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Bakhtin at Christ's Kirk - Part II - Carnival and the Vernacular Revival

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Part II

Carnival and the Vernacular Revival

There can be little doubt that, in the context of the "Christ's Kirk" tradition as a whole, Ramsay's contribution is an anomaly and represents a direction that tradition was not to take. Many of the carnival elements which lapse with Ramsay are, however, restored in John Skinner's "The Christmass Bawing of Monimusk,"[1] written in 1739 when the author was only eighteen or nineteen, but not published until half a century later, in September 1788.[2] Skinner had the original "Christ's Kirk on the Green" by heart before he was twelve, and later in life he translated it into Latin verse. Perhaps it was this intimate acquaintance with the original that allowed him to reanimate its values so faithfully. Although unavailable to Fergusson, and therefore to be discounted as an influence on the latter's poems in the stanza, "The Christmass Bawing" can be seen retrospectively as constituting a genre through its interaction with the model text.

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[1]Skinner's poem is quoted from Thomas Crawford, David Hewitt and Alexander Law, eds. *Longer Scottish Poems . . . 1650-1830* (Edinburgh, 1987) II, 103-14.

[2]William Walker, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Skinner M. A.*, 2nd edn. (London, 1883), pp. 10-13.

Ramsay's wedding was a celebration involving individuals, and lacked the communal, ideological content which is a crucial feature of carnival. Skinner's poem deals with a game of football played by members of the parish at Christmas time, and in the village churchyard, both factors establishing powerful links with the festive calendar and the community's sense of its persistence in time in defiance of mortality. When dealing with "Christ's Kirk" and "Peblis to the Play," the question of the relation of these poems to actual social practice could only be adumbrated. Such investigations pertain to anthropology. However, Skinner made a simple assumption, which underpins the "Christ's Kirk" poems of Fergusson and Burns, namely, that this was an appropriate literary form for dealing with community festivals. In Allan Maclaine's words

> Skinner's poem represents an attempt to domesticate the *Christis Kirk* tradition in eighteenth-century Scotland. Ramsay . . . had used more or less generalized scenes and characters with an antiquarian emphasis. But Skinner here portrays a specific celebration (which he has actually witnessed), in a specific place (Monymusk), with some touches of local dialect actually used there. In other words, Skinner is here working away from the Ramsayesque continuation of the original *Christis Kirk*, and instead is using the genre as a vehicle for a specific, local, and contemporary subject.[3]

The presence of a literary model influenced the result. The fifteenth-century poem is as essential to "The Christmass Bawing" as the actual football match, and Skinner's poem springs from an interaction, not between poet and feast, but involving poet, feast and literary model. The genre was marked, not just by a modified stanza form, but by inherited words and phrases (echoing, in Skinner's text, Ramsay as much as the original "Christ's Kirk")[4] and, most crucially, an ideology closely related to Bakhtin's understanding of carnival.

In a study of Dostoevsky first published in 1929, Bakhtin considered the survival of carnival in literature:

> But carnival, its forms and symbols, and above all the carnival attitude itself over many centuries seeped into numerous literary genres, merged with their characteristics, formed them, and became inseparable from them. Carnival, as it were, was reincarnated in literature, in a definite and vigorous line of its development.[5]

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[3]Allan H. Maclaine, "The 'Christis Kirk' Tradition: Its Evolution in Scots Poetry to Burns," *SSL*, 2 (1964-65), 171.

[4]There are echoes of Ramsay at *ll.* 1-2, 10, 74, 86, 106, 133, 181, 188-9, 199, 291, 295 and 298, and of the original "Christ's Kirk" poem at *ll.* 1-2, 25, 74, 181, 199, 298.

[5]Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor, 1973) p. 131. Further references to this work will appear in the text.

The "Christ's Kirk" poems from the eighteenth century are a specifically Scottish phenomenon. Carnival as a literary survival was reanimated by reference to actual carnival or to pseudo-carnivalistic social practices. The crowning poem of this revival, Burns's "Holy Fair," is an excellent example of the complexities involved. Was the communion ceremony Burns took as his subject an actual carnival survival, masked as religious observation? Or is the poem primarily an example of the carnivalization of religion, achieved by applying a literary form of carnival to a predominantly orthodox ceremony? The difficulty of answering this question points to the semantic richness of the texts resulting from the fusion of literary carnival tradition and current social practice.

Skinner's football match presents a mixture of predictability and spontaneity. The prior's man knows well beforehand how things are going to work out:

> The prior's man, a chiel as stark
> Amaist as giant cou'd be,
> Had kent afore o' this day's wark,
> For certain that it wou'd be (*ll.* 154-7).

where "wark" indicates both the movements of the ball and the accompanying punches and scuffles. It is in the nature of the village football match that there should be injuries, but at the same time the game is played according to rules which ensure that serious damage will not be done. The gravity of the strokes is apparent, theatrical but not substantial:

> Leitch wi' 's fit gae him sic a kick,
> Till they a' thought him slain
> That very day (*ll.* 97-9).
> . . .
> But suddenly frae some curst wight,
> A clammyhowat fell'd him
> Hawf dead that day (*ll.* 151-3).

where the crucial word is "hawf." The reader guesses instinctively, in "Sanny soon saw the sutor slain" (*l.* 208) that the participle is metaphorical. The match abounds in falls (*ll.* 26-7, 79, 161-2, 214-6), highlighting the grotesque body with references to the backside; "bum-leather" (*l.* 44), "arse" (*ll.* 133, 198), "nether end" (*l.* 206); the bladder (*l.* 42); "riftin" (belching, *l.* 83); "bockin" (vomiting, *l.* 55); and blood streaming from the mouth and the nose (*l.* 124).

Two falls are particularly interesting. In stanza 10 the "inset dominie" (quite possibly Skinner himself) is attacked and "heels-o'er-gowdie cowpit" (*l.* 88), while another group sets on the parish clerk in stanza 29 and "Beft o'er the grave divine/ On's bum" (*ll.* 260-61). Both men have official functions in the community. Both are overturned, and the second dirtied. Most crucially, the possibility of being a spectator, present at the tussle but not involved, is denied them. Carnival violence draws them into the festivity and subjects them to the

same treatment as everyone else present. This motif is strong and persistent. It is more than likely that the real crime of Burns's "Tam O'Shanter" lies in attempting to be a spectator of the antics in Alloway Kirk, and that the witches' pursuit expresses the need to force him into being a participant. Nobody may stand on the sidelines.

In contrast to Ramsay's cantos, Skinner's poem takes place in the open air. The motif of going home crops up early in the poem, where Francy Winsy, "a sauchin slav'ry slype" (*l.* 47), is comforted by his mother, and she threatens to take up his defense:

> 'Waeworth his chandler chafts,' co' Kate,
> 'Deil rax his saul a whang,
> Gin I had here the countra skate
> Sae beins I shoud him bang.' (*ll.* 64-7).

