subsequently describes a contradictory or 'antithetical mind' that was fundamental to his creation of the Byronic Hero.

Less often quoted, but perhaps no less remarkable, are Byron's comments in his Journal from a month earlier, in November 1813, where, having read Burns, Byron muses on what he might have been, 'if a patrician':

> Read Burns to-day. What would he have been, if a patrician? We should have had more polish — less force — just as much verse, but no immortality—a divorce and a duel or two, the which had he survived, as his potations must have been less spirituous, he might have lived as long as Sheridan, and outlived as much as poor Brinsley […].[372]

Byron's imagined, polished version of Burns takes on more Byronic qualities. 'A divorce and a duel or two' gives the impression of aristocratic scandal, or dark brooding so familiar to our conceptions of the Byronic Hero, and to Byron. A month later, Byron's mind apparently still much occupied with thoughts of Burns, is unable to simply polish off the dirt of the ploughman poet, and instead opts to embrace the strangeness of an 'antithetical mind':

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[371] *Byron's Letters and Journals*, III, p. 239.
[372] *Byron's Letters and Journals*, III, p. 207.

> It seems strange; a true voluptuary will never abandon his mind to the grossness of reality. It is by exalting the earthly, the material, the *physique* of our pleasures, by veiling these ideas, by forgetting them altogether, or, at least, never naming them hardly to one's self, that we alone can prevent them from disgusting.[373]

Byron continues to struggle with the contradictions he finds in Burns and recognises these contradictions as strange. Byron associates reality with grossness and disgust, and that in order to exalt the real, it must be done through a veil, or be forgotten, or most startlingly of all, by 'at least, never naming them hardly to one's self'. Having found in Burns an 'antithetical mind', Byron's musings turn inward, and are suggestive of moments in *Manfred*, a play he would write several years later, particularly the incantation of Act One: 'and the power which thou dost feel | Shall be what thou must conceal' (220-21).[374] I suspect what Byron locates in Burns as a 'veil' or what Eliot locates in Byron as 'an actor' is the desire for both Burns and Byron to assume a posture that they could reasonably pass off as autobiographical. The posture adopted in their poetry is a mixture of truth and affectation.

Eliot directs most of the attention in his essay towards *Don Juan*, and to various autobiographical scenes in the Oriental tales and *Childe Harold*. Part of the sensationalism of Byron's poetry was derived from a belief that the heroes of the poems related to events Byron himself took part in. Eliot is at turns scathing and understanding of Byron's fabricated self-analysis, although he reads the self thus arrived at in *Don Juan* as the nearest Byron came to the truth. Eliot is at his harshest when criticising this impulse — more common to the early Oriental tales — in Byron's verse, even though he acknowledges it as an impulse many are guilty of, perhaps even himself '[…] one cannot help feeling pity and horror at the spectacle of a man devoting such gigantic energy and persistence to such a useless and petty purpose:

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[373] *Byron's Letters and Journals,* III, p. 239.
[374] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 281.

though at the same time we must feel sympathy and humility in reflecting that it is a vice to which most of us are addicted in a fitful and less persevering way'.[375] Discussing a passage of *Lara*, but clearly speaking more broadly, Eliot continues thus:

> This passage strikes me also as a masterpiece of self-analysis, but of a self that is largely a deliberate fabrication — a fabrication that is only completed in the actual writing of the lines. The reason why Byron understood this self so well, is that it is largely his own invention; and it is only the self that he invented that he understood perfectly.[376]

Byron's art for fabricated self-analysis rested on the fact that he deliberately created characters that shared qualities of himself, and of those he knew; in *Don Juan* this was, among others, Juan and Donna Inez. Fabricated or distorted acts of self-analysis are ever present in Burns's poetry, and Byron's journal entries concerning Burns suggest an appreciation of this fact.

Stafford's comment, quoted earlier, that Tam could be seen to represent the figure of Burns himself is perhaps a livelier instance of Burns writing himself into his poetry. Whereas Byron writes himself as character into his poems (Manfred, Lara, Harold, the Giaour), Burns's personae often permeate his poetry through his subjects and themes; writing about mice, beggars, daisies, dogs, sheep, cotters, and taverns, all in a colloquial, demotic language, creating an intimacy more authentic than the Augustan poetry of Gray or what was soon to come with Wordsworth. Burns more frequently appears not as a character within his poems, but within the character of his poems. This was a carefully crafted process begun in the preface to his debut volume *Poems: Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), where the image

[375] Eliot, 'Byron', p. 439.
[376] Eliot, 'Byron', p. 439.

of an unlearned, rustic poet singing seemingly simple songs overshadowed the superb craftsmanship of his versification:

> The following trifles are not the production of the Poet, who, with all the advantages of learned art, and perhaps amid the elegancies and idlenesses of upper life, looks down for a rural theme, with an eye to Theocrites or Virgil. To the Author of this, these and other celebrated names their countrymen are, in their original languages, 'A fountain shut up, and a book sealed'. Unacquainted 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.[377]

As Burns's celebrity spread through Edinburgh, and south into England during 1786-87, the image of a rustic bard or untutored genius, 'unacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing Poet by Rule' took hold, despite the obvious, learned craft of his poems. Burns was a rural poet who wrote on rural themes. However, many of his poems on these subjects channelled his wide reading — Pope, Milton, Gray, and Shakespeare are ever present sources throughout his poetry, — and he wrote in verse forms that were bold and innovative, such as the Standard Habbie, as well as writing Spenserian stanzas and lively epistles.

'Poet' was perhaps an unlikely role for either Burns or Byron; unlikely for peasant or peer, and each poet claimed he did not set out to achieve fame in verse. Both poets maintained the appeal of their image by using it as a continued theme for their poetry; writing from what they knew. They shared a certain temperament, where Byron expressed a delighted shock at 'obscene oaths and songs' in Burns's letters. Although the events of Byron's life certainly did shock 'English respectability', as Speirs noted, Martin reminds us

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[377] Burns, *Oxford Works,* I, p. 72.

that the most shocking truths of Byron's life do not appear in *Don Juan* and Byron 'rarely, if ever, commits his cardinal sins within the poem himself'.[378]

Burns does not show the same restraint in his comic masterpiece, 'The Jolly Beggars' (also known as 'Love and Liberty: A Cantata' and 'Tatterdemallions'). 'The Jolly Beggars' is the Burns poem that most anticipates the comic realism and colloquial speech of *Don Juan*. Most likely composed in 1786, 'The Jolly Beggars' was not published until 1799. James Kinsley gives an overview of the initial opposition to the poem:

> Burns considered publishing *Love and Liberty* in 1787. Dr. [Hugh] Blair, in memoranda on 'proposed additions to the New Edition [1787]', dismissed 'The Whole of What is called the Cantata, the Song of the Beggars and their Doxies, with the grace at the end of them' as 'altogether unfit for publication. They are by much too licentious; and fall below the dignity which Mr Burns possesses in the rest of his poems and would rather degrade them'.[379]

It is unlikely that Byron would have shared Blair's opposition to Burns's poem. Burns's poem begins in a similar setting to 'Tam O'Shanter', and as Kinsley notes, 'This is one of Burns's finest openings, moving from the bitter weather outside — described in terms of hostile energy — to convivial warmth inside'.[380] However, in 'Tam O'Shanter', the scene begins in warmth and mirth and moves out of doors into hostile weather. 'The Jolly Beggars' is set in 'Poosie-Nansie's' pub, which Burns himself had frequented, and describes the landlady as 'The Hostess of a noted Caravansary in M[auchline], well known to and much frequented by the lowest orders of Travellers and Pilgrims'.[381] The poem which draws from the tradition of the ballad-opera is split into Recitativos and Airs, where, much as in opera,

[378] Martin, p. 189.
[379] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* III, p. 1150.
[380] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, III, p. 1152.
[381] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 195.

the Recitativo is delivered in naturalistic spoken dialogue between songs. Burns displays a virtuosic command of language and of stanza form. The first two stanzas are derived from the 'Cherry and Slae', a fifteenth-century poem by Alexander Montgomerie.[382] Conversely, the Airs or songs of the poem are delivered, for the most part, in standard English quatrains, and set to various tunes.[383]

Burns's familiarity with Poosie-Nansie's inn, accompanied by the Recitativos written in Burns's trademark blend of Scots dialect and standard English facilitate the impression that Burns himself is directing the narrative action of the poem before handing off to the various characters that tell of their hardships in song:

> First, niest the fire, in auld, red rags,
>
> Ane sat; weel brac'd wi' mealy bags,
>
> […]
>
> Then staggering, an' swaggering,
>
> He roar'd this ditty up[384] (15-16, 27-28)

Thus Burns introduces the first of his characters, a soldier of love and war who bears the scars of both, 'This here was for a wench, and that other in a trench', and sings of old campaigns:

> I lastly was with Curtis among the *floating batt'ries,*
>
> And there I left for witness, an arm and a limb;
>
> Yet let my Country need me, with ELLIOT to head me,

[382] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, III, p. 1040.
[383] Burns changes stanza form and rhyme scheme frequently throughout the whole poem. This aids in giving individuality to the various speakers, but also shows off Burns's virtuosic skill and adeptness across forms in a unified piece.
[384] Burns, Poems and Songs, I, p. 195.

I'd clatter on my stumps at the sound of a drum.[385] (37-40)

Much as Byron does throughout all of *Don Juan,* Burns couples a social idiom that deals with serious, often historical moments, imbued with an offhand humour that propels the action while maintaining the tone and energy necessary for such a raucous scene. While real events and military figures are described, the scene is undercut by the last line 'I'd clatter on my stumps at the sound of a drum'. Clattering on 'stumps' bathetically undermines the brutal reality of a disabled veteran and conjures up an image far more comic than pathetic.

Byron claimed of the famous shipwreck scene in the second canto of *Don Juan* 'not a single *circumstance* of it [was] *not* taken from fact — not indeed from any *single* shipwreck — but all from *actual* facts of different wrecks' and this passage contains a mixture of valour, on the part of Juan, while Byron's actions as narrator maintain the essential humour of the plot:[386]

Nine souls more went in her: the long-boat still
 Kept above water, with an oar for mast,
Two blankets stitch'd together, answering ill
 Instead of sail, were to the oar made fast:
Though every wave roll'd menacing to fill,
 And the present peril all before surpass'd,
They grieved for those who perish'd with the cutter,
And also for the biscuit casks and butter.[387] (Canto II, 481-88).

[385] Burns, Poe*ms and Songs*, I, p. 196.
[386] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 1047.
[387] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 448.

While it is reasonable to lament the loss of 'biscuit casks and butter' as a vital loss of food, the line still reads humorously as the action plays to the rhyme and the demands of the stanza. As with Burns in 'The Jolly Beggars', Byron delighted in turning a perilous, violent situation into a creative act of versification that foregrounds virtuosic technical achievement ahead of a more sombre engagement with pathos. As far as I know, Byron does not mention 'The Jolly Beggars', but the poem's varied deployment of intricate verse forms, all delivered in colloquial speech or song, does fulfil Eliot's remarks of *Don Juan* exhibiting 'a torrential fluency of verse'. [388] Coincidentally, both 'The Jolly Beggars' and *Don Juan* share Italian influences on their forms.

It is hard to know precisely what Eliot thought of Byron: he finds weakness in his self-obsession; insults his poetry and physical defects, which he manages to couple together, 'The stanza that he borrowed from the Italian was admirably suited to enhance his merits and conceal his defects, just as on a horse or in the water he was more at ease than on foot'.[389] But Eliot was self-conscious about his large ears and his Missouri accent; a self-consciousness that is reflected both poetically and critically in poems like *Prufrock*, itself as playfully, tortuously self-conscious as Byron, with 'a hundred indecisions'.[390] Levine suggests that 'Eliot himself, in his essay on Byron, provides an insight into Byron's ambiguous self-presentation, which reflects in turn upon Eliot'.[391] There is also evidence for this in an epigraph to Eliot's collection of critical essays, *The Sacred Wood*. No attribution is given, but Eliot quotes from Byron's *Beppo*: 'I also like to dine on becaficas'.[392] Eliot's decision to preface a volume of critical essays with this remark is revealing: 'becaficas' — a

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[388] Eliot, 'Byron', p. 433.
[389] Eliot, 'Byron', pp. 438-39.
[390] Jason Harding, 'Unravelling Eliot' in *The New Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*, ed. by Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 5-6; T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 14.
[391] Levine, p. 538.
[392] T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (Methuen: London, 1920), p. xviii. I am grateful to Richard Lansdown for alerting me to Eliot's epigraph, and for his helpful and stimulating conversations on Eliot and Byron.

Mediterranean delicacy — makes haute cuisine out of a songbird, suggesting its own 'ambiguous self-presentation' in Eliot, where dining on a creature never meant to be eaten shows the act of criticism as murdering to dissect, or a meal that is insufficiently substantive, or simply an indulgence, and threatens to contradict his belief in poetry as a 'superior amusement'.[393] Prefacing *The Sacred Wood* with a quotation from Byron also betrays Eliot's claim that Byron was primarily an enthusiasm of his schoolboy days.[394] Eliot's consistently contradictory remarks on Byron betray his own antithetical mind; where Eliot is at his most critical of Byron's style, he helps to highlight those supposed defects as the virtuoso perfections of Byron's performative style. We have also seen Eliot full of praise; noting that Byron had a 'genius for digression', and also calling the dedicatory stanzas to *Don Juan* 'one of the most exhilarating pieces of abuse in the language'.[395] There is an essential coyness to Eliot's remarks on Byron and his poetry. He pays Byron the first respect of reading him carefully, and comprehensively, though he is dismissive of how much poetry Byron wrote, claiming 'The bulk of Byron's poetry is distressing, in proportion to its quality; one would suppose that he never destroyed anything'.[396] He talks condescendingly of reading *Don Juan* as a school-boy of sixteen, the same age as Juan. He then launches into a decidedly odd and digressive comparison between busts of Byron and Walter Scott, where he, of course, prefers Scott's, and concludes of Byron:

> that pudgy face suggesting a tendency to corpulence, that weakly sensual mouth, that restless triviality of expression, and worst of all that blind look of the self-conscious; the bust of Byron is that of a man who was every inch the touring tragedian.[397]

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[393] Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* p. viii.
[394] Eliot, 'Byron', p. 430.
[395] Eliot, 'Byron', p. 442.
[396] Eliot, 'Byron', p. 430.
[397] Eliot, 'Byron', p. 431.