The gender reversal is comical, and the retreat into domestic space has connotations of unmanliness and cowardice. It recurs in stanzas 14 and 20, and most strikingly in stanza 28 when Tam, who "wadha gien a plack/ T' ha been safe wi' his wife/ At hame that day" (*ll.* 250-52), is confronted with the miller's knife in what may be a potential "knifing related to childbirth" of the kind Bahktin mentions.[6]

Oaths come from Francy's mother and a "stalwart stirk in tartain claise" (*l.* 136). The poem deploys a splendid range of vocabulary for physical and character types. Bakhtin comments that "the popular-festive language of the marketplace abuses while praising and praises while abusing" (*Rabelais*, p. 415), and these terms have all the rich ambivalence of carnival speech, where praise and blame are inextricably intertwined. The players include "swankies" (*ll.* 12, 109), "fallows" (*l.* 73), a "gruff grunshy grane" (*l.* 94), a "gudman" and a "callant" (*ll.* 101, 277),, a "cawrl," a "chiel" and a "huddrin hynd" (*l.* 95, 132, 127), a "gilpy," a "wight," a "carlie" and a "spark" (*ll.* 148, 151, 173, 182), "kendlins," "rascals" and "ablachs" (*ll.* 134, 170, 232), a "menseless man," a "trypal" and a "gurk" (*ll.* 195, 203, 221). The tanner is "a primpit bit" (*l.* 37) and Francy Winsy a "fliep" and a "gilpy" as well as a "slype" (*ll.* 55, 68, 47). A profusion of words describing the kinds of people to be met with in the world, never neutral or with detachment, but always with keen interest and enthusiastic participation, is not deployed accidentally. It is a further instance of the remarkable fidelity with which Skinner's poem reproduces crucial features of carnival practice.

The same goes for the structure of his poem. The tussle is inexhaustible, constantly renewing itself. Pairs of fighters succeed one another in a potentially endless sequence, occasionally interlocking, as when Tam Tull is incensed by

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[6]Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1965), p. 254. Further references to this work will appear in the text.

Rob Roy's striking his friend Geordy (*ll.* 21-6), only to disappear at once from view. We meet him again, dissatisfied with the extent of the mayhem:

> Tam Tull upon him kiest his ee,
> Saw him sae mony foolzie,
> He green'd again some prott to pree,
> An' raise anither bruilzie (*ll.* 226-9).

The arrival of reinforcements is a familiar theme from the original "Christ's Kirk." Here the scoring of a goal passes almost unnoticed because of the fighting, and

> Some grien'd for ae hawf hour's mair fun,
> 'Cause fresh and nae sair fail'd (*ll.* 284-5).

The overall impression is of inexhaustible vitality, of endless renewal. The chaos of Skinner's football match takes on a wide significance when seen through Bakhtin's eyes:

> Even the pressing throng, the physical contact of bodies, acquires a certain meaning. . . the individual body ceases to a certain extent to be itself; it is possible, so to say, to exchange bodies, to be renewed. . . . At the same time the people become aware of their sensual, material bodily unity and community. . . . The body of the people on the carnival square is. . . aware of its unity in time; it is conscious of its uninterrupted continuity within time, of its relative historic immortality (*Rabelais*, p. 255).

Whether because the culture of folk humor was still alive in rural Aberdeenshire of the eighteenth century, or because the poet who describes them had a peculiarly sensitive grasp of the literary iconography of carnival, the Monymusk villagers act out, with their blows and kicks and tripping up, a profound perception of human indestructibility in the face of death, authority and power, which finds literary expression through the iconography of carnival, with its

> peculiar festive character without any piousness, complete liberation from seriousness, the atmosphere of equality, freedom, and familiarity, the symbolic meaning of the indecencies, the clownish crownings and uncrownings, the merry wars and beatings, the mock disputes, the knifings related to childbirth, the abuses that are affirmations (*Rabelais*, pp. 254-5).

Neither Ramsay's completion of the original "Christ's Kirk" nor John Skinner's creative revival of the tradition in "The Christmass Bawing of Monnimusk" commands a wide audience in Scotland today. If the former was a dead end, a well-intentioned but uncomprehending travesty, the latter, faithful to the spirit of the original, made its world of imagery strikingly contemporary. The poems by Fergusson and Burns in the modified stanza form, however, are central to

our understanding of Scotland's eighteenth-century revival of vernacular poetry. An analysis of them in terms of the language of carnival posited by Bakhtin offers the possibility of a new approach which complements and in some respects supersedes those offered hitherto.

The core patterns of carnival imagery still subtend texts such as Fergusson's "Leith Races" or "The Election," which have so far been interpreted in primarily descriptive terms, as if any coherence they offered was at second hand, mirrored from the events they portrayed. Their structure is neither mimetic nor linear, but a structure of images and ideas enacting a view of the world. "The Holy Fair" by Burns is built upon a series of ambivalences and juxtapositions which are profoundly carnivalistic rather than satirical.

The use made in these poems of the Christ's Kirk stanza is much more than an instance of cultural nationalism. The intrageneric relations between "Christ's Kirk on the Green," "Peblis to the Play" and Fergusson's and Burns's new creations constitute a rich vocabulary, largely ideological, in which to couch a critique of both fair and communion, the vocabulary of carnival:

> Carnival is an eminent attitude towards the world which belonged to the entire folk in bygone millennia. It is an attitude towards the world which liberates from fear, brings the world close to man and man close to his fellow man (all is drawn into the zone of liberated familiar contact), and, with its joy of change and its jolly relativity, counteracts the gloomy, one-sided official seriousness which is born of fear, is dogmatic and inimical to evolution and change, and seeks to absolutize the given conditions of existence and social order. The carnival attitude liberated man from precisely this sort of seriousness (*Rabelais*, p. 133).

Far from being merely imitative of earlier models, or descriptive of social practice, these poems embody "a peculiar point of view relative to the world" which could only be articulated by means of a literary carnival tradition, a continuing "culture of folk carnival humour." The perspective they offer was "immanent in the traditional popular-festive system of images" Burns and Fergusson inherited (*Rabelais*, pp. 66, 4, 211). Bakhtin characterizes the potential of this system as follows in his book on Dostoevsky:

> The carnival forms, transposed into the language of literature became *powerful means* of artistically comprehending life, they became a special language, the words and forms of which possess an extraordinary capacity for *symbolic* generalization, i.e. for *generalization in depth*. Many of the essential sides, or, more precisely, strata, of life, and profound ones at that, can be discovered, comprehended and expressed only with the help of this language (*Problems*, p. 131).

The Russian theorist detected a kind of reincarnation of carnival in Dostoevsky's fiction. While Gogol had an extra-literary experience of carnival through his contact with Ukrainian folklore (*Problems*, p. 131, fn. 108), Bakhtin attributes Dostoevsky's knowledge of it to literary sources. Carnival forms

were undoubtedly mediated to Fergusson and Burns through the literary tradition. It is highly likely that they also experienced them directly in the communal events they described. For these events themselves enacted an ideology, a view on the world, with full or partial consciousness. A fair was not just a happening, it was a meaning too.

"Christ's Kirk" and "Peblis to the Play" are products of an extraordinarily privileged moment in the Renaissance when the culture of laughter was able to animate the high genres of literature. Their attribution to a king reads like a folk memory of that cross-fertilization. Fergusson and Burns wrote in a different world, where a "new official culture" promulgated "stability and completion of being . . . one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness." The grotesque with its profound ambivalence was banished from the high genres, but continued "to live and to struggle for its existence in the lower canonical genres (comedy, satire, fable) and especially in non-canonical genres (in the novel)." Bakhtin remarks that "all these genres had a more or less oppositional character" (*Rabelais*, pp. 101-2).

Fergusson wrote in two languages, Burns oftener than not in a creative mixture of two. The choice of Scots for much of their work had a clearly oppositional character in post-union Scotland, and it is also possible that poems in the Christ's Kirk tradition functioned as a lower or even non-canonical genre in a world whose literary products were frequently modeled on the English Augustans. The availability of such options means that, while it may be accurate to describe the poetry of the vernacular revival as profoundly British in its overall complexity and its range of responses to a transformed political and cultural situation, Scottish literature of the eighteenth century has a radically different typology from that of English literature in the same period. No strand in English writing of the time can match the function within Scotland of poetry in Scots, with its vivacious, eternally destabilizing influence, marginalized and central at one and the same time. The implication is that, if the Union of Parliaments integrated Scotland further into Britain and produced a Scottish literature which can be characterized as British in intent, it also deepened the differences between the culture of the two countries, driving them farther apart.

The oppositional character of Fergusson and Burns' "Christ's Kirk" poems is evident in their treatment of established authority, both civil and religious, whose presence looms increasingly amidst the carnival celebrations. Fergusson does not miss a chance to lambaste the Edinburgh city guard, and "The Election" is a wry denunciation of the workings of the civil administration. The genre evolved rapidly in the fourteen years that separate the publication of Fergusson's "Hallow-Fair" from that of Burns' "The Holy Fair." With "The Election," Fergusson introduced the striking innovation of applying the genre, not to the feast of the people, but to the ceremony in which civil authority renews and regenerates itself. Burns took the next, logical step and applied the "Christ's Kirk" tradition, with its accumulated weight of three centuries of Scottish popular and written culture, to established religion.

It is fascinating to read Bakhtin's suggestion that Dostoevsky found the literary forms of carnival peculiarly suited to an examination of the phase of nascent capitalism, when the old ideologies, as it were, came unstuck from actual social practice, for it seems probable that this was precisely what was happening in Burns's Ayrshire, and what led him to seize upon the "Christ's Kirk" tradition with such alacrity:

> By *relativizing* everything that was externally stable and already formed, carnivalization, with its pathos of change and renewal, permitted Dostoevsky to penetrate into the deepest strata of man and of human relationships. It was an amazingly productive means of artistically capturing the developing relationships under capitalism at a time when previously current moral principles, beliefs and forms of life were turning into "rotten strings", and the ambivalent, unfinalizable nature of man and of human thought, which until then had been hidden, was laid bare. Not only people and their actions, but also *ideas* broke out of their self-enclosed hierarchical nests and began to collide in the familiar contact of the "absolute" (i.e., fully unlimited) dialog.
>
> (*Problems*, p. 139)

An insight of this kind is particularly precious because it demonstrates that there was nothing nostalgic or regressive about the revival of the "Christ's Kirk" genre by these two poets. Carnivalization helped Burns, a liminal figure, perpetually on the boundary between ages and cultures, to come to grips with the new ideologies emerging in his time. In his treatment of the church he was hardly a beleaguered intellectual defending himself by means of poetry. Economic developments were already undoing the power of the clergy. Their backsides, to use a carnivalizing metaphor, were already visible. Rather than mounting a heroic attack from a position of weakness, Burns was in fact kicking an opponent who had already been felled by other, less personalized antagonists.

Fergusson's poems are rich in references to the language of the marketplace, where

> a special kind of speech was heard, almost a language of its own, quite unlike the language of the Church, palace, courts, and institutions. It was also unlike the tongue of official literature or of the ruling classes (*Rabelais*, p. 154).

The Hallow-Fair is a place for courting, and the chaffing that goes on echoes the language of the men and women in "Peblis to the Play":

> Here country John in bonnet blue,
> An' eke his Sunday's claise on,
> Rins after Meg wi' rokelay new,
> An' sappy kisses lays on;
> She'll tauntin say, "Ye silly coof!
> Be o' your gab mair spairin";

He'll tak the hint, and criesh her loof
Wi' what will buy her fairin,
To chow that day.
("Hallow-Fair," *ll.* 19-27).[7]

Venality, trickery and deception are integral to the marketplace and to the fairground in general. Preparing to attend the Leith Races,

Ilk dame her brawest ribbons tries,
To put her on her mettle,
Wi' wiles some silly chiel to trap,
(And troth he's fain to get her,)
But she'll craw kniefly in his crap,
Whan, wow! he canna flit her
Frae hame that day.
("Leith Races," *ll.* 48-54)

Men are not the only victims. The poet warns women attending Hallow-Fair to beware of the vendors there:

Ye wives, as ye gang thro' the fair,
O mak your bargains hooly!
Of a' thir wylie lowns beware,
Or fegs they will ye spulzie,
For fairn-year Meg Thamson got,
Frae thir mischievous villains,
A scaw'd bit o' a penny note,
That lost a score o' shillins
To her that day.
("Hallow-Fair," *ll.* 47-55)

Whenever money changes hands there is an implication of uncertainty, of ambivalence, as here in "The Election":

Here politicians bribe a loun
Against his saul for voting.
The gowd that inlakes half a crown
Thir blades lug out to try them,
They pouch the gowd, nor fash the town
For weights an' scales to weigh them.
Exact that day. (*ll.* 111-7)

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[7]Fergusson's poems are quoted from *Poems by Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson*, ed. Alexander Manson Kinghorn and Alexander Law (Edinburgh, 1985).