Eliot was looking closely, and perhaps we are persuaded to recall Byron's digression on the accuracy of busts during Haidee's introduction:

> […]
> I've seen much finer women, ripe and real,
> Than all the nonsense of their stone ideal).
>
> I'll tell you why I say so, for 'tis just
> One should not rail without a decent cause:
> There was an Irish lady, to whose bust
> I ne'er saw justice done, and yet she was
> A frequent model; and if e'er she must
> Yield to stern Time and Nature's wrinkling laws,
> They will destroy a face which mortal thought
> Ne'er compass'd, nor less mortal chisel wrought.[398] (Canto II, 943-52).

Contradictions and hypocrisy are not unique to Byron, Burns, or Eliot, or to poets generally, but in reading Eliot's remarks on Byron in a more neutral light, we can usefully build on Eliot's deft and sensitive readings. There is still more to be said about Eliot's engagement with Byron; about Eliot's mystifying remarks that do not always square with his own poetic practice. However, Eliot's decision to explore the Scottish side of Byron was inspired, even if it was not original, and through that lens we come to a richer understanding of some of Byron's most well-known impulses. In taking Eliot's essay on Byron seriously, we can also more readily see how a poet such as Burns appealed with such consistency to Byron.

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[398] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 463.

The free flowing 'torrential fluency of verse' noted by Eliot in Byron, also evident in Burns remains important to the next section of this chapter concerned with the satirical poems of Byron and Burns. Form and temperament are interconnected components of each poet's verse making and so my discussion of the satirical strain in each poet continues with a focus on poetic form.

3.3 'The Physique of our Pleasures': Form and Satire in Byron and Burns

This section begins with an examination of the similarities in verse form between Burns and Byron, where I focus on Burns's use of the Standard Habbie stanza and Byron's use of *ottava rima.* Both poets revived older stanzaic forms and adapted them to new purposes that gave the impression of high originality, as well as cultivating the belief that their poetry resembled their natural modes of speech, both of which, incidentally, were fundamental elements of Romantic lyric poetry. I show how Burns's and Byron's careful manipulation of verse forms allowed for a satirical commentary on both critics and conventions, while also offering self-conscious critiques on their own role as poets. Turning, then, to two satires — 'A Dream', (1786), and Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* (1822) — I point up a similarity in satiric outlook, or what Speirs refers to as their 'shared satiric spirit'. Despite the vastly differing social circumstances inherited by each poet, Burns and Byron hold remarkably similar attitudes in the face of those they most strongly disavow. By aligning Byron with Burns, we can see how coy pretence and energetic indignation give way to a sympathetic impulse that uses comedy or nonchalance to elevate the poets' own geniality. The comic effects are often achieved through compressed rhymes and diminutions, and nonchalance is born of a conscious choice to shrug off the importance usually bestowed upon authority.

Poets or Rhymers?

The six-line Standard Habbie stanza with the rhyme scheme *aaabab* was revived by Robert Sempill and Alan Ramsay, before being adopted and improved upon by Burns. Likewise, *ottava rima* was not a new poetic form, but Byron was the first English poet to master it. The most striking feature of both the Standard Habbie stanza and *ottava rima* is the compression of rhyme. Both poets knew that rhyme could facilitate an approximation of natural speech; in Burns this often came out as energetic indignation, and in Byron's case as the speech of a 'broken Dandy', a man of casual disinterest. Burns's skill at using the 'real' language of men sparked, in part, fundamental elements of Romantic poetry, most famously expounded by Wordsworth in the transformative Preface that accompanied the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). Although Burns did write from what he knew, he consciously elected to write in a mixture of Scots dialect and standard English, having both options at his disposal. If Burns's revival and mastery of the Standard Habbie suited the poetry of a labouring-class peasant farmer, then the Italian verse form used by Byron was an aristocratically appropriate vehicle for his social critiques and poetical self. Byron critiqued the society and literary scene that he knew, and his language 'drew on the speech of wits and gentlemen,' and had done so throughout his career. [399] Despite the difference in register, Burns and Byron both reject critics, rebuking, with energetic wit, pretence and popular convention or so-called proper taste. Burns famously does this in his poetic, 'Epistle to J. L*****k, An Old Scotch Bard':

[399] Andrew Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 111.

A set o' dull, conceited Hashes,

Confuse their brains in *Colledge-classes*!

They *gang in* Stirks, and *come out* Asses,

Plain truth to speak;

An' syne they think to climb Parnassus

By dint o' Greek!

Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire,

That's a' the learning I desire;

Then tho' I drudge thro' dub an' mire

At pleugh or cart,

My Muse, tho' hamely in attire,

May touch the heart.[400] (67-78)

Burns is making a passionate defence of his poetry, and although in an earlier stanza he claims he is 'nae Poet', 'But just a rhymer', we have cause to be suspicious. The skill of Burns's artistry is such that he can make the elaborately crafted, tightly controlled verse come across as spontaneity, as if there is no distance between his thinking, speaking, and writing; or, as Low put it, 'his art conceals art, so that the impression created is frequently one of wholly spontaneous, improvised composition'.[401] We can see a similar effect working playfully in Byron's *Beppo*:

Oh that I had the art of easy writing

What should be easy reading! could I scale

Parnassus, where the Muses sit inditing

[400] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 87.
[401] Low, *Kilmarnock Poems*, p. xxiii.

Those pretty poems never known to fail,

How quickly would I print (the world delighting)

A Grecian, Syrian, or *Assyrian* tale;

And sell you, mix'd with western sentimentalism,

Some samples of the finest Orientalism.

But I am but a nameless sort of person

(A broken Dandy lately on my travels)

And take for rhyme, to hook my rambling verse on,

The first that Walker's Lexicon unravels,

And when I can't find that, I put a worse on,

Not caring as I ought for critics' cavils;

I've half a mind to tumble down to prose,

But verse is more in fashion — so here goes![402] (401-16)

Like Burns, Byron satirizes tastes and tastemakers but, also like Burns, he comments on his own poetry; having published — with great success — oriental tales such as *The Giaour* and *The Corsair,* he bemoans an audience eager for 'sentimentalism'. The 'I' of these stanzas is Byron is taken for granted, just as 'me' is with Burns. But both poets are also satirizing themselves. Burns's claim that one spark of nature's fire is all the learning needed is demonstrably false, and it plays into his critics' hands. There is a further concealment in Burns's petition of the muse in asking for one 'spark o' Nature's fire', as he references both Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Pope's *Prologue to Sophonisba*.[403] Burns's programme doubles back on itself, as the intricately spun stanza calling for natural inspiration instead reveals his breadth of learning, in the same breath that he pleads for untutored genius.

[402] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 329.
[403] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, III, p. 1059.

There is another irony, of course, in that Burns and Byron both cared a great deal about 'critics' cavils'. Both poets insert themselves into their verse, especially when describing or defending their programme for poetry, in an act that makes them the 'manipulators of [their] own subjectivities', to adapt a phrase from Jerome McGann.[404] We witness Burns trying to pull off a coy pretence of biographical detail with images of the poet 'struggling' at 'pleugh or cart'. However, Burns's 'plain truth to speak' is loaded with puns and word play. A 'Stirk', according to the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (Burns does not gloss this word), is 'a young bovine animal after weaning, kept for slaughter at the age of two or three, not for breeding', and in Ayrshire slang 'a stupid oafish fellow', or, as used by Ramsay, 'a sturdy young man'.[405] The primary use of this term as a heifer works well with 'asses', as both produce the image of a young, underdeveloped farm animal (the joke being they learn nothing). But, if we take the third definition of 'a sturdy young man', the initial joke is repeated, with the added bonus of scatological humour. Burns places this low, compact language in direct opposition to the formal classical tradition of Greek and Latin. Burns deliberately chooses diction that sharpens his critique. Byron attempts something similar, pretending his 'rhyme' and 'rambling verse' is not the stuff worthy of high criticism, although we know after nearly a hundred stanzas of *Beppo*, and hundreds more in *Don Juan* and *The Vision of Judgment*, that Byron's consistent use of his stanza form is highly controlled.

Seemingly casual mastery of stanzaic and metrical forms is central to the art of Byron and Burns. The similarities rest not only in a creative repetition of sounds and rhymes, but also in the use of colloquial language that denies its own formal complexities. The offhanded wit of Byron's concluding couplets is most reminiscent of Burns's verse epistles, as both

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[404] Jerome J. McGann, 'Byron and the Anonymous Lyric', *The Byron Journal*, 20 (1992), pp. 27-45, p. 29.
[405] *Dictionary of the Scots Language*. https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/stirk

have a knack for filling their stanzas with names, and self-consciously commenting on their own role as poets. Indeed, their verse is often used as an occasion to justify the need, or reason, for more of their own verse, as in Burns's verse epistle 'To W. S*****n, Ochiltree':

> *Ramsay* an' famous *Ferguson*
> Gied *Forth* an' *Tay* a lift aboon;
> *Yarrow* an' *Tweed*, to monie a tune,
> Owre Scotland rings,
> While *Irwin, Lugar, Aire* an' *Doon*,
> Naebody sings.
>
> Th' *Illissus, Tiber, Thames* an' *Seine*,
> Glide sweet in monie a tunefu' line;
> But *Willie* set your fit to mine,
> An' cock your crest,
> We'll gar our streams an' burnies shine
> Up wi' the best.[406] (43-54)

Burns celebrates those poets that came before him, but he makes the case for his own programme, first locally and then globally. Ramsay and Fergusson had raised the Tay and Yarrow in their poems, but nobody had sung *his* rivers. In the second stanza, mirroring and expanding the one before, Burns branches out to a wider tradition, both classical and European, only to return to the belief that he can celebrate and elevate his home (perhaps punning on the dialect word for streams, 'burnies', with his own name). Byron adopts a similar approach and tone in the opening salvos of *Don Juan*:

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[406] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 94.

Vernon, the butcher Cumberland, Wolfe, Hawke,

Prince Ferdinand, Granby, Burgoyne, Keppel, Howe,

Evil and good, have had their tithe of talk,

And fill'd their sign-posts then, like Wellesley now;

Each in their turn like Banquo's monarchs stalk,

Followers of fame, 'nine farrow' of that sow:

France, too, had Bounaparté and Dumourier

Recorded in the Moniteur and Courier.

Barnave, Brissot, Condorcet, Mirabeau,

Petion, Clootz, Danton, Marat, La Fayette,

Were French, and famous people, as we know;

And there were others, scarce forgotten yet,

Joubert, Hoche, Marceau, Lannes, Dessaix, Moreau

With many of the military set,

Exceedingly remarkable at times,

But not at all adapted to my rhymes.[407] (Canto I, 9-24)

Byron's message is essentially the same as Burns's: 'famous people and famous places or events have been written about, at length, by other famous people. Interesting and important as they may be, they are not my subject'. Each poet also expresses a desire for their subjects to be more local and biographical where the half-rhymes of foreign words, or, the laboured procession of foreign names suggest the subject's unsuitability to either poet's desired programme. As with Burns, Byron's subject is a version of himself. Burns elevates the rivers

[407] Byron, *Major Works*, p. 378.

of Kyle because they are important to him and his life, and therefore are worthy of praise in verse. That many of the characters and events in *Don Juan* hold biographical similarities with Byron's life is well known.[408]

Both Byron's use of rhyme in his *ottava rima* poems and Burns's use of the Standard Habbie creatively and systematically exhaust — repeatedly — combinations of sounds. Casual subjects, colloquial language, and diminutions, all help to facilitate the comic possibilities of both verse forms. Repetition in Burns's rhyming dimeters allows for either a punching halt to a thought, or a lingering afterthought, both usually comic, and almost always emphatically employed. In Byron, the triple repetition of two alternating rhyming sounds builds to a comic breathlessness that constantly threatens to unravel, but is consistently saved by the closing couplet, which simultaneously regains the stanza's composure and draws a line underneath it.[409] The conclusion of Burns's verse epistle 'To W. S*****n, Ochiltree' is an excellent example of poetic craft dressed in humorous, biographical, and colloquial language. Part of the poem's brilliance, and what arrests the reader's attention, is Burns choosing to follow the conceit of the epistle through to its ultimate conclusion by signing his name:

> While Highlandmen hate tolls an' taxes;
> While moorlan herds like guid, fat braxies;
> While Terra firma, on her axis,
> Diurnal turns,
> Count on a friend, in faith an' practice,
> In Robert Burns.[410] (103-08)

[408] Byron, *Major Works,* pp. 1043-44.
[409] David Ellis has also commented on the various comic effects of the stanza as achieved by Byron. Ellis, 'Byron's Sense of Humour', *Romanticism*, 17, (2011), pp. 106-15.
[410] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 96.

This stanza is extraordinarily compressed. The anaphora in the first three lines works alongside the repeated sounds of this stanza's *a* rhyme — 'taxes', 'braxies', and 'axis' — which then turns, remarkably, on its own axis in the fourth line, an effect aided by the Latinate syntactic inversion ('Diurnal turns') and the indentation of the line. The turn thus allows the poem to sign off with its concluding thought. As in *Beppo* or *Don Juan* the stanza is top heavy. Anaphora and repetition of sound build tension that needs to be resolved. Indeed, beginning each line with the anticipatory 'while' signals something about to be, and with each delay, the stanza becomes more pregnant. Burns's register in this stanza is the blend of colloquial talk of farmers: 'herds', 'braxies' (dead sheep), and 'taxes', with the higher scientific register of 'terra firma' and 'Diurnal'. As the concluding stanza of the poem is ostensibly an elaborate excuse to sign off on his name, Burns takes the opportunity to generate six lines of poetry that are representative of the best of his talents. The listing of names, in the case of Byron, or Burns's signing off his own poem place the poets within their poetry in a casually, autobiographical way. These lines are not sensationalising, yet they allow for details of the poet to coyly enter the poem and are always subject to manipulation.