It would be wrong to interpret Fergusson as a disapproving satirist of manners in all these cases, though the attack on the politicians is clear enough. Ambivalence is at the heart of carnival and informs not just the exchange of cash but the words in which merchandise is publicized:

> these announcements have nothing in common with naive and direct practical advertisements. They are filled with popular-festive laughter. They toy with the objects they announce. . . Popular advertising is always ironic, always makes fun of itself to a certain extent (*Rabelais*, p. 160).

In these surroundings, one wonders how far even "the true an' faithfu' list/ O' Noblemen and Horses" racing at Leith is to be trusted (*ll.* 59-60).

Highland English is impishly mimicked in "She maun pe see our guard" and "Pring in ta drunken sot" ("Hallow-Fair," *ll.* 94, 96). Fergusson brings "Norland speech" into both "Hallow-Fair" (*ll.* 37-45) and "Leith Races" (*ll.* 118-27). Sawny the tailor hawking his "protty hose" and the "Buchan bodies" crying their "bunch of Findrums," as well as being samples of the range of dialect to be heard where folk gather from so many different regions, are typical of the marketplace in their ambivalent, self-ironizing praise. They are Edinburgh's equivalent of the *cris de Paris* which echoed in Rabelais' ears:

> The city rang with these many voices. Each food, wine, or other merchandise had its own words and melody and its special intonations, its distinct verbal and musical imagery (*Rabelais*, p. 182).

The "browsters rare" with their "gude ale" make sure the cheese they serve is "fu' saut" ("Hallow-Fair," *ll.* 14-18), while the "browster wives" at Leith sell "trash," scraping the bottom of their barrels for "drumbly gear" they know they will have no trouble palming off on such a day (*ll.* 100-108). Everyone is on the make:

> Here chapmen billies tak their stand,
> An' shaw their bonny wallies;
> Wow, but they lie fu' gleg aff hand
> To trick the silly fallows:
> Heh, sirs! what cairds and tinklers come,
> An' ne'er-do-weel horse-coupers,
> An' spae-wives fenzying to be dumb,
> Wi' a' siclike landloupers,
> To thrive that day.
> ("Hallow-Fair," *ll.* 28-36).

Bakhtin writes that "France's dramatic culture" at the time of Rabelais was "closely related to the marketplace," and that Rabelais himself was well acquainted with "the marketplace spectacles" (*Rabelais*, p. 155). Although Fergusson does not mention them, we can be sure that the fairs he describes had

their share of booth theaters to keep everyone present entertained. The entire fair partakes of the nature of theater. Nothing is what it appears to be. Everything aspires to become something else:

> Around whare'er ye fling your een,
> The haiks like wind are scourin';
> Some chaises honest folk contain,
> An' some hae mony a whore in;
> Wi' rose and lily, red and white,
> They gie themselves sic fit airs,
> Like Dian, they will seem perfite;
> But its nae goud that glitters
> Wi' them thir days.
> ("Leith Races," *ll.* 136-44).

The next stanza features the bearers of fake coats of arms, the "mony hunder,/ Wha geck at Scotland and her law" (*ll.* 146-7). The collusion of all participants is essential to the success of this spectacle. They enjoy it while being (or because they are) conscious of the deceits.

Comic reversal, lowering and besmirching, abounds in both poems, which also articulate the grotesque concept of the body with its emphasis on "that which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off" and on "eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing) (*Rabelais*, pp. 320, 317). Jock Bell gets not just one "clamihewit," but several, from "a stark Lochaber aix" which "gar'd his feckless body aik,/ An' spew the reikin gore," and he finds himself "peching on the cawsey" ("Hallow-Fair," *ll.* 79-80, 88-9, 91). The town guard in "Leith Races" is presented in terms of protuberances and outflow. They have "mony a gausy snout/ Has gusht in birth-day wars" and the barber is busy scraping the "whisky plooks that brunt for wooks" off their faces. Their "spaterdashes" will soon be splattered with "weet, and weary plashes/ O' dirt" (*ll.* 79-80, 64, 69, 71-2), while the ardent debaters in the Robin Hood Club engage in a kind of verbal besmirching, as "dirt wi' words they mingle" (*l.* 166).

The violence in "Leith Races" is both planned and spontaneous, in traditional carnival fashion. Everyone knows it will occur. The details are left to the workings of chance. The stress on the rear end ("Their tails") is characteristic:

> Her *Nanesel* maun be carefu' now,
> Nor maun she pe misleard,
> Sin baxter lads hae seal'd a vow
> To skelp and clout the guard:
> I'm sure Auld Reikie kens o' nane
> That wou'd be sorry at it,
> Tho' they should dearly pay the kane,
> An' get their tails weel sautit
> And sair thir days. (*ll.* 82-90)

Observing the fine liveries of the town guard, the speaker predicts that "'ere the sport be done.../ Their skins are gayly yarkit/ And peel'd thir days' (*ll.* 160-2). The use of the present tense indicates a ritualistic, repetitive event. Words like "sport" and "gayly" highlight the carnival nature of the violence, paralleled by the effects of drink when "Great feck gae hirpling hame like fools,/ The cripple lead the blind" (*ll.* 174-5).

The correspondences in iconography, in the vocabulary of actions and images, with "Christ's Kirk," "Peblis to the Play" and with the system outlined by Bakhtin are unmistakable. Yet there is a perceptible darkening of tone in Fergusson's poems. The advice to readers (or listeners) in the closing stanzas of "Hallow-Fair" and in the thirteenth stanza and the closing quatrain of "Leith Races" can just about be read as archly tongue-in-cheek rather than somber. The danger of drink is that it may dampen good humor ("make our spirits thrawart," "Leith Races" *l.* 177), and the comparison of a black eye to a bluebell ("een as blue's a blawart/ Wi' straiks" *ll.* 179-80) is a lightening touch. The same cannot be said for those who will curse the time they "toutit aff the horn/ Which wambles thro' their weym/ Wi' pain" (*ll.* 115-7), or for the pathos, with its striking gender sympathy, of this quatrain:

> Bedown Leith-Walk what burrochs reel
> Of ilka trade and station,
> That gar their wives an' childer feel
> Toom weyms for their libation
> O' drink thir days (*ll.* 95-9).

Fergusson is not an antiquarian. His aim is not to preserve the earlier system of generic markers and imagery. If it is to live, it must develop in his writing, and the key to the darkening of tone may lie in its oppositional status. In earlier times carnival had been the feast the people gave themselves:

> . . . all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age (*Rabelais*, p. 10).

All those present mingled in chaotic, yet subtly ruled participation. By contrast, Fergusson's poems incorporate the representatives of an authority determined to restrain that chaos. The town guard may be attacked and wounded. It cannot be obliterated. The marketplace and the fairground are no longer "the center of all that is unofficial," and the "extraterritoriality" they previously enjoyed has been severely curtailed (*Rabelais*, pp. 153-4). Authority's invasion of the carnival space extends to the persona of the poet. His speech is infiltrated by at least a semblance of common sense and prudence, in a process which culminates in the rhetorical and attitudinal pyrotechnics of the narrator of "Tam

O'Shanter."[8] The accretion of new elements, such as the archaizing prologue to "Leith Races," with its dialogue between the Poet and Mirth, is a further aspect of this adaptation to new social and cultural circumstances.

"The Election" is Fergusson's finest contribution to the genre, and offers impressive proof of his talent for evolving and redirecting inherited forms. Assigned a different function, each element gains in vigor. This creative transformation is paradoxically more faithful to its model than any antiquarian reconstruction, or prolongation, could have been. Bakhtin singles out ambivalence as an "indispensable trait" of the "grotesque image," and describes all carnival images as "deeply ambivalent, being intimately related to life-death-birth" (*Rabelais*, pp. 24, 149). Fergusson's treatment of the election adapts this ambivalence to a new context, as Burns will do in "The Holy Fair."

He describes the "showing of faces" when the fourteen incorporations dined together.[9] The occasion is rich in comic reversal. The poorest tradesmen are kings for a day, gloriously if ephemerally translated like Bottom and like Tam:

> The canty cobler quats his sta',
> His rozet an' his lingans;
> His buik has dree'd a sair, sair fa'
> Frae meals o' bread an' ingans:
> Now he's a pow o' wit and law,
> An' taunts at soals an' heels;
> To Walker's he can rin awa,
> There whang his creams an' jeels
> Wi' life that day (*ll.* 37-45).

There are two transformations here. The cobbler has suddenly become an intellectual, an expert in rules and procedures. He also gets a good square meal for the first time in many moons. Fergusson's account of his normal diet is veined with pathos.

Ambivalence also colors the treatment of the self-important John, crying to servants to bring his wig, his shirt and scarf. The comments of the neighbors who look on agog have the familiar carnival mixture of praise and scoffing:

> "Whar's Johnny gaun," cries neebor Bess,
> "That he's sae gayly bodin
> Wi' new kam'd wig, weel syndet face,
> Silk hose, for hamely hodin?"
> "Our Johnny's nae sma' drink you'll guess,

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[8]See my "Defamiliarising 'Tam O'Shanter'" in *Scottish Literary Journal*, 20 (May 1993), 5-18.

[9]See *Longer Scottish Poems*, II, 376.

He's trig as ony muir-cock,
An' forth to make a Deacon, lass;
He downa speak to poor fock
Like us the day." (*ll.* 19-27)

The tone of the fourth, seventh and eighth lines is crucial to the effect of the stanza as a whole.

Irony is sharper in the opening stanza, where the speaker reinterprets the election procedure as a pretext for general carousing, a typical carnival lowering to which the participants are oblivious. Note how the adverb "gayly" crops up once more:

Now ye may clap your wings an' craw,
And gayly busk ilk' feather,
For Deacon Cocks hae pass'd a law
To rax an' weet your leather
Wi' drink thir days. (*ll.* 5-9)

The diners are first assimilated to birds, then reduced to their gullets, the part of the anatomy where the voluptuous pleasure of drinking is located.

Three stanzas are devoted to the banquet itself, which cannot be characterized in the overwhelmingly celebratory terms Bakhtin uses for banquet imagery in Rabelais:

> We will not understand the spirit of grotesque feasting if we do not take into account the deeply positive element, the victorious triumph inherent in every banquet image of folklore origin. . . . The popular images of food and drink are active and triumphant, for they conclude the process of labor and struggle of the social man against the world. . . . They are universal and organically combined with the concept of the free and sober truth, ignoring fear and piousness and therefore linked with wise speech (*Rabelais*, pp. 296, 302).

This is no symposium where truths can be articulated which are normally suffocated by taboos and everyday routine. It is not true carnival but a concession made by an oligarchy to the poor in their midst. According to Bakhtin, from the seventeenth century onwards "the feast ceased almost entirely to be the people's second life, their temporary renascence and renewal." But he stresses the word "almost" "because the popular-festive carnival principle is indestructible" (*Rabelais*, p. 33).

The "Christ's Kirk" genre permits Fergusson to carnivalize a social function, thereby highlighting its contradictions, its lack of coherence. The meal has the rude energy of a wrestling match. The carnival violence is gastronomic. Diners "stegh an' connach" their food. Not just their teeth, but their clothes and hats engage in "tassles teugh wi' slavers" (*ll.* 48-53), and brandy is required to moderate the effects of frenetic, violent consumption:

The dinner done, for brandy strang
They cry, to weet their thrapple,
To gar the stamack bide the bang,
Nor wi' its laden grapple. (*ll.* 55-8)

Will speaks of himself as a barrel, a graphic illustration of his ability to absorb drink which is especially appropriate given that making them is his trade. His reference to the devil echoes the earlier "The de'il may claw the clungest" (*l.* 47). Oaths and freedom of speech are integral to carnival:

"Weels me o' drink," quo' cooper Will,
"My barrel has been geyz'd ay,
An' has na gotten sic a fill
Sin fu' on handsel-Teysday:
But makes-na, now its got a sweel,
Ae gird I shanna cast lad,
Or else I wish the horned de'el
May Will wi' kittle cast dad
To hell the day!" (*ll.* 64-72)

One of the kings for a day meets with a comic upending because he refuses to call for a sedan chair:

He took shanks-naig, but fient may care,
He arselins kiss'd the cawsey
Wi' bir that night (*ll.* 79-81).

The inset tale that follows, where Will finds Jock in bed with his wife, has a drenching with urine and a carnival thrashing neither of which leads to serious consequences:

Wi' maister laiglen, like a brock
He did wi' stink maist smore him
Fu' strang that night

Then wi' a souple leathern whang
He gart them fidge an' girn ay,
. . .
But the niest day they a' shook hands,
And ilka crack did sowder (*ll.* 88-92, 104-5).

Will empties the chamber pot over his wife and the cobbler, in a gesture with a long ancestry. Urine, like excrement, is "gay matter . . . *intermediate between earth and body*." Both "debasing and tender," it "fertilizes the earth as does the body of the dead" (*Rabelais*, pp. 175-6). We cannot be sure how much survived in eighteenth-century Edinburgh of the "ambivalent character of drench-

ing in urine, the element of fertility and procreating power contained in this image" (*Rabelais*, p. 23). Its very presence is a telling indication of Fergusson's fidelity to the inherited carnival repertory.