The 'complex associations of the poet's mind' discussed in the introduction showed how Burns actively developed a series of masks and personae in both his poetry and public appearance that led to the early critical myopia that so profoundly shaped much of his critical legacy. Burns's verse epistles afforded the poet with the perfect opportunity for his sleight of hand. Epistles are poems dressed as letters, crafted for publication. Yet, in the case of Burns, the distinction between biographical and poetic creation is not always clear, and the 'I' of the poem has a tendency to escape critical scrutiny as, in the context of a letter, it feels much less self-conscious.

Burns did not write many narrative pieces, but the local subjects of his poems, oftentimes named, allow the reader to be drawn into the poet's self-conscious act of speaking

or telling the poem. As in Burns's epistle, Byron generates a multitude of stanzas that seem to do whatever he wants them to do, and in the fifth stanza, he returns to the subject of his poem to mock convention, but also to clue the reader into the Anglicised pronunciation of his titular character:

> Brave men were living before Agamemnon
>
> And since, exceeding valorous and sage,
>
> A good deal like him too, though quite the same none;
>
> But then they shone not on the poet's page,
>
> And so have been forgotten:— I condemn none,
>
> But can't find any in the present age
>
> Fit for my poem (that is, for my new one);
>
> So, as I said, I'll take my friend Don Juan.[411] (Canto I, 32-40)

Byron fills his stanzas with a vocabulary familiar to his theme. There is no real reason to mention Agamemnon, other than as a perfunctory nod to Homer for his epic, although he pretends he is trying to find his subject. In much the same way that the 'Highlandmen' and 'Braxies' are relevant to Burns's poem in that he is celebrating his native soil, Agamemnon fits a formal and metrical purpose more than a didactic or narrative one. Ultimately the stanza is designed to end on the hero's name, 'Don Juan'. By ending on the name, and finishing his most immediate thought, it allows Byron to start anew in the next stanza.

Each poet maintained a kind of *sprezzatura*, a studied nonchalance, designed to mask formal complexities with casual speech and casual subjects. For Burns, dialect went a long way in aid of his program, likewise the verse epistle, especially when biographically minded, further distracted attentions away from a carefully constructed art. For Byron, digression,

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[411] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 379.

humour, and an offhanded manner of speech move at a speed, and with an easiness and creative expressiveness that Speirs saw as common to both poets.

The open, conversational forms of Burns and Byron give their poetry several shared qualities: both poets are able to convey their energetic love of life, of joy, and to criticise the overly-serious with a jaunty swagger. Andrew Rutherford, in discussing the important turn *Beppo* brought to Byron's career makes this comparison:

> […] more than any other poet — much more even than Burns — Byron conveys the *fun* of being alive and sinning, or of living a normal social life made up of commonplace activities like dining, drinking, talking, riding, making love, and so on.[412]

As to which poet conveyed 'the *fun* of being alive' more is perhaps up for debate, but that Burns is the name to spring to mind is suggestive of similarities that should be further developed. Byron, in trading the formal and the metaphysical Spenserian stanzas of *Childe Harold* for the virtuosic Italian *ottova rima* of *Beppo* returned to an earlier Romantic inheritance, initiated by Burns:

> […] His poetry now becomes a poetry not of humorous fantasy like Frere's, but of reality, of truth: he uses his new poetic idiom, derived from his own real every-day manner of speech, to present his own real every-day ideas and interests. The constituents of his 'reality' are very different, of course, from those of Wordsworth's, for while both poets deal with the commonplace, Byron finds his material in a decadent urban Society of the kind which Wordsworth saw as utterly opposed to the integrity of rustic life.[413]

[412] Rutherford, p. 122.
[413] Rutherford, p. 114.

Byron's speech is indeed very different to that of Wordsworth, just as Wordsworth's speech is different to that of Burns. But all three poets used forms that accommodated *their* speech, or at least a poetic idiom that reflected their ideas of what speech should be.

For Burns, speech, or the language employed in his poetry, was mutable. Moving between standard English, Scots dialect, or a creative hybrid of the two is what defines his voice: more accessible and literary than Ramsay or Fergusson, and more authentic than Wordsworth. As we saw with 'Tam O'Shanter', changing register could be an effective tool in a digressive poem. Burns's digressive poem 'The Vision', which appeared in the Kilmarnock edition is explicitly digressive and its digressions are often marked by shifts in register. 'The Vision', divided into two sections, 'Duan First' and 'Duan Second'. A Duan, as annotated by Burns is 'a term of Ossian's for the different divisions of a digressive Poem. See his Cath-Loda, Vol. 2. Of M'Pherson's Translation'. [414] 'The Vision' moves from a descriptive setting of Burns's native landscape to the story-teller's home where local Muse, Coila, appears, eventually to crown the poet with a 'Holly round my head'. The version of the poem printed in Kinsley's edition is two-hundred and seventy-six lines (this being the Kilmarnock version, and the shortest of the three manuscript versions that exist). Despite the poem's length, very little by way of narrative event takes place. Indeed, it is a poem of very little action, instead far more concerned with digressive descriptions of local history, Burns's own attempts at writing poetry or being a poet, and long descriptions of Coila herself. Although Coila does not even speak until the beginning of the second Duan. McGuirk places 'The Vision' in the wider context of Burns's verse epistles and biographical tensions discussed in a number of other poems throughout the Kilmarnock edition, 'this Muse who appears out of nowhere to legitimise Burns has all the characteristics he has been promoting

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[414] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 103.

in the vernacular epistles'.[415] The biographical tensions (promoted here and elsewhere) allow the reader to take the speaker of the poem as Burns. This is achieved through use of personal pronouns, and details familiar to life of Burns, such as the decision of whether to write poetry or try to make a more financially successful living:

> All in this mottie, misty clime,
>
> I backward mus'd on wasted time,
>
> How I had spent my *youthfu' prime*,
>
> An' done nae-thing,
>
> But stringing blethers up in rhyme,
>
> For fools to sing.
>
> Had I to guid but harket,
>
> I might, by this, hae led a market,
>
> Or strutted in a Bank and clarket
>
> My *Cash-Account*;
>
> While here, half-mad, half-fed, half-sarket,
>
> Is a' th' amount.[416] (19-30)

This biographical stance intrigues the reader, and shares qualities with the realistic, natural descriptions of the poem's first two stanzas. In a turn characteristic of Burns's humour (though, as Thomas Crawford has noted, not original to Burns), the point at which Burns is about to swear off poetry and be '*rhyme-proof* | Till my last breath—' is exactly the point at which Coila enters, bestowing the mantle of bardship on Burns.[417] The opening stanzas of the

[415] McGuirk, *Sentimental Era*, p. 39.
[416] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 103.
[417] Thomas Crawford, *Poems and Songs*, p. 184.

poem cultivate an interest in the poem's narrator, promoted through biographical details that in turn motivate our interest in the narrative action of the poem. Burns legitimises the tale told by propping himself up as the poem's source of authority. To return to Eliot's remarks, we can see how the tension between story and story-teller maintains a mutual interest in both poets.

McGuirk, contrasts some of the deficiencies of 'The Vision' with Burns's earlier, superior work, noting:

> Typically, Burns is at his best in his early work when he is aggressively defensive: justifying his feelings, praising his friends, attacking his enemies, and showing the world that everything — including odd subjects like mice and beggars — means something to a sensitive poet.[418]

Mice and Beggars aside, the same might be said of Byron. *Ottova rima* provided the perfect platform for Byron to 'justify his feelings…attack his enemies' and be 'aggressively defensive' in general (particularly in the opening stanzas of *Don Juan*). Both Burns's 'Epistle to J. L*****K' and 'The Vision' are concerned with the role of the poet, and the poet's right to that role. McGuirk is correct in noting the absence of aggression from 'The Vision', however, it is arguably Burns's most explicit claim in the Kilmarnock edition of his belief in himself as bard.

The 'aggressively defensive' which generates much of Burns's wit is at its most effective in his satirical poems. Burn's satires tended to be on personal or familiar subjects, much as Byron's were. While the above examples serve to illustrate the formal and technical

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[418] McGuirk, *Sentimental Era,* p. 40.

similarities used in the playful verses of Burns and Byron, the remainder of the next section explores the similarities between Burns and Byron as sympathetic satirists.

Satire and Sympathy

Both Burns and Byron manipulated their chosen verse forms to perform an ironic account of their own productions, which are often critical not only of conventional tastes, but also of their own role as poets, as illustrated by two personal satires: Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* and Burns's poem, 'A Dream', featured in his debut Kilmarnock volume (and directly precedes 'The Vision'). Verse form remains important to these two poems, but of greater significance here are the affected poetic attitudes in each satire, and the insights they afford into the shared 'satiric spirit' of the two poets.

This tempering of the satiric spirit, located by Speirs, in each poet forms the nub of my reading of 'A Dream' and *The Vision of Judgment*. Speirs's comments acutely identify an affinity of temperament and outlook between Burns and Byron, and he is right to see Byron's three major *ottava rima* poems — *Beppo*, *Don Juan*, and *The Vision of Judgment* — as successors to Burns. Burns's poem, 'A Dream', appeared with a brief note by the poet explaining his inspiration:

> On reading, in the public papers, the Laureate's Ode, with the other parade of June 4th, 1786, the Author was no sooner dropt asleep, than he imagined himself transported to the Birth-day Levee; and, in his dreaming fancy made the following Address. ('A Dream', Author's note).[419]

[419] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 265.

Thirty-six years later, in 1822, Byron published *The Vision of Judgment*, which was a satire against Southey's recently published poem of (almost) the same name.[420] Southey, who was now Britain's Poet Laureate, had written his poem, *A Vision of Judgement*, on the death of George III — a poem which McGann describes as 'a celebration of England's most conservative traditions'.[421] Both Burns and Byron wrote poetic satires against the same King, prompted by the works of different Laureates, with both poets using a dream, or vision, frame for their critiques. However, I am not suggesting that Burns's satire is a long-overlooked source for Byron. Byron, in his Preface, acknowledges Fielding and the Spanish satirist Quevedo y Villegas as offering a precedent for this kind of monarchical satire, and publishes his poem under the pseudonym 'Quevedo Redivivus' — literally, 'Quevedo reborn'. But we can read the correspondences between these poems by Byron and Burns as more than a passing curiosity when we consider their content, form, attitude, and outlook.

Burns's satire is written in the same stanza form as his trenchant religious satire, *The Holy Fair*, an alliterative, 'modified form of that in *Chrystis Kirk of the Grene*', which was a famous Middle-Scots comedy concerning rustic life.[422] The stanza carries alternating metrical and rhyming patterns similar to those of the ballad, while its truncated refrain holds similarities with the Standard Habbie. Burns uses his address to criticise the King as well as the institution of the monarchy but, as in *The Holy Fair,* the stanza form is well suited to light-hearted satire, and humour or bathos. Likewise, in *The Vision of Judgment*, the form chosen by Byron suggests, while he may be criticising, or passing judgement, his poetry maintains a playful spirit, and is not meant to cut too deeply.

[420] For a comprehensive account of the complex relationship between the two 'visions of judgment' see Peter Cochran, *Byron and Bob: Lord Byron's Relationship with Robert Southey* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010).
[421] Byron, *Major Works*, p. 1073.
[422] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, III, p. 1095.

Playful, if not gentle, criticism of the monarchy allows Burns to tease out his own opposition to the King:

For me! before a Monarch's face,
    Ev'n *there* I winna flatter;
For neither Pension, Post, nor Place,
    Am I your humble debtor:
So, Nae reflection on YOUR GRACE,
    Your Kingship to bespatter;
There's monie *waur* been o' the Race,
    And aiblins *ane* been better
        Than You this day.[423] (19-27)

The first four lines present Burns bold and undaunted by the King's title, and express the belief that a man's worth comes from his actions, not his title, a sentiment Burns also expressed in his famous lines, 'The rank is but the guinea's stamp, | The Man's the gowd for a' that' (7-8).[424] However, the second half of the stanza turns and claims it holds nothing against George the person, but rather against the institution of the monarchy. Indeed, Burns is happy to tell the King in the last two lines of the stanza there have been plenty of worse Kings, but perhaps one better, too.[425] This is essentially the tone of Burns's satire: a rough and rude dressing down of authority, tempered by 'a warm-hearted geniality'. These lines are also a way for Burns to separate himself from other poets. In the preceding stanza, Burns imagines poets as 'a venal gang' (which perhaps incorporates the Laureate, Warton) attending and complimenting the Birthday Levee, whereas Burns presents himself as the

[423] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 266.
[424] Burns, *Poems and songs*, II, p. 762.
[425] Low glosses 'ane' (one) as Charles Edward Stewart. Low, *Kilmarnock Poems*, p. 43.

uncouth *Bardie*, not beholden to the more proper etiquette expected from poets.[426] Indeed, 'A Dream' carries on in a similar manner, criticising the King's ministers and state officials, and, more obviously, William Pitt, before moving on to the Royal family — first the Queen, and then the Prince Regent:

> For you, young Potentate o' W—,
> I tell your *Highness* fairly,
> Down Pleasure's stream, wi' swelling sails,
> I'm tauld ye're driving rarely;
> But some day ye may gnaw your nails,
> An' curse your folly sairly
> That e'er ye brak *Diana's pales,*
> Or rattl'd dice wi' *Charlie*
> By night or day.[427] (82-90)

Burns begins criticising the Prince for his over-indulgence in pleasure. The reference to Diana works in two ways: Diana is the Virgin Goddess as well as the Goddess of hunting, and both of these identities are related, as hunting in poetry so often serves as sexual metaphor. By breaking her pales, Burns is making a crude sexual joke that points to the Prince's two-fold loss of chastity, not to mention his well-known penchant for gambling with Charles James Fox (Charlie), referenced in the following line. But Burns was hardly the poet to make a serious criticism out of sexual promiscuity, and one suspects gambling was seen as a folly more by others than by Burns. Indeed, the criticism quickly turns into something far more generous:

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[426] Burns was not to know that Warton's Birthday Ode can be read as satire, a fact evidenced by subsequent yearly Odes on the occasion, approaching pseudo-comic sycophancy.
[427] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 268.