The poem has a dazzling alternation of narrative tones which, in the absence of a spoken rendering, modern readers can only reconstruct effortfully and partially. They are unlikely to share in the speaker's complacent satisfaction that a battered wife pawns her apron the next day to buy her husband drink. But how far can we identify Fergusson with such comments? All we can surmise is that he has one attitude to John and another to the cobbler, just as the angling of the false, semi-official carnival of the banquet must differ from that of the domestic *fabliau* back home in the cooper's bed.

His most daring ambivalence occurs in the final stanza, topically as traditional as the drenching with urine. Bakhtin notes the

> ancient connection between the forms of medicine and folk art which explains the combination in one person of actor and druggist. This is why the images of the physician and the medical element are organically linked . . . with the entire traditional system of images (*Rabelais*, p. 159).

Medicine partook of the deceitful, ironic, self-advertising atmosphere of the fair, and was connected to the carnival through the untrustworthiness of its practitioners and through "joyous" diseases such as gout or syphilis, the consequence of drinking and sexual activity. Fergusson points out that his banqueters will undoubtedly require treatment. The banter turns to black humor when the electoral term "lang leet" is applied to those who will die from the effects of excessive indulgence:

> Ye lowns that troke in doctor's stuff,
> You'll now hae unco slaisters;
> Whan windy blaws their stamacks puff,
> They'll need baith pills an' plaisters;
> For tho' ev'now they look right bluff,
> Sic drinks, 'ere hillocks meet,
> Will hap some Deacons in a truff,
> Inrow'd in the lang leet
> O' death yon night (*ll.* 127-35).

For Bakhtin, a perception of life and death as interdependent and omnipresent is basic to carnival. The body simultaneously dies and comes alive. It is "a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming" (*Rabelais*, p. 24). Fergusson turns this ambivalence to a grim *memento mori*. His poem ends, not with the triumphant list of nominees, full of expectation and self-importance, but with the list of those who have succumbed, and who will eat and drink no more.

Fergusson and Burns were very nearly contemporaries. Less than a decade separated their births, and scholars have highlighted the verbal and structural reminiscences which link their poems.[10] Nevertheless, the most striking thing about the pair is the distance which separates them in culture and attitude. If anything, the superficial relationship of model and admirer, the apparent coincidence in intent of poems such as "The Farmer's Ingle" and "The Cottar's Saturday Night" or "Leith Races" and "The Holy Fair," serves to heighten our awareness of a profound difference in world view and approach.

Fergusson's texts are less accessible to us because he looks back to pre-Union Scotland, to the mastery of Latin, the familiarity with the classics and the patriotic historical perspective which characterized Boece and Buchanan and inspired eighteenth-century vernacular humanism.[11] In his work, a pattern of ideology and imagery such as carnival, which had flourished in the medieval world, could continue to be active and productive. To characterize him as backward-looking is in no way a value judgment. This is how he must appear to a Scotland which has been molded for nearly three centuries by union with England. Fergusson points to different possibilities. He stands at the start of a highway as yet unexplored. And so his work is only partially permeable by a culturally unionist tradition of criticism.

"The Election" demonstrates how easily the literary tradition of carnival could be adapted for satirical use. There is, however, much in the poem which cannot be read as merely satiric. Satire encourages the reader to construct a moral subtext, a scheme of values by which the scenes depicted are evaluated and judged, and which the ambivalence of carnival could only corrode. Carnival does not have a message. It does not invite intellectual comprehension. It was, at least in earlier social practice, a ritual, and moral accounts of ritual are notoriously unilluminating. Not the understanding, but the acting counts Carnival is ludic, satire didactic. Satire teaches. Carnival plays.

In "The Ordination," Burns turns the inherited mode to unequivocal satiric use, thereby manifesting his cultural distance from Fergusson. His opening stanza is tantalizingly close to that of "The Election" and has the poignancy of one who in the very act of paying tribute to his master reveals his failure to understand him. Fergusson's "rax an' weet your leather" (*l.* 8), used metaphorically for the gullets of the banqueters, recurs in an incitement to the tanners of

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[10]See the section "Influence on Burns" in Allan H. MacLaine, *Robert Fergusson* (New York, 1965), pp. 158-62.

[11]See the chapters by James MacQueen on "Scottish Latin Poetry" and by John and Winifred MacQueen on "Latin Prose Literature" in *The History of Scottish Literature*, Vol. I, *Origins to 1660*, ed. R. D. S. Jack (Aberdeen, 1988), 213-43, and also Douglas Duncan, *Thomas Ruddiman: A Study in Scottish Scholarship of the Early Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1965).

Kilmarnock, "ye wha leather rax an' draw" (*l.* 3).[12] The weavers are urged to "fidge an' claw" (*l.* 1), while Fergusson's electors were to "clap your wings an' craw" (*l.* 5). A contempt alien to the earlier poet informs Burns's very first lines, and is sustained throughout the poem.

He places "The Ordination" in the mouth of an evangelical extremist. The use of personifications such as Common Sense, Learning and Morality locates poet, persona and reader in a scheme which is the opposite of carnivalesque. Poet and reader are to share an ironic distance from the persona. A perspective of this kind is inimical to carnival, which abolishes distance as all present mingle. Irony not tinged with praise is as alien to carnival as is praise devoid of irony. There is no sense in which Burns can be said to be praising the persona of "The Ordination."

The poem operates a lowering of religion which is not ambivalent and therefore not carnivalesque. If the externals of besmirching are familiar, the dirt involved has lost any sacral quality:

> This day M[c]******* taks the flail, [Mackinlay
> An' he's the boy will blaud her!
> He'll clap a *shangan* on her tail,
> An' set the bairns to daud her
> Wi' dirt this day (*ll.* 14-8).

The violence evoked is far from playful. It moves in one direction only, from perpetrator to victim, with a predictability that excludes any spontaneity and a coarse vigor that aims to disgust the reader:

> See, see auld Orthodoxy's faes
> She's swingein thro' the city!
> Hark, how the nine-tail'd cat she plays!
> I vow it's unco pretty:
> . . .
> But there's Morality himsel,
> Embracing all opinions;
> Hear, how he gies the tither yell,
> Between his twa companions!
> See, how she peels the skin an' fell,
> As ane were peelin onions! (*ll.* 91-4, 100-105)

At the close we have to imagine humans being rendered to fat, like pigs to lard. Can we be sure that Burns takes no part in the gleeful sadism of the speaker?

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[12]Burns's poems are quoted from *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford, 1968). Further references to this work will appear in the text.

If mair they deave us wi' their din,
Or Patronage intrusion,
We'll light a spunk, and, ev'ry skin,
We'll rin them aff in fusion
Like oil, some day (*ll.* 22-6).

Burns's principal device for lowering in this poem is a satirical appropriation of Christian pastoral metaphors. The device is highly amusing. It is as if the preachers had been taken at their word. This deliberate misinterpretation underpins what may have been Burns's first published poem, "The Holy Tulzie" also known as "The Twa Herds":

The twa best Herds in a' the west
That e'er gae gospel horns a blast
This five and fifty simmers past,
O dool to tell!
Hae had a bitter, black outcast
Atween themsel.—(*ll.* 7-12)[13]

Satire favors animal imagery, but to a different end. Where the church portrays Christ as the good shepherd and the faithful as his flock, satire will reply that human beings certainly do behave like animals, apparently agreeing, but in fact subverting. For the step from viewing the congregation as sheep to viewing them as beasts is a tiny one:

O Sirs! wha ever wad expeckit
Your duty ye wad sae negleckit?
You wha was ne'er by Lairds respeckit,
To wear the Plaid:
But by the vera Brutes eleckit
To be their Guide.—(*ll.* 19-24)

Those who cast their votes are brutes. It is sobering to find this condemnation of church democracy from Burns's pen.

In "The Ordination" the congregation are compared to cattle, and the words of their evangelical preachers to withered cabbage stems:

Now auld K*********, cock thy tail, [Kilmarnock
An' toss thy horns fu' canty;

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[13]The evidence about the publication of this poem is puzzling. Burns wrote, "The following was the first of my poetical productions that saw the light" (Kinsley, I, 70), but there is no record of its being published before 1796. Elsewhere Burns was emphatic that he "first committed the sin of RHYME" before he was sixteen, with the song "O once I lov'd a bonnie lass" (Kinsley, III, 1003).

Nae mair thou'lt rowte out-owre the dale,
Because thy pasture's scanty;
For lapfu's large o' *gospel kail*
Shall fill thy crib in plenty,
An' *runts* o' *grace* the pick an' wale,
No gi'en by way o' dainty
But ilka day (*ll.* 46-54).

The stanza immediately following has an almost surrealistic rush of imagery. Burns indulges in something very like free association. In a parody of the Jews in Babylonian captivity Babylon becomes Babel and the harps fiddles which, strung along a clothes line, turn to nappies. The pegs fixing them remind Burns of the pegs which turn a fiddle, and his attention darts to the cavorting of the player's elbow as he wields the bow. In its turn this transports him back to the pastoral imagery he has been sending up, becoming a lamb's wagging tail. The transitions are so swift that the stanza verges on incoherence. It is one of the most dazzlingly modern in all Burns's output:

Nae mair by *Babel's streams* we'll weep,
To think upon our *Zion*;
And hing our fiddles up to sleep,
Like baby-clouts a-dryin:
Come, screw the pegs wi' tunefu' cheep,
And o'er the thairms be tryin;
Oh, rare! to see our elbucks wheep,
And a' like lamb-tails flyin
Fu' fast this day! (*ll.* 55-63)

There is further lowering in the fourth stanza, which trivializes and demeans three stories from the Bible. Carnival lowering was never purely negative. In Bakhtin's words, "folk humour denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture" (*Rabelais*, p. 11). The sexual organs, the generating part of the body, had not lost their sacred character, and a redressing of the balance between the intellective and the amorous zones could never be truly degrading. Burns's lowering is. It moves in one, not two directions. The effect is satirical, and the reference to "*rams* that cross the breed" (*l.* 43) demonstrates how, in this poem at least, he can only present rule-defying sexuality in the language of its detractors.

With "The Ordination" Burns abandoned carnival for satire. With "The Holy Fair" he wrote what may be the greatest poem in the Christ's Kirk tradition, reformulating the ambivalence highlighted by Bakhtin.[14] Burns's intro-

[14]J. C. Bittenbender's article "Bakhtinian Carnival in the Poetry of Robert Burns," in *Scottish Literary Journal* 21 (November, 1994), 23-38, derives many fine insights from an application

duction, in which the speaker encounters Superstition, Hypocrisy and Fun on their way to the communion ceremony, is obviously an expansion of Fergusson's dialogue with Mirth. Fewer readers have detected that Burns took the basic syntactical pattern for his poem from "Leith Races":

> Some chaises honest folk contain,
> An' some hae mony a whore in
> ("Leith Races," *ll.* 138-9).

> Here, some are thinkan on their sins,
> An' some upo' their claes
> ("The Holy Fair," *ll.* 83-4).

The figure is zeugma,[15] where two semantically opposed elements are yoked together by an identical pattern of syntax. In the above examples, there are three elements, subject, verb and object. The subject and verb are unchanged, while the first object is replaced by a second with an effect of surprise or incongruence.

Zeugma is the syntactical equivalent of carnival. A term is replaced by an antonym instead of a synonym and the unchanging structure that governs the substitution implies that on some level they are equivalent The ultimate effect is to make opposites co-present. Each term unstably, dizzyingly, threatens to turn into its own contradiction, carrying its opposite within it. It is the syntactical enactment of the "grotesque image" in which "we find both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis" (*Rabelais*, p. 24).

The passage from Rabelais most relevant to "The Holy Fair" describes Gargantua's confusion when his wife dies giving birth to their son. It is worth quoting at some length:

> . . . seeing on the one side his wife Badebec newly dead, and on the other his son Pantagruel newly born, and so big and handsome, he did not know what to say or do. His mind was troubled with the doubt whether he ought to weep in mourning for his wife, or laugh out of delight at his son. On either side he found sophistical arguments which took his breath away. . . And consequently he remained trapped, like a mouse caught in pitch, or a kite taken in a noose.

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of Bakhtin's theories to "The Holy Fair" and other poems. It appeared after this essay had been completed.

[15]Zeugma is a "figure of speech in which a word stands in the same relation to two other terms, but with a different meaning." J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 761.

> 'Oh, poor Pantagruel, you have lost our good mother, your sweet nurse, your beloved lady. Ah, false death, how unkind you are to me, how cruel you are to me, to wrench from me her whose rightful due was immortality!'
>
> And as he spoke he bellowed like a cow. But when Pantagruel came into his mind, he suddenly began laughing like a calf. 'Ho, my little son,' he cried, 'my ballocklet, my footkin, how pretty you are! How grateful I am to God for having given me such a fine son, such a jolly little fellow, so smiling and gay! Ho, ho, ho, ho! How glad I am. Let's drink, ho, and banish all melancholy!'[16]

Bakhtin chooses this passage to illustrate his thesis that

> Rabelais' unconditional defense of life. . . is also inclusive of death. . . . the image of death is devoid of all tragic or terrifying overtones. Death is the necessary link in the process of the people's growth and renewal . . .
>
> Birth and death meet in this scene. Death is the "other side" of birth (*Rabelais*, p. 407).