Yet aft a ragged *Cowte's* been known,

To mak a noble *Aiver;*

So, ye may dousely fill a Throne,

For a' their clish-ma-claver:

There, Him at *Agincourt* wha shone,

Few better were or braver;

And yet, wi' funny, queer *Sir John,*

He was an unco shaver

For monie a day.[428] (91-99)

A 'Cowte' is a colt or awkward fellow, and an 'Aiver' an old work horse.[429] Burns has chosen his dialect words well, suggesting that not only might the young and foolish grow up to be old and hardworking (or even great), but comparing the young Prince favourably, in aligning him with Prince Hal, and Charles James Fox with Falstaff.[430] Burns, who 'winna flatter' the King, is more than happy to give the Prince the benefit of the doubt, and suggests that youthful indiscretion gives way to greater maturity. Byron's criticism of the monarchy falls along similar lines in *The Vision of Judgment.* Although Byron's condemnation of the King is more sustained, and delivered in far harsher terms than in Burns's poem, Byron ends the invective by striking a benevolent and genial note:

'God save the king!' it is a large economy

In God to save the like; but if he will

Be saving, all the better; for not one am I

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[428] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 268.
[429] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* III, pp. 1561, 1549.
[430] The comparison of Charles Fox to Falstaff was common at the time. See, for example, John Boyne's satirical print of 1783. www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-12455

Of those who think Damnation better still:
I hardly know too if not quite alone am I
In this small hope of bettering future ill
By circumscribing, with some slight restriction,
The eternity of hell's hot jurisdiction.[431] (97-104)

Byron says here, and repeats throughout, that he does not wish to damn the King. Indeed, in one of the poem's most memorable scenes, the enemies of the King, John Tooke and the faceless Junius, are asked to make their pronouncements. But again, Byron directs them away from judgement. They had said their piece on earth and were happy to leave it at that. Byron's poem is not so much a satire against the King as an attack on Southey, and a judgement on the act of judgement.

Kinsley noted that Burns's 'social disposition [...] has a satiric as well as a sympathetic side' and this can be seen clearly in 'A Dream'.[432] But despite the playful tone of the poem, as much concerned with witty banter as it is with satire, when his friend and correspondent, Mrs Dunlop, suggested the poem could be offensive, Burns bristled at the thought of changing his ways for English gentlemen. Dunlop, who read Burns's poem in its second edition (1787), remarked: 'I ought to have told you that numbers at London are learning Scots to read your book, but they don't like your Address to the King, and say it will hurt the sale of the rest'. But Burns was capable of practising what he preached, retorting: 'I set as little by kings, lords, clergy, critics &c. as all the respectable Gentry do by my Bardship'.[433] One can almost taste Burns's rancour with rank and the banal manners of polite society. Burns's disregard for 'kings, lords, clergy, critics', and the rest is born out of a deep

[431] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 945.
[432] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, III, p. 975.
[433] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, III, p. 1191.

resentment of the wealthy and advantaged, who felt that their social station was enough to elevate them as men. The satirical strain is nurtured, partially, by a demand for equality, and a severe distrust that class or wealth has any bearing on a person's intrinsic worth. But Burns was capable of writing poetry far more biting and damning than in 'A Dream'. 'Holy Willie's Prayer' as a personal satire cuts with a far sharper blade, and 'Man was Made to Mourn', while not a satire, condemns the cruel ironies of the labouring poor in far harsher terms than anything expressed in 'A Dream'. The playfulness of the poem is evidenced partially by the high proportion of dialect words, framed within an address to the King, which makes one wonder how much of it Burns expects the King to actually understand. The verse form of the poem is also useful in gauging the tone of Burns's satire. Although the form is not inherently satiric, or comic, Burns was a skilled maker, and the alternating rhyme scheme of the stanza is well-suited to Burns's affinity for condensed rhyme, natural speech, and a light-hearted disposition.

Byron's 'Vision' shares this balance of satire and sympathy. Although *The Vision of Judgment* is far more biting (though not condemnatory), this is partially because the stakes are higher. Burns's address sent up the neo-classical lines of the laureate, Thomas Warton, whose poem flattered the King on his birthday by positively aligning Britain with classical Greece, whereas Byron was engaging with Southey's *A Vision of Judgement,* occasioned by the death of George III.[434] Southey's poem, which McGann refers to as the 'banal apotheosis of King George III', sought to elevate the late King, as well as the monarchy.[435] Southey's Dedication to the King, written in the language of affected flattery, is followed by a Preface which sets out the basic principles and functions of how successfully to apply Latin versification to the English language. Southey's sustained discussion of various metrical

[434] *Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Warton*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1802), II, pp. 108-15.
[435] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 1073.

forms and patterns is meant to illustrate the great, deliberative pains that he has undertaken as a poet, going so far as to claim that, 'In repeating the experiment upon a more adequate scale, and upon a subject suited to the movement, I have fulfilled one of the hopes and intentions of my early life'.[436] This is taken from the same Preface in which Southey, railing against his contemporaries, and specifically against Byron, accuses them thus:

> The school which they have set up may properly be called the Satanic school; for though their productions breathe the spirit of Belial in their lascivious parts, and the spirit of Moloch in those loathsome images of atrocities and horrors which they delight to represent, they are more especially characterized by a Satanic spirit of pride and audacious impiety, which still betrays the wretched feeling of hopelessness wherewith it is allied.[437]

And so, a haughty Preface followed an obsequious Dedication, before turning to tired, over-wrought poetry. Byron's own Preface reveals how little his poem is really concerned with the King's death, as it is entirely geared up as an attack on Southey:

> If Mr Southey had not rushed in where he had no business, and where he never was before, and never will be again, the following poem would not have been written. It is not impossible that it may be as good as his own, seeing that it cannot, by any species of stupidity, natural or acquired, be *worse.* The gross flattery, the dull impudence, the renegado intolerance and impious cant of the poem by the author of 'Wat Tyler', are something so stupendous as to form the sublime of himself — containing the quintessence of his own attributes.[438]

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[436] Robert Southey, *A Vision of Judgement* (London, 1821), p. xxvii.
[437] Southey, pp. xx-xxi.
[438] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 939.

Byron, incredulous at Southey's hypocrisy over his earlier Jacobin play, *Wat Tyler*, returned fire, attacking Southey as a bad poet, and his poem as a bad poem. The latter point is important, considering how much of Southey's Preface is devoted to the careful construction of his hexameters, and how Southey sees himself as holding up the virtues of a bygone poetic age while his contemporaries produce poetry that has the 'wretched feeling of hopelessness'. It is in this light that we should consider Byron's decision to write his response to Southey in *ottava rima.* Southey may not have had *ottava rima* in mind when writing his Preface, but Byron, in continuing to develop his own use of the stanza form, was aligning himself not just with its origins as an oral form (hence its suitability to 'natural speech'), but also to its frequent use by major English poets such as Wyatt, Sidney, Spenser, Drayton, and Milton.[439] Byron was likewise aware of and influenced by his contemporary John Hookham Frere's use of *ottava.* Byron's adaptation of the Italian verse form allowed him to adopt a posture completely antithetical to Southey's posture. The effect works as a seemingly effortless response to Southey's high-minded programme. Not only does Byron deliver his satire in an apparently casual style so familiar to his best poetry, but he mocks the conceit of Southey's poem by refusing to admit any importance to the question of the King's salvation, or, indeed, to Southey himself. In the final stanza of *The Vision of Judgment* we can see how Byron generates a sympathetic, albeit casual dismissal of the matter at hand:

> As for the rest, to come to the conclusion
>
> Of this true dream, the telescope is gone
>
> Which kept my optics free from all delusion,
>
> And show'd me what I in my turn have shown:
>
> All I saw farther in the last confusion,

[439] *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Roland Green and others, 4th edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 986.

Was, that King George slipp'd into heaven for one;
And when the tumult dwindled to a calm,
I left him practising the hundredth psalm.[440] (841-48)

This ending is not bathetic, nor does it deflate. The King simply 'slipp'd' into heaven, as if unnoticed and unimportant. Judgement on George III's salvation, ostensibly the subject of the poem, is treated trivially, yet still benevolently. Long before the poem's conclusion, readers know that Byron is more concerned with writing good poetry, and showing that Southey wrote bad poetry, than with any moral, or political subject, and this is reinforced by the attitudes assigned, in an earlier scene, to some of the King's harshest critics.

Byron's first experiment in *ottava rima* was his 1816 'Epistle to Augusta', a beautiful and moving piece, entirely devoid of the comic. Burns began experimenting with the Standard Habbie in 1785, where 'Poor Mailie's Elegy' is generally considered to be his earliest attempt at the form. Like Byron, Burns chooses when to assume the posture of energetic indignation, or playful social satire, but is equally capable of a slow-motion reworking of enlightenment philosophy, meant to strike at the heart of his own convictions, as seen in the second stanza of 'To a Mouse, On turning her up in her Nest, with the plough, November, 1785':

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,

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[440] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 968. Leaving the King to practise the hundredth Psalm is a fitting move by Byron, especially the verse 'Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! | give thanks to him, bless his name!'. Psalms, 100: 2.

An' *fellow-mortal!*[441] (7-12)

The reader feels a similar geniality in these serious lines. Treating a mouse not as a fellow human, but as a fellow *mortal* is just the other side of the coin to refusing flattery in the face of title. The same essential, warm-hearted spirit lives in much of Burns's poetry despite differences in tone, mode, genre — or, in this instance — stanza form. Byron held a lifelong admiration for Burns, and one can see why. Burns took up Ramsay's revival of the Standard Habbie stanza, abandoned by the English in the Middle Ages, and made it his own. Byron, who in his Preface to *The Vision of Judgment* acknowledges one of *ottava's* masters, Luigi Pulci (whom he partially translated), took an Italian form used in epic, narrative verse and, after a brief experiment with the epistle to his sister, turned to the comic and satiric themes of *Beppo*, *Don Juan*, and *The Vision of Judgment*. While it would be oversimplifying the complexities of literary history and Romantic networks to suggest that Byron's satire is really about good poetry and bad poetry (it would certainly be oversimplifying Byron's relationship with Southey), *The Vision of Judgment* gives importance to Byron's deliberately skewed sense of aesthetics that finds Southey's poetry wanting.[442] Byron could just about stomach Southey's conservatism and the hypocrisy it came with, but the theme of Southey as a bad poet is one of the poem's most stable narratives, and plays on Southey's own over-confident Preface. Byron, who refused to judge the late King in any serious terms, had fewer reservations in judging Southey, but the charge is concerned only with Southey as a bad poet:

Now the Bard, glad to get an audience, which

By no means often was his case below,

[441] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 127.

[442] It is perhaps worth recalling one of Peter Cochran's many aphorisms: 'Southey thought he was a great poet, but wasn't one. Byron became a great poet without really realising how he did so'. Cochran, p. 2.

Began to cough, and hawk, and hem, and pitch

His voice into that awful note of woe

To all unhappy hearers within reach

Of poets when the tide of rhyme's in flow;

But stuck fast with his first hexameter,

Not one of all whose gouty feet would stir.

But ere the spavin'd dactyls could be spurr'd

Into recitative, in great dismay

Both cherubim and seraphim were heard

To murmur loudly through their long array;

And Michael rose ere he could get a word

Of all his founder'd verses under way,

And cried, 'For God's sake stop, my friend! 'twere best—

"*Non di, non homines—*" you know the rest.'[443] (713-28)

Southey's impediments to 'the ride of rhyme's in flow' are manifested in an inability to speak, as the Laureate can only cough, hawk, hem, and pitch his voice out of tune. A few stanzas later, Byron is happy to have Southey laughed off stage, and pitched into his Cumbrian lake, where he is left 'bobbing'.[444] But it is fitting that he should leave Southey with a half-finished maxim of Horace, which can be translated thus: 'Neither Gods nor men [tolerate mediocre poets]'.[445] Byron knew that Southey would be familiar with the line from Horace, but snidely insinuates that he does not have the self-awareness to understand it.

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[443] Byron, *Major Works*, p. 964.

[444] Throwing Southey into water strikes a contrast from his quip against Southey in the dedication to *Don Juan* 'gasping on deck, because you soar too high, Bob, | And all, for lack of moisture, quite adry, Bob!'. Byron's insult in *Don Juan* coarsely puns on the slang 'adry' for 'coitus without emission' (Byron, *Major* Works, p. 1044), which may have resonances with Byron's criticism of Southey's production of dry poetry in *The Vision of Judgment*.

[445] Byron, *Major Works*, p. 1074.

Byron's irritated refusal to complete the maxim (as voiced by Michael) is indicative of his attitude towards Southey, while affirming the belief that his own poetry could enjoy a more tolerant audience.

Both Burns and Byron had a particular disdain for the kind of condescension exhibited by Southey, and both poets knew the best way to combat the malcontents was with their own superior art. In *The Vision*, Byron made no attempt to hide the fact that it was an angry riposte to Southey. He spent much of his own Preface criticising the Poet Laureate, much as he had done in the introduction to *Don Juan*. In *Juan,* the introductory stanzas were not only scathing and relentless in their treatment of Southey, but were also heavily critical of Coleridge and Wordsworth, or, to quote Eliot again, made up 'some of the finest abuse in the language'.

Byron saw the King as a tyrant, yet believed, as Rutherford has noted, that the 'most humane and gentlemanly thing to do is to hope for other men's salvation — not for their damnation.'[446] While wishing for the soul of a tyrannical king not to suffer eternal damnation is perhaps not as unusual as taking up mice or beggars for a subject, the compassion displayed by Byron is indeed 'humane' and exactly the kind of sympathy we might expect from Burns. Similarly, Byron's democratic sensibilities, his support and belief in religious freedom and democracy — exhibited full force in *The Vision of Judgment* — are reminiscent of Burns's democratic poems such as 'A man's a man for a' That', as well as his celebrations of love and liberty in 'The Jolly Beggars.' For Byron, freedom and liberty are:

> simple (admittedly) but vitally important concepts. They mean freedom from foreign rule, freedom from despots, freedom of speech, freedom of political action, freedom, finally, to worship God as one pleases without suffering civil disabilities.[447]

[446] Rutherford, p. 226.
[447] Rutherford, p. 231.

Burns would agree wholeheartedly, and it is in this aspect of Byron's satire that we might call upon Burns's famous lines from 'The Jolly Beggars':

> A fig for those by law protected!
> LIBERTY'S a glorious feast!
> Courts for Cowards were erected,
> Churches built to please the PRIEST.[448] (254-57)

Burns's indignation is usually directed at those who lack their own sympathy, and for the rigidly righteous or 'unco guid' who elect themselves as arbiters of an unearned morality. Neither Burns nor Byron exhibit the delicacy of Pope's mock-heroics, nor are their satires developed by finding storms in a teacup, such as in *The Rape of the Lock*. Instead, Burns and Byron undertake serious criticisms of theology and poetry for their subjects. Likewise, Pope tends not to display the anger that the poetry of Burns and Byron derives so much of its energy from. The innovative success of Burns's satires comes from a creative blending of traditions. In adapting and inventing from two traditions, Burns developed a style that was all his own. Bentman, discussing Burns's satires in relation to Pope, and the Scottish tradition reads it as a successful development of 'the Scottish form beyond any of its past realizations by combining this interesting but previously undistinguished kind of poem with the techniques of Pope, the ideas of the Enlightenment, and his own benign point of view'.[449]

Byron's attack is aimed at Southey, his approach to poetry, and his conservative beliefs. In two of these respects — attacking an individual, and their theology — *The Vison of Judgment* also resembles two of Burns's religious satires. Both 'Holy Willie's Prayer' and

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[448] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 208.
[449] Bentman, *Burns*, p. 40.

'The Holy Fair' express, to varying degrees, criticisms of the 'Auld Licht', or the evangelical Calvinism present in Burns's community. Burns's sympathies lay with the moderate 'New Licht', and 'Holy Willie's Prayer' is a severe criticism, specifically, of a village elder, William Fisher, and of Predestination in general. The poem is delivered as an address to God by Willie, and in assuming the voice of his object for satire, Burns exacts full control over the absurd pride and greed of Willie's beliefs, as he preens:

> Yet I am here, a chosen sample,
> To shew thy grace is great and ample:
> I'm here, a pillar o' thy temple
>   Strong as a rock,
> A guide, a ruler and example
>   To a' thy flock.—
>
> But yet—O L—d confess I must—
> At times I'm fash'd wi' fleshly lust;
> And sometimes too, in wardly trust
>   Vile Self gets in;
> But thou remembers we are dust,
>   Defil'd wi' sin.—[450] (25-42)

Without grace, or much strength, Willie's arrogant condescension at being one of the elect makes light work of his sexual transgressions. The occasion for Burns's poem was a case in which his friend, Gavin Hamilton, was taken to court by Fisher, but was successfully

[450] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, pp. 75-76.

defended by another of Burns's friends, Robert Aiken.[451] Aiken's defence of Hamilton was successful, which in the poem serves to further fuel Willie's indignation:

> O L—d my G—d, that glib-tongu'd Aiken!
> My very heart and flesh are quaking
> To think how I sat, sweating, shaking,
> And p—ss'd wi' dread,
> While Auld wi' hingin lip gaed sneaking
> And hid his head![452] (85-90)

Burns's poem is unavoidably personal. Indignation at public offense provided Burns with an opportunity to write his angriest satire (as Bentman points out 'The Holy Fair' is altogether more light-hearted). While Byron's attacks on Southey do not assume the voice of his opponent in the same way — doing so only briefly in the end of *The Vision of Judgment* and not at all in *Don Juan* — there is something of Burns in both the anger, and free-flowing verse of Byron's satires. Where Pope's anger manifested itself in witty couplets, the irregular lines of the Standard Habbie could show Byron a form in which personal animosities and general moral or theological critiques could be adapted to an everyday language.

3.4 'So, We'll Go No More A Roving': Lyric Moments in Burns and Byron

Two areas of consideration still left to explore in relation to Burns and Byron are their respective uses of lyric, and how each poet used song and music in his poetry. This section

[451] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 74.
[452] Burns, *Poems and Songs,* I, p. 77.

briefly looks at several lyrics by each poet and examines similarities in imagery, cadence, and diction. However, the song writing and song collecting of Burns, and the *Hebrew Melodies* of Byron remains beyond the scope of this chapter, though a discussion of Burns, Byron, Felicia Hemans, and Thomas Moore is deserving of critical attention, both in regard to the musical impulses of each poet, as well as the nationalising programmes of Burns in the S*cots Musical Museum,* Heman's *Welsh Melodies,* in Moore's *Irish Melodies*, as well as the lyrics Byron wrote for what was later given the title *Hebrew Melodies.*[453]

Byron's lyrics are comparatively neglected compared to his longer works, and some of Burns's earliest songs, some of which appeared in the 1786 Kilmarnock edition are almost entirely ignored. This chapter concludes with a discussion of a well-known but little discussed lyric of Byron 'So, We'll Go No More a Roving' alongside a little known and almost forgotten lyric of Burns, 'Song Composed in August,' also known as 'Now Westlin' Winds'.[454] Rather curiously, the 1966 edition of the *Oxford Book of Scottish Verse*, edited by John MacQueen and Tom Scott include in their selection, two poems of Byron; Lachin Y Gair' and 'So, We'll Go No More a Roving'.[455] The first poem is perhaps less of a surprise given its subject and diction, however, the latter's inclusion is striking, and no explanation is given apart from the editor's beliefs about Byron as a Scottish writer implicit in their decision to include him in their anthology.

'So, We'll Go No More a Roving' was written as part of a letter to Thomas Moore in February 1817. The MS is lost, and the poem has no other source, and so scholars tend to contextualise the poem through the letter Byron wrote. McGann notes that the poem 'refers most immediately to the Venetian carnival, just ended; but its nostalgia also goes back further

[453] See Kirsteen McCue's essay, '"Difficult to Imitate and Impossible to Equal": Byron, Burns, Moore and the Packaging of National Song', *The Byron Journal*, 45.2 (2017), pp. 113-25.
[454] 'Song Composed in August' has enjoyed some popularity through Scottish Folk Singer Dick Gaughin's 1981 recording.
[455] *The Oxford Book of Scottish Verse*, ed. by John MacQueen and Tom Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 440-42.

to encompass Byron's gay life in London during his Years of Fame, with Moore and other friends'.[456] Brean Hammond also notes the importance of Byron's post-carnival exhaustion as relevant to reading this lyric, as well as his recent affair with Marianna Segeti.[457] However, the poem taken on its own, makes no mention — explicit or implicit — of Venice, Carnival, or Byron's time in London. The poem deals in much more abstract language, and while exhaustion, and a self-imposed desire for 'rest' from a roving weariness are the subjects of the poem, contextualising the lyric from the rest of the letter it was presented with can only provide a limited contextualisation to one of Byron's most famous lyrics. Indeed, the lyric feels more pastoral than urban, and more concerned with an amorous parting than a nostalgia for friendship:[458]

> So, we'll go no more a roving
>   So late into the night,
> Though the heart be still as loving,
>   And the moon be still as bright.
>
> For the sword outwears its sheath,
>   And the soul wears out the breast,
> And the heart must pause to breathe,
>   And love itself have rest.
>
> Though the night was made for loving,
>   And the day returns too soon,

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[456] Byron, *Major Works*, pp. 1038-39.
[457] Hammond, 'The Ethical Turn', pp. 168-81.
[458] It has been suggested to me that 'roving' indicates a sense of male camaraderie, as opposed to a more romantic courtship. While I agree the verb is more suggestive of friendly conviviality or perhaps certain 'bloke-like' behaviour, I believe the poem inclines more towards the amorous concerns of the heart and the specific pain that attends the parting of lovers.

Yet we'll go no more a roving

By the light of the moon.[459]

'So, We'll Go No More a Roving' has been linked either to Burns or Scottish poetry, as evidenced by the Oxford anthology, and Hammond's essay, which compares Byron's poem alongside Burns's 'Ae Fond Kiss'. While I do not want to go so far as to suggest Byron's poem is a 'Scottish poem' (whatever that might mean), it will be worth comparing alongside Burns's 'Now Westlin' Winds' in an attempt to apprehend similarities between the poems, as evidence of Burns's deeper influence on Byron and Romantic modes of writing. 'Now Westlin' Winds' was included in the Kilmarnock edition, and is one of his earliest poems. Burns's poem is about an imagined meeting, as opposed to Byron's poem of parting, but both poems elevate romance under the light of the moon, and both poems use roving, or wandering, as a way of communing with either nature or the self. Burns's lyric reads in full:

Now Westlin winds, and Slaught'ring guns

Bring Autumn's pleasant weather;

And the moorcock springs, on whirring wings,

Amang the blooming heather:

Now waving grain, wide o'er the plain,

Delights the weary Farmer;

And the moon shines bright, as I rove at night,

To muse upon my Charmer.

The Pairtrick lo'es the fruitfu' fells;

The Plover lo'es the mountains;

[459] Byron, *Major Works*, p. 315.

The Woodcock haunts the lanely dells;

The soaring Hern the fountains:

Thro' lofty groves, the Cushat roves,

The path o' man to shun it;

The hazel bush o'erhangs the Thrush,

The spreading thorn the Linnet.

Thus ev'ry kind their pleasure find,

The savage and the tender;

Some social join, and leagues combine;

Some solitary wander:

Avaunt, away! The cruel sway,

Tyrannic man's dominion;

The Sportsman's joy, the murd'ring cry,

The flutt'ring, gory pinion!

But PEGGY dear, the ev'ning's clear,

Thick flies the skimming Swallow;

The sky is blue, the fields in view,

All fading-green and yellow:

Come let us stray our gladsome way,

And view the charms o' Nature;

The rustling corn, the fruited thorn,

And ilka happy creature.

We'll gently walk, and sweetly talk,

While the silent moon shines clearly;

I'll clasp thy waist, and fondly prest,

Swear how I lo’e thee dearly:
Not vernal show’rs to budding flow’rs,
Not Autumn to the Farmer,
So dear can be, as thou to me,
My fair, my lovely Charmer![460]

Burns’s poem is nearly four times longer than Byron’s, and thus allows for a much more extended description of the natural scene. Burns’s poem also makes larger comments on man and nature than does Byron’s, but there are several essential similarities worth drawing out. The most immediate similarities in ‘Westlin’ Winds’ seventh line ‘And the moon shines bright, when I rove at night’. Indeed, both poems are largely paratactic, though the final stanzas in each give the poems a sense of narrative emphasis for their conclusion. Of course, both poems share a belief in what exactly, night-time is meant for. Byron, who had read Burns as early as 1813, would have been familiar with the Kilmarnock and Edinburgh editions of his poetry, and while the comparison between the lyrics perhaps falls short of an intertext, Byron’s poem appears to owe something to Burns’s imagined landscape, where the night is ‘made for loving’.[461] Both poems seek respite from a noisy world. For Byron, it is an internal, world-weary escape, where desire must give way to the physical needs of the body. For Burns, the natural world is juxtaposed against ‘tyrannic man’s dominion,’ but both man and nature are subordinate to Burns’s lover. ‘Now Westlin’ Winds’ shares a number of qualities characteristic of the Romantic lyric: a solitary figure wandering through nature, musing on the problematic relationship of man’s relationship with the natural world (in this case, hunting), while simultaneously painting a landscape both realistic and intimately familiar to the poet. Burns’s poem which Kinsley has noted as alluding to Pope’s *Windsor*

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[460] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, pp. 4-6.
[461] *Byron’s Letters and Journals*, III, p. 207.

Forest is also Romantic in its reimagining of Augustan pastoral. Formally, each poem has song-like qualities, with a number of different tunes being attributed to 'Now Westlin' Winds'. Burns revised his poem in 1789, where it was included in the *Scots Musical Museum*. Byron's lyric, while not a song, is set to traditional ballad meter, with its own musical connotations inherent. Byron's use of ballad meter coupled with thematic similarities in 'roving | By the light of the moon' (11-12) suggest that Burns's early poem may have been in his mind while he wrote his letter to Moore. Less remarked upon is Byron's mention in that same letter of Francis Jeffrey, and the harsh reviews Byron believed to have come from him. Jeffrey had also written harshly against the perceived vulgar components of Burns, and as a 'Scotch reviewer' Byron refers to him as a 'self-constituted judge of poesy'. The mention of Jeffrey in Byron's letter is by no means a smoking gun in relation to Byron and Burns, yet it is another example of the rhymes and echoes that keep arising in an evaluation of the two poets. In this instance, the influence for Byron may be sub-conscious, but his lyric, in its simplicity of abstracted images, in its musical qualities and diction, seems to owe something to the early songs and lyrics of Burns.

While the end of Byron's poem reiterates the lament for what can no longer be, Burns's concluding stanza finds the poem's rover imagining a meeting with his beloved:

> We'll gentle walk, and sweetly talk,
>   While the silent moon shines clearly;
> I'll clasp thy waist, and fondly prest,
>   Swear how I lo'e thee dearly:
> Not vernal show'rs to budding flow'rs,
>   Not Autumn to the Farmer,
> So dear can be, as thou to me,
>   My fair, my lovely charmer! (33-40)

Here Burns brings together the natural landscape, the weary farmer, and the object of his affection, where his love for 'Peggy' (Jean Armour) is imagined as greater than both flowers need for water, and the harvest for the farmer. The concept would perhaps be sentimental and over-idealising, however Burns's language remains local and realistic, and in so doing creates an intimacy that retains its sincerity. This love, it seems, is precisely what 'So, We'll Go No More a Roving' is forced to reject. Byron knows that both his soul and the world were made for this kind of love, yet his 'roving' must be quelled, and it is suppressed in the abstract language, and its repetitions, as the brief poem itself becomes exhausted by the nights that once gave it life.

The tension between the pain of loss at the moment of parting and the eternity of loss that follows is recurrent in both Burns's and Byron's lyrics. Drummond Bone frames his discussion of Burns and Byron in terms of nostalgia, using German poet Georg Philipp Schmidt von Lübeck's conception in 'Der Wanderer' as his point of departure. Bone discusses 'Ae fond Kiss', 'My Heart is in the Highlands', and 'A Red, Red Rose' by Burns, and scenes from *Manfred*, *Childe Harold*, as well as 'It is the Hour' from *Hebrew Melodies*, by Byron. The poems are well chosen and invite further discussion of similarities between Burns's and Byron's lyric mode more generally.