Gargantua looks from side to side, at his dead wife and his newborn son in turn. Each sight provokes a different emotion, and he is unable to reconcile the two. His position is remarkably similar to that of the blacksmith whose account of an open-air communion ceremony may well have been a source for Burns:

> At first, you find a great number of men and women lying together upon the grass; here they are sleeping and snoring, some with their faces towards heaven, others with their faces turned downwards, or covered with their bonnets; there you find a knot of young fellows and girls making assignations to go home together in the evening, or to meet in some ale-house; in another place you see a pious circle sitting round an ale-barrel, many of which stand ready upon carts for the refreshment of the saints. . . . in this sacred assembly there is an odd mixture of religion, sleep, drinking, courtship, and a confusion of sexes, ages, and characters. . . a little nearer the speaker. . . you will find some weeping and others laughing, some pressing to get nearer the tent or tub in which the parson is sweating, bawling, jumping, and beating the desk; others fainting with the stifling heat, or wrestling to extricate themselves from the crowd: one seems very devout and serious, and the next moment is cursing his neighbour for squeezing or treading on him; in an instant after, his countenance is composed to the religious gloom, and he is groaning, sighing and weeping for his sins: in a word, there is such an absurd mixture of the serious and comic, that were we convened for any other purpose than that of worshipping the God and Governor of Nature, the scene would exceed all *power of face*.[17]

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[16]*The Histories of Gargantua and Pantagruel by François Rabelais*, trans. and with an Introd. by J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, 1955), p. 177.

[17]From *Letter from a Blacksmith to the Ministers and Elders of the Church of Scotland, in which the Manner of Publick Worship in that Church is considered, its Inconveniences and*

The movement of the blacksmith's account and of the scene from Rabelais is the same. One can almost see the speaker's head swivel from side to side, like a spectator's at a tennis tournament. It is significant that his gaze cannot take in both players, both sides of the coin at once. The visions he alternately sees demand contradictory and irreconcilable reactions from him, and all he can do is to note their co-presence, to acknowledge with a shrug of impotence that they are not, in fact, mutually exclusive.

Zeugma mimics this situation excellently. The identical syntactical structure stands for the single observer and the simultaneity of the phenomena. The changing element stands for their opposite, contradictory nature. If we look at the whole of the stanza quoted above, the underpinning zeugmas are clear:

> Here, some are thinkan on their sins,
> An' some upo' their claes;
> Ane curses feet that fyl'd his shins,
> Anither sighs an' pray's: [*sic*]
> On this hand sits a Chosen swatch,
> Wi' screw'd-up, grace-proud faces;
> On that, a set o' chaps, at watch,
> Thrang winkan on the lasses
> To *chairs* that day (*ll.* 82-90).

The seventh and ninth stanzas of "The Holy Fair" are also built on a "Here . . . There" structure. In the twentieth, the "lads an' lasses" are "blythely bent/ To mind baith *saul* an' *body*" (*ll.* 172-3). Alternation of contradictory elements also governs the movement of the poem's action. The faithful arrive and take their seats, and courting begins (VII-XII). Sermons follow (XIV-XVII), then the focus shifts to the tavern where assignations are formed (XVIII-XX). Further hellfire and brimstone preaching (XXI-XXII) gives way to eating, drinking and lovemaking (XIII-XXVII).

Carnival violence takes verbal and gastronomic in addition to purely physical form in "Leith Races" and "The Election." Here it appears as disputes over doctrine (fomented by alcohol):

> While thick an' thrang, an' loud an' lang,
> Wi' *Logic*, an' wi' *Scripture*,
> They raise a din, that, in the end,
> Is like to breed a rupture
> O' wrath that day (*ll.* 158-62).

Defects pointed out, and Methods of removing them honestly proposed (London, 1759), as quoted in Thomas Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh, 1978), p. 69.

At the same time, certain opposites are conflated. Burns's indifference to the affiliations of the preachers has mystified some readers. The same treatment is meted out to moderates and extremists, to Moodie's "eldritch squeel an' gestures" and Smith's "cauld harangues," Peebles' "meek an' mim" discourse and the "auld wives' fables" peddled by Miller (ll. 114, 122, 141, 148). Expectations that Burns will favor one side rather than another are disappointed. This is because he has no ideological axe to grind in "The Holy Fair." The poem is not satiric in approach, and any message we may attempt to formulate from it soon reveals its inadequacy. Burns is not complaining that Christian worship should be more sincere, or less adulterated with sex, or that radical preachers should be replaced with moderates, or that communions should not interfere with courting. (Indeed, how would the lovers meet if there were no communion?) He merely shows us that all this is, that preaching and lovemaking, Presbyterian doctrine and extramarital sex are not only compatible, but go extremely well together. And this insight is a profoundly carnivalistic one, an affirmation of that which happens rather than its rejection in favor of an imagined superior world.

The closing stanza offers a riot of zeugmas, with additional internal rhyming to highlight the pairing of equivalents:

> How monie hearts this day converts,
> O' Sinners and o' Lasses!
> Their hearts o' stane, gin night are gane
> As saft as ony flesh is.
> There's some are fou o' *love divine*;
> There's some are fou o' *brandy*;
> An' monie jobs that day begin,
> May end in *Houghmagandie*
> Some ither day (*ll.* 235-43).

If the balance is tipped in any way, this is thanks to the placing of "houghmagandie"; given the predictable, repetitive nature of the following tag, it is, to all intents and purposes, the final and most powerful word in the poem.

There are indications of communal mating in "Peblis to the Play," and the violence in "Christ's Kirk at the Green" may have a sexual significance. Ramsay had sanitized this aspect of the genre by making a wedding ceremony, in which only two participants are joined together, and on a permanent basis, the subject of his third canto. In "The Holy Fair" Burns restores a crucial element to the genre. It is, nevertheless, a poem of opposition. The use of the stanza is polemical. In the earlier poems, the ideological matrix of carnival was shared by characters, poet and audience. Only the modern reader is excluded by its unfamiliarity. In "The Holy Fair," the characters are not aware of the overall picture they compose. They do not consciously carnivalize religion. This is the work of the poet, who shares his perspective with the reader. It is a perspective created by the text, not by the participants. There is no frontal attack on Pres-

byterianism. The spleen and vicarious violence of "The Ordination" have vanished. The poet's evident assent to the communion, in all its aspects, excludes a satirical approach. Nevertheless "The Holy Fair" represents Burns's most powerful undermining of Calvinist hegemony. He does not engage with it, but sets it in a different framework, the ideological framework of carnival. The tradition of carnival-type celebrations in Scotland, and their embodiment and perpetuation in a literary system, made his use of that framework possible.

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