The tendency for either poet's love lyric is frequently a return to a state of isolation or solitude, though almost never by choice. Loving is usually momentary — either as a moment that breaks long-awaited anticipation, or as recalled from a position of loss. While 'Ae Fond Kiss' meditates on a tender moment, the poem is more concerned with the pain of what follows:

> Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;
>
> Ae fareweel, and then for ever!

Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,

Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee. —

Who shall say that Fortune grieves him,

While the star of hope she leaves him:

Me, nae chearful twinkle lights me;

Dark despair around benights me.—

I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy,

Naething could resist my Nancy:

But to see her, was to love her;

Love but her, and love for ever.—

Had we never lov'd sae kindly,

Had we never lov'd sae blindly!

Never met — or never parted,

We had ne'er been broken-hearted.—

Fare-thee-weel, thou first and fairest!

Fare-thee-weel, thou best and dearest!

Thine be ilka joy and treasure,

Peace, Enjoyment, Love and Pleasure!—

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever!

Ae fareweel, Alas, for ever!

Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,

Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.—[462]

The pain of eternal separation is captured in a single, parting moment. As in 'So, We'll Go No More A Roving', the loss or absence of celestial light, 'nae chearful twinkle lights me', signifies an emotional darkening, though in Burns's poem it is 'dark despair' as opposed to the coming, sobering day. The moment, however, is protracted by the final stanza that closely mirrors the poem's opening lines. The word 'sever', too, suggests a degree of emotional violence as well as 'warring sighs and groans', which have similarities with the sword and sheath of Byron's lyric, though Byron's images are more fittingly aristocratic. Hammond notes the contrasting effects of these two poems where Burns performs a sincere parting, and Byron performs worldliness.[463] Another crucial element to 'Ae Fond Kiss' that resonates with a quintessentially Byronic tone is a lament for the curse of memory. The fourth stanza — the poem's most famous lines (the ones Byron used as an epigraph) — suggest that never loving or never parting is equally desirous in the face of a final separation. The curse of having loved and lost is a destructive force for Byron in 'So We'll Go No More A Roving', where the 'soul wears out the breast', but also in the opening scenes of *Manfred,* where Manfred asks the spirits for 'Forgetfulness' and 'Oblivion, self-oblivion'.[464]

Burns's poem is in tetrameter quatrains, rhymed *aabb*, which also has the effect of being divided into rhymed couplets. The couplets, which often repeat the rhyme-word exactly, or nearly exactly, such as 'him | him', 'Sever | ever', 'me | me', and 'thee | thee' mark a clear separation between halves of the stanza, while still pairing off lines together. The diction is also highly repetitive; the word 'never' is introduced in the fourth stanza where it is then used four times (five if we count 'ne'er'), and where anaphora in the first, fourth,

[462] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, II, pp.591-92.
[463] Hammond, 'The Ethical Turn', p.178.
[464] Byron, *Major Works,* p. 279.

fifth, and sixth stanzas emphasises the significant pressure being placed on one kiss, though by the end of the poem the call for 'Ae fond kiss' feels like a call for one *more* kiss. Prolonging and delaying the moment becomes playful as well as painful, where the superlatives of the fifth stanza ironically call into question the sincerity of singular affection expressed in the lines 'but to see her, was to love her; | Love but her, and love for ever'; referring to someone as your 'first and best' is not the same as calling them your one and only. The poem, along with 'Gloomy December' was written for 'Clarinda' (Agnes McLehose) before Burns's proposed departure for Jamaica. The pain of loss that attends Burns's expected parting is expressed in a wish for a final physical embrace, yet he and Clarinda were never physically intimate; a parting kiss would have been a first, last, and only kiss, had it actually occurred (and had Burns actually left for Jamaica).[465] The historical context is relevant only in so far as it heightens the emotional or 'performed' sincerity noted by Hammond, and strengthens the claim that Burns wrote always as a poet (in either folk or more classical traditions) with a self-consciousness that privileges artifice above accurate representations of circumstance.

One of the most notable differences between Burns's lyrics and those of Byron is the absence of guilt or shame. Byron's echoes of Burns are qualified by a mysterious and haunted conscience, as well as by bitterness and uncertainty. Byron's poem 'When We Two Parted', derives its pain not just from parting but the circumstances of that parting, where in 'When We Two Parted' Byron bitterly remarks of being 'Half broken-hearted' (3), forming an incongruity and silence both in the act of parting and subsequent experience of loss. The silent tears which mark Byron's loss contrasts sharply with the 'sighs and groans' of Burns's lyric, and his use of 'sever' in the fourth line, 'To sever for years' does not share the mutually

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[465] Hammond refers to Burns (who's pen name was Sylvander) as having a platonic relationship with McLehose. However, not actualising or consummating their mutual affections does not make it platonic, just unrealised. Burns did, however, impregnate McLehose's maid, Jenny Clow, who had been charged with delivering love letters between 'Sylvander' and 'Clarinda'.

accepted fate of Burns's poem where 'we sever': the lovers separate, together, and creates a similar effect to stanzas that are separated by neatly rhymed couplets. There is a confidence to Burns's love lyrics, something that is partially achieved by Burns as either a mutual or leading force initiating the separation. Burns's vow to 'pledge thee' suggests that he is taking his love with him, and that his love is eternal, and though it may be broken by chance or fate, it will return as surely as spring:

> O my Luve's like a red, red rose,
>
> That's newly sprung in June;
>
> O my Luve's like the melodie
>
> That's sweetly play'd in tune.—
>
> As fair art thou, my bonie lass,
>
> So deep in luve am I;
>
> And I will love thee still, my Dear,
>
> Till a' the seas gang dry.—
>
> Till a' the seas gang dry, my Dear,
>
> And the rocks melt wi' the sun:
>
> I will love thee still, my Dear,
>
> While the sands o' life shall run.—
>
> And fare the weel, my only Luve!
>
> And fare thee weel, a while!
>
> And I will come again, my Luve,

Tho' it were ten thousand mile!— [466]

The final stanza echoes lines in the penultimate stanza of 'Ae Fond Kiss':

Fare-thee-weel, thou first and fairest!

Fare-thee-weel, thou best and dearest!

However, 'A Red, Red Rose' promises a love that can outlast geologic time and spatial boundaries, and nearly refuses to acknowledge loss altogether, as opposed to 'Ae Fond Kiss' which is reconciled to a permanent farewell. Indeed, the lyric only acknowledges the prospect of loss in the final stanza. At first, the call to love 'Till a' the seas gang dry' or 'while the sands o' life shall run' reads as a declaration of intensity and passion, before we learn that the speaker's declaration presages a parting. Burns's use of traditional ballad meter and the near repetition of the second stanza's final line with the first line of the third stanza, as well as the repetitions of the upbeat 'my Dear', give the lyric its confidence and swagger so that we do not doubt the hyperbole, as it is spoken with the 'faith of recovery', as Bone puts it.[467]

There is no such faith in 'When We Two Parted', where the imagined return can only recapitulate into 'silence and tears':

When we two parted

In silence and tears,

Half broken-hearted

To sever for years,

Pale grew thy cheek and cold,

[466] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, II, pp. 734-35.
[467] Bone 'Nostalgia in Burns and Byron', p. 102.

Colder thy kiss;

Truly that hour foretold

Sorrow to this.

The dew of the morning

Sunk chill on my brow—

It felt like the warning

Of what I feel now.

Thy vows are all broken,

And light is thy fame;

I hear thy name spoken,

And share in its shame

They name thee before me,

A knell to mine ear;

A shudder comes o’er me—

Why wert thou so dear?

They know not I knew thee,

Who knew thee too well—

Long, long shall I rue thee,

Too deeply to tell.

In secret we met—

In silence I grieve,

That thy heart could forget,

Thy spirit deceive.

If I should meet thee

After long years,

How should I greet thee?—

With silence and tears.

Byron's poem of parting is marked by silence, guilt, anger, and isolation. The separation, as with Burns's 'Ae Fond Kiss' is initiated by a kiss that signals a termination. However, fondness is replaced by coldness, and is recalled retrospectively as a moment that 'foretold sorrow'. Byron's poem is about secret love that cannot be spoken; it cannot be spoken both because the affair must remain secret, but also because it is simply too painful to give voice to.[468] Parting in either lyric is painful; Burns goes so far as to imagine having 'never met' in order to prevent what is now experienced, but Byron's speaker, who is typically misanthropic, questions how he could have loved in the first place 'why wert thou so dear?' (20). The guilt and silence of Byron's lyrics are partially a product of his aristocratic standing. Burns, who occupied the opposite pole of the class spectrum felt no such shame at publicly declaring his love or as Hammond quotes from Robert Crawford's biography, 'Ae Fond Kiss' allows Burns to 'Perform his intense, private erotic sadness before a public audience'.[469]

Byron loved Burns's songs, and felt his own powers unequal to them.[470] However, his lyrics that deal with parting, while they bear many Byronic hallmarks: the brooding isolation and the scorn of betrayal, share Burns's technique of capturing singular moments that signify

[468] This is the driving sentiment in 'I Speak Not – I Trace Not – I Breathe Not', a poem probably about Augusta, included in the *Hebrew Melodies*. The poem uses the same *aabb* rhyme scheme as 'Ae Fond Kiss' although many of Byron's quatrains throughout *Hebrew Melodies* use that rhyme. However, the final stanza's emphasis on 'one sigh of thy sorrow – one look of thy love, | shall turn me or fix, shall reward or reprove' (17-18) perhaps echo Burns's 'Ae Fond Kiss'. *Byron's Hebrew Melodies*, ed. by Thomas Ashton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 129- 31.
[469] Hammond, 'The Ethical Turn', p. 178; *The Bard*, p. 344.
[470] Byron rejected George Thomson's request for verses that might be set to music. George Thomson had published Burns, something Byron was very much aware of: 'I know that I could rhyme for you – but not produce anything worthy of your publication. – it is not a species of writing which I undervalue – on the contrary Burns in your country – & my friend Moore in this – have shewn that even their splendid talents may acquire additional reputation from this exercise of their powers. – you will not wonder that I decline writing after men whom it were difficult to imitate – & impossible to equal'. *Hebrew Melodies*, p. 12.

all that came before and what is to come after. Poems, like ‘So, We’ll Go No More A Roving’ are wistful and world-weary and fail to match Burns’s sexual exuberance that he will ‘come again’, despite the practicalities of time, or circumstance. And yet, ‘When We Two Parted’ echoes Burns with ‘half broken-hearted | To sever for years’ (3-4), as well as ‘long, long shall I rue thee’ (23-24) perhaps echoes Burns’s lament ‘had we never met–or never parted, | We had ne’er been broken hearted’ (13-14).

There is still more work to be done on exploring the connections between the lyrics and songs of Burns and Byron. There are similarities in Burns’s ‘Afton Water’ and Byron’s ‘To the Po’, poems that both imagine a river’s power as directly linked with the thoughts of their beloved, while maintaining a primary concern on the poet’s inner subjectivities.

Byron, like Wordsworth, admired Burns throughout his entire career, quoting him often and praising him regularly. Burns’s celebrity and performativity, as well as his virtuosic verses, inspired Byron’s adopted Italian model, where a class-conscious register affected a performed account of his perceived biography. Byron resembles Burns more closely than any other Romantic poet. Although Byron was aristocratic and cosmopolitan; Burns impoverished and rural, both were social poets, whose subjects and themes were a critique of the society that relentlessly tried to define or limit them. Part of the enjoyment in reading either poet is found in their anticipation of their critics and peers, where colloquial humour resists and transcends conventional tastes, ultimately defining their own pre-eminence. No other poets of the Romantic period have had so much biographical analysis assumed in their poetry. Believing that the poet can be found wholly within the poem will always mislead, and the consistency and skill with which Byron and Burns manipulated this fact helps illuminate the affinities between two antithetical minds.

Coda:

Reciprocities of the Imagination

My coda returns to a number of themes and subjects discussed throughout the thesis, though, I hope, without recapitulating previous arguments. First, I begin by addressing conceptions of friendship. Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron all conceived imaginative scenarios suggestive of possible friendship with Robert Burns. For Wordsworth and Keats, these impulses are a product of their trips to Scotland and, for Byron, they are the result of acknowledging or inventing, like-minded temperaments of personality — be these democratic, performative, or bawdy.

The second section returns to the early reviews of Burns's poetry to consider how the partisan and often nationalistic attitudes towards Burns's verse sharply contrasts with the poets who engaged with Burns more openly and recognised that local language and the local customs found in many of Burns's poems often speak to universal ideas. Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron knew what many early reviewers did not: that expressions of love, indignation, tenderness, and humour are more potent and admirable for being so widely understood.

I conclude by offering a few brief remarks regarding Burns's general absence from English Literature department syllabuses. Raymond Bentman and Murray Pittock have both discussed the 'critical-canonical turn' in Burns studies since the end of the Second World War. Burns's continued absence from such syllabuses makes a return to centre-stage unlikely. Although scholarship on Burns's involvement with and connection to English Romanticism is steadily increasing, his integration into the classroom is a frontier yet to be

confronted fully. I briefly discuss potential ways of bringing Burns into the discussion of evolving literary trends in late eighteenth-century British poetry, and how the joys as well as the difficulties of Burns can usefully enrich students understanding of Romantic-period literature already being taught.

Friendship: Burns the Brother Poet

'Good verse *most* good, and bad verse then seems better
Received from absent friend by way of Letter.
For what so sweet can laboured lays impart
As one rude rhyme warm from a friendly heart?'
— Anonymous epigraph used by Coleridge[471]

'LET other Poets raise a fracas
'Bout vines, an' wines, an' drunken *Bacchus,*
An' crabbed named an' stories wrack us,
An' grate our lug,
I sing the juice *Scotch bear* can mak us,
In glass or jug.'
— Burns, 'Scotch Drink' (1-6)

My thesis re-examines the influence and relationship of Burns's life and poetry on three major Romantic poets. I do not offer a redefinition of the paradigm of British Romanticism in a bid to accommodate Burns as a preeminent figure within the poetic movement. Instead I have illustrated the extent to which Burns's presences exist self-consciously within his own poetry, as well as the general poetic and aesthetic concerns, of Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron.

McGann and Pittock have both commented on the difficulties, or perhaps inadequacies, of attempting to define Romanticism comprehensively, while providing useful ways of thinking about the problem of periodization. McGann's 1992 article 'Rethinking Romanticism', begins by addressing some of the fallout from his seminal study *Romantic*

[471] These lines appear as the anonymous epigraph to Coleridge's poem 'Lines: Written at Shurton Bars, near Bridgewater, September 1795, in Answer to a Letter from Bristol', in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Oxford Authors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 24.

Ideology, published in 1983. Returning to his criticism of René Wellek, McGann reminds us of Wellek's definition of Romanticism as 'Imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style', which McGann suggests is 'not wrong so much as it is abstract and preliminary'.[472] The inadequacy arises in attempting to unify all Romantic authors through a closed set of principles (aesthetic, visionary, ideological) which necessarily exclude, or misrepresent poets such as Blake, Byron, and others. Instead, McGann offers a more capacious view that avoids anything too systematic:

> However, to the extent that romanticism is executed not as a prescriptive but as a poetic economy – a dynamic scene of evolving tensions and relationships, as in a family – its primal terms and data cannot lapse into systematic rectitude. Romantic poetry, in short, constructs a theatre for the conflicts and interactions of the ideologies of romanticism.[473]

This does not mean that Romanticism becomes nebulous or entirely vague. Pittock articulates what constitutes the boundaries of the 'theatre', or where the borders of 'periodization' can be defined in his opening chapter in *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* as a matter of the availability of choice:

> The strong presence of certain features which make their appearance in cultural developments found between 1750 and 1780, […] will be taken as providing the range of possibilities, the choice of cultural options, which their own and succeeding generations could neglect, but which had been simply unavailable earlier. Periodicity is thus defined as what is available for writers to choose, not by what they did choose.[474]

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[472] Jerome McGann, 'Rethinking Romanticism', *ELH*, 59 (1992), pp. 735-54, (p. 735); (p. 739).
[473] McGann, 'Rethinking Romanticism', p. 739.
[474] Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, p. 4.

Pittock's definition of periodicity can, of course, be applied to any period, as can McGann's view of a 'dynamic scene'. His discussion of periodicity, as well as McGann's remarks, offer a way of looking at what separates Burns's influence on Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron, from all of the other influences that are also self-consciously manifest in their works, and oftentimes common to all three poets. Milton and Shakespeare, to name but two, are profoundly important authors for the poets I have discussed; Spenser was a far greater influence on Keats than Burns, just as Horace was for Byron. But there are two important, essential differences with these earlier poets, both of which centre on proximity. Pittock's remarks on choosing what was 'simply unavailable earlier', reminds us — just as Wordsworth did himself, with the famous claim 'Whose light I hailed when first it shone' — that he (and by association, the other poets of his generation), were the first to be influenced by Burns. Second, and very much related, was the fact that Burns's recent death, which was in living memory for Wordsworth, allowed for a deeply personal engagement with Burns's poetry, despite the fact that neither Wordsworth, Keats, nor Byron ever met him (Byron was eight when Burns died, and Keats was a few months shy of his first birthday).

Without suggesting any unifying thread of influence, each chapter does show how Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron all responded to Burns in such a way that they could productively imagine themselves as friends with their brother-poet. Burns could conceivably have lived long enough, and he would have been close enough geographically, to have known and befriended the English Romantics, and so this section of the conclusion discusses the unique possibilities Burns offered his early, English admirers.

Friendship is a constant subject of Burns's poetry. There are eight epistles addressed to friends in the Kilmarnock edition and, in crafting verse epistles as opposed to more formal addresses, Burns creates feelings of intimacy, enhanced by exuberant recollections of real events, such as in his 'Epitsle to L*****K'. Like Byron, Burns appears most honest when at

his most performative, such is the force of a poetry that is 'predominantly rhetorical and conversational rather than symbolic or mythic'.[475] Burns's conviviality and openness in his addresses are disarming and warm and invite reply. Burns's verse epistles often have a purpose: to send poems to a friend, to offer advice on life (though usually tongue in cheek), or to praise the virtue of friendship itself, as in his 'Epistle to Davie, A Brother Poet', while they are both formal and public, and by presenting his sociability on the poetic stage, generate an image that is accurate, while still remaining essentially dramatic.

Wordsworth, in his poem 'At the Grave of Burns', was moved to imitate Burns's Habbie stanza and, as discussed in Chapter One, invokes Burns's lines from 'To A Mountain Daisy'. Wordsworth's imitation of Burns is motivated by the occasion of the poem itself, with a stanza form that openly acknowledges Burns, while it facilitates the conversational, friendly approach that the poem imagines. In order to properly celebrate or remember his would-be friend, Wordsworth enters into his own dramatic personage that meets Burns both literally and poetically on home turf. Wordsworth spends four out of fourteen stanzas musing on a prosperous friendship with Burns. Not only does he imagine being seen atop Skiddaw from Criffel, he considers what it would have meant to have walked and talked with Burns in his native land:

> Might we together
> Have sate and talked where gowans blow,
> Or on wild heather.
>
> What treasures would have then been placed
> Within my reach; of knowledge graced

[475] McGann, 'Rethinking Romanticism', p. 737. McGann applies this to Byron, though clearly it is true also of Burns.

By fancy what a rich repast!

But why go on?—

Oh! Spare to sweep, thou mournful blast,

His grave grass-grown.[476] (52-60)

While Wordsworth's wish to sit and talk with Burns is common to many mourning an absence, the un-made connection is wished for in the service of poetic inspiration. The poem's desire to connect with Burns through casual conversation in nature is reminiscent of Burns's own celebrations of friendship with a 'brother poet', as in his 'Epistle to Davie', for his friend, David Sillar:

What tho', like Commoners of air,

We wander out, we know not where,

But either house or hal'?

Yet *Nature's* charms, the hills and woods,

The sweeping vales, and foaming floods,

Are free alike to all.

In days when Daisies deck the ground,

And Blackbirds whistle clear,

With honest joy, our hearts will bound,

To see the *coming* year:

On Braes when we please then,

We'll sit and *sowth* a tune;

Syne *rhyme* till't, we'll time till't

And sing't when we hae done.[477] (43-56)

[476] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works,* III, p. 66.
[477] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 66.

Burns has no trouble imagining aimless wandering with a poet-friend with whom he often took long walks. More to the point, Burns's depiction of friendship centres on '*Nature's* charms' and '*rhyme*'. Burns's word 'sowth', is glossed (by the poet) as 'to try over a tune with a low whistle', which Robert Crawford notes as offering 'an account of the compositional technique they shared. Sillar had a real interest in how poems were made, and how to become a poet'.[478] Wordsworth had likewise found Burns instructive, having learned 'how verse may build a princely throne | On humble truth' (35-36). Wordsworth's lines commemorating his time at Burns's grave, however, were not content simply to lament death or to praise Burns's virtues as poet. Wordsworth's proximity is at first haunting and more traditionally elegiac, in its recognition of his own mortality:

> And have I then thy bones so near,
> And thou forbidden to appear?
> As if it were thyself that's here
>   I shrink with pain;
> And both my wishes and my fear
>   Alike are vain.[479] (6-12)

However, Wordsworth's shift in tone from mournful to celebratory is a more appropriate tribute to a poet whose voice Wordsworth is attempting to capture. To 'have sate and talked where gowans blow', gently recalls the lines from Burns's epistle quoted above. 'Gowans', a Scots word for daisies, echoes Burns and Davy who 'sit and *sowth* a tune' (54) 'in days when Daisies deck the ground' (49). Daisies covering the grass would have no doubt been a

[478] *The Bard,* pp. 87-88.
[479] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works,* III, p. 65.

powerful image for Wordsworth in a familiar poem, and in his own poem composed during such self-conscious indulgences in Burns's verse. Burns's social ebullience and passion for the twin powers of poetry and nature draws Wordsworth in close where he begins to echo Burns more clearly than at almost any other point. Like Sillar, Wordsworth knew there was much to be learned from Burns, and that Burns would have willingly shared what he knew. When Wordsworth wonders:

> What treasures would have then been placed
> Within my reach; of knowledge graced
> By fancy what a rich repast!
> But why go on?—

Wordsworth's wish is not purely to reach for the secrets of poetry, or of Burns's mind, but to take part in what friendship with Burns would have meant. To be in proximity with Burns would have meant a proximity to 'treasures'. Curiously, Wordsworth suggests that knowing Burns would have 'placed' the treasures 'within my reach', which is not quite the same as apprehending the treasures. The past participles 'placed' and 'graced' acknowledge this remove, and 'repast' with the word 'past' built into it, continues to keep the fullness of what Burns had to offer at a distance.

Wordsworth's poem is neither fully an elegy nor a tribute. Published in 1842, long after it was 'partly composed' in 1803, which is, as the title reminds us, still seven years after Burns's death, Wordsworth acknowledges that there is still more to learn from Burns. Perhaps Wordsworth's letter of 1816 'To A Friend of Robert Burns' already begins to imagine his place as one closer to Burns than the average admirer. Although 'At the Grave of Burns' is not the only time Wordsworth uses the Standard Habbie stanza, it is the closest he comes to imitating Burns's voice, while quietly invoking Burns's poems to a 'brother-poet'.

The degrees of separation between Wordsworth and Burns were very few, and Burns's native Ayrshire was a site that invited the poets of pilgrimage to wonder out loud about a poet whom they saw so much of themselves in.

Similarly, Wordsworth's visit to 'Burns country' stimulated tensions on how to properly respond to his surrounding. So too, did Keats's 1818 tour, where the contradictions and confrontations are recorded in his letters and poems. It is worth returning to Keats's letter to Reynolds covering July 11th and 13th, 1818, as well as his sonnet composed in Burns's cottage. In a previous chapter I discussed the tensions and contradictions of Keats's letter to Reynolds against the destroyed sonnet and resisted the critical tendency to read Keats's poem as the culmination of a disappointing or unsatisfactory encounter with Burns. I have quoted the sonnet again in full to better contextualise critical comments from Morris Dickstein, as well as help to clarify new remarks I will be making on the sonnet:

This mortal body of a thousand days
  Now fills, O Burns, a space in thine own room,
Where thou didst dream alone on budded bays,
  Happy and thoughtless of thy day of doom!
My pulse is warm with thine old Barley-bree,
  My head is light with pledging a great soul,
My eyes are wandering, and I cannot see,
  Fancy is dead and drunken at its goal;
Yet I can stamp my foot upon thy floor,
  Yet can I ope thy window-sash to find
The meadow thou has tramped o'er and o'er,—
  Yet can I think of thee till thought is blind,—
Yet can I gulp a bumper to thy name,—

> O smile among the shades, for this is fame!

Dickstein reads 'This Mortal Body of A Thousand Days' as Keats settling 'for what he had hoped to avoid' while also calling it 'a strange and haunted poem quite unlike anything else that Keats wrote'.[480] While I find Keats's sonnet to be more positive than usually thought, Dickstein acutely apprehends part of the process by which Keats chooses to meet the important occasion of being in Burns's cottage. Dickstein's movement towards his discussion of Burns's sonnet begins with a letter to Tom (July 13th 1818), where the poet remarks on some of the landmarks in Burns's poetry, as well as the mountains that 'did not beckon Burns to some grand attempt at Epic', thus leading Dickstein to compare this episode alongside the poem Keats recently composed:

> A similar re-enactment of the failure of Burns occurs in the poem. Keats drinks toddy in order to approximate Burns's spirit. Instead he re-enacts Burns's misery. 'Fancy is dead and drunken at its goal', dead as Burns is, drunk as Burns so often was. So Keats must settle for what he had hoped at all costs to avoid: an approximation not of Burns's spirit, but of the actual Burns, the Burns who lived in this cottage.[481]

Although Burns did not live in the cottage for very long, (the family moved to Mount Oliphant in 1766), Keats's decision to write a sonnet in the cottage is, as Dickstein says, 'symbolic'.[482] It is symbolic in the same way as Wordsworth's decision to write in the Standard Habbie stanza with marked allusions to Burns's verse, while visiting Burns's grave. Indeed, much like Wordsworth's poem 'At the Grave of Burns', Keats's attempt to capture the voice and posture of Burns is mostly clearly indicated with the triumphant closing couplet

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[480] Dickstein, pp. 177-78.
[481] Dickstein, p. 177.
[482] Dickstein, p. 175

where he 'can gulp a bumper to thy name' and 'smile'. Dickstein distinguishes between Burns's 'spirit' and his 'misery', where misery is a loaded term as he has in mind Keats's letter that exclaims 'His misery is a dead weight upon the nimbleness of one's quill'. However, Keats does not make such a distinction, and recognises that misery is in fact part of Burns's spirit, 'he was miserable — we can see horribly clear in the works of such a man his whole life, as if we were god's spies'. Keats's sonnet which reflects on a day 'thoughtless […] of doom', a life as yet un-besmirched by time, recalls lines from 'Despondency, an Ode':

> Oh, enviable, early days,
> When dancing thoughtless Pleasure's maze,
> To care, to Guilt unknown!
> How ill exchang'd for riper times,
> To feel the follies, or the crimes,
> Of others, or my own![483] (57-62)

Instead of a failed re-enactment, Keats attempts a synthesis of man and poet, both upon himself and Burns. He tasks himself with the symbolic — though sincere and creative — act of writing a sonnet under Burns's roof, in pursuit of 'annulling self', as he had put it in his letter to Reynolds. The sonnet claims to 'think of thee until thought is blind', surely an act of annulling self. It is true that Keats was unable to banish Burns's misery as he had hoped ('we need not think of his misery […] bad luck to it'), and the eager poet's confrontation with Burns's misery is detailed in the portion of the letter dated Monday morning, 13 July, in his encounter with 'The Man at the Cottage' who drank with Burns.[484] Keats's contempt for the

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[483] Burns, *Poems and Songs*, I, p. 234.
[484] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 324.

'flat dog' conveys the impression that he is most piqued by the fact this man was allowed to be friends with Burns. Keats hated 'the rascal', thought he should be 'kicked for having spoken to [Burns]' and called him a 'mahogany faced old Jackass'. Keats's pique has the ring of jealousy about it and in the context of the letter that had quoted lines from the Gospels 'a Prophet is no Prophet in his own Country', Keats begins to align Burns with himself. Keats feels he has a greater understanding and sympathy for Burns than did his own countrymen, where the anger at the man in the cottage reflects Keats's kinship with Burns, as much as the drunk old man's unsuitability to the role of Burns's friend.

One point of consistency in Keats's commentary during his time in Burns country is the pull to make Burns more familiar. For example, when he wrote to his brother Tom that Burns's 'disposition was southern', or in his letter to Reynolds that, contrary to his expectation or 'prejudice' Ayrshire was 'as rich as Devon'. The synthesis of familiarity culminates inside Burns's cottage where he 'Now fills, O Burns, a space in thine own room' (2). The adverb 'now' implies a temporal relation to a previous state. Keats was approaching Ayrshire, then approaching the cottage, and now, fills a space in the room, a space that would have been filled previously by Burns. Keats has superimposed himself onto Burns, both physically and formally through attempting a sonnet. Although Keats does not imagine a friendship with Burns in the same way as Wordsworth (probably a consequence of his age), his visit to Burns's cottage provokes him into an imaginative space that goes beyond the passive observer, or awe-struck literary pilgrim; Keats, who always wished to take the correct measure of his friends, tries almost to dislodge Burns from the unhappy circumstances that damaged a proper valuation of a great poet.

Drinking, smiling, writing (or sharing in a creative endeavour), looking askance at those who hold no interest, these are all elements of friendship that develop intimacy. That Keats's most vivid descriptions of Burns's cottage come in a letter to a close friend is telling

and intensifies his own oscillating emotions. The letter to Reynolds is at times giddy, where he jokes about his friend and travel companion, Charles Brown copying things in his Journal that might land him 'on the cutty-stool all next winter', a penitence Burns famously paid.[485] The move playfully conflates Keats's life with Burns's and brings Reynolds in on the game. The letter is his first to Reynolds since early May and makes a startling acknowledgment of the difficulties in gauging the temperament of his friends from such a distance:

> I wish I knew always the humour my friends would be in at opening a letter of mine, to suit it to them nearly as possible I could always find an egg shell for Melancholy– and as for Merriment a Witty humour will turn any thing to Account– my head is sometimes in such a whirl in considering the million likings and antipathies of our Moments– that I can get into no settled strain in my letters […][486]

Keats, the chameleon letter writer, dutifully follows in an unsettled strain. Pleasant descriptions of Ayrshire and the approach to the cottage are followed by a joke about Brown, which quickly turns into a harangue against the 'Jackass' and the frustrations of the flat sonnet before sentimental musings on wanting to see his 'little Nephews in America', then turning to quips and compliments about marriage and Reynolds' current engagement. The end of the letter states Keats's 'resolve to have a care of my health' and wish that Reynolds do the same before concluding:

> Tell my friends I do all I can for them, that is drink their healths in Toddy— perhaps I may have some lines by and by to send you fresh on your own Letter— Tom has a few to shew you.[487]

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[485] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 324.
[486] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 324.
[487] Keats, *Letters*, I, p. 326.

The negative readings of 'This Mortal Body' often depend on emphasising the disappointments expressed in Keats's letters. However, by taking the entire letter to Reynolds into account (as well as the letter to Tom), we can see that Keats's disappointments or his 'failure' to capture the spirit of Burns ignores the number of comments Keats made that align him more positively with Burns, as well as the raised glass that concludes the sonnet. Fittingly, Keats's letter ends with a similar gesture as the sonnet, toasting his friends with toddy in one hand, while teasing out new poetry with the other.

Like Keats, Byron also aligns whisky with Burns and the poetic inspiration it brought, writing to James Hogg in 1814:

> Indeed I think you and Burns have derived a great advantage from this, that being poets, and drinkers of wine, you have had a new potation to rely upon. Your whisky has made you original. I have always thought it a fine liquor. I back you against beer at all events, gill to gallon.[488]

Byron's letter to Hogg is amiable and eminently quotable. Byron was setting Hogg and Burns in opposition to Wordsworth and Southey whom he doubted 'ever got drunk'.[489] Byron and Keats are unusual in their positive alignment of Burns with whisky. Burns's supposed alcoholism was usually a cause for dour reflections, not as an enabling part of his muse. The pleasures of poetry exist hand in hand with drink and was indeed part of the poetic tradition, as Byron saw it: 'Poetry must always exist, like drink, where there is a demand for it', and, inserting himself into the esteemed lineage 'I am of the old creed of Homer the wine-

[488] Byron, *Letters and Journals*, IV, p. 85.
[489] Byron, *Letters and Journals*, IV, p. 85.

bibber'.[490] Perhaps we should not be surprised to see Byron celebrate in Burns what more sober critics and poets had derided or lamented.

When Byron wondered what Burns would have been 'if a patrician?', he is of course reflecting on the similarities between himself and Burns, though paradoxically, he believes had Burns lived longer (for drinking less) he would have lost his immortality. Low refers to Byron's 'antithetical mind' summation of Burns as applicable 'with fair accuracy to Byron himself' and that 'perhaps he understood Burns because he knew himself'.[491] While Byron's self-recognition in Burns has its similarities with Keats's 'annulling self', it also shares in the wistfulness of Wordsworth's stanzas; we might have been friends, we might have been equals. However, unlike Wordsworth and Keats, Byron preferred to consider Burns nearly always as a poet; perhaps he also understood something about the gossip and rumour — the misery — which surrounded Burns's death.

Byron's comments on Burns are often loaded with class-conscious terms. This can be seen not only in his journal remarks about Burns the patrician, but also in an 1821 letter to John Murray: 'But of what "*order*", according to the poetical aristocracy, are Burns's poems? […] so much for the *rank* of his *productions*; the rank of *Burns* is the very first of his art'.[492] Byron employed similar language in 'further addenda' to the same letter:[493]

> Far be it from me to presume that there ever was, or can be, such a thing as an *aristocracy* of *poets*; but there *is* a nobility of thought and of style, open to all stations, and derived party from talent, and partly from education,— which is to be found in Shakespeare, and Pope, and

[490] Byron, *Letters and Journals*, IV, p. 85.
[491] Donald Low, 'Byron and Burns' in *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 27 (1992), 128-42.
[492] *Critical Heritage*, 326.
[493] This letter to Murray is part of Byron's involvement in the 'Bowles Controversy', nominally centred around William Bowles's harsh criticism of Pope.

> Burns, no less than in Dante and Alfieri, but which is nowhere to be perceived in the mock birds and bards of Mr. Hunt's little chorus.[494]

In both comments, Byron is content to allude only subtly to what Burns was not, instead preferring to rank him as a poet and artist. When Byron says that 'Burns is often coarse, but never vulgar' it is a way of praising Burns's ability as a low character who wrote on low subjects yet retains his originality and is never common, or debased. For Byron, vulgarity 'is a sad abortive attempt at all things, "signifying nothing"'.[495]

Although these remarks do not shed much light on the notion of friendship between Burns and Byron, they do, when taken together, suggest an integration of Burns into a proper poetic lineage which stretches from Cain and Abel to Pope, Scott, and Campbell.[496] The terms in which Byron discussed Burns such as 'rank', 'aristocracy', 'nobility', 'patrician', even 'coarse' can all be applied to Byron himself and has the effect of making Burns something like his double or his brother.

Byron's own Scottish lineage, as discussed in Chapter Three, gave Byron a certain familiarity with Burns. However, Byron sensed the limits of identifying with Burns too closely on national grounds. The next section discusses the early reviews of Burns that placed great pressure on Burns's Scottish identity, and considers these remarks not just alongside Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron, but also within the context of Burns's global appeal.

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[494] Prothero, II, p. 591.
[495] Prothero, II, pp. 591-92.
[496] Byron's letter to Hogg conceives of Cain and Abel as poets: '[…] I make little doubt Abel was a fine pastoral poet, and Cain a fine bloody poet […]', Byron, *Letters and Journals*, IV, p. 84.

‘English Bards and Scotch Reviewers’: Response and Responsibility

> ‘I have a treasure, a whole set of original Burns letters, never published or to be published, for they are full of fearful oaths and the most nauseous songs, all humorous, but coarse, bawdy and in ‘good set terms’. […] I must tell you one thing. Packwood, writing to his brother bookseller [Murray] says, ‘how lucky you are in having such a poet’; as if one was a horse, an ass or anything that is *his*.’
>
> — Byron to Francis Hodgson, December 14th, 1813

Early reviewers and modern critics alike have placed great emphasis on Burns’s importance as a national poet. In his Preface to the Edinburgh edition of his poems, Burns spoke of ‘coming to claim the common Scottish name’, although he was presenting an inflated version of himself. Reviewers such as Jeffrey and Scott in the nineteenth-century, or Thomas Crawford, Daiches, and Spiers, in the twentieth often define Burns in such a way as to limit his accessibility. Conversely, contemporary critics from McGuirk to Bentman and Pittock, as well as others, have resisted this reductive impulse, and have sought to emphasise Burns’s universality.

Henry Mackenzie’s unsigned *Lounger* review of 1786 states of Burns’s language:

> One bar, indeed, his birth and education have opposed to his fame, the language in which most of his poems are written. Even in Scotland, the provincial dialect which Ramsay and he have used, is now read with a difficulty which greatly damps the pleasure of the reader; in England it cannot be read at all, without such a constant reference to a glossary, as nearly to destroy that pleasure.[497]

These sentiments were repeated in 1809 by Francis Jeffrey, to which he added his own colourful propaganda:

[497] Henry MacKenzie, unsigned essay in the Lounger, 9 December, 1786. In, *Critical Heritage*, p. 69.

> Before proceeding to take any particular notice of his poetical compositions, we must apprise our Southern readers, that all his best pieces are written in Scotch; and that it is impossible for them to form any adequate judgment of their merits, without a pretty long residence among those who still use that language. To be able to translate the words, is but a small part of the knowledge that is necessary. The whole genius and idiom of the language must be familiar; and the characters, and habits, and associations of those who speak it. We beg leave too, in passing, to observe, that 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 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 […] add to all this, that it is the language of a great body of poetry, with which almost all Scotchmen are familiar […] Scotch is, in reality, a highly poetical language; and that it is an ignorant as well as an illiberal prejudice, which would seek to confound it with the barbarous dialects of Yorkshire or Devon.[498]

Both passages leave a lot to be desired. One might reply to Mackenzie's remarks that the difficulty other Scottish readers have with Burns's dialect is a product of artifice, orthography, use, and employment of a flexible poet; something McGuirk and Bentman have discussed at length. One also is left wondering why, even with the initial impediments that call for the glossary — *which Burns wanted us to have* — we would only read a poem once. Jeffrey's comments are more than merely partial: they are absurd and false. Burns's language has never been the language of the 'whole country'; it has never been the language of the Highlands, of the Hebrides, or of Edinburgh. Burns's native dialect was regional, and when turned to the page, hybrid and unique. Nevertheless, the substance of Jeffrey's remarks

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[498] *Critical Heritage*, pp. 186-87.

remained largely accepted, and led Spiers in the twentieth century to remark that Burns's verse has:

> no connections with English verse at any point, so that to consider it as a 'reaction' to the English eighteenth-century manner or, along with Wordsworth, the beginning of the nineteenth is (and has been) to breed confusions.[499]

When I discussed false conceptions of Burns's language and artifice in the introduction, it was an attempt to illustrate Burns's skill as a poet and as a highly self-conscious constructer of his persona. Now, I wish to consider these remarks as the product of a harmful trend that has sought to claim a poet's voice for nationalistic ends. It is unlikely that any single person can speak for an entire nation, no matter their multiplicity of voices. The impulse to do so, while at times understandable, devalues the diversity and culture of Scotland, and insults the admirers of Burns spread across the globe. Paradoxically, one cannot speak for a nation, but they might be able to speak for the world.

What Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron identified with in Burns's poetry was deeply personal and rarely ideological. Although Wordsworth did claim an understanding of Burns through his familiarity with Cumberland dialect, his readings of Burns, especially in his *Letter to a Friend*, as well as the poetry that acutely apprehends the sensitivity required to appropriately respond to suffering and nature, shows Wordsworth embracing Burns's most human and universal qualities. Likewise, Keats, who saw only a great poet struggling against misery, and Byron, who saw himself.

[499] Spiers, p. 117.

While the critical trend to recognize Burns's art has gained momentum in the last forty years, he remains largely absent from the classroom. Burns's language is undoubtedly difficult at times, but it is not impenetrable, and the glossary should not be shunned. Indeed, it is an important textual artefact in its own right. One feels that until Burns is integrated into English department syllabuses as an important figure of changing literary trends in the late eighteenth century, the views of Jeffrey and Mackenzie, or of Spiers will still hold sway. McGuirk's Penguin edition of Burns's *Selected Poems* (1993) offers a valuable introduction to Burns's art, with clear editorial principles in her selection and arrangements. It also includes a very helpful note on Burns's dialect, which acknowledges the 'few difficulties' some readers may encounter.[500] Donald Low's edition of *The Kilmarnock Poems* (1985) is also an excellent edition that could serve as a reliable classroom primer and has the benefit of reprinting the poems as they appeared in Burns's debut volume, while including the Preface and Glossary in the appendix. Low includes glosses on the page (not as intrusive as some have claimed), as well as detailed notes on the poems which largely correspond to Kinsley's edition.

Adding Burns to discussions of Romantic poetry or British literary history need not be at the expense of other writers. There is no need unsettle the so-called 'big six'— they are where they deserve to be. But Burns mattered to those poets, and he should matter to today's students and teachers of Romantic poetry.

[500] *Robert Burns: Selected Poems*, ed. by Carol McGuirk (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 299

